From spark to flame –
Creating and sustaining motivation and inspiration in our learning community

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Articles from the Learning and Teaching Conference 2009
Centre for Learning and Teaching
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Articles from the Learning and Teaching Conference 2009
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Editorial introduction

There is a well established and growing community of colleagues at the University of Brighton and partner colleges who are engaged in exploring and sharing their established and innovative practices in learning, teaching, assessment and encouragement of student learning. They do this in a number of ways, in everyday practice for example, through taking part in central learning and teaching fellowships and discipline oriented faculty activities. Some disseminate externally and internally, through conference presentations, consultancies and publications. Some have won national awards. One of the key moments in the university calendar for internal dissemination is the annual Learning and Teaching Conference, which welcomes around 250 colleagues and up to 100 contributors. The post conference publication is a lasting product of the day, which offers presenters the opportunity to work their contributions into peer-reviewed essays worthy of publication. The 2010 post conference publication, From spark to flame – creating and sustaining motivation in our learning community, is the fruit of their labours and the nurturing of the editorial committee who have peer-reviewed and edited the work: Gina Wisker, Lynda Marshall, Mark Price and Jess Moriarty.

Professor Glynis Cousin provided a lively keynote for the conference, which starts this collection, ‘Researching with students’ makes the case for a turn towards researching with rather than researching on students to enable a deeper quality of data from dialogue. She goes on to suggest a ‘third space’ research setting as a developmental one, and develops an example of third space research within an appreciative inquiry framework.

‘Doctoral learning journeys: facilitating learning leaps’ by Charlotte Morris, and the National Teaching Fellowship funded Doctoral learning journeys team at Brighton and Anglia Ruskin, explores the research to date, and considers how doctoral students across the disciplines make ‘learning leaps’, crossing conceptual thresholds at different stages in their research, and ways in which they can be supported to do so, focusing here on that support provided by their supervisors.

Dr Ming Cheng looks at staff and students in terms of quality and awards. ‘Quality in teaching and learning: a comparison of the views of academics and students’ notes that pressures to enhance the quality of university teaching have led to attention being paid to the recognition and reward of good teaching practice. Using appreciative enquiry, the paper investigates the positive teaching experience of Teaching Excellence Awards winners and their students, exploring how they interpret good teaching practice and their conceptions of ‘quality’ and ‘quality enhancement’.

Two essays consider student development, transition and achievement. ‘Academic and personal transition: a study of first year foundation degree students at City College Brighton & Hove’ by Rachael Carden and Chris Wellings, considers the academic and personal transitional experiences of first year foundation degree students. It finds that students are able to reflect in a sophisticated manner on their own development through transition and offers suggestion for easing transition that have been gathered throughout the project.

‘It’s not what we expected: patterns of achievement and progression among undergraduates from different ‘social’ groups studying on three courses, and the questions they appear to raise about assessment practices’ by Adrian Chown and Steve Waite with Lucy Chilvers, focuses on physical science lecturers’ concerns that ‘non-traditional’ students might be receiving significantly lower marks and more referrals than ‘traditional’ students with comparable ‘UCAS points’. An analysis of entry and assessment data to establish relative patterns of achievement and progression reveals a different more complex situation. White British working class students did not ‘underachieve’ in comparison with their peers, rather the opposite. However, the marks of
British Asian students may be a cause for concern. Simultaneously, another concern emerges that male students often achieve significantly lower marks and receive more referrals than females.

Several papers explore creative and innovative practice with undergraduates, including Dr Sarah Atkinson’s ‘The university as film set: the UCH collaborative film project’, which focuses on a broadcast media experience for students at University Centre Hastings, where activity simulates professional working environments within the higher education context to enhance and enrich course delivery and student engagement. The article considers teaching methods that enable students to make a significant contribution to a project and gain in-depth insights into the field and its professional working practices.

Continuing the creative theme, ‘Linking creative practice to the personal development agenda’ by Jess Moriarty and Christina Reading, considers how supporting students with their creative process can help to enhance assessed work and provide them with life skills to take into the workplace and beyond university. ‘Museums and education: rekindling the romance’ by Rebecca Reynolds explores the use of museums by HE students from one-off field trips to museum-based modules which are part of HE curricula. The paper focuses on ‘Breaking into the V&A’, a module exploring ‘ways in’ to using museums for second year art and design students, sponsored by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD).

Another V&A, University of Brighton CETLD activity also features, this time in collaboration with the Royal College of Art and the Royal Institute of British Architects. Jane Devine Mejia and Patrick Letschka consider ‘Online exhibitions and archives: an immersive experience for practice-based learning’ testing assumptions on how students use images and social networks, and how physical and virtual archival experiences support learning and creative practice, through a virtual exhibition and an immersive experience based on Ernö Golfinger’s iconic British modernist house and its archive.

Developing students as researchers and online learning are also themes in ‘Teaching Spanish and the use of Web 2.o’ by Maria Angeles Emmerson. This paper describes the introduction of a range of elearning approaches to the teaching of Spanish and the subsequent benefits. Outcomes include the increase in self-directed learning, interactivity between students, flexibility of access to course related activities and information, and the development of resource materials. Examples of the use of blogs, MP3 recorders and other tools and activities undertaken by students are described and evaluated.

Elearning is an underpinning feature in ‘Goodbye face to face, hello Facebook: the use of social network sites to help facilitate a mentoring relationship’ by Sue Will and Julie Fowlie, which investigates innovative ways of using technology to support learning and induction when dealing with large numbers of students at the Business School. Facebook, primarily a social network, has the potential for use in a mentoring capacity and also provides a virtual tutor presence whereby the course tutors can respond to students’ queries giving guidance and support when necessary.

As is appropriate in a publication, one paper considers turning a programme into a publication. ‘From pedagogy to publication: developing a taught skills programme into a student workbook and published textbook by Bob Smale and Julie Fowlie, reports on the development of a taught programme that focuses on the development of personal, academic and job search skills at Brighton Business School, and the development of the taught materials into both an internal student workbook and an externally published textbook.

Gina Wisker
Head, CLT and Chair,
Conference Organising Committee
Researching with students

PROFESSOR GLYNIS COUSIN

Abstract

This article presents the case for a turn towards researching with rather than researching on students. I make the argument that this turn enables a deeper quality of data from dialogue rather than from an ‘extractive’ model of research. I offer the image of ‘third space’ research to capture the idea of the research setting as a developmental one between the parties there. Finally, I offer an example of third space research within an appreciative inquiry framework.

Introduction

For over 30 years, research in higher education learning and teaching can be described broadly as research on learners. Whether we are talking about national or institutional surveys or the phenomenographic research that has dominated this field, the quest has been to extract perceptions and measures of satisfaction from students. In line with a social scientific turn towards a more dialogic approach to research, I will present reasons for researching with students. Firstly, I will discuss a ‘hunting and gathering’ approach to interviewing, contrasting this with models of ‘interactive interviewing’ (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) and with the notion of transformative research offered by Heron and Reason (2001). I will finish with a case study of a student-led research project to illustrate the benefits of a research with approach to higher education research.

Research as a third space?

Much higher education research is based on surveys or interviews (focus group, semi-structured, telephone etc.) On the face of it, using these methods seems a relatively straightforward stimulus-response event but gathering and representing people’s experiences is fraught with interpretive difficulties. What is disclosed by a respondent and how it is read or heard, will be shaped by all kinds of factors from the biography of the parties to the time of the day in which the responses are made.

The interview in particular is inescapably an interactional, meaning making event whether we recognise this or not. As Alldred and Gilles write, (2002:146) the interview ‘is the joint production of an account by interviewer and interviewee’. Similarly, Holstein and Gabrium (1997:14) argue that ‘meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter’. The interview, then, is best seen as a social event rather than a technique. That is not to say that it does not involve techniques but it cannot be reduced to them.
Perhaps the latest thinking on interviews suggests that much research, especially qualitative, is best conceptualised as a ‘third space’. This space generates ideas, insights or knowledge out of a dynamic encounter between interviewer and interviewee. Elsewhere (Cousin 2009) I give an example of how this works from Davies’ (1999:96-97) work. Davies interviews the parents of a young man with learning difficulties. At the beginning of an interview, the parents declare that their son has ‘got no value of money’. Thirteen responses later, the father concedes ‘yes probably he would value a bit of money, if he was having it in a pay packet every week’. From a reading of Davies’ questions, suggestions and prompts, it is clear that she and the parents produced a space in which ideas were dynamically developed between the parties. While extractive interviewers try to minimise any ‘interviewer effect’ from interviewee responses, an interactive interviewer expects to suggest possible directions of inquiry from interviewee responses, an interactive interviewer expects to suggest possible directions of inquiry with the interviewee.

An emerging dialogic form of inquiry in higher education that has ‘third space’ characteristics comes from some of the research into threshold concepts. I have called these forms transacational curriculum inquiry (Cousin 2009:ch.12) because they typically involve subject specialists, students and education developers working together in a third space to explore difficulties in the subject. As I discuss (2009), Orsini-Jones (2008) offers a particularly strong example of this, and her reported interview extracts with students show a very developmental order of questioning and dialogue.

In sum, the aim of much contemporary research, particularly an interview, is not to extract understandings, perceptions or experiences as if these were stable and easily retrievable by the interviewee. In the case of the interview, one aim is to develop the interviewee’s understandings however tentative or contradictory these may be within the interview. A twin aim is for the interviewer to develop his/her understandings. This orientation on the interview might be seen also as one in which interviewers and interviewees alternate as teachers and learners throughout the interview process (Pawson and Tilley 1997). Sometimes the interviewers need to suggest explanations as teachers and sometimes they need to listen and hear explanations as students. It is important to note that this model of research does not aspire to find the truth, rather, as I discuss below, it seeks to be generative of fresh understandings and/or lines of inquiry.

I should acknowledge that formulating ways of developing the dialogue in an interview is easier said than done. Just as with any interview method, ‘third space’ interviewing requires intelligence, subtlety, sensitivity, a good ear and the positionality of a learner who addresses what she/he is bringing to the third space (Cousin 2010). In particular, there is always going to be the risk of too much interviewer domination in the hands of an over-eager researcher.

Whatever its risks, however, an added value of researching with consists in its generative potential. In the first instance, it is helpful to examine this generative potential through the binary of transformative/informative suggested by Reason and Heron (2000). Although like any binary, it presents stark opposites that become more blurred in practice, it does support our thinking about shaping research projects with students.

**Transformative/informative**

As indicated, student experience research and phenomenography takes the extractive position, particularly at the stage of analysis where the interview transcripts become the researcher’s text to play with. Even where the analysis is returned to the respondents, by this stage, the researcher has claimed first authorship. The respondents have informed the analysis but they have not shaped it. In informative interviewing the students assist an inquiry rather like witnesses to a police investigation. In transformative inquiry, reflective dialogue is designed to enable shared understandings within a solution-oriented framework. Participative action research offers one
Researching with students

way of achieving this, and another is that of appreciative inquiry which informs the case study to which I now turn. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a revised version of action research, which replaces the latter’s emphasis on problem solving with an emphasis on ‘what gives life’. Here is my summary of this framework (Cousin 2009:168):

‘A core principle of AI proposes that a problem cannot be solved within the mindset of the problem itself; transcending this mindset involves a focus on ‘what gives life to organisations’ so as to ‘discover ways to sustain and enhance that life-giving potential’ (Ludema et al 2001:189). Thus, AI strives to shift our focus from our habitual problem-focused ways of seeing to a focus on the positive in order to ‘heighten energy, sharpen vision and inspire action for change’ (The Center for Appreciative Inquiry 2008). If we keep asking questions about the problems in a setting, the effect is to drive our imagination into a depressing corner. If we look for what animates a setting, we ignite our thinking with possibilities rather than limitations. In this sense, our lines of inquiry are fateful (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005).

My illustrative case centres on a project in the Sociology Department at Warwick University (Hughes 2004, ‘Linking Teaching and Research in a Research-Oriented Department of Sociology’) funded by the HEA Subject Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP). As indicated, this project was designed within an appreciative inquiry spirit and thus, broadly followed the appreciative inquiry cycle of ‘discovery’ (data gathering and analysis), ‘dream’ (thinking big about changes in the light of the findings), ‘design’ (designing the change) and ‘destiny’ (sustaining the change). Besides the transformative appeal of appreciative inquiry, we were also drawn to the ease with which ethical clearance can be secured for a research method that looks for the light, energy and the positive in a setting. I will now describe the key moments and gains from the project, which I hope will be of interest to anyone thinking of doing a similar project.

Researching with students

Selection of students

Clearly, it was important to offer a transparent and fair means by which to select students. In order to do so, we invited second year students to write a paragraph on how they might research students’ experiences in the department (in the event, we were able to involve all of those who responded). We selected from second year students because they have some undergraduate experience but are not tied up with final examinations. The funding from C-SAP allowed us to pay the students a modest bursary, although a cost free way of doing this kind of research would be to involve students who are doing a research methods course.

Preparing the students

Christina Hughes (who led the project) and I ran a morning workshop with the students to explore questions of focus, research tools, timeframe and an ethical framework. By the end of the morning, students had reached agreement with each other about what they would do, how the work would be divided, and when they would meet to compare notes and so on. It was also decided that the students would depict their findings on posters to support their presentation of them to academic staff. We stressed the meaningfulness of following an appreciative inquiry direction for the discovery process.

Conducting the research (discovery)

In the final research report to C-SAP, Hughes’ describes the elements of this phase:
‘The data collection phase began in January 2004. These students, supported by members of staff in both Sociology and the Centre for Academic Practice, used a range of methods, including interviews, focus groups, participant observation and biographical materials to gather data from students. Respondents were sampled from all years of undergraduate study and included joint degree, overseas and EU students’. 

The students did not follow strictly the appreciative inquiry method of generating propositional statements from this data (see Cousin 2009: ch.10) opting instead for synthesising the findings in visual and textual form for a poster presentation as described below.

**Presenting the research (dream)**

Again, I will quote from Hughes’ report (2005): ‘The findings from this stage of the project were presented at a full meeting of all staff in Sociology during the summer term 2004. This dissemination event was organised and led by the student researchers. The students also produced posters of their main findings and research approaches prior to the meeting. These were displayed in a prominent place in the Department of Sociology from the end of the spring term and into the summer term. The results of their efforts not only led to lively discussion and dialogue between staff and students but were also significant in the development of innovations to be piloted in the following year in four undergraduate modules’.

Broadly, the findings pointed to a preference among learners for exceptional learning activities such as study trips, community project involvement and authentic research opportunities. These are not startling findings but what was powerful about the project was that the students brought these findings to the attention of the academics and shared their ‘dream’ of the kinds of curriculum change they would like. This created a lively discussion, the outcome of which was a promise by four academics to ‘surrender a measure of pedagogic space’ (Barnett 2000) to the students, by growing their active role in the shaping of a research based curriculum.

**Making and sustaining the change (design)**

Four curriculum initiatives were formulated with the students and piloted in the ‘design’ phase of the project. Two of the five student researchers were joined by two postgraduate students to work with the academics on the implementation and evaluation of the projects. Despite some initial awkwardness from teachers, an important outcome of this phase was the development of a design partnership between academics and students. Particularly in the light of more experimentation with technology, it seems to me that such partnerships offer a very promising way of achieving transformative research.

**Destiny**

This modestly funded research project (of £ 4,500.00) provided the foundation for a successful bid (with Oxford Brookes) for a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. This led to the Reinvention Centre, which focused on the generation of research-based learning opportunities for undergraduates (£ 3,000,000.00 in the Sociology Department). Apart from this spectacular result, the student researchers had learned invaluable skills and made a very meaningful contribution to the student experience in their department.

**Conclusion**

We owe an enormous debt to the phenomenographic tradition and the student experience research, that it encouraged. Indeed, there remains room and reason for this to continue.
However, this tradition centres on the researcher as author and extractor of information and is thus not apace with new thinking about how the researcher/researched opposition can be softened by a research with, rather than a research on orientation. As an example of researching with, I have offered a case of a dialogic and developmental form of higher education research in which students and academics work in partnership. When confronted with the need to research an area of higher education, I hope I have persuaded the reader to consider whether research with students might be the most fruitful form of inquiry and provide the most effective force for curriculum change.

References


Hughes C (2005) ‘Linking Teaching and Research in a Research-Oriented Department of Sociology’ at: www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/resources/project_reports/findings/ShowFinding.asp?id=139


Reinvention Centre, Sociology Department, University of Warwick at: www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rs/undergrad/cetl/

Biography

Professor Glynis Cousin is Director of the Institute for Learning Enhancement at the University of Wolverhampton. She joined the university from her previous role as senior advisor at the Higher Education Academy, York. Glynis has worked in adult, community and higher education, and her research is in the fields of: diversity, internationalisation, curriculum enquiry and research methodology. Her recent book Researching Learning in Higher Education was published by Routledge in February 2009.
Abstract

The Doctoral Learning Journeys project investigates how doctoral students in a number of disciplines make ‘learning leaps’ and cross conceptual thresholds in their research, and ways in which they can be supported to do so. It aims to explore and conceptualise the nature of doctoral students’ learning during research and skill development, and to examine and enhance the practices of supervisors and examiners in order to support and assess student learning. This paper will outline emergent findings of a national survey, ongoing mapping of doctoral students’ learning journeys and interviews with doctoral supervisors. So far, this research identifies ways in which students begin to work at more conceptual, critical and creative level as part of their learning journeys. It also begins to suggest ways in which doctoral supervisors can support this process.

Introduction

The National Teaching Fellowship scheme (NTFS) funded ‘Doctoral Learning Journeys’ project (2007-10) is based at the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Brighton and works in collaboration with Inspire at Anglia Ruskin University. Focusing on universities in the UK, it aims to capture student experiences along with supervisor and examiner perceptions of students crossing ‘conceptual thresholds’, identifying moments when doctoral researchers begin to work at more critical, conceptual and creative levels. Threshold concept theory (Meyer and Land 2003; 2005; 2006) posits that in undergraduate learning, students may experience new ways of thinking within their discipline which are transformative, leading to changes in ways of seeing the world. These changed perspectives, ways of thinking and understanding may initially, be experienced as challenging or troublesome, and students may move through a period of liminality. The threshold concept may be bounded, bordering into new conceptual areas and integrative, illuminating a previously hidden interrelatedness of ideas. Ongoing research involving team members which applies this theory to doctoral learning (Wisker, Robinson, Trafford, Lilly and Warnes 2003; Wisker and Robinson 2008; Wisker and Robinson 2008; Wisker, Robinson and Kiley 2008; Kiley and Wisker 2008; 2009; Trafford and Leshem 2008; 2009) argues that conceptual threshold crossing at doctoral level is also evidenced by encounters with troublesome knowledge, movements on from stuck places through liminal spaces into new understandings which are transformative. It is characterised by doctoral learners achieving the ability to work at a conceptual level. This conceptual
threshold crossing is likely to involve ontological change – seeing the self and the world differently – and epistemological development whereby doctoral learners make original contributions to understanding and meaning. We set out to capture the dimensions of the doctoral learning journey, exploring how students recognise and articulate their transitions to working more conceptually, critically and creatively; how supervisors recognise students’ conceptual grasp of their research and to identify strategies and activities, which supervisors might employ to encourage the development of this conceptual level learning.

Methods

The project adopted mixed methods including a national survey of 300 doctoral students which obtained both quantitative and qualitative data. This drew participants from a range of HEIs in the subject areas of Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Education and Health. Simultaneously, the project has mapped the learning journeys of over 20 doctoral students in the same disciplines and from a cross section of HEIs over two years. Learning trajectories and key learning moments in their journeys are captured longitudinally through semi-structured interviews and journaling, designed to produce rich qualitative descriptions of student experiences of learning. The final stage of the research involved interviews with 21 supervisors and is now gathering responses from 20 examiners and programme leaders to gain their perspectives on if and how students display conceptual threshold crossing, and what strategies can be employed to encourage or nudge this learning. The 21 supervisors were chosen from the same five subject areas as the students and were from three different universities. They represented a range of roles, from lecturer to professor.

Findings

To date, the project has not found evidence of the subject specific threshold concept crossing at this level which has been identified in undergraduate students (Meyer and Land 2003; 2005; 2006); however, there is emerging evidence of conceptual threshold crossing, of moving from ‘stuck’ places through liminal spaces into new, more conceptual understandings. Students have described experiences of profound ontological change which is transformative and leads to students seeing the self and the world differently. Epistemological understanding also develops considerably as students understand and engage in the research process, preparing to make an original contribution to knowledge.

Learning moments where students indicate conceptual threshold crossing may occur when they identify research questions; determine relationships between existing theories and their own work; devise methodology and engage with methods; analyse data and reach conceptual conclusions. The student survey captured a variety of ways, as identified by students, in which learning might occur. They included the discovery of a theory, theorist or concept that encapsulates their thinking; the synthesis of two or more concepts to create a new concept; the development of innate or intuitive understandings and a mechanistic, almost superficial, adoption of conceptual position to satisfy requirements of discipline referred to in the threshold concepts literature as mimicry. Mimicry can however, form an important part of the learning journey, enabling students to become confident with their disciplinary language and academic writing, as demonstrated in this extract from a student journal:

I read my friends PhD after my upgrade and then wrote my own ideas in a similar format, for an introductory chapter, just to feel like I had something concrete.

Both the survey and interviews have identified learning leaps which are transformative and irreversible in line with the threshold concepts literature (Meyer and Land 2003; 2005; 2006;
Cousin 2003). While moving through the process of designing and conducting research which will make a contribution to knowledge, doctoral learners begin to ‘think like a researcher’ (Trafford and Leshem 2008; 2009), developing conceptually and creatively in terms of thinking processes; they may deepen their understanding of the research process itself; develop confidence in academic language and the language of their discipline; understand their contribution to knowledge and how their work fits in with that of other researchers, and ultimately develop an identity as researchers, academics and/or professionals and feel able and confident in defending their research. The transformative quality of these processes is illustrated in these quotes:

As time goes on and you start to, you almost develop this skin that is academic and this persona within yourself and as you... get the feedback that comes back and you're thinking about you're doing this the right way and so you begin to start, it's like watching a butterfly I suppose emerge from chrysalis pupa or pupa chrysalis and so on like that and so you begin to develop and I think as that goes on then you gain a certain amount of confidence’ (interview participant).

I realised that doing research was a part of who I am, and whether I did it formally, as in writing this thesis, or in other ways, I will always do it (survey participant).

Learning in terms of conceptual development tends to be experienced as a gradual, accumulative process, with various learning moments occurring as the students move through different phases of research. Conceptual threshold crossing may also take the form of a sudden learning leap, often described as a ‘light-bulb’ or ‘eureka’ moment, a breakthrough moment when things ‘click into place’. The interviews with doctoral learners are identifying that moments in the learning journey when these more dramatic leaps occur tend to come towards the end when the student is writing up, though students also often make significant learning leaps during the transfer of status process. Prior to these learning leaps, students often report experiencing ‘stuck places’ where they feel unable to move, using metaphors such as ‘I hit a brick wall’ or plateau which can involve, for example, a sense of feeling overwhelmed with the amount of data or reading. These moments can indicate a state of liminality and while they can trigger a crisis in confidence and even dropping out of the course, are a normal part of the learning process, enabling students to step back from the research, reflect on its progress and if necessary develop more focus:

At this point I feel like I've reached a plateau... It seems the more I read, the more I need to read, because I can now pinpoint what exactly I don't know and need to learn more about, but I have begun to worry that the time constraints may limit just how much I need to do. I have spoken with several of my colleagues and they say they feel the same way. It's a bit of a mid-course panic (interview participant, second year).

Such experiences of 'stuckness' often precede a sudden shift forwards in terms of understanding, confidence and creativity. Indicators of this conceptual threshold crossing include identity change whereby students see themselves as researchers or practitioners within their field, for example as a sociologist or philosopher, and become part of academic community, defending their work and engaging in debate, as illustrated in these quotes:

Feeling engaged in the contemporary academic debate: ie realising that there are ideas, experiences and data that I have collected and that is likely to be relevant to other researchers, and that other researchers work is relevant to mine is something which has affected my ways of thinking as a researcher. Not as a ‘research student’ but as a member of an active and collaborative academic community that depends on generous and constant exchange of information (survey participant).
A big learning experience for me has been that doing a doctorate is not a search for the truth but is really just taking part in a conversation. I suppose that is also a learning experience in that when I sit with the ‘learned’ in a conference I feel confident in challenging them as I now see myself as a peer (interview participant).

As part of this process of becoming independent researchers, developing an academic identity and seeing themselves as peers within an academic community, students have reported a changing balance of power in their relationships with their supervisors which indicates that they are changing in the way that they see themselves, have increasing autonomy and are taking ownership of, and responsibility for their work:

The balance in the relationship between us is tilting slightly as well because where I was prepared to be guided, going back to assignment one where you are at the beginning stage, the actual balance itself is quite, it’s more of an equal partnership in the discussions now (interview participant).

According to students, factors, which help to trigger this learning, include:

- opportunities to articulate their ideas and findings through networking and presenting
- discussion, questioning and critiquing from supervisors and peers
- a good supervisory relationship based on trust which enables confidence to develop
- visualisation techniques (such as mind maps)
- taking a step back from the research; having the freedom to explore ideas and take risks; opportunities to link learning with experience
- the process of writing; goal setting; life and study skills, eg work/life balance, time management
- familiarisation with appropriate academic language and the development of meta-learning (awareness of the self as a learner).

All of these factors can enable doctoral learners to move forwards, work at the necessary levels to achieve their doctorate and can stimulate transformative conceptual threshold crossing. Such conceptual threshold crossings require the motivation and openness to learning of the individual student, a supportive supervisory relationship and an enabling academic environment with opportunities to engage with a wider academic community.

Supervisors’ perceptions of threshold concepts and conceptual threshold crossing

In addition to the student interviews, supervisors’ understandings of threshold concepts, and conceptual threshold-crossing were examined to reveal whether they thought there were threshold concepts and conceptual thresholds, and if so, whether the concept was related to the trajectory students’ individual projects or to the discipline. Interviews captured supervisors’ perception of critical points in doctoral studies where students crossed conceptual thresholds or made ‘learning leaps’ to achieve more conceptual understandings of their research. There was a focus on when these leaps were likely to happen, and the characteristics of these ‘learning leaps’. So far, these findings complement the findings emerging from analysis of student interview data.

The notion of the discipline specific threshold concept is described as a portal, opening up a new way of thinking about something, and it would produce a significant, irreversible shift in the students’ perception of the subject (Meyer and Land 2003). However, supervisors interviewed
held different views of threshold concepts. Some cast doubts about their existence. They argued that it was normally a theory rather than concepts that would guide a doctoral project, and that even if there were some key concepts in a specific research project, these concepts may not apply to the whole discipline. The perception that threshold concepts are not subject specific corresponds with the student interviews, which suggests that the subject specific threshold concept crossing identified in undergraduate students (Meyer and Land 2003; 2005; 2006) has not been well evidenced at doctoral level studies.

The main argument for those who contested the notion of threshold concepts, especially in Arts, Language and Philosophy, was that each project was different, and the completion of a project would largely depend on students’ commitment to their study, supervisors’ support and encouragement, and student time management of their project. Other supervisors acknowledged the existence of threshold concepts which might influence students’ approach to conducting research. For example, two supervisors from Health Professions identified that patient-centred concepts had greatly influenced their students’ doctoral studies.

Despite the different perceptions of whether threshold concepts exist, all of the supervisors interviewed were aware that there were a variety of ‘learning leaps’ or what we have described as moments when students work at a more conceptual level, a conceptual threshold crossing in the journey of doctoral studies. The learning leaps were perceived as transformative, identical with the argument of (Meyer and Land 2003; Cousin 2003). The three perceived main indicators of learning leaps are increased confidence, improved writing, and conference presentation. This underpins the student perspectives on conceptual threshold crossing in terms of ontological and epistemological development where they gain identities as researchers, understand their contribution to knowledge and develop confidence in using the academic language of their discipline. An example of evidence of increased confidence in writing is given by a supervisor in an arts discipline:

Well, they’ve got an extra dose of confidence. They’ve got an extra dose of clarity. They’re more confident, they’re clearer, and they’re probably very inspired to go and do something else quickly, to take advantage of those changes. I think that’s right.

Of the supervisors who referred to the conference presentation as a breakthrough indicator, one pointed out that presenting and successfully defending research at a conference suggested that students had achieved a good understanding of their work, enabling them to compare their research with other researchers and get into a dialogue with others about their research contribution:

They could be things that happen externally, they could be somebody does a conference presentation and they realise that their work is comparable with other people presenting.

Supervisors had different understandings of whether students’ learning leaps were more likely to happen at a certain stage of their doctoral study. One view among four supervisors is that the learning leap could happen at any time during the study, such as in the design of research questions, or in data collection, data analysis and making conclusions, or even in the viva preparation period. This argument is similar with the findings revealed in the student interviews. Three supervisors argued that the learning leap was more likely to happen when students transferred from MPhil to PhD. Another two suggested the learning leap was more likely to happen when students started to collect their data, and when students started to write their thesis. An interviewee from an arts discipline argued that learning leaps did not happen in a dramatic way, but after the transition from MPhil to PhD. It was easy to observe that over time students had made some type of learning breakthrough:
I'm not sure I can think of particular instances of that happening in a sort of dramatic way, … but I can observe, if I look how a student has got to some place after two years when they started so, you know, you've clearly moved from here to here and that's a real break.

Supervisors emphasised the importance of giving support to students to enable this learning leap to happen, as students might experience a state in which they become stuck in their study because transformation could be conceptually difficult (Meyer and Land 2005). The most frequently mentioned types of support were:

• helping students to build up confidence in their study
• encouraging students to get involved with their research community, for example, through attending seminars, conferences and group study
• providing students with suggestions for literature searches
• encouraging students to engage with their project and not be afraid of making mistakes.

One example of confidence building from the early stages of the learning journey provided by a supervisor in a social science discipline, was to encourage them to write a critical review on the related literature:

Sometimes students are a bit frightened about critically appraising other people's work. It's not until they get to the end of their PhD, when they've transferred, and you say right, now it's time to go back and have a look at this chapter, see what you think about these people's writing now, and it comes back and it's quite different. So I think there is something in there about building confidence and I think you can do that, you can try to do it early on.

Conclusion

Findings from the survey, student and supervisor interviews to date, support the argument that rather than acquiring subject specific threshold concepts students often achieve at undergraduate level, research students tend to cross conceptual thresholds at particular points in their learning journey. These tend to be transformative, involving a primarily ontological, alongside epistemological, shift as students become part of their academic milieu, engaged in discussion and debate and preparing to justify their work to the wider academic community. Doctoral learning and the development of the ability to work at the appropriate conceptual, critical and creative level tends to be experienced as an accumulative process with learning moments occurring at different stages of the journey. Conceptual threshold crossing may also be experienced as a sudden change in understanding or a learning leap, which can occur at any stage in the process, but in this research has tended to occur towards the final stages of the journey. Factors which help to facilitate students' learning leaps identified by both students and supervisors, include signposting relevant theories and concepts alongside providing opportunities to become involved in the research community, to discuss, write and present, gain confidence in use of academic language and become self-aware and autonomous as learners. This involves allowing learners to take risks and make mistakes – allowing them to experience moments of ‘stuckness’ and phases of liminality as part of their learning process – while remaining supportive. This conceptual threshold crossing for doctoral learners, as opposed to discipline related threshold concepts gained at undergraduate level, involves gaining the ability to think like a researcher, make an original contribution to knowledge and defend this within their research and professional communities. Underpinning this, a positive supervisory relationship plays a vital role in enabling learners to build the skills, language, critical engagement, confidence and self-awareness necessary for successful doctoral learning.
Charlotte Morris et al.

References


Biographies

Charlotte Morris is a research officer who has worked in the area of learning and teaching in higher education for five years. She is currently lead researcher on the HEA-NTFS project ‘Doctoral Learning Journeys’, has run two internal HEFCE funded Widening Participation projects, ‘Open Minds: enhancing the learning experience of students with mental health difficulties’ and ‘Aspect: positive teaching practices for students with Asperger Syndrome/Autism’, and has recently begun work on a new ESCalate funded project ‘Troublesome Encounters: Strategies to support
the wellbeing of masters and doctoral students during their learning processes’. Charlotte is also doing fieldwork for a part-time DPhil in Gender Studies at the University of Sussex, investigating lone mothers’ choice making around intimate relationships. In her spare time, she enjoys walking, dancing, music and spending time with her three children, cat and rabbits.

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The university campus as film set
The UCH collaborative film project

DR SARAH ATKINSON

Abstract

In October 2008, all media staff and students at University Centre Hastings (UCH) were involved in a major film production to produce a promotional film for the Centre. The campus was transformed into a live film set over the course of three days.

Scripted by students in the first weeks of the course, using professional actors, drama techniques and post-production finishing, this was an innovative approach to the promotional film brief, and a unique opportunity to implement and practice simulative teaching and learning methods.

This article explores ways in which simulating professional working environments within the higher education context can enhance and enrich course delivery and student engagement. It will also explore teaching methods which allow students to play a valued and significant contribution to a project, in order to gain valid and in-depth insights into the field and its professional working practices.

Introduction

‘Hastings! Hastings! Hastings! you’re listening to Burst, the official University of Brighton radio station’. As the words spoken by Tom Baker’s inimitable and unmistakable tones rumble through the speakers, so begins another screening of the UCH promotional film at the latest open day. What follows is six minutes of fast-paced, dynamic, dramatic, fluid and contemporary student-scripted
film content. Two minutes of which, are perhaps the longest list of credits ever seen on a film of this format. The list shows the names of all of the students who contributed to the production. Some of whom are listed in four different places, since they were given the unique opportunity of being involved in the film within a multitude of different roles: scriptwriter, extra, art department and production assistant. This latest screening of the promotional film signals another celebration of this successful venture. The underlying effects of the project emanated from the production experience itself, and the student responses to it are further explored in this article.

Background

The Broadcast Media programme comprises a vocational portfolio of undergraduate courses, all of which have an emphasis on professional industry standards and practice. The courses embody innovative industry emulation in the overall teaching and learning ethos and within all of the approaches to assessment. The programme is situated in the wider context of the University Centre Hastings (UCH), which actively aims to bring higher education opportunities to an area of regeneration.

It was during the induction phase to the programme in autumn 2008 that the groundbreaking UCH collaborative film project was devised. It was a pilot exercise on which to build the foundations of future work-based learning activities, which are an integral facet of the course, and its unique industry practice ethos.

During the induction period of the university cycle, it is common for students to experience feelings of loss, alienation and inadequacy. The formal university induction process tends to bombard the students with information and university jargon, which to the unfamiliar might as well be a foreign language. Therefore this sense of loss and inadequacy that the students arrive with is extended further into their university experience. This is arguably more acute within the UCH student body, many of whom are first generation university students.

The centrality of the institution of the university is emphasised during this period, and so the collaborative film project aimed to make the students and their experiences the centre of the induction process. As such, the project aimed to improve self-esteem, confidence in ideas, and to foster an overall sense of inclusion. It also aimed to provide the students with a sense of empowerment, regardless of their level, and to give them a sense of ownership of the course.

Widening Participation and LearnHigher funding supported the project and the brief was to publicise UCH courses to a diverse, non-traditional student demographic. The approach to the film project itself, was also focused on widening participation, engaging the entire student body in a professional field where work experience is sometimes difficult to access. The basis of the UCH film project was to provide an accessible environment in which the participating students would engage with work-based learning activities. The dynamic and fast-paced work environment of a film set was recreated, and all associated professional working practices were emulated to make it as true to life and real for the students as possible.

Aims of the project

The challenge of the project was to provide an effective, exciting and engaging overview of the course and the professional area that the students wanted to enter into, within the first two weeks of the semester. This challenge was compounded by attempting to contain an entire production cycle (normally three to six month in the real world, with no one participant being a party to the entire process,) within the few weeks of the course.
Dr Sarah Atkinson

At the end of year 1, all students will have individually written a short film script; produced a group documentary; planned, shot and edited a short drama; produced a radio feature and worked on a television studio programme. These are longer term goals in which the students have to wait for the entire year to see their hard work and efforts come to fruition in the form of a completed production. The collaborative film project enabled us to include experience and insights into all of these areas; giving the students a potted overview of the work that they would be covering over the coming year. A key aspect of the UCH film project was that students in the different departments of the crew (ie camera, sound and art department) would be organised in such a way that all three levels of students would be placed together; with the intention that they would learn from one another, by adopting a model of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL). PAL is defined by Boud, Cohen and Sampson as; 'students learning from and with each other in both formal and informal ways' (2001:4), the benefit of adopting such an approach within the collaborative film project, is the fact that 'a key function of PAL may be to ease the transition to university for new students' (Court and Molesworth 2007:124). Students involved with the film project were able to meet and work with one another as well as getting to know key members of Broadcast Media staff.

Production process

The project aimed to build professional awareness and practice, and the overall emphasis throughout was on attaining high-end production values through real world working conditions. This was achieved by deploying all Broadcast Media staff (both academic and technical) and industry professionals, (a director of photography, grip and camera operator) as key members of the production team. The emphasis was one of mutual collaboration between students, staff and professionals to ensure that students felt involved, included and equal.

The validity and the realism of the work-based learning experience was of paramount importance. Work-based learning has been articulated as 'a broad definition to encompass work-based and experiential learning as well as traditional instruction-led learning undertaken at the workplace' (HEFCE 2009). Professional actors were cast in order to emphasise the actuality of the experience, and to enable the professional film set feel. Alongside making use of the high-end production facilities in the Broadcast Media centre at UCH, additional professional equipment was hired such as tracks and a dolly (above). This ensured that the production became a high profile event during the course of the shooting cycle at both UCH and in the Hastings local community. All locations were sourced on campus or within the local area, to ensure that all students had access to the activities, and that involvement took place across different courses and included all staff, many of whom were brought in to help out as extras on set which enhanced a sense of a supportive and involved community environment.

The approach to the script was one of collaborative writing by a large group of first year students. Similar groundbreaking collaborative film projects under development at the time of production, included A Swarm of Angels¹ which involved multiple collaborators, exploiting the exciting potential of Web 2.0 technologies in order to share and write a feature length script within an online environment.

The idea of the collaborative film project was to hand over this creative aspect entirely to the students. The script was created using a collaborative online Wiki in which students could add,

¹ http://aswarmofangels.com/
The university campus as film set

amend, and delete each other’s work as the script developed. The students were provided with a story structure within which to work. The framework included three students from different backgrounds (Character C, Character H, and Character U,) following them from their decision points to apply to study at UCH, to their subsequent arrival and experience of the campus and university life. The Broadcast Media students created the scenarios in workshops and worked independently online by inputting and adding to the dialogue. Although much of the content had to be cut back for the final shoot (the students wrote 17 pages, which had to be edited down to six), the original student dialogue and descriptions were maintained. The script editing process enabled an invaluable lesson to be taught in terms of shooting script ratios, and budget and schedule restrictions. The descriptions of the characters in terms of their physical characteristics and personalities were also maintained through the casting process and selection (the original student Wiki can be viewed at: http://uch-collaborative-film.Wikispaces.com). The advantages of utilising the Wiki technology enabled all students to participate in the project within their own time and allowed them anonymity, whilst also being introduced to the concept of team working. As Bernard et al have observed ‘Effective learning needs to be collaborative and interactive’ (Palloff and Pratt 1999).

Outcomes

In addition to being designed as a valued learning exercise in itself, the film project also raised awareness of UCH and its activities throughout the local community. The practical outcomes of the project were:

• A promotional DVD, which contained the drama and documentary element. These films are both screened at open days and the DVD has been widely distributed to schools and FE colleges across the country.2
• The generation of unique course learning materials; the script, planning documents, storyboards and ‘rushes’. These invaluable materials have all been digitised into electronic form and are available in various locations on studentcentral. They are currently used and referenced across the course in various different modules. The application of these resources to the course teaching has proven meaningful to the students since they could then relate to the familiar material which they had played a major part in generating, thus giving them a sense of ownership of the materials. This sense of ownership is of great importance and worth to the students, as observed by Collis:

2 Copies of the DVD are available from: s.a.atkinson@brighton.ac.uk.
‘... students not only have a wider choice of resources and modalities of study materials from which to choose... but also come to share in the responsibility of identifying appropriate additional resources for the course and even contributing to the learning resources in a course’ (1998:377).

The accessibility of these materials has in turn led to enhanced assignment engagement. Using one illustrative example within a post-production module on which I teach, the resources were used for teaching purposes and also for the basis for assessment. A resource bank such as this, which includes all production elements from one programme/film in one repository, is difficult to obtain and difficult to make use of due to copyright and licensing issues. Available resources tend to be outdated and have little visual relevance to the expectations and sensibilities of contemporary students. To address this problem, the UCH collaborative film project deliberately used contemporary shooting styles and editing techniques (ie fluid camera work and fast-paced cutting), which are familiar techniques that students are adept at consuming and have a desire to create. Alongside the rapid development of media technologies that we experience today, new styles of production will continue to manifest and so the project addressed these constant changes. These resources (for the purposes of post-production,) are also impossible to obtain from commercial film and television outputs, since the films are already cut, fine-tuned, graded, and treated. In order for students to gain an authentic and valid experience of cutting the rushes of a production, elements such as the clapperboard need to be visible (so that the student can ascertain the shot and take number), and the off camera commands such as ‘speed’ ‘action’ and ‘cut’ need to be heard. Different ‘takes’ need to be accessible too, so that students appreciate and gain an understanding of the importance of shot selection, being able to experiment with different ‘takes’ (variations of the same shot or sequence) so that they can make active and informed decisions about shot size, flow, pace, composition and continuity.

This particular post-production assignment required the students to produce a television advertising campaign using the rushes taken from both the drama and documentary shoots. As such, they were able to produce their own individual versions and interpretations of the footage, which resulted in some even faster-paced, innovative and original responses to the promotional film brief.

**Student feedback**

From a project planning perspective, there was a clear distinction of the approaches taken towards the different levels of students on the course, in order to give all three levels of the course an experience relevant to their level of expertise. Upon completion of the film project, students were required to complete questionnaires and some were interviewed in more depth to ascertain the success of these approaches. Overall through these feedback channels, the students communicated a sense of relevance and appreciation of the material on the course in terms of professional industry practice through their experience on the film set. There was a clear distinction between the types of feedback that was received.

- Year 1 students could see their ideas realised, through their creation of the script even though they didn’t have any prior course knowledge or experience.
- Year 2 students had the opportunity to apply technical skills that they’d learned from the course from their previous year of study in a professional working environment.
- Year 3 students were given the opportunity to specialise and had opportunities to take on more responsible roles shadowing the professionals.
The university campus as film set

Year 1 students expressed an appreciation of the experience as an induction activity, and as an effective introduction to the course and the field of professional film production. Several responses to evaluation questionnaires were indicative of this:

- it got you ready for what it will be like in the industry...
- ...I liked how we saw how the professionals got the work done
- ...I felt it was a great way in which to gain experience on the film process and set
- it made me realise how professional you have to act to make it in the industry.

Year 2 students clearly appreciated the experience of the professional environment, but wanted more involvement on a technical and creative level.

- ...I feel the role of the camera op and grip could have easily been filled by the students of UCH – meaning students could have been more involved.

In some cases, Year 2 students were fiercely critical of the restriction to gain operational access to the equipment, which they felt was unfair and inappropriate. In some cases this led to them criticising the overall end product of the promotional film. As Trowler has also observed:

‘When emotional satisfaction is denied through preventing people from achieving their own goals, being compelled to realise other people’s goals, then there will be rejection’ (2008:153).

This rejection is clearly seen in the case of the UCH promotional film, since one student openly discredits the final quality of the film, as a result of their sense that they didn’t have true creative control of the finished product.

Year 3 students expressed a desire for longer term in-depth involvement of the entire process and in some cases felt access was limited. They made comments such as:

- ... more involvement with the scripting phase ... and ... not enough time doing any particular role.

Conclusion

Student feedback from the project suggests that the experience contributed to the strengthened Broadcast Media cohort identity, improved retention and led to significant course enhancement and staff development. It has proved successful in raising the profile of the media production subject area and that of the University Centre itself, within both local and national arenas. It also provided a test-bed on which to develop new approaches to simulational and experiential learning.

The core objective on which the project was based was how to enhance the quality of the student experience, from which these additional benefits emanated. It is therefore necessary to consider and look forward to an approach which would address the students’ comments and feedback in order to enhance and improve their experiences in future projects.

The Broadcast Media course is now in a position to have alumni working in the media industry (within the BBC drama department and at Envy post-production house in Soho, to name but two graduate destinations). This provides an ideal opportunity to invite graduates back to be involved in a similar project, but this time in the capacity of the professional mentors. In future projects, graduates would be able to take the place of staff members in order to further validate the experience, and increase the potential inspiration the project offers new students undertaking the course. This would formalise the invaluable PAL experience, embedded in this particular
project, and extend its effects further by encouraging more in-depth student involvement, participation, and full creative control.

Such an approach would undoubtedly build upon and strengthen an already groundbreaking project and a unique exercise in teaching and learning within a contemporary HE environment. The project’s legacy is continually felt by all those involved in its creation, and by the new students attending the open days and subsequently enrolling on the Broadcast Media courses.

Acknowledgements

A huge and heartfelt thank you to all of the staff based at UCH who contributed to and supported this project so willingly and generously. The full list of credits which includes all those that contributed and were involved, can be viewed at the end of the promotional film, available from Sarah Atkinson at: s.a.atkinson@brighton.ac.uk.

In memoriam

The character of Olivia in the promotional film is based on Foundation Degree Broadcast Media student Mathapelo Thobela. Mathapelo was involved in the scripting phase of the project and the students decided to base the character on her life situation and the fact that she didn’t want to be stuck working in a coffee shop all her life, and so decided to go to university. The character is actually played by a professional actress, but Mathapelo appears as an extra in the film; in the lecture theatre scene and also dancing in the background at the party.

Mathapelo tragically died on Monday 5 October 2009, before commencing her second year of studies. She is described by those that knew her as a lovely person; always smiling, always happy. Mathapelo’s legacy and these precious memories of her will continue to live on in the film.

References

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Biography

Dr Sarah Atkinson is a principal lecturer in Broadcast Media, University Centre Hastings, where she was appointed in 2006, to develop and lead the newly validated Broadcast Media course provision. This now includes a suite of well-regarded course offerings in the media production field. Sarah was awarded a university Teaching Excellence Award in 2008 and an Art, Design and Media teaching fellowship in 2009 in recognition of her significant contribution to this area. Sarah has a PhD from Brunel University. Her practice-based thesis ‘Telling Interactive Stories’, investigates digital fictional interactive storytelling, and her interactive film Crossed Lines, has been exhibited at art shows in the UK, US, Greece and Belgium.
Linking creative practice to the personal development agenda

JESS MORIARTY AND CHRISTINA READING

Abstract

Supporting students with their creative process can help to enhance their assessed work and provide them with life skills to take into the workplace and their lives beyond university. However, enabling students to make links between their sources for inspiration and the development of their creative practice can sometimes be difficult, since students fail to see their creativity as having a meaningful effect on their studies, their vocational ambitions and personal development. This paper reports on a research project that found that students’ creativity was most effectively supported by creating opportunities for students to identify the things within themselves that inspire their creativity, and thus improve their confidence and ownership of ideas. It argues that combining creativity with the Personal Development Planning (PDP) agenda could make both meaningful and relevant to students.

Introduction

This paper argues that linking creative practice to the Personal Development Planning (PDP) agenda provides opportunities for students to make meaningful associations between their university studies and their ongoing vocational and personal development. Supporting students with their creative process can help to enhance their assessed work and provide them with life skills that they can take into the work place and their lives beyond university. Enabling students to make links between their sources for inspiration and the development of their creative practice however, can sometimes be difficult, since students fail to see their personal creativity as having a meaningful effect on their practice, their vocational ambitions and personal development.

This paper reports on a research project that investigated students’ experiences of creativity at the University of Brighton. It found that students’ creativity was effectively supported if opportunities were provided for them to identify the things within themselves that inspire their creativity, improve their confidence and ownership of ideas, and create spaces in which to discuss their creativity away from their assessed work. Ultimately, the paper suggests that student creativity is best supported by embedding workshops into the curriculum that provide opportunities for students to gather the confidence and motivation to discuss their creativity, and the factors that inspire it. It argues that doing this would enable higher education to combine creative practice with the PDP agenda in a way that would make both meaningful and relevant to students and staff.
These issues raise a number of questions for higher education about how to progress the PDP agenda and promote creativity amongst students. Questions include:

- Do staff and students still feel PDP is relevant to meaningful teaching and learning?
- How can PDP be linked to the creative curricula without distorting important aspects of PDP and the creative process?
- How exactly can PDP be linked to the teaching and learning of creative and reflective students?
- Is creativity and the teaching of it, the same for all creative subjects (design, creative writing, art, performance, etc)?
- Can this process encourage learning across the curricula that liberates students from the traditional approaches to their subjects?
- How can academic staff ensure that they are creating a vision of creativity that fits with the sustainable and moral values of higher education?
- Can this process be used to empower students with the confidence to interpret the academic material that is in keeping with their own values and interests, with a view to facilitating lifelong learning?

Creative practice and PDP

Within existing literature there is extensive debate about whether creativity resides in ‘the person, a process or an outcome’ (Dineen et al 2005:156), and therefore to what extent HE can influence it through teaching and other personal and academic experiences. This paper argues that whatever the source, supporting students to identify their own processes and products within their creative practice, can enhance their creative scholarship (their understanding of the factors that influence their processes as well as the quality of the products they produce) and equip them with the skills for professions related to their practice.

Employers are increasingly seeking to recruit staff who can demonstrate the ability to suggest novel and useful ideas, and to exploit connections and opportunities not seen by others (Drewery 2003). Art and design graduates should be well placed to offer these skills, as an important contributor towards business success (Drewery 2003), but it remains unclear whether creative practice graduates are aware of how these skills can assist their employability and entrepreneurship (Harvey 2000).

Nurturing creativity is also supported by recognition of the fact that ‘it is a very personal act’ (Jackson 2002:1) and for this reason, it is connected to students’ intrinsic motivation for learning and equipping them with the confidence and skills to critically reflect on their processes at work in their own creative practice. These conditions suggest that HE will need to create learning environments for creative practice students that: ‘... develop self-efficacy, encourage risk taking in safe environments and help students engage in messy/complex processes in unpredictable situations which have no right or wrong answer’ (Jackson 2002:3).

They also suggest more facilitated and collaborative models of teaching and learning that tap into students’ intrinsic motivations. Reid (2004) argues: ‘... that creative teaching involves setting up a learning environment that encourages students to see the essence as well as the detail of the subject, to formulate and solve problems, to see connectedness between diverse areas, to take in new ideas, and to include the element of surprise in their work’. With this in mind, the approach of this project was to ask students about their creative practice. An outcome was to
facilitate a workshop for creative practice students in a dynamic learning space and to ask them to reflect on the experience of explicitly exploring and connecting with their creativity; and moreover, how this might help them with their creative practice and studies.

**Stage 1 Interviews with creative practice students: sources for inspiring practice**

Undergraduate students on the Illustration degree from the School of Arts and Architecture, and students who had taken a creative writing module in the School of Language, Literature and Communication, were invited to be interviewed about their creative practice. The interviews asked students to reflect on their inspirations and creative processes in relation to their academic studies, and how (if at all), this linked with their personal development. The project was managed by two lecturers, who worked cross-department, recruiting students from their specific disciplines.

By identifying the specific mechanisms for creative processes amongst these students, we aimed to discover shared experiences that support students in their creative practice. The project sought to use these personal conversations to identify the circumstances and material that empowers students with their creative process. The confidence and belief in their own ideas and their ability to execute them is important for creativity. Students vary in their degree of confidence, which can be eroded by negative criticism and/or supported by encouragement from tutors, family or friends. The key to ensuring that students get the best out of courses lies in helping them to develop a better sense of themselves and being able to relate their creativity to their studies. This enables them to get more out of their course and prepares them for their professional working lives. We also found that students who were clearer about their interests and motivations, and had a better sense of themselves were also more confident about their work and ownership of it. We discovered a number of key factors to developing students’ creativity:

i) *The importance of students’ capacity to relate creativity to their academic studies and vocational ambitions*

Whilst personal biographies might provide a trigger for their creativity, students also need to be able to relate this to their studies and their vocational ambitions. To do this, they need targeted support to be able to locate their creativity within a disciplinary framework.

ii) *This capacity needs to be supported by a process that allows students’ opportunities to record, discuss and develop their ideas*

Students’ creativity is supported by a process through which they can follow their ideas and motivations as they develop their creative approaches. Central to this is the ability to reflect on, discuss and debate the processes at work in their creative projects.

iii) *Creativity is encouraged by collaborative activity, feedback and encouragement from peers and tutors*

Students’ creativity is nurtured by positive support and encouragement from tutors, family and peers. It is also supported by collaborative activity with fellow students, and opportunities to engage in discussion and debate about their creativity. Many students describe early memories of being encouraged to be creative, which were central to their motivation for becoming creative practitioners.
Artwork by students on the BA Hons, Illustration degree:

1 Lyall McCarthy
2 Alice Patullo
3 Noriko Sato
4 Creativity workshop at the Creativity Centre
5 Connie Dickson
6 Lucy McGarth
7 Hannah Bailey
8 Rebecca Parnell
9 Ruth Nicols
10 Ivan Franco
11 Creativity workshop at the Creativity Centre
Linking creative practice to the personal development agenda

I mean part of the reason I did it was probably because I would do something and people would go, Wow, wow! Look at what Ben’s doing!

iv) Creativity is supported by spaces in which to be creative

Students also value personal spaces in which to be creative. They need spaces they can make their own in order to be creative. For some students (especially visual practice students), this space relates to a physical place in which they can surround themselves with the images and other stimuli that inspire them. For other students this can be related to ways of working, for example, carrying a notebook or sketchbook in which to collect and store things that they notice.

v) Students’ creativity is supported by reading, writing and drawing skills

All students, regardless of their disciplinary focus, regarded writing, drawing and reading as key skills for creativity. The most creative students seemed to be able to use these skills interchangeably, using reading and writing to inspire visual practice and using visual practice to inspire writing. Many students describe memories of developing these skills in equal measure when they were young with perhaps one form eventually coming to dominate their practice (Biggs 2003).

The findings from the interviews suggest that students benefited from the opportunity to discuss their creative process. The interview provided the opportunity for students to identify their own processes and to see how they were developing as practitioners and learners. We wanted to identify a way to encourage students to explore this further in collaboration with other students. The insights provided by the interviews were used to design and facilitate a workshop to support students’ creative processes.

Stage 2 Piloting a possible solution: a creative personal development workshop

Having interviewed the students, they were invited to attend a one-day voluntary workshop to explore and discuss their sources for inspiration and to share their creative products. The students took part in a variety of writing and drawing exercises, working individually and in small groups that combined the disciplines. They were also asked to discuss a number of questions relating to their creativity and personal motivations, which included:

• What conditions are conducive to your creativity?
• What does it mean to be creative and what is the effect of this on your academic studies and life skills?
• What have been the effects of collaboration? How can you take this further?

By taking part in these exercises, we aimed to create opportunities for students to reflect on their creative work and to make the links between the seemingly intangible thing that is creativity and their academic and personal development. Students were asked to reflect on their experience of explicitly exploring and connecting with their creativity, and how this might help them with their studies. The feedback from the workshop was extremely positive with students welcoming the opportunity to discuss and debate their creativity within the informal setting of the Creativity Centre, and away from their studies. The workshop provided a way of making creativity personal and meaningful to them.

Like the students, the authors found the cross-department collaboration a great source of inspiration for their own research and teaching processes. This is another reason why we would endorse this approach as having a meaningful effect on staff and students’ creative processes,
and on their personal development at the University of Brighton. We are currently seeking funding to extend this project and to pilot a series of creative workshops that would be embedded throughout creative practice courses. The focus of these workshops would be to ask students to reflect on their experience of exploring and connecting with their own creative processes and practice, and how this might be helpful to their academic studies and personal development. In doing this, we are suggesting that it may be helpful for HE to link the PDP agenda and the creativity agenda as a way of making both relevant and meaningful to students.

**Conclusion**

PDP is an approach that is rooted in ‘the idea of self-reflective and self-regulated learner’ (Foster 2002:7), an approach that has also been shown to be beneficial to students’ creativity. Although the approach to learning that PDP advocates is widely embraced by HE, it has yet to find a convincing way of engaging staff and students with its agenda (James 2003). This study suggests that creative process is inextricably linked to personal development, academic achievement and vocational ambition. By creating opportunities for students to identify and reflect on their personal motivations for work, and to debate their creative process in a collaborative and social environment, there is an opportunity for HE to make the PDP agenda more meaningful and relevant to creative practice students and staff. In facilitating this form of reflective practice, which is central to PDP, we believe the different factors that influence a student’s creativity can be meaningfully discussed, recorded and developed. It would also allow HE the opportunity to learn about the critical moments in students’ creative processes across different disciplines.

**References**


Linking creative practice to the personal development agenda


Biographies

Jess Moriarty is a senior lecturer in the School Humanities at the University of Brighton. She teaches undergraduates on the degree programmes that have received excellent feedback and has extensive experience in facilitating writing workshops and retreats for students and professionals alike. Jess is currently writing her paper for a doctorate in Education. She has written in a variety of genres and carried out research into staff development and writing techniques.

Christina Reading works on funded research projects for the Faculty of Arts and the Centre for Learning and Teaching. Christina is currently developing a strand of an HEA funded project for the CLT that explores the evolution of the creative practice/writing doctorate in collaboration with the University of East London. She is also working on a Heritage Lottery funded project gathering oral histories from audiences, to tell the story of the social history of the cinema over the last 100 years. Christina joined the Faculty of Arts in November 2007, to work as a research fellow on a joint CELTD/CLT project designed to investigate how design students learn from museum collections and other sources of inspiration. She is currently working towards the completion of a practice-based doctorate, which examines the way women figurative artists have pictured melancholy at the University of the Creative Arts.
Goodbye face to face
hello Facebook

The use of social network sites to help facilitate a mentoring relationship

SUE WILL AND JULIE FOWLIE

Abstract

This research investigates innovative ways of using technology to support learning when dealing with large numbers of students within the Brighton Business School. The mentoring project covers a combined total of around 650 first and final year students, and aims to find out if social network sites can be used to help develop a mentoring relationship between the students. It also seeks to determine if the quality of the relationship is improved by encouraging students to keep in contact, and share experiences of learning with each other in this way. Facebook is a framework familiar to most students, and is used by a large proportion of them to share information and exchange knowledge and ideas. Although it is primarily a social network site, it has the potential for use in other ways for example in a mentoring capacity. The project is therefore, seeking to engage with student learning in a medium and space that is already utilised by them, without being seen as university initiated. It also provides a virtual tutor presence where the course tutors can respond to students’ queries giving guidance and support when necessary.

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Introduction

The research considers how student learning can be supported using the social network site Facebook. It is reviewed within the context of a mentoring programme that is created between the first and final year students at the University of Brighton Business School (BBS) as part of their academic studies. It seeks to establish if Facebook can be used to help develop this relationship, and to determine if the quality of the encounter is improved by encouraging students to keep in contact and share experiences of learning with each other using this facility. Facebook is an online activity familiar to most students, and is already used by a large proportion in a private and social capacity to keep in touch with family and friends. The project therefore seeks to engage with student learning by using a medium already familiar to them. It seeks to develop their academic learning by using an online social network facility that could be regarded as outside of the university’s more traditional spheres of learning. By undertaking this research,
it is hoped to establish if the social network site Facebook can add value to an academic mentoring relationship for students at BBS. In doing this, it hopes to achieve the following objectives:

- to establish levels of popularity and usage of Facebook by first and final year business students within BBS
- to find ways in which a Facebook group page can be used to help facilitate a mentoring relationship
- to see if the mentoring relationship is improved by using Facebook as a means of maintaining contact
- to provide tutors with feedback for future development of the module.

The research project was granted a Learning and Teaching Award from the University of Brighton to undertake the investigation. This required a presentation of findings at the Learning and Teaching Conference in July 2009. An application was also accepted for a conference at Imperial College, London on 'Innovations in teaching methods' which took place in September 2009.

**Background to the University of Brighton Business School mentoring programme**

The research is based upon the 2008-09 first and final year cohorts of undergraduate students at BBS. Both first and final year students follow a taught programme of study that incorporates a requirement to undertake the mentoring relationship. Both year groups are required to be involved in the project as it forms an assessed part of their programme. The benefits to both parties of being involved in this relationship, have been tried and tested over the 10 plus years that it has been in operation. However, various developments have taken place over the years to help improve its effectiveness.

Tutors on the programme set up the mentoring project at the start of the academic year by allocating and pairing first and final year students. The combined total population in this year’s study is in excess of 500 students. Once the pairings have been published, establishing and continuing the relationship is down to the leadership and guidance of the final year mentor and the individual mentee/s concerned. The tutors continue to provide support to the project via a series of taught input sessions to help facilitate the relationship. They act as a consultancy team offering tutorials, help and advice to the mentors when requested.

Analysis of feedback received the previous year suggested that a significant number of students were using Facebook to build and maintain their mentoring relationship. The tutors felt that rather than ignore its potential, they would host a group page on Facebook at the start of the year’s mentoring project as a pilot scheme to see if it added any value to the existing mentoring programme. The findings have provided the primary data for this small scale research project.

**Background to the development of social network sites**

*The Times Higher Education* (11 September 2008), paints a bleak picture in an article entitled ‘Survey finds it’s all work, less play for the top-up generation’ (Atwood 2008). It suggests that there has been a dramatic drop in the number of hours students spend socialising, “Two years ago seeing friends was the biggest event in the student day, with 44 per cent of students devoting five hours or more on a typical weekday to their social life. Now only 15 per cent of students spent this much time with friends’ (Atwood 2008:14). In contrast, the article suggests that online social networking has become a significant part of university life with 88 per cent of students using social network sites every week, ’... for 9 per cent of students this takes up a significant chunk
of their time – 11-20 hours’ (Atwood Op. cit). The suggestion seems to be that students have moved their social interaction from the physical to the virtual environment. The reasons behind this appear to be more complex. Statistics in the article point to students becoming increasingly detached from campus life. It is suggested that students living at home and conducting part-time employment alongside their studies, might be partly responsible for this.

This shift towards online communication, is reinforced by research published by the telecom regulator Ofcom. Their annual survey (August 2009) on communication services used by the adult population shows a marked increase in the use of the internet. ‘Mobile telephony and home internet use (including web and applications) both experienced the largest increases in average daily use (15 per cent and 22 per cent respectively).’

The move towards more social interaction being conducted in a virtual space is reinforced by recent research (Nielsen.com 2009a). The report identifies that social networks and blogs are now the fourth most popular online activity ‘one in every 11 minutes online globally is accounted for by social network and blogging sites’. A more recent news release from the company states that time spent on Facebook has increased nearly 700 per cent in the last year ‘growing from 1.7 billion minutes in April 2008 to 13.9 billion in April 2009... there is no question that people continue to gravitate towards social networking and blog sites’ (Nielson.com 2009b).

Whilst the huge growth in usage of social network sites is acknowledged, what creates the appeal and drives the demand is possibly less tangible. Mezrich (2009) attempts to track the rise of the Facebook phenomena. From humble origins, fellow Harvard students and college friends Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Saverin launched The Facebook. It was originally designed as an extended online college community for Harvard students. On one level, its appeal seemed to be the exclusive nature of the site. You had to know the right people in order to be invited to join.

‘An online community of friends – of pictures, profiles, whatever – that you could click into, visit, browse around. A sort of social network – but one that was exclusive, in that you had to know the people on the site to get into it. Kind of like in the real world – real social circles – but put online, by the people in the social circles themselves’ (Mezrich 2009:79).

Coupled with this was its capacity to let friends in your social network know what was currently happening in your life. Giving them a day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute account of events supported with photographic evidence.

‘You didn’t just visit the site once. You visited it every day. You came back again and again, adding to your site, your profile, changing your pictures, your interests, and most of all, updating your friends. It really had moved a large portion of college life onto the Internet’ (Mezrich 2009:111).

Another main factor in its success was the capacity to save students time, and increase the flow of information. It allowed the students to keep each other updated on events and activities that were happening in and around the campus, in a way that normal face to face communication would not allow.

‘It was really such an amazing tool, lubricating the social scene – making everything happen so much faster’ (Mezrich 2009:110).

A theme that seems to emerge is that of maximising time effective communications. By creating a virtual space, individuals can keep in touch with their wide social network of friends, without needing to be in the same time and space physically. As Brown (2008) notes, it allows the hoarding of friends. Although he points out that more is not necessarily better, in fact arguably the more you have the less they are worth. Such activity brings into question the true value
and meaning of friendship. ‘Thanks to Facebook I never lose touch with anyone. And that, my Friend, is a problem’ (Brown 2008:1).

**Establishing the research methodology**

In order to obtain primary data for the study, a range of tools and techniques were used to collect information from the 2008-09 first and final year student population at BBS. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected to help establish statistical evidence and gauge personal attitudes and opinions. In particular, the following activities were seen to be helpful in providing data for analysis.

- Establish a group page on Facebook called BBS Mentoring 2008. A total of 188 students requested to join the group. This translated to 37.5 per cent of the total final year and 28 per cent of the total first year students.

- Initial questionnaire to all first and final year students to identify their current usage of Facebook (Collis and Hussey 2003).

- A small sample of focus groups with first and final year students who currently use Facebook (Collis and Hussey Op. cit.).

- Mentoring evaluation questionnaire to gauge the usefulness of the project. A total of 152 replies (62 per cent) were received from the final year students. A smaller sample of 37 first year students was also questioned about their mentoring experience, which translated at 17 per cent.

**Outcomes of the research activity**

Atwood (2008) highlights the current dilemma facing many of today’s university students. Conflicting demands on their time mean they are potentially less able than previous generations to meet and socialise face to face. Given this background, it seems unsurprising that 67 per cent of the students surveyed reported being Facebook users. In fact, this statistic might have been higher, had it asked students to include the use of all social network sites and blogging tools rather than just their usage of Facebook. All those who reported using Facebook said they accessed their account on a daily basis, giving justification to its prominence as supported by the secondary data mentioned above. The type and range of activities undertaken was also interesting. It’s capacity for them to communicate both privately and publicly was seen as important, along with the visual element it provides via the uploading of photos, pictures and video. The dimension to socialise was also prominent in the responses received. Arguably, all these elements might be regarded as requirements of a face to face transaction. It is therefore, possibly for these reasons that Facebook has become such a successful replacement for real time social life.

Facebook therefore appears to be a successful virtual community used by BBS students for their social activity. The focus of the research however, was on the value of using this facility within a mentoring relationship. The qualitative data suggests that the establishment of the BBS mentoring group page did add value to the student experience. The ability to locate mentees and mentors via posting on the group page wall certainly proved useful, and the posting of mentees photographs allowing them to tag and identify each other, was also popular. Communications between tutors and students was seen as a productive activity, allowing reinforcement of messages and information given out in the seminars. It became apparent from the focus groups that students had also added their mentees as friends on their own individual Facebook accounts. Some reported setting up their own group page with colleagues and getting all their mentees to join.
A mentoring evaluation questionnaire has been conducted over several years with different cohorts of students. It is therefore possible to compare this year’s results with those obtained from last year. As all other parts of the mentoring relationship remained the same, any significant differences in results might in part, be explained by the introduction of Facebook into the process. Not surprisingly, given its prominence with this year’s students, Facebook is mentioned by 21 per cent of the 2008-09 student cohort, which is a substantial increase from the 6 per cent mentioned in the previous year’s students. Given the increase in this type of communication, it was interesting to note that a corresponding decrease was reported in face to face meeting. In the previous year only 6 per cent of students said they didn’t have a face to face meeting with their mentee, however in the 2008-09 figures this had risen to 9 per cent.

Another interesting statistic comparing the year on year figures, is the increased level of satisfaction with the mentoring experience. Asking about their mentee’s co-operation in the mentoring process 51 per cent of the previous year mentors said it was excellent or good, whereas in the 2008-09 cohort this had increased by 15 per cent to 66 per cent. Clearly, a number of factors could be attributed to this increased level of satisfaction not least that this year’s mentees were just more committed and engaged with the process. Part of the reason for their commitment could be due to the improved channels of communications facilitated possibly by the use of Facebook. Certainly some support for this idea comes from the fact that over half of the final year mentors said they had visited the BBS Facebook group page. This in itself would suggest improved levels of awareness and better information.

Conclusion

The aim of the research, to find out if Facebook can add value to a mentoring relationship, appears to have been partly established. As another channel or vehicle for communication to take place, it appears to have been successful for some students. Although not the main means of contact, 21 per cent of the mentor replies said they had used it for some or all of the mentoring process. Specific objectives for the research targeted Facebook usage and popularity amongst the BBS students. Just over two thirds of those surveyed have a Facebook account and use it on a daily basis. Over half of these users have held their account for between one and two years. This would appear to justify its usage with students, as it is clearly a medium actively used by a large number of them.

The usefulness of a Facebook group page was established by analysing activity carried out on the BBS Mentoring group page. Some of the main activities involved the use of photograph tagging or naming to help identify each other. This helped in the location of missing students, enabling mentors and mentees to ‘find one another’ and pair up. It was also apparent from the focus groups and mentoring evaluation questionnaire, that communicating and informing on all aspects of the mentoring process were key features. In trying to establish if the mentoring relationship had been improved by the use of Facebook, the data collected showed a 15 per cent increase in levels of mentor satisfaction, which might be supportive of this objective. For the reason already stated, it is not conclusive evidence but it does provide some indication of its success.

The implications for the future development of the programme have been influenced by the research findings. The number of our students using Facebook on a daily basis proves its popularity and accessibility. The positive increase in mentor levels of satisfaction also provides some indication of its value to students. From the findings, some specific recommendations for future development of the programme might include the need to increase publicity for the BBS mentoring group page, particularly amongst the first year students. Given that the number of face to face transactions appears to have dropped in favour of using virtual online communication it may also be necessary to incorporate a requirement for students to undertake some face
to face meetings in the assignment brief. It is recognised that the use of Facebook within the mentoring process to help facilitate university learning starts to blur the boundaries between students' private and public space. However, as the analysis suggests that students are already making use of this online facility to conduct their mentoring relationship, it seems sensible to try to harness the activity in a proactive way rather than simply ignoring its existence.

**References**


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**Biographies**

**Sue Will** is a qualified teacher with a BA in Professional Education and an MA in Personnel and Development. She is member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and advises on the national CPD panel. Prior to joining the higher education sectors, Sue spent several years working for large city institutions as a human resource advisor, firstly within insurance broking and latterly with two large firms of city solicitors. She has 12 years lecturing experience, seven of these working within the Brighton Business School. Sue currently teaches on the CIPD professional programmes and has a research interest in reflective practice.

**Julie Fowlie** is a senior lecturer at Brighton Business School, where she has been closely involved in developing the ‘Professional and Academic Skills programme’. Her teaching includes aspects of management, organisational behaviour and human resource management. She has research interests in emotional intelligence and pedagogy. Julie previously worked in the finance industry in a senior management position having also had experience as a bond dealer. She is also a qualified swimming coach and lifeguard. Julie has taught in adult, higher and further education and runs her own training business, most recently designing and delivering a management development programme.
Academic and personal transition
A study of first year foundation degree students at City College Brighton & Hove

RACHAEL CARDEN AND CHRIS WELLINGS

Abstract
This study considers the transitional experiences of a group of first year foundation degree students who enrolled at City College Brighton & Hove in 2008. The project examines two main aspects of transition: academic and personal. It finds that students are able to reflect in a sophisticated manner on their own development through transition. Social aspects of transition and arrangements for group working emerge as issues for further exploration. Suggestions for easing transition were gathered throughout the project, and are presented in the conclusion.

Introduction and methodology
This paper considers the transitional experiences of a group of first year foundation degree (FD) students at City College Brighton & Hove (CCB&H). The project focuses on students enrolling in 2008, across four FDS: Hospitality and Event Management; Travel and Tourism Management; Business and Food; and Culinary Arts. The researchers set out to generate better understandings of the experiences of these students, in order to inform pedagogic and institutional planning.

Research suggests that transition is a complex process involving multiple dimensions. Therefore, an initial priority for the researchers was to identify key concepts for consideration in the project. To achieve this, a self-selected random non-probability sample of 13 first year foundation degree students formed a focus group. The two key themes that emerged from the group were i) academic and ii) personal transition. By 'academic transition', we mean students’ perceptions about their own educational development, including their experience of different learning and teaching strategies. The theme of personal transition – an equally important aspect of the transition process, is concerned with perceptions about identity, peer relations and ease of integration.

Our two key themes were pursued through the development of six student case studies. A purposive non-probability sample was selected for case study, reflecting the researchers’ interest in students from the local area, international students, and those with no family history of participation in higher education. A literature review was also undertaken to contextualise the project. The findings were presented at the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference 2009, where delegates were asked to suggest ways of improving transition, and their contributions are included at table 3.
Anecdotal evidence observed over several years, indicated that there were some serious areas of concern for students embarking upon foundation degree study across the four FDs. These students have diverse educational, social and academic backgrounds and their experience of transition had not been formally investigated. Other research into transition onto FD courses, suggests that this transition is a complex process involving multiple dimensions. In order to establish which of these dimensions were perceived by the target group of students to be the key areas of concern, a first focus group of 13 students was held in November 2008. The main areas for investigation arose from the literature search: application and enrolment (Green 2007; Krause and Coates 2008); academic level (Krause and Coates Op. cit.); social issues (Green Op. cit) and identity and support issues (Goddard and Penketh 2009; Bourdieu 1990).

A working hypothesis arose from this focus group that academic and personal issues were having the most impact upon transition. ‘Academic transition’ was taken to include students’ perceptions about their own educational development, including their experience of different learning and teaching strategies, while ‘personal transition’ focused on perceptions about identity, peer relations and ease of integration. What was less clear, was the impact of previous academic experiences on current learning. Further investigation was undertaken through interviews, to investigate this, and the role of the institution(s) in the social transition of these students.

**Literature review**

Much of the literature on transition considers first year undergraduates in university settings (Green 2007; Harvey, Drew and Smith 2006; Jackson 2004; Krause and Coates 2008). However, recent growth in FD student numbers has led to increased interest in their experience of transition. This has tended to focus on transition to progression routes at level 6 (Burkhill, Dyer and Stone 2009; Greenbank 2007; Goddard and Penketh 2009). Less has been said about the particular focus of our study, the experiences of first year students beginning HE foundation degrees in FE settings. Nonetheless, some fruitful lines of enquiry emerge from the relevant literature. There is agreement amongst commentators that transition can represent a complex and difficult moment in an individual’s life. Transition may be as much about reflecting on one’s own place in the world, as about adjusting to the rigours of a new level of academic study. Goddard and Penketh (2009) analysed a sample of learning journals written by students progressing from a foundation degree to an honours level progression route. They used students’ journal entries to construct a series of narratives, which map out how transition may be experienced differently by different individuals. They propose, for example, an ‘aspirational’ narrative (in which students recognise that they are studying at A-level beyond their original expectations of themselves), and a ‘beset by trials’ narrative (which emphasises the need to overcome external barriers to study in order to achieve). Goddard and Penketh’s research is significant because it highlights that transition is not merely a question of academic progress, but rather involves a complex interplay of academic and social factors, such as those discussed in this study. Successful transition consists precisely in the learner resolving these multiple challenges and demands.

Transition may involve a period of intense self-reflection, which may be closely linked to an individual’s perceptions about their place within any new learning environment. Krause and Coates (2008) for example, use a ‘Transition Engagement Scale’ to analyse the relationship between students’ expectations about HE level study, and their actual experience of it. Green (2007) conducted a study of A-level students and noted that there may be a mismatch between initial perception and experience. Green investigates some possible causes for this. Citing Bourdieu (1990), Green suggests that the values, habits and customs of sixth form colleges may be very different from those of an HE institution, and so can convey distorted expectations about university study. Learning factors such as independent reading and the ability to engage with
criticism and contextualization, may also differ between the institutions. Similarly, the assessment emphasis at A-level may not prepare students for the more general and in-depth experience at HE level, suggesting that some extra tuition or changes to pedagogy may be required.

As understandings of transition have evolved, teachers and institutions have sought ways of intervening to smooth transition. The motivation for this is to facilitate students’ academic and personal development, and to improve achievement and retention. Two potential focuses for action have emerged. The first relates to learning, teaching and assessment strategies, Burkhill, Dyer and Stone (2009) conducted a study, which invited teachers of HE in FE to reflect on their learning and teaching practices. The findings foreground the well-established distinction between teacher-focused methods like lectures, and more interactive, student-focused approaches. The researchers concluded that the teachers surveyed valued student-focused methodologies, like those commonly thought to characterise skills-based FE programmes in the lifelong learning sector. Bowl (2003), has suggested that some students may be alienated by large lectures, formal teaching situations and inaccessible staff. It may be then, that student-focused teaching practices are the right ones to ease transition.

The second area of possible intervention in transition relates to institutional process, particularly for the induction of new students. This is the focus of the literature review carried out by Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006) for the Higher Education Academy. Harvey et al found that induction is a significant part of a package to ensure good student retention, but must be carefully planned to meet its objectives. It is argued that gradual induction through a period of three weeks or longer, is beneficial in establishing learning communities, providing that it is linked to a programme of study and includes the active participation of students.

In summary, this brief review of the literature has highlighted that any account of transition must recognise the multiple facets of the phenomenon. Efforts to smooth transition through pedagogy and institutional process require careful planning, and a holistic approach.

Case studies

In accordance with university ethics procedures, the identities and genders of students have been protected and answers given have been anonymised. All students were aware that their responses could be widely disseminated through possible publication and at conference. They agreed to participate voluntarily. The sample of six students was purposive, chosen to be representative of the main groups of students who attend these courses at CCB&H. They included a mature student with extensive industrial experience but limited academic history; a student whose parents and siblings had attended an HEI; a student whose parents and siblings had not attended an HEI; a student who had followed the traditional A-level progression route; an international student; and a student who had attended an HEI previously but had left. While the sample size is small and therefore not statistically reliable or robust, it constitutes the first stage of a work in progress. Further research is needed into the sub sets of each of these students to identify any overarching trends. In order to maximise the validity of any future research, a phenomenological approach would indicate that future research should be conducted by a third party.

Student A

There is a history of HE participation in student A’s family, and university has always figured in the student’s life plans. There was a gap of eight years between the student’s completion of A-levels and enrolment on the FD. This concurs with the proposition that FD students may experience difficulties in decision making, and arrive on their courses by default (Greenbank 2009). On beginning the FD, student A was conscious of a step change in academic level, but
felt well-prepared for this by A-level study. Several years experience in a relevant industry had contributed to the student’s ability to make connections between the FD and the world of work. The student’s intention on completion of the course is to complete a BA top-up. Student A has a well established social group outside of college, and has found it relatively easy to form friendships with members of the immediate cohort. However, the student does not feel integrated within the wider HE community in the college, or with the university.

Student B

Student B has already studied with the Open University, and has extensive work experience in the hospitality industry. The student has always planned to complete degree level study in this subject and feels that academic development has been achieved through the process of transition. The student has experienced many moments of intense stress, followed by a strong sense of achievement at coping with these moments, for example by completing work to deadlines. Student B was surprised to exceed expectations of self. This follows the findings of Lloyd (2008) who shows that those students with accurate expectations of what the level of study at HE level will be like, are more likely to succeed, whereas those students who have failed in previous HE qualifications are far more likely to fail the second time around.

Student C

Student C is an international student who has lived in Brighton for seven years. The student’s previous qualifications are NVQ2 and NVQ3 qualifications gained at the college. The student is among the first generation in his family to participate in higher education. Student C’s previous background is professional experience as a chef, however, the student felt that in order to progress in the industry, further study was required. The student selected an FD because of its relevance to the workplace. Academically, the student has found the course challenging, particularly in relation to writing, and did not feel well prepared by previous education. The student now feels that a huge jump in academic level and confidence has been achieved, especially in writing. Socially, the student is well integrated with the tutor group, though full-time work makes socialising difficult. The student feels very much a part of the college, although there is no contact outside of the immediate cohort group.

Student D

There is a history of HE participation in the student’s family. Initially, student D opted for employment following A-levels, but returned to study to improve career prospects and earning potential. The student perceives a definite academic and personal change between October and April, and feels that this confidence has developed partly as a result of achieving good grades and also through personal growth. Student D feels that the gap between A-levels and HE has now been bridged, and that the transition happened quite quickly. The student likes the learning environment and the accessible, open door policy of staff. Student D understands the rationale for group work on the course, and as a mature student, had realistic expectations about the challenges that might occur and the need to ‘take the reins’ in group working.

Student E

The student initially entered the workplace after A-levels, but returned to study after recognising a need for academic and personal development in order to achieve career ambitions. Socially, the student feels that the cohort group gelled quickly. Student E has some social interaction with members of the cohort, but less at times of assessment. In terms of self-development,
the student feels better equipped in communication and negotiation. The student perceives a definite progression in terms of academic and personal development. Student E found study skills very useful, especially for people who hadn’t studied for some time, as it forms the basis for their academic work. The student recommended that study skills be more front loaded as it is so important for early assignments. Student E reported variability in the availability of tutor support, but noted the role of other members of the cohort in peer support. The student was aware that support is available through the college and the university, but was not sure how to access it.

**Student F**

Student F studied at the college before enrolling on the FD, and has a history of family participation in HE. The student enjoyed the social experience of the course, and formed friendships quickly. This was a contrast to school, where the student experienced bullying. Student F, does not know any students outside of the immediate cohort group and suggested that shared modules would facilitate this. In common with a number of students, the student felt some antipathy towards group work, particularly around working with difficult people. However, the student recognised that this was an important preparation for the workplace. Student F feels a sense of great academic and personal change, with particular improvements in: increased autonomy and responsibility; self and work management; dealing with people and motivating others; formulating research questions for example in case studies and active note taking skills.

**Conclusion**

Members of the case study and focus group participants were able to reflect in a sophisticated manner about their transition. This indicates that their first six months of FD study has brought about a real sense of academic and personal growth. Further investigation is required to investigate causes for this growth, and to determine the extent to which it is due to their experiences at the college, or to external factors such as living away from home for the first time. All participants felt broadly comfortable about their transition, and none had an overwhelmingly negative experience.

Three recurrent patterns emerge from the case studies. Firstly, all participants reported increased confidence in academic skills and in the ability to relate learning to the workplace, which concurs with Goddard and Penketh’s findings (2009). A study of teaching practices at the college would demonstrate if this is due to teaching practices, as discussed by Burkhill, Dyer and Stone (2009). Secondly, although students felt well integrated socially within their cohorts, they tended not to socialise within the wider college or university. That induction processes are key to the construction of learning communities, as noted in Harvey, Drew and Smith’s literature review (2006) is supported by the findings in this project. Use of some of the learners’ recommendations for integration (table 2), combined with suggestions from delegates at the Learning and Teaching Conference (table 3) could be used to address this sense of isolation.

Finally, most students reported a level of antipathy towards group working. Group working plays a key role in the first semester of the four foundation degrees, and is intended to foster bonding between students, and to contribute to the vocational element of the course through raising awareness of team working in the workplace. Students are able to recognise this, yet their experience of group working is often negative. This project provides a basis from which to develop pedagogy and institutional policy, in order to address academic and social transition on FD courses at CCB&H. Further research is currently being undertaken.
## Table 1: Case study summary outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>percentage of participants in agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background and qualifications</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a parent with an HE qualification</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have A-level qualifications</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have previously undertaken HE study in a different subject</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have previous working experience</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An HE qualification will improve my career prospects</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am working to support my studies</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic aspects</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I noticed a significant jump in academic level when starting my FdA (Foundation Degree Arts)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I noticed a moderate jump in academic level on starting my FdA</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to identify a point in time at which I recognised that transition had taken place</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My tutors are accessible and helpful</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I have achieved higher level skills in:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group working</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of business terminology</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social aspects</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel well integrated with my tutor group</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know students on other courses at CCB&amp;H</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel well integrated with the University of Brighton</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have an established social group in Brighton</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use studentcentral to socialise with my tutor group</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use Facebook to socialise with my tutor group</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My social life is restricted by study and work</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Student suggestions for easing transition

1. Improved studentcentral induction
2. Improved publicity about relevant university activities
3. Front loading of study skills
4. Ensure telephone messages are picked up and acted upon
5. Pre-course tasks to evaluate learning styles
6. First year groups to meet with second years at the end of the autumn term, for advice and support on assessment
7. More writing support for students whose first language is not English
8. Access to Facebook for networking within and beyond tutor groups
9. Clarify student support arrangements between the college and the university
10. Move welcome talks to later in the course to avoid information overload in the first week
11. Equality of information for all college students (for example about the existence of the HE study room)
12. Clearer information on progression and grading at the beginning of the course

Table 3: Suggestions to ease transition from delegates at the learning and teaching conference

- Give out diaries rather than wall planners to help with time management
- Have mixed tutor groups across FdA courses
- Do teambuilding activities early in the courses (maybe residential)/team skills day
- Pre-enrolment access to information
- Find out about financial constraints: living at home? travelling? working? mature students? with families?
- Have preparation at sixth form level for transition
- Have a mentoring scheme (second to first year)
- Have a buddy scheme
- PASS system of student ambassadors and student mentoring
- Use Twitter or Facebook to combat isolation
- Have weekly personal tutorial groups (of four or five) rather than individual
- Emphasise the importance of Fresher’s Week
- Have pre-arrival tasks or contacts (three people) maybe on Facebook or Twitter
- Make sure that on the first day they ‘have a friend’
- Have small group pre-course activity on blog so that they have made contact
- Give support to non-traditional students
Acknowledgements
The researchers would like to thank the University of Brighton for supporting the project through a Centre for Learning and Teaching fellowship. We are also grateful to Catherine McConnell for her role as adviser and mentor.

Bibliography

Biographies
Rachael Carden has been teaching and teacher-training young adults for 20 years, and has been a lecturer and personal tutor on Foundation Degree Courses at City College Brighton & Hove since 2006. Rachael is currently researching FdA students undertaking top up courses, and would welcome any discussion about FdA student transition on: R.Carden@brighton.ac.uk.

Chris Wellings manages the Higher Education Centre at City College Brighton & Hove, where he also teaches English Literature to Access to HE students. Chris’s research interests include the development of foundation degrees and work-based learning, nineteenth-century literature and culture, and the history of the novel.
Quality in teaching and learning
A comparison of the views of academics and students
DR MING CHENG

Abstract
Pressures to enhance the quality of university teaching have led to attention being paid to ways of recognising and rewarding good teaching practice in England (DfES 2003). This paper is based on a project which investigates the positive teaching experience of Teaching Excellence Award winners at the University of Brighton. It draws predominantly on Appreciative Inquiry interviews (Ludema et al 2001) with university award winners and their students, exploring how they interpret good teaching practice and their conceptions of ‘quality’ and ‘quality enhancement’. The research reveals differing perceptions of quality. The award winners perceived good teaching practice as empowering students and identified the concept of quality as achieved through transformative learning outcomes. Students however, whilst recognising the concept, defined quality in more instrumental terms (for example: passing examinations). They found it difficult to develop transformative learning and tended to relate quality to academic teaching practice rather than their own learning experience.

Introduction
‘Quality’ as a concept has migrated from the industrial and commercial settings of the 1980s into the domain of higher education (Newton 2002). However, ‘quality’ is a contested concept (Barnett 1994). It is relative to stakeholders in the higher education sector (Harvey and Green 1993). The stakeholders are the individuals or groups who are regarded as having a legitimate interest in the quality of higher education, such as funding bodies, students, staff and employers of graduates (Srikanthan and Dalrymple 2003).

Models of quality
There are different ways to understand quality in the university sector, such as quality is power (Morley 2003) and quality is bureaucratisation, impression management and conformity (Newton 2002). These interpretations provide valuable insights into how academics use quality as a pejorative term. However, the interpretations suggest that there is a lack of a shared definition of quality among academics, and that the proposed quality models are not closely related to academics’ teaching experience and their understanding of teaching.
Harvey and Green (1993) have further developed the concept of quality by arguing it as: exception; perfection; fitness for purpose; value for money; and transformation. These interpretations have greatly influenced the subsequent debate about quality in higher education. Of the definitions, the concepts of ‘fitness for purpose’ and ‘value for money’ are perceived to be closely related to the operating assumptions of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (Barnett 1992; 2003; Ottewill and Macfarlane 2004).

The concept of quality as ‘exception’ is related to high standards of performance or achievement. It means that quality is something special. Harvey and Green (1993) identify three variations of exception: distinctive, embodied in excellence, and passing a minimum set of standards. Quality as perfection means everything is correct and there is no fault. However, the institution does not intend to produce standardised graduates, free from defects. This approach is therefore, perceived as inappropriate in the higher education setting.

In order to assure and to improve the quality of teaching and learning, a shift of emphasis has taken place in the university sector in England in the way that quality is defined from ‘fitness for purpose’ during the 1990s, to one more focused on ‘student transformation’ in the 2000s. This can be understood as a shift from quality assurance to quality enhancement, which is a process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities (QAA 2006).

Quality as transformation emphasises the enhancement and empowerment of students. It highlights the importance of students taking a leading role in assuring the quality of their own education (Harvey 2006). This concept implies critical thinking, which encourages students to challenge preconceptions of their own, their peers and their teachers (Harvey and Green 1993). It is popular among students who speak of their university time as a transformational experience, both in developing as a learner and as a person (Barnett 2007).

Quality as transformation is related to the concept of transformative learning, which is believed to have grown out of a confluence of post-1960s radicalism, critical pedagogy theories (McLaren and Leonard 1993; Shor 1996; Giroux 2001) and a new interest in adult education as part of social welfare (Mezirow 1990; 1991; 2000). Based on this theory, students should not only engage with knowledge but also develop their capacity to understand and question existing ideas, assumptions and discourses that inform their experiences and common sense understandings of society (Herod 2002).

Lomas’s (2002) empirical research with 108 senior managers in higher education institutions in the UK, reveals that transformation was perceived as one of the most appropriate definitions of quality, but it is difficult to measure and apply it in practice. One reason is that the notion of quality as transformation has not been interpreted by clearly stated purposes (Harvey and Knight 1996).

Teaching Excellence Awards

Despite the difficulties in measuring quality, there is increasing pressure to enhance the quality of university teaching and learning. This has led to attention being paid to ways of recognising and rewarding good teaching practice (DfES 2003). There is research on the evaluation of teaching awards schemes across the UK (Skelton 2004; Trowler et al 2005; Warren and Plumb 1999), but this is mainly confined to awards schemes at the national level. Very few studies have focused on award schemes within an institution, and few have examined the notions of quality and quality enhancement by linking them to the teaching practice of teaching award winners.
In order to cover this gap in the research literature, a project was established to examine how Teaching Excellence Award winners at the University of Brighton understood the notions of teaching, quality and quality enhancement, and whether there was a perceived difference between the concepts of quality and good teaching practice. The Teaching Excellence Awards scheme was established in 2002 and has been used to recognise and celebrate academics outstanding contributions to student learning in the university. It links to the university’s learning and teaching strategy and aims to move beyond recognition and reward, to provide academics with professional development opportunities to enable them to meet agreed national teaching standards, managed by the Higher Education Academy, and to build a record of attainment against those standards. The scheme welcomes nomination of individual academic staff or a team of academics who have helped with students’ learning. The nominees could be staff from across the University of Brighton or from its partner colleges, including personal tutors, lecturers, part-time visiting lecturers, information advisors, technicians or members of Student Services.

Research methods

The research adopts Appreciative Inquiry interviews (Ludema et al 2001) with seventeen academics and eight students undertaking masters programmes. Of these academics, fifteen were Teaching Excellence Award winners (2005-08) and two were panel members of the awards scheme. These academics and students were chosen from six different schools/departments. The academics interviewed ranged from lecturers to professors, and interviews were developed around three research questions:

- What is perceived as good teaching practice?
- How to define the terms ‘quality’ and ‘quality enhancement’?
- Are there perceived differences and similarities between the notions of ‘good teaching practice’ and ‘quality’?

This research first explores how academics understand teaching and how they interpret good teaching practice. It then examines how academics and their students define the terms ‘quality’ and ‘quality enhancement’, and how they think the term ‘quality’ is related to good teaching practice.

Understanding of teaching

The interview data suggests that award winners conceive their own teaching in terms of the following three styles: content-centred, student-centred, and learning-centred. The content-centred teachers are those who focus on teaching content and adopt an approach based on the primacy of cognitivism. They see their role as didactic ‘lecturers’ in the sense of an individual whose role is to impart knowledge to students.

In contrast, the student-centered teachers are those who aim to help students gain a good learning experience by building on the prior knowledge of their students with an understanding of their need to make sense of their own experiences. These lecturers understand that students construct their own understanding of the world and pay close attention to this. They place more stress on a participative learning environment through the use of group work processes rather than imparting knowledge via lectures and hand-outs. The learning-centered teachers focus on the ways in which their students learn. Most of the award winners interviewed described themselves as either student-centred or learning-centred teachers.
Quality in teaching and learning

The majority of the award winners understood the concept of teaching as a process of not only transferring knowledge, but also of stimulating knowledge, and enabling students to engage with problems and puzzles. There was a strong emphasis on empowering students in the teaching process, which encourages students to develop their own learning and writing processes. This view is similar to Harvey and Green’s argument (1993) that transformative learning is important in the university sector.

The main reason for the support of transformative learning was that academics tended to expect students to become independent learners and thinkers. They would like to teach students as equals in order to stimulate knowledge. For example, an award winner from a business background argued that:

*In my practice, I don’t ever see myself as passing on knowledge. It’s about stimulating knowledge because I believe they bring with them a wealth of experience because they’ve all been exposed to media of some kind, film, TV, and obviously I can’t see everything that’s available to see.*

This interviewee believed that treating students as equals could bring in different information and experience to the class, therefore encouraging students’ participation in teaching. This view was held by another five of the award winners interviewed. A transformative learning perspective was mainly held by academics who were student-centred or learning-centred. For example, one award winner argued:

*What I try to do is provide stimulating useful sessions in the classroom that is very much the emphasis on the student developing their own learning and writing process. So rather than just sitting at the front of the classroom and imparting my knowledge to them, … I think it’s something about empowering students,… and how we can make sure that everyone does feel part of something when they come to this university.*

The argument of this interviewee was that transformative learning could increase the diversity of teaching and learning, and get students involved in the learning process. Nearly half of the award winners appreciated the importance of being facilitators in the learning empowerment process. For example, an award winner from a business background described his experience of being a facilitator in the following way:

*The value of my role has been in creating the scenario and the environment of court etiquette and maybe some help with their cases. In most of the instances where students have been involved, the bulk of the work in terms of actually going out and finding out about the criminal offences which they are going to be questioned on and actually practising, the students have done themselves.*

Thus suggesting that being a facilitator could help students to construct a view of what is presented to them, so they can understand the relationship between the knowledge and its practical application. Therefore, students would be more motivated and initiate more work themselves. Being a facilitator, was also perceived by most award winners as an effective way to encourage students’ experiential learning:

*I think that’s really important, that they’re not just told don’t do this, don’t do that because we know, those that make the biggest impact and have the best reputations are those that break the rules and do experiment and do think outside the boundaries, so that’s what I always want. Even though we’re training our students vocationally and we want them to go into a professional media career where they do have restrictions that they’re still allowed within the university environment to experiment and explore.*
This interviewee implied that facilitating students’ learning can give them more scope for creativity and experimentation, and enable them to become independent. This finding is similar to the argument of Sheffield (1974) that it is important for teachers to stimulate students to become active learners.

**Defining good teaching practice**

Nearly all of the award winners stated that there was no recipe for good teaching practice, but they found it essential to keep students’ knowledge updated, and to engage with students at all stages of teaching. One perceived element of good practice was making teaching entertaining and informative. It should not only give students skills that will be appreciated and respected in their future careers, but also allow students to flourish creatively and develop enquiring minds and cognitive ability. As a result, students will see that there are many opportunities beyond the lives they lead, and many different ways of thinking beyond the ways they normally think. This suggests that there is an expectation of students to become independent learners and thinkers in the learning process.

Analysis of the data from the research reveals that there were seven perceived main factors in achieving good teaching:

- knowledge of the subject;
- academic approachability;
- good communication skills;
- peer learning among academics;
- a learning environment that sparks students’ interest, for example, elearning;
- different types of learning for students, for example, experiential learning; and
- a developed feedback system, not only face to face feedback in the classroom but also online feedback.

The first four factors, are related to academic professional development, focusing on academics’ subject knowledge and ability to communicate. These factors suggest that the award winners were aware of the importance of developing their professional skills along with students, and in line with the needs of a wider society. The learning environment was perceived as vital, but award winners understood that it could be influenced by the equipment and facilities provided by the university. Finally, different types of learning and feedback can be interpreted as necessitating teaching strategies, which help academics to realise who their students are, how they learn, and how to respond to their varied needs.

**Interpretations of quality**

This research also explores how award winners and students interpreted the terms ‘quality’ and ‘quality enhancement’. It reveals that academics and students understood the term ‘quality’ differently. One academic interviewee described ‘quality’ as a political term, used for management purposes and measured in terms of student scores, attrition rates and retention. This finding is similar to the arguments of Barnett (1992; 2003) and Ottewill and Macfarlane (2004) that quality has become a term used for political reasons to review the goals of the institution that are articulated through its mission statement.

Another three academic interviewees defined quality as meeting standards of either subject benchmarking statements or the National Student Survey. This view suggests that the concept of quality is interpreted as high standards of performance or achievement (Harvey and Green 1993). The remaining 10 academic interviewees related quality to students’ learning experience. They emphasised learning benefits and ways to improve student learning, in order to develop and empower the student as a learner and as a person. This finding closely corresponds with quality as transformation of students (Harvey and Green 1993).
Quality in teaching and learning

The various interpretations of quality among the award winners suggest that the concept of quality is still debatable and elusive within the academic community. It is still early days for some academics to become actively engaged with the ongoing discourse of quality in relation to teaching and learning, though their understanding of quality as transformation indicates that academics have been working to achieve quality, and that they are aware of the dimension of quality and their role in facilitating quality learning. Quality as transformation, was perceived as mainly involved with academics transferring and stimulating knowledge, and making students actively engaged with the learning process to fully understand the relationship between knowledge and its practical application.

In spite of the prevalent understanding of quality as transformation among academics, most student interviewees treated passing exams as their priority in the study. They understood quality in an instrumental way, and doubted the feasibility for them to develop transformative learning at master level programmes. They defined quality as a knowledgeable tutor delivering a good teaching session. This suggests that students understood quality in a pragmatic way, and related quality to a positive outcome (i.e. passing the examination). Students saw quality as more closely related to an academic’s teaching practice than to their own learning experience. This might be the reason that students find transformative learning challenges the traditional role of the student and the teacher (Cranton 1996; Moore 2005). Students’ understanding contrasts with the idealistic view of academics that quality is the transformation of the students, and students should take the initiative in the learning process.

Students tended to judge teaching practice according to academics' knowledge of the subject area, the way academics organised their lectures, and the amount of hand-outs academics provided. The requirement for hand-outs to contain detailed information indicates students' dependence on academics, and their focus on existing knowledge in their study, which explains why the notion of transformative learning was not widely accepted among students.

Quality in relation to good teaching practice

Although good teaching practice and quality were perceived as closely related, nearly half of the award winners understood them to be different. One perception is that good teaching practice is an aspect of quality. For example, an award winner from the business school depicted quality as a circle which includes good teaching practice:

Pedagogic quality is one circle and within that circle is good teaching practice.

The other perception is that good teaching practice is a complicated process of empowering students’ learning by providing creative, interesting and enjoyable classes, so quality relates to the positive outcomes of students’ learning. Even if the teaching practice is good, it will not necessarily produce good results, so the quality may not be considered high. Therefore, quality is about measuring the results against standards. For example, an award winner from a health and safety background argued that quality is standards related:

I think that there are some differences, you have to really potentially consider how is good working practice actually applied, ‘cos we can talk about good working practice and about what people do, but when it’s applied, does it really deliver the quality? and there’s almost a gap between in theory what’s good at the delivery stage, and then the end quality result and that delivery stage is vulnerable. If it’s delivered or presented in a way where it’s poor, then it won’t work, it won’t give you quality.

In spite of the concern that it was hard to set up standards for quality, 10 academic interviewees expressed their wish to make quality relevant to the standards of either their professional body
or that of their subject. There were five other perceived key factors affecting quality: enthusiasm (of the teacher); an environment that is conducive to learning; student-centred teaching practice; relating teaching to research; and keeping teaching material updated.

**Quality enhancement**

Quality enhancement is another theme explored in this research. The majority of academics and students defined it as ‘improvement’, which is similar to the definition provided by the QAA (2006). From the view of academics, the notion of improvement was about meeting national standards and using innovative teaching practices. This included making teaching more interactive, diverse and accessible for students. For example, an award winner with a science background argued in favour of the following requirements of the national curriculum to improve the quality of course teaching:

> I think it (quality) should always be grounded on what is actually needed to be known, what subjects matter, needs to be known rather than academic preference for a particular area. So rather than being led by the academics it should be led by some type of national curriculum.

Instead of putting emphasis on the quality of learning opportunities as the QAA suggests, academics argued for increasing the profile of teaching through identifying and sharing good teaching practice and achieving the right balance between teaching and research in the university. This reason was due to a feeling held by nearly two thirds of academics, that teaching was not always prioritised. One perceived way to improve the profile of teaching was to increase the emphasis on recognising and rewarding good teaching practice. This finding suggests that there is still a long way to go to prioritise teaching in the university sector, despite the increased attention to ways of recognising and rewarding good teaching practice to enhance the quality of university teaching (DfES 2003).

**Academics’ sense of recognition**

The Teaching Excellence Award was perceived to have boosted award winners’ sense of achievement in their teaching practice. The increased reflection and confidence in teaching helped to benefit their students’ learning. The increased confidence in carrying on with the awarded teaching practice and in working with other academics across the university, was a key benefit brought by the awards. The majority of award winners appreciated the recognition for the work they had done, especially the strategy applied to their courses, though some felt it brought pressures, since they felt the need to maintain particularly high standards. From the view of most award winners, receiving the award had helped them to improve their CV. For example, an award winner described it as a way to polish her CV and to help her get external examining experience:

> It’s much more likely to help me on a CV get things like, um, external examining posts for example. Now that is an outcome because it looks good on a CV or a biography.

The award was not only seen as recognition of the award winners’ current work, but also as contributing to their professional development in terms of building confidence to apply for research grants, getting involved with research projects and providing chances to attend conferences. Another award winner highlighted the importance of winning the award to her professional development:

> It’s not just given me confidence in terms of personal confidence but its also given me confidence to apply for other things as well. Not so much teacher of excellence but funding, projects and to get involved and to make other links at the university.
Benefiting the student learning experience

The awards were also perceived as benefiting the student learning experience, though indirectly. One reason was that the award winners’ teaching practice had helped their students to increase their confidence in knowledge and learning. For example, an award winner from a health background revealed that his adoption of a problem-based learning style, had helped students to understand why they were learning certain things and how this learning directly related to their profession:

*Problem-based learning helps students to be confident in learning to learn. It gives them the confidence that any patient they meet, they can find out about that person even if they are short of knowledge, because in these days we cannot teach everything a student needs to know in three years. So to give them the great confidence every week they’re identifying their own learning needs, they identify their own learning objectives, and it gives the student back some autonomy.*

This interviewee argued for students’ empowerment by relating learning to students’ practice. In this way students gained more confidence. They became self-directed learners and behaved in a professional way.

Conclusion

‘Quality’ is a contested term in higher education. This paper explores quality from the perception of Teaching Excellence Award winners at the University of Brighton in terms of learning and teaching. It reveals that some awarded teaching practice was related to the notion of student transformative learning. However, there is a gap between students’ instrumental view of quality in their learning, and the award winners perception of using quality as transformation to enhance students’ learning.

The paper first describes and analyses the award winners’ understanding of teaching, and how their teaching practice has benefited student learning. It then highlights the differences between good teaching practice and quality. The varied understanding of quality among the award winners suggests that the term ‘quality’ is still in debate, though some academics have been working to achieve quality in their practice. It will take time for the academic community to reach consensus on the definition of quality and how to measure it.

There was a view among the award winners, that quality should be led by national standards instead of by the preferences of academics. Most academics did not want to make quality a management concept, but would like to make it relevant to the standard of either their professional body or that of their subject. The relevance was perceived as important in enabling students to achieve professional behaviour in their future career. There were five perceived key factors of quality:

- enthusiasm; an environment that is conducive to learning; student-centred teaching practice; relating teaching to research; and providing up to date teaching material.

Despite the prevalent view among the award winners that quality was the empowerment of students’ learning, the student interviewees doubted the feasibility of achieving student transformation at masters level education. They preferred to understand quality in a pragmatic way and defined it as a knowledgeable tutor delivering a good session. The different perspectives suggest that quality is relative to different stakeholders in higher education, and that it is important to consider the views of both sides when defining the term ‘quality’. In consideration of the current trend of treating quality as transformation within the higher education sector, there is
Dr Ming Cheng

an urgent need to redefine the concept of ‘transformation’ and to illustrate its dimensions and criteria in more explicit terms.

The concept of quality enhancement as improvement, was shared by both award winners and their students in this project. The sense of achievement among the award winners and their students’ increased confidence in learning, were perceived as the main benefits related to the Teaching Excellence Awards. There was a strong emphasis on improving the status of teaching through the recognition of good teaching practice within the university in order to improve the quality of learning and teaching.

Both academics and students understood the importance of meeting students needs and of adopting different teaching methods in the quality enhancement process. Student needs were interpreted as passing exams, making teaching relevant to what students needed to learn and benefiting their future careers. However, there are some questions that need to be explored in future research. One is that if meeting students needs is a priority in the quality enhancement process, which student needs should be met and which should not? Another question is that since quality is perceived as standards related, should it be national or discipline related? The third question is that since students have been placing an emphasis on existing knowledge in the learning process, and understand quality from a pragmatic view, which contrasts with the idealistic view of academics that quality is student transformation, then who should take the initial role in learning, academics or students?

References


**Biography**

**Dr Ming Cheng** is a research fellow at the Centre for Learning and Teaching, University of Brighton. She completed her MA in Educational Studies at the University of York, and her PhD in Higher Education at the University of Bristol. Her research interests cover: quality, quality audit, quality enhancement, academic work, doctoral learning and supervision in England, and the 'brain drain' phenomenon and university merger in P R China.
It’s not what we expected
Patterns of achievement and progression among undergraduates from different ‘social’ groups studying on three courses, and the questions they appear to raise about assessment practices

ADRIAN CHOWN AND DR STEPHEN WAITE WITH LUCY CHILVERS

Abstract

Lecturers on three closely related physical science courses at the University of Brighton recently became concerned that ‘non-traditional’ students might be receiving significantly lower marks and more referrals than ‘traditional’ students with comparable ‘UCAS points’. This perception is consistent with reports in the literature, which generally indicate a strong correlation between social class, ethnicity and educational attainment at all levels of education (HEA 2008; Casson and Kingdon 2007; Hayes et al 2007; DfES 2006). However, an analysis of entry and assessment data to establish relative patterns of achievement and progression is revealing a rather different and more complex situation.

Some of the lecturers’ concerns appear groundless: for example, their White British working class students did not ‘underachieve’ in comparison with their peers, rather the opposite. However, the marks of British Asian students may be a cause for concern. Moreover, the pattern of marks received by Black British and British Asian students are curious, and in some respects not what we should expect given the number of students in each category on the three courses. These provisional conclusions must be treated with caution, however, because the low numbers of ‘non-traditional’ students and the uncertain allocation of students to particular groups make it very difficult to compare their marks and draw conclusions about their relative achievement in a confident manner.

At the same time, another concern is emerging from the data. It appears that male students on these courses often achieve significantly lower marks and receive more referrals than females. This provisional conclusion is again consistent with reports in the literature of increasing differences between male and female rates of achievement and progression in higher education in many countries (HEPI 2009). The findings suggest a need to investigate whether the ways in which students are assessed plays a significant role in these differences.
**Introduction**

The research discussed in this paper is work-in-progress. It is being conducted at the University of Brighton within the context of national and institutional policies to increase participation in higher education by people from socio-economic and ethnic groups that are, or until recently were, under-represented. People ascribed to these groups, are usually referred to as ‘non-traditional students’ in contrast to ‘traditional students’, who are typically White, British and ‘middle class’. The research was initially undertaken because lecturers on three cognate courses at the university formed the impression that non-traditional students were achieving significantly lower marks and receiving more referrals, than ‘traditional students’ with comparable entry ‘profiles’. Three student groups were the focus of concern: Black British, British Asian and, in particular, White British, working-class.

The lecturers’ impression is consistent with research reports in the literature, which generally indicate a strong correlation between social class, ethnicity and educational attainment (DfES 2006), although the causal factors in this relationship are widely acknowledged to be numerous and complex (HEA 2008; Maringe and Fuller 2007; Gillborn and Mizra 2000). The achievement of the three groups referred to above is a particular concern, especially that of White, British, ‘working-class’ students. They tend to have the lowest attainment rates at all levels of education, and males in this group do less well than females (HEA Op. cit; Casson and Kingdon Op. cit; Hayes et al Op. cit). As part of a strategy to remedy this situation, the UK government’s current ‘Widening Participation’ policy is designed to ensure that increased numbers of ‘non-traditional students’ gain admission to higher education and, once admitted, successfully complete their courses (Harrison and Hatt 2009; Watson 2006).

Since the introduction of the Widening Participation policy, there has been a marked increase in the number of research studies concerned with the recruitment, retention and achievement of ‘non-traditional’ student groups in HE. However, until recently many of these studies have tended to adopt a ‘deficit’ perspective. That is, they have tended to focus on the negative effects of personal history and circumstance (individual ‘deficiencies’), and have given relatively little attention to the influence of institutional characteristics: cultures; policies; curricula, and methods of teaching, learning and assessment (Gorard et al 2006; Greenbank 2006; Hudson 2005; Jones and Thomas 2005; Atherton and Webster 2003; Foskett 2002).

This neglect is significant because individual higher education institutions (HEIs) have different recruitment, retention and achievement rates in respect of non-traditional students (Yorke and Thomas 2003). So it seems likely that institutional characteristics are an important influence on the achievement rates of non-traditional students. HEIs therefore, are being urged to examine how they support ‘non-traditional’ students and consider whether they might improve this aspect of their work (HEA Op. cit; Yorke and Thomas Op. cit; Thomas 2002).

**The original purpose of the research**

The original purpose of the research was to undertake a quantitative and qualitative investigation of the progression, achievement and experience of two cohorts of students during the first and second years of the three courses. In the first stage of the research, quantitative data would be analysed to examine relative patterns of achievement and progression, and establish if the lecturers’ impression was accurate. The question to be addressed at this stage, was therefore:

Do non-traditional students, especially White, British working-class students, studying on the three courses receive significantly lower marks and/or more referrals than other students with a similar number of entry points?
We anticipated that the relative patterns of achievement and progression would indicate that students from 'non-traditional' groups were underachieving. If this was the case, we intended to gather qualitative data in the second stage that would enable us to address the following question:

Do institutional factors appear to influence their achievement? If so, which factors? (Potentially influential institutional factors include institutional cultures; policies; curricula, and methods of teaching, learning and assessment).

However, we acknowledged that the achievement and progression data might indicate other patterns of relative achievement. In this case, data would be gathered to address the following question:

What factors underlie these other patterns?

The discussion that follows relates to the first of these questions and to other unanticipated, emergent patterns in the data.

**Methodology**

In the first stage of the investigation we analysed the enrolment data for students who entered the three courses in the academic years 2006-07 and 2007-08, to identity students who were White, British working class, British Asian and Black British. The categorisation of 'ethnic identity' and social class, and the allocation of individuals to particular ethnic or social groups are complex and contested matters (Hayes et al Op. cit; Maringe and Fuller Op. cit). In the context of policies concerned with widening participation, the UK government and its agencies, particularly the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), use three criteria (or 'standard performance indicators') to identify students as 'working-class':

- attendance at a school or college in the state sector
- parental occupation allocated to National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) categories 4–7 inclusive
- home postcode area known to have a low proportion of 18 and 19 year-olds in HE.

To identify their ethnic identity individuals are normally asked to select from the standard categories used in the 2001 census (ESDS 2008). The main indices used in this study therefore, were gender, ‘ethnicity’ according to the standard categories used on the university enrolment form; parental occupation in accordance with the NS-SEC categories; postcode; school or college in state or private sector. The number of entry points achieved by each student and the students’ ages, were also noted.

We then analysed the module marks and number of referrals received by each group during the first and second years of their courses. In total, records for 239 students were examined. For the different categories of students, we were able to examine student performance at level 1 on entry, together with their progression and achievement at level 2. For ease of interpretation the results of this analysis have, where appropriate been presented as a percentages. The statistical significance of the patterns observed was assessed using the chi-square test applied to the class frequencies values. All statistical analysis was performed using MINITAB version 15.

The project was scrutinised and approved in accordance with the University of Brighton research ethics and governance procedures. The names of individual students were irrelevant to the research. To ensure anonymity, only student identification numbers were used throughout the study and no key to these was available to the researchers.
Provisional analysis of assessment data

In this section, we present selected findings from a provisional analysis of the data relating to the marks achieved in the first and second years of their study by students in the cohorts referred to above. First, however, we need to emphasise an important caveat. So far as these three courses are concerned, it has been difficult to construct a robust account of the performance of students in different socio-economic groups that enables us to compare their marks and draw conclusions about their relative achievement in a confident manner, for the following reasons:

- the number of students from each of the three non-traditional groups in each year-group of the three courses is generally fewer than 20, with the number of White, British, working-class males in low singles figures. (The total number of White, British, working-class students in the two year-groups of the three courses was 20: seven males and 13 females). Therefore, small variations in the marks of one or two individuals could make a large difference to the relative performance of ‘their’ group.

- students can choose whether or not to study certain modules; therefore, assessment results for option modules relate to various permutations of students. Because the number of students in ‘non-traditional’ groups is low, the choices made by particular individuals may make a significant difference to the relative performance of their group in a module.

- significant numbers of students don’t indicate their ‘ethnic’ identity on their application forms. Because the number of Black British and British Asian students is sometimes low, the omission from either group of two or three students who have not indicated their ‘ethnic identity’ could result in a significantly inaccurate or misleading pattern of relative performance for that group.

- the indices of social class in particular may not be accurate. Therefore, students may be allocated to the ‘wrong’ social-class group and this could result in a significantly inaccurate or misleading pattern of relative performance for working class students. In this regard, it is pertinent to note that in the academic year 2007-08 the socio-economic status of 26 per cent of entrants to UK HE was defined as ‘unknown’ (Harrison and Hatt Op. cit).

We are also mindful that comparing the aggregate marks for several modules may mask important differences in the relative performance of different groups in particular modules. However, comparing relative performance in individual modules may result in a fragmented ‘picture’ that lacks coherence. We tried to avoid these difficulties by examining the results of modules and levels of study.

The progression and achievement of white working-class students

An analysis of the marks achieved by White, British, working-class (Ww-c) students indicates the following:

Successful completion of level 1 and level 2 stages of study

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ww-c males</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other males</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ww-c females</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other females</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

White, British, working-class students had a significantly higher progression rate than other
Adrian Chown and Dr Stephen Waite with Lucy Chilvers

students. It is also pertinent to note the disparity between male and female progression rates, which is discussed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean marks at level</th>
<th>level 1</th>
<th>level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ww-c students</td>
<td>51.92</td>
<td>53.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other students</td>
<td>49.91</td>
<td>54.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other males</td>
<td>49.30</td>
<td>53.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other females</td>
<td>50.79</td>
<td>55.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*White, British, working-class* students had higher mean marks than *All other students* at level 1, but the smallest increase in mean mark from level 1 to level 2. Again, it is pertinent to note that *All other males* achieved lower mean marks at levels 1 and 2 than *All other females*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of mean marks at level 1 and level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ww-c students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other females</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*White, British, working-class* students received proportionately fewer third class marks and significantly more 2:2 and 2:1 marks than *All other students*. Put another way, they were relatively high achievers. We should also note that *All other males* got proportionately more third class marks and fewer firsts than *All other females*.

The comparative progression and achievement of ‘non-traditional’ students

An analysis of the results of *British Asian (BAsian)*, *Black British (BB)* and *White, British working-class (Ww-c)* students indicates the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean marks at level 1 and level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BASian male and female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BB male and female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ww-c male and female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Black British* students had higher level 1 and level 2 mean marks than students from either of the other two ‘non-traditional’ groups.

*British Asian* students had the lowest mean mark at level 1 and level 2. Although they showed the highest increase from level 1 to level 2, their marks at level 1 in particular suggest there may be a cause for concern. This requires further investigation.

As was noted above, *White, British, working-class* students have the smallest rate of increase between level 1 and level 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of mean marks at level 1 and level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASian male and female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BB male and female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ww-c male and female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*British Asian* students received proportionately more marks in the third and 2:1 bands, and
far fewer 2:2 marks than we should expect given the number of students in this category on the three courses.

Black British students had proportionately more third class marks than White, British working-class students. They also received more 2:2 marks than we should expect and fewer marks in the 2:1 band.

White, British working-class students were awarded more 2:2s than we should expect.

These differences in attainment between British Asian, Black British and White, British, working-class students were statistically significant. It is possible that the differences in student performance on these courses simply reflect the range of academic attainment achieved by students prior to entry. To explore this we correlated UCAS tariff point scores on entry against overall mean module marks achieved at HE level 1 and level 2. Performance at both level 1 and level 2 was significantly correlated with UCAS tariff scores (n= 122, p < 0.05) with coefficients of determinations (R²) of 0.04 and 0.08 respectively. This implies that UCAS tariff point scores on entry account for between 4 per cent and 8 per cent of the subsequent variation in academic attainment at level 1 and level 2. Thus, although this relationship is statistically significant, relatively little of the variation in achievement observed among this cohort of students can be attributed directly to attainment level prior to entry. There was no relationship between the social and economic classification of students, and UCAS tariff point scores.

Provisional conclusions

We have drawn four provisional conclusions from the research to date. Firstly, the White, British working-class students in these cohorts appear not to have lower achievement and progression rates than their peers. Indeed, in some respects they seem to be relatively high achievers, although their marks have the smallest rate of increase between level 1 and level 2, and further research is required to see if a similar pattern emerges in the marks of other cohorts. Secondly, the mean marks of British Asian students at level 1 suggest there may be a cause for concern and these require further investigation. Thirdly, the patterns of marks received by Black British and British Asian students are curious, and in some respects, not what we should expect ‘statistically’; therefore they should also, be subject to further investigation. However, these conclusions must be considered in the light of the concern previously described that the low numbers of ‘non-traditional’ students and the uncertain allocation of students to particular groups make it very difficult to compare their marks and draw conclusion about their relative achievement in a confident manner.

The fourth tentative conclusion is that female students on the three courses appear to have achieved significantly higher marks and received fewer referrals than males. There is support for this impression in the literature, as the following data from the recent Higher Education Policy Institute report on male and female participation and progression in higher education (HEPI Op. cit) illustrate:


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>young entrants</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mature entrants</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National degree class profiles (2007-08) (home graduates from UK HEIs)
Source: HEPI (2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of degree</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:2</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd or Pass</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>('Good degree' ie 1st or 2:1)</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A re-examination of the data

To further explore our impression, we re-examined the data referred to above to make some comparisons of female and male achievement. We began by comparing the referral rates of both genders in 26 modules at levels 1 and 2, and found the following:

Referrals ‘awarded’ in 26 level 1 and level 2 modules

- A greater proportion of females were referred in two modules
- An equal proportion of females and males were referred in three modules
- A greater proportion of males were referred in 21 modules

In this case, the differences ranged between 1% (13% female : 14% male) and 17% (14% female : 31% male) with a mean of 6.6%

We then compared the marks in the degree classification bands received by both genders in those 26 modules:

Achievement of marks in degree classification bands (3rd, 2:2, 2:1, 1st) for 26 modules at level 1 and level 2

- in 19 modules females did better than males overall; but in four of these a higher proportion of males got marks in the 1st class band
- in 3 modules, males did better overall but in one of these a higher proportion of females got marks in the 1st class band
- in 3 modules, the pattern of marks was broadly similar
- in 1 module, there was a curious pattern that is difficult to interpret

Females therefore did better overall in 19 of the 26 modules.

The HEPI paper notes that in some studies female students are found to outperform males in course work, while males do better at exams. It is also sometimes reported that females and males tend to achieve higher marks in different subjects, with females doing better in biology, for example. (Of the three modules referred to above in which males did better overall, the assessment of one module comprised 50 per cent exam and 50 per cent coursework; that of another, 60 per cent exam and 40 per cent coursework). To explore these suggestions in relation to our data we examined the results for three groups of modules. The first comprised study skills and biological skills modules at level 1 with an overall weighting of 50 per cent coursework and 50 per cent exam. These seemed to be the kinds of module, in which we might expect females to do
better than males. The marks received by females and males in the degree classification bands were as follows:

**Level 1 Study skills and bio-skills modules combined**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70%+</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-69</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R/F</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of students</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these modules females did substantially better overall, with 59% receiving a mark of 60 or more, compared to 31% of males. In contrast, 53% of males received a mark of 40-59, compared to 30% of females. We compared these marks with the results from three chemistry modules at level 2 with an overall weighting of 40% coursework and 60% exam. We identified these as modules in which we might expect males to do better. The results in this case were:

**Level 2 Chemistry modules combined (3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70%+</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R/F</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of students</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these modules 21% of females received marks of 60 or more, compared with 19% of males, while 62% of females received marks of 40-59, compared with 61% of males. However, within the latter mark range there are significant differences in the proportions of females and males receiving marks in the 40-49 and 50-59 bands, with males performing better than females.

An additional comparison was made with the marks from mathematics and statistics modules at level 1 with an overall assessment weighting of 80% tests/exams and 20% coursework. Again, these were modules in which we thought males might achieve better results.

**Level 1 Maths and statistics modules combined**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70%+</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-69</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R/F</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of students</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although a greater proportion of males received marks of 70 or more, it is notable that in these modules 43% of females received marks of 40-59, compared with 24% of males, while
14% of females received a mark of less than 39, compared with 31% of males. Females therefore did significantly better overall.

The HEPI report notes there is increasing concern in the UK and many other countries about growing differences between male and female rates of participation, retention and achievement in higher education. Within this broad context of concern, our initial investigation of progression and achievement rates on these three courses appears to indicate that women often do significantly better than men. In this regard, it is notable that the annual report of another school within the same faculty of the university provides similar indications. In this school, a substantially higher proportion of female undergraduate students progressed ‘unconditionally’ at the end of the first two levels of study (HE levels 1 and 2), while a higher proportion of males failed, or were required to re-sit assessments.

### Summer progression by gender at HE levels 1 and 2 in July 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Progressing ‘unconditionally’ in June</th>
<th>Progression decision deferred until September pending re-sits</th>
<th>Fail</th>
<th>Did not complete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
<td>65.9 %</td>
<td>25.4 %</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td>57.7 %</td>
<td>29.9 %</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, we need to further investigate these apparent differences between the achievement and progression of male and female students, but the local, national and international data appear to raise three new questions for research:

1. **Do the ways in which we assess undergraduate students have a significant influence on the relative progression and achievement rates of males and females?**

Factors we might expect to be influential in this regard include the forms of assessment; timing of assessment; use of formative assessment; kinds of feedback provided to students and availability of chances to rework assignments in response to feedback.

2. **Do other institutional factors have an influence?**

Factors to consider in this case would include institutional cultures and policies; different kinds of curricula; and methods of teaching and learning.

3. **Do male and female students have different attitudes or approaches to assessment that influence their relative progression and achievement?**

### The general significance of our findings

The research discussed here is still in progress and our intention now is to investigate these questions. In the meantime, we think the experience we have described in this paper is of general interest for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates that course teams can learn a great deal from a detailed comparative analysis of assessment and progression data. Secondly, the differences between the achievement and progression rates of male and female students that have emerged during our local research are also evident in the national and international data. We hope our paper will therefore encourage colleagues to investigate the three questions set out above in the context of their own courses.
Acknowledgement

The research referred to in this paper was funded by the University of Brighton as part of its programme to widen participation in higher education and enhance the achievement of ‘non-traditional’ students.

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Adrian Chown and Dr Stephen Waite with Lucy Chilvers


Biographies

Adrian Chown is a senior lecturer in higher education in the Centre for Learning and Teaching. He has worked in the field of educational and professional development in adult, further and higher education since the early 1980s. Before he joined the CLT, he held similar posts at University College London and the Centre for Education Studies, Croydon College. Adrian teaches on a range of modules and courses in education and research. He is also involved in a wide variety of projects and events concerned with the development of teaching and learning in the university. He has a particular research interest in the ’workplace’ learning of academic staff and its role in the development of their pedagogic practices.

Dr Stephen Waite graduated from the University of Sussex in 1975 with a first class honours degree in Biological Sciences. He completed his DPhil at the same institution and then taught biology and ecology at the University of Westminster before moving to the University of Brighton in 1991. At Brighton, he was head of Biology and then deputy head of the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences before taking up his current post of Vice Principal (HE) at Hartpury College in September 2009. While at Brighton, he was involved in a number of teaching and learning projects, including an FDTL funded project on student transition. He was bioscience curriculum lead for the Sussex Learning network, and involved in activities of the University Centre Hastings, where he helped develop and taught on a combined BA Honours programme.

Lucy Chilvers works in the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences as a student support and guidance tutor, offering advice and guidance to students. She also supervises a peer learning scheme called PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) which involves providing leadership and facilitation skills training and regular debriefs to students who lead small group study sessions for lower level students. After studying Social Psychology at the University of Sussex, Lucy worked with teenagers with special educational needs in a local secondary school before joining the University of Brighton in 2007.
Online exhibitions and archives
An immersive experience for practice-based learning

JANE DEVINE MEJIA AND PATRICK LETSCHKA

Abstract
This paper discusses the Centre for Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD) Online Exhibitions Project, a collaboration between the University of Brighton, the Royal College of Art, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A). During the project, we tested assumptions about how students use images and social networks, and how the physical and virtual archival experience supports learning and creative practice. We explored the potential of archives to expand learning through a virtual exhibition by offering undergraduate students an immersive experience based on an iconic British modernist house and its archive. Although the research focused on Materials Practice and 3-D design students, those who use virtual learning environments and technologies such as Facebook and Flickr will also find the project of interest.

Introduction
Students studying on the 3-D Materials Practice BA programme at the University of Brighton are expected to explore issues of production, detail, skill and material manipulation. All of these qualities can be observed within collections, as can other concepts such as intimacy, narrative or the cultural use of objects. The use of collections has been a traditional part of the student experience across many courses that offer the study of materials and production of the made object. Visits are regularly made to national collections, local museums and students can also make references to private collections, sometimes their own.

‘Collections’ as the main theme for a visual research unit of study arose from the need to reference cultural themes, to inform understanding and to build on previous knowledge. In order to reposition perceptions of how collections are used within teaching and learning at the University of Brighton, and to move away slightly from the established use of museum collections to inform learning, another way of engaging with collections was considered. As Kevin Walker (2008) points out: ‘Design tutors impart to their students a dual stance toward museums – as places for inspiration and reference on one hand, and as cultural authorities to be questioned on the other’.

A visual research project entitled ‘The Secret Life of an Object’ was introduced to challenge the idea of ‘Edutainment’, referred to by Hooper-Greenhill (2007), as a mix of education and
entertainment that she associates with some museum learning experiences. The second year undergraduate students were asked to research beneath the surface of what is usually presented for public consumption, and think more deeply about the relevance and effect that collections could have on their own creative enquiry and studio work. As the artist, Shirley Chubb (2009) recently observed about collections, especially the formally housed ‘…they are like the ordered tips of an iceberg’. Beneath the surface, lying unseen, are a mass of artefacts and objects jumbled together out of time and cultural sequence. They are stored in a controlled space and generally ignored.

Contemporary makers like David Clarke have made objects specifically for important national collections, only to see their work disappear into hidden archives away from public view. Competitions and commissions offered by museums encourage makers to produce the highest quality work that requires careful maintenance, but which become impotent of function once placed behind glass, perhaps ultimately to become one of the museum’s ‘use unknown’ artefacts.

The Online Exhibitions Project originally emerged from a shared curiosity among the archivists who are part of the CETLD partnership in exploring the potential of virtual exhibitions in higher education learning. While all of the archivists had some experience of online exhibitions within their institutions, none had attempted a collaborative project that incorporated HE learning objectives and enabled student participation, with a particular emphasis on students in the practice-based disciplines. The broader context for the online exhibitions research was defined by the core CETLD themes: learning spaces physical/virtual), practice-based learning and object scholarship (through the interpretation of artefacts and drawings in archives and museum collections), the student voice (student-centred, personalised learning) and the use and application of collections. Other CETLD projects currently underway that relate specifically to archival collections are the V&A’s ‘From Sketch to Product’ blog, developed with the Royal College of Art, and the Offsite: Insight project to develop online inductions to the V&A and RIBA architecture collections.

Beginning with a review of the art, design, museum, library and archives literature about online exhibitions and virtual learning, and a survey of best practice in online exhibition design, the project staff developed a prototype exhibition using existing digitised materials from CETLD partner archives, hosted on the CETLD Web 2.0 website. The prototype was then tested with students and tutors, to see whether initial assumptions about technology, archives and practice-based learning held true. These assumptions were that students would be comfortable interacting in a social networking environment, that the online exhibition would provide them with a valuable
introduction to archives as a source for creative practice, and that the physical and virtual experiences we planned for them would have tangible learning outcomes.

Finding a theme for the online exhibition

In choosing content for the online exhibition, it was important to find a guiding theme that would demonstrate the diversity of the partner archives and that would be appealing to design students. Exploration of the archives revealed that their common strength lay in British design of the twentieth century and that a possible overall theme could be that of the design process. Only RIBA held a digital collection that focused on the design of one project from preliminary sketch to completion: the Ernö Goldfinger archive for 2 Willow Road, one of the first Modernist homes to be built in Britain and now a National Trust property. Further advantages to this choice were the involvement of the National Trust curator and RIBA/V&A education officer in presenting the house and its archive to the students. The Goldfinger material also served as a vivid example of a varied and extensive archive of a lifetime’s design work, encompassing architecture, furniture, graphic design and writing. A sequence of 36 images was selected from the RIBA library database of architectural drawings and photographs and from the University of Brighton Design Archives, to form the core of the online exhibition.

Working with Web 2.0 technologies

On the assumption that we would use the CETLD Elgg Web 2.0 site to host the prototype exhibition, project funding did not include a budget for software acquisition or development. Elgg was adopted at the University of Brighton three years ago as the platform for its social network community@brighton, one of the first in the UK to provide a shared space in which staff, students and tutors could interact. Elgg (www.elgg.org) is a versatile system that provides blogging, file sharing, image presentation and social networking capabilities.

As the initial work began on the Willow Road Online Exhibition, we found that Elgg’s photo gallery feature did not offer all the functions needed to create a visual narrative of Ernö Goldfinger’s design process. Our aim was to find a way of presenting images in a visually engaging way, with the capability to display descriptive metadata, to arrange and manipulate the images, and to
enable the contribution of student-created content to the exhibition. As a result, we explored a number of open source web album packages and chose Jalbum and its Fotoplayer template as the best option, given time and technical constraints. Fotoplayer (www.fotoplayer.com) allowed the creation of a visually attractive slideshow with large browse-able thumbnail images, space for image metadata display, enlarging, zooming and panning functions and a ‘guestbook’ comment box for each image. In the end, we used a hybrid approach by linking the Fotoplayer album to our Elgg site so that we could use Elgg’s blog and file sharing features while benefitting from Fotoplayer’s image presentation strengths.

Real and virtual experiences: structuring the research

Briefly, the project was structured so that the 12 students who volunteered would visit the house at 2 Willow Road for a tour with the National Trust curator and have free time to photograph, sketch and ask questions. They then received an introduction to the related RIBA Goldfinger archival material at the V&A, this time with an education officer, who facilitated discussion and exploration of the Willow Road archive. This hands-on archive exploration and house tour acted as a preparation for the virtual experience which began a week later when we asked the students to view the online exhibition for the first time. They were then invited to join the Elgg Web 2.0 Online Exhibitions Community where they could upload their own photographs and commentary to a password protected blog, view the online exhibition, write comments in the image guestbooks and share other information and images with the group over a period of eight weeks.

Working on site: the embedded experience

The house at 2 Willow Road, offered an opportunity to experience another way of seeing a collection. One that focuses much more on a personal collection within a house designed by the owner, surrounded by all of the objects and artefacts that make up a domestic environment, and protected by experts that live in the collection, rather than by glass cabinets or hidden rooms. It is a working house that once formed part of a professional practice, as well as a social, domestic habitat. Here nothing was hidden and nothing was labelled. Details everywhere point to evidence of a working methodology embedded in the fabric, which encourages an engagement. Within the collection of objects, there is a sense that this is a very personal set up, where things are left open, revealed or glimpsed, and they draw us towards becoming empathetic.

The students were not briefed or prepared when they arrived at the house. They were without prior knowledge of Ernö Goldfinger, the designer and owner, or his working practice. 2 Willow Road allowed an engagement to occur within a 3-D space in real time, senses became more engaged through recognising the kitchen, the toilet, the workbench as well as past social events and parties that gave the rooms an atmosphere that could be ‘felt’. The space allowed an immersive experience to occur alongside serious and important collected artefacts.

Using the online exhibition and blog

The shift from this immersive experience to a virtual environment gave the students space for reflection and communication of their experiences. By contrast, in her paper, Sharon Macdonald (2003) speaks about the Internet as disembedding us, especially from our locality. She suggests that the notion of cultural identity is now becoming more generic where ‘we can reflexively make up our own identities’. Information that is presented on a screen, where the viewer is alone becomes more difficult to internalise and externalise without a prior experience or someone to share it with. The strengthening of connections between the intellectual, sensory and physical is an important part of our development as creative individuals, which when it is experienced can
then be discussed. This became the main point of introducing the students to the blog and the online exhibition. This approach reinforces the notion of an ‘emergent agenda’ a term coined by Chris Rose (2006), that comes out of the interaction of individuals with an artistic production as an objective. The opportunity for students to upload their own selected photographs and their personal observations to the blog and to view them alongside official archival photographs of 2 Willow Road, became a further method of embedding their experience and reflecting on the value of primary research methods.

Assessing learning outcomes

To evaluate pedagogical impact, we asked students to complete a set of questionnaires, to self-assess their learning both from the online exhibition and from their archives encounter. An interview with their tutors also identified learning outcomes of which the students were not necessarily aware, but that were manifested in their approach to drawing, their awareness of materials and attention to the use of space in designing their projects. Although we worked with a small group, the value lay in assessing their learning over a period of eight weeks and in seeing the work they produced during this time.

On the whole students responded enthusiastically to their immersion in the archives and commented in the questionnaires on what they had learned: I never heard about it before, but seeing [the] archives and house, some of the details, will help me on my current project and furniture construction. Another noted: ...You get a great sense of Goldfinger’s vision through sketchy drawings to visualise designs... Above all, the students appreciated the value of seeing actual drawings.
Learning from students

From the questionnaires, we determined that most students used Facebook, but only one used the university’s Elgg community@brighton site. Although familiar with social networks, they did not necessarily see the point of using an academic social network that links students, tutors and staff in the same virtual environment. The assumption that students would use a social network simply because they knew how to, was proven incorrect. Several students posted images to the online exhibition blog, but they did not comment on each others’ postings or contribute much text related to their own photographs. Very similar results can be found in the CETLD project ‘See What I’m Saying’ final report. They largely valued the Willow Road Online Exhibition as a reminder of the RIBA archival drawings and photographs they had seen at the V&A, as well as a complement to their experience of the house in its current form (the archives date from 1937-49).

At the same time, there was a great appreciation for the real over the virtual as a result of their contact with the National Trust curator and RIBA/V&A education officer, the physical experience of being in the house, and the opportunity to examine archival drawings and learn from them. Several students wanted more time to explore the archives and to sketch in the house. They appreciated the ‘behind the scenes’ access to the designer’s work that the archive offered, as distinct from the structured formality of a museum exhibition. Certainly the online exhibition did not replace the archives and house visits, but it gave students a virtual space in which to re-examine and reflect on the material they had viewed in person. Most of them felt motivated to use archives again for practice-related research after this introductory immersive experience.

Conclusion

Online exhibitions offer the potential of demystifying the archive and making it relevant to students as a source for practice-based research. Our project enabled design students to explore and learn from archival material on site and in a virtual environment. The online exhibition dissolved some of the physical boundaries that deter students from using archives: opening hours, location, fragility of materials and handling restrictions, the need to know what to request and to accept archivist mediation of research (ie the lack of browse-ability) by enabling them to engage in self-directed exploration of the Willow Road archive in an online context.

The juxtaposition of the students’ visual interpretation of an immersive experience within a structured web-based environment gave the online exhibition its true learning and teaching value. While the students as participants did not consciously have ideas ready upon arrival, they had them already within their experiential references. The group discussions helped to draw out aspects that are notable, interesting or promising for discovering where their personal research interests lie. This shared process allows a space in which to formulate and develop a language of ideas, and most importantly – perhaps the whole point of this research project – to clarify the basis for further personal research and practice, to develop the students’ sense of what is important to them, to build confidence about exploring archival resources in a virtual and physical environment and to encourage them to take ownership of their own ideas.
Acknowledgments

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Biographies

Jane Devine Mejia was the Research Fellow for Online Exhibitions at the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD), University of Brighton (2007-09). She holds a BA (Hons) in History, and a master’s degree in Library Science from McGill University, Montreal. Jane was previously the art and architecture librarian at the University of Notre Dame, USA (1997-2004) and information services and systems librarian at the National Film Board of Canada, Montreal (1986-94). Her research interests focus on teaching and learning with images and student engagement with research collections.

Patrick Letschka is a senior lecturer and the area leader for the Wood Department and Visual Research on the MDes 3-D Design and Materials Practice WMCP programmes. His work is primarily interested in researching through moving image and making objects that function within ritual. He is currently part of ‘The Breathing City’ project, an ongoing interdisciplinary arts and science collaboration. He graduated with a BA (Hons) from the crafts course WMCP, completed a masters degree in Design in 2005 and a PG Cert in Learning and Teaching in HE, 2006.
Teaching Spanish and the use of Web 2.0

MARIO ANGELES EMMERSON

Abstract

This paper describes the introduction of a range of elearning approaches to the teaching of Spanish. The benefits arising from such techniques are discussed, and outcomes include the increase in self-directed learning; interactivity between students; flexibility of access to course related activities and information; and the development of resource materials. Examples of the use of blogs, MP3 recorders and other tools and activities undertaken by students are described and evaluated. Consideration is also given to the emerging changes associated with Web 2.0 and in particular, how elearning tools provide rapid and shared access to an increasingly wide range of information, and allow the student greater autonomy in the learning process. This in turn leads to a shift in the roles of both teacher and students.

Introduction

This last year has marked a sea change for me as a teacher of Spanish with the introduction of eleaning approaches. The process of change has been one of awakening and discovery, but essentially one of using elearning techniques to build upon and to complement the foundations provided by more traditional approaches in the teaching of modern languages. In IT terms, I was something of a novice, but was becoming increasingly aware of how students in particular, were accessing and sharing information with a growing range of tools. At an elearning technology event (ELT2) in April 2008, I heard Martin Weller describe the development in teaching models from directive teacher/passive learner to teacher as facilitator and more interaction and self-directed learning from the student. The change in the dynamics of the teacher/student relationship and their roles, which is a characteristic of the Connectivism model of elearning (Siemens 2005), was a compelling notion, and pointed towards the benefits of incorporating Web 2.0 in language studies.

Until recently, my use of the web was limited to email exchange, searching for information and posting of tasks for students on studentcentral. However, I was concerned to provide students with more speaking practice than was possible in our time together in class. An ICT colleague introduced me to the MP3, which allowed me to record a range of Spanish expressions for use in conversational dialogue and to post them onto the studentcentral website. The students were able to access this material in their own time and found it very helpful in developing oral skills.
Encouraged by the success of this modest beginning, I began to extend the use of the MP3 and introduced other tools such as blogs, Flickr, YouTube, Google maps and podcasts. I will describe how I have used a variety of tools in a Spanish teaching and learning context, what benefits the students experienced, and where the next steps might take us. Firstly, however, I will consider some of the theoretical underpinnings and key concepts in the evolution of elearning and Web 2.0.

Some key characteristics of elearning

The movement from directive teaching of a content defined by the teacher and transmitted to the relatively passive student, to the increasingly self-directed learning from a variety of shared resources by the student, has been succinctly described by Downes (2005); Anderson (2007); Elliot (2009) and others. However, in my view, it is important to recognise helpful features of both the more traditional pedagogic approach and of elearning connectivism, which can be adopted in a more eclectic and customised teaching/learning model. The basis for this belief is that students vary between themselves, and within themselves from time to time, in their need for a degree of direction, explanation and support from a teacher. The variables of self-confidence and motivation can be significantly influenced in the teacher-student relationship.

Howard Gardner (1993) identified a number of learning styles and proposed that a student will learn most effectively when able to employ their preferred learning style(s). Certain of these styles eg Interpersonal, and Interactive, clearly relate to the social and self-directed aspects of web-based elearning. Vygotsky (1978) in his social constructivism model of learning, argued that students extend their learning through assistance and exchange from adults and peers. This social and sharing nature of learning is of course, a key feature of elearning, described by Anderson (2007) as one of the six ‘big ideas’ behind Web 2.0.

Fundamentally, the elearner is a creator as well as a consumer of content. More and more data and information is generated and can be accessed, modified and extended by the community of users. Moreover, such activity can take place at a time and location, which suits the individual learner.

The combination of rapid technological and social change has given rise to a new kind of learner in the twenty-first century, described by Prensky (2001) as ‘digital natives’. Quite how universal this shift in learner attitude and behaviour actually is, is a matter of opinion, but there can be no doubt that there is a significant direction of travel towards greater autonomy for the learner, more communication and participation, and the expectation of quicker access to information in images as well as text, and from multiple sources.

Elliot (2009), in discussing the evolution towards the connectivist approach (Siemens 2005) argues that the emerging new style of learning also requires a new pedagogy. Indeed, the teacher and learner must make the journey together and there are certainly challenges to our values and perceptions of the teacher role and functions. However, with particular reference to foreign language teaching, I would maintain that elearning tools and methodology enable the student to extend in a personalised fashion, certain elements which are most effectively taught, in the first instance, in a face to face context. It is the synergy of the combination of approaches, which adds most value to the learning experience.

Uses of an MP3 recorder and blogs in foreign language teaching and learning

It became clear from the outset that many students were using and benefiting from the weekly recordings posted on studentcentral. These customised and rather brief samples of speech
allowed modelling and practice of pronunciation and intonation, eliciting language from students and developing vocabulary and structures. They also helped to build confidence in using spoken language.

**Amy: promoting fairtrade in Peru**

Amy was interviewed using the portable and easy to use MP3 recorder, which allowed the capture of authentic language in a natural, conversational manner. Amy described the lives of Peruvian women, their families, and the fairtrade business *Mamacha*, which she established to promote the sale of their colourful clothes, rugs and bags, handmade from alpaca wool. Alongside her recording, students were given a website link to *Mamacha*, which proved a valuable resource in learning about the culture of Peru, the geography of the country, its local language variants, and its dramatic history, illustrated by a hyperlink called ‘Inspiring tales of the Andes’. This was an excellent example of how the MP3 tool can lead to a wider appreciation of the context and culture in which the language is used.

**Nick: conversation with a TV producer**

A video interview with Nick talking in Spanish about his background and life in Hollywood as a TV producer, was made available on student-central. Students were then invited to write questions in a blog to Nick and his replies to individuals came in the form of MP3 recordings which were placed in the same blog for all students to listen to. Subsequently the blog remained running, and further postings of exchanges and web links with updates of Nick’s life and career were included. This exchange of dialogue attracted a lot of interest and there is no doubt that the opportunity to have direct conversation with a Hollywood TV producer provided great motivation. However, the major benefit for students was the development of language.

**Student recordings**

In a classroom situation where the language produced by students is not recorded in any way, the opportunity to revisit the dialogue with the individual, or indeed by others, is lost. I therefore used the MP3 to record spoken language from students in a variety of forms in order to develop reusable resources, as well as providing material for the personal development of the speaker. To this end, students made individual recordings about their countries, towns, families, aspects of culture and celebrations, and various stories and anecdotes. The recordings were supplemented with photographs, and a transcription of the content posted on a blog. In one example, Oana Maria places a recorded invitation to a party in a blog, allowing readers to comment and ask questions of Oana. Some of these exchanges can be viewed in.

1 Nick https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk/webapps/lobj-journal-bb_bb60/blog/sp141sp142/_739557_1/
2 Invitacion a una fiesta https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk/webapps/lobj-journal-bb_bb60/blog/sp111sp112/_772145_1/
Another situation, involved students visiting the website of the Hotel de Londres in San Sebastian which portrays live webcam images of the beach in front of the hotel itself. Students then engaged in a role play conversation between a client and hotel receptionist to seek information and make a booking. Further recorded activities involved students engaged in group discussions and debates.

**Using blogs**

The progression to using blogs was a natural one and soon students were placing writing, imagery and voice recordings in blogs related to:

- Description of cities in Spanish speaking cultures
- Personal profiles
- Countries of origin, home and families
- Presentations on researched themes
- Creative writing
- Anecdotes and fables
- Role plays and dialogues
- Drama performance

Many nationalities were represented in my student group and they were invited to make presentations on a blog of their school life, which reflected cultural characteristics. Other students were then able to ask questions and make comments in an exchange of dialogue in Spanish.

In another example, I posted into a blog a photograph of the Spanish playwright Federico García Lorca with the question ¿Quién era? Who was he? The number and variety of responses from students was substantial. I had in fact, posed this question to students at three different phases of study. The beginners’ contributions were more limited than those at more advanced levels, but the linguistic development value was significant for both groups. The level of interest in Lorca led me to showing students the film Bodas de Sangre by Carlos Saura. This is an adaptation of a play of the same title by Federico Garcia Lorca. This version however, had no dialogue and the story was depicted in a flamenco styled dance performance. Students were invited as a group to create their own dialogue, which they then performed and documented in blogs with recordings, photographs and transcriptions. Possibilities to extend to related activities did not stop there, and some students engaged in reading and acting out a scene using the script from the actual play by Lorca (see over). This activity was in every sense dramatic and greatly enjoyed by all.

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3 Reserva hotel Londres https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk/webapps/lobj-journal-bb_bb60/blog/sr121sr122/_.773791_1/
4 Klasse 1 https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk/webapps/lobj-journal-bb_bb60/blog/sr121sr122/_.768517_1/
5 Lorca https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk/webapps/lobj-journal-bb_bb60/blog/sr11sr112/_.754293_1/
Other tools

Earlier this year Google made available their latest tool Streetview, which allowed me to journey around the city of Sevilla as a virtual visitor. I then made an MP3 recording⁶ as I took my students along Mateos Gago, a lively street, towards the square which hosts two important buildings, the Giralda and the Catedral. I instructed my students on how to get to the starting point in Google maps and posted the MP3 recording, which enabled them to listen to my directions and commentary in Spanish as they moved along the streets looking at the sites. An ensuing blog invited students to further explore and comment upon, cultural aspects of Sevilla such as the Semana Santa and the Feria de abril.

There are other tools worthy of mention including Windows Movie Maker in conjunction with the MP3, Cantasia Studio, Second Life and of course, new applications are constantly emerging. My experience so far has been very positive and there are distinct benefits for both students and teachers, some of which I will describe below.

Benefits

The use of the above mentioned MP3, blogs and other tools by myself as a teacher, and the students as increasingly interactive participants, has undoubtedly extended the opportunities for self-directed learning. A number of observations and benefits reflecting our elearning approach to date are recorded in the words of students:

- Enjoyed the blogs – very interactive and involving….little details of people, habits and culture
- Helped me tie (Spanish) words to real places and culture
- Taking part in the play was a fantastic experience for me'
- I want to visit Donosti/San Sebastian, Sevilla and Barcelona now
- Nick answered me!
- The online blogs were really helpful….talking with people like Nick was an eye-opener

Characteristically, the activities described above allow for learning in a highly interactive fashion. Students can engage with information and its authors, whatever the time, wherever the place and whatever the amount and level of difficulty.

- Students have much more control over what and how they learn
- There are great opportunities for open-ended exploration by students of themes, which catch their interest.
- Different aspects of e-activities suit different learning styles
- Students learn from each other – material produced is of value to all
- They are encouraged by others’ work – seeing others do things is contagious

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⁶ Sevilla https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk/@@3475ade13ac0c722275f1c0d6f03205c/courses/1/sp111sp112/content/_777988_1/sevillaper cent203.mp3
Teaching Spanish and the use of Web 2.0

- Cultural awareness is developed. Students from different cultures can share their experiences and gain new insights.
- Students’ work is recorded, transportable and easily accessed. In fact, it can contribute to a student’s own eportfolio.
- Students create and build resources for their own course. The materials can be taken forward to other students in later years.
- There is pride and satisfaction in seeing themselves and their work online. It can also be shown to friends and family.
- Students lacking in confidence can find new means of expression and self-realisation.
- Course material can be recycled and used by other teachers.
- Teachers can learn IT skills from students!

Positive feedback, good exam results and increased participation appear to reflect student satisfaction, linguistic achievement and growth in cultural awareness, although it would be impossible to gauge at this point the extent to which these results could be attributed to the use of the Web 2.0. There have been some difficulties related to technical limitations, which prevented the use of certain tools, due to incompatibility with the university’s current IT system.

Considerations for the future

If we are to get the best out of the technological innovation in Web 2.0, it will be necessary to cultivate movement towards a new pedagogy, which can accommodate elearning principles and methods. The changes in ICT and elearner behaviour is extraordinarily rapid and the process of bringing about change in a professional body, in this case teachers, is complex (Knoster, 1991). LeRoy and Simpson (1992) identified five essential components in order to effect such change in values and behavior:

- **Vision**: a clearly communicated view of the outcomes and results of the change.
- **Incentive**: the benefits of the change must be demonstrated, compelling and seen to add value.
- **Resources**: people must have access to the tools of the new technology.
- **Skills**: users need to develop skills in using the new technology and be supported in this process.
- **Action plan**: a change process requires a plan for the introduction and consolidation of its new applications and the involvement of its new users.

The vision and the incentives should ideally come first, in order to drive the movement forward, but in the case of elearning, it is the resources ie the new technology which is racing ahead. Many potential users in the teaching world may feel rather intimidated by the skills required to use these new tools to best effect, and initially I found myself in that position. However, I believe universities are well placed to accommodate elearning technology into the way that subject content is accessed and used interactively by students, who largely bring the IT skills with them.

Web 2.0 is a universal shift which impacts on life in the widest sense. Communications and access to information have changed for everyone, but what feels like a revolution is still an evolution in terms of learning. There is great benefit in language learning in particular, in students being able to use elearning tools to extend and practice language skills in their own time wherever they...
can access a computer network. However, few people manage to learn a language by themselves. A teacher is able to adapt the pace and structure of learning, to assess the student’s needs and potential, and hopefully at a more personal level, to inspire and motivate. The way forward is surely to adopt the best practice from both worlds in order to maximise learning effectiveness for all students.

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**Bibliography**


**Biography**

**Maria Angeles Emmerson** is a Basque who speaks Euskera and Spanish and is currently a senior lecturer in Spanish at the University of Brighton. She also has considerable experience as an associate lecturer with the Open University. Maria Angeles has degrees in Performing Arts and Linguistics and has particular interests in Spanish film and Basque culture. She has taught in a variety of contexts including schools, adult education and prisons.
Museums and higher education
Rekindling the romance

REBECCA REYNOLDS

Abstract

Use of museums by higher education students varies from one-off field trips to museum-based modules, which are part of HE curricula. This paper reports on an example of the latter, ‘Breaking into the V&A’, a module for second year art and design students. The module offered students a range of ‘ways in’ to using museums, including exploring the history of museums, visiting behind the scenes at the V&A and designing an exhibition. Sponsored by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD), it was developed in response to research findings showing that students needed support using collections. Student feedback is summarised and elements, which could be used in other courses, are highlighted.

Introduction: museums and higher education courses

There is a growing interest in the role of museums in students’ learning in a range of HE subjects. This role includes one-off trips to museums as complements to core courses, and at the other end of the spectrum, courses and modules about museums. Examples of museum-based courses are the Museums and Heritage Studies BA offered by Brighton’s Faculty of Arts from 2008, which developed from museum-focused elements which were already part of other courses in the faculty. Examples of museum-based modules which students take in addition to their core subjects include those at the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) in Reading run by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Applied Undergraduate Research Skills (CETL-AURS).

A continuum of the involvement of museums in higher education is suggested by this comment from Carin Jacobs, Director for the Center of Arts, Religion and Education at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, USA: ‘I assert that there exists a hierarchy of involvement with museums in education, beginning at the level of the ad hoc field trip and ending in a perfect world, with museums as satellite universities’ (Jacobs 2009). (An interesting debate on the relationship between higher education and museums was sparked by Jacobs’s article and can be found in the same issue of Museum Management and Curatorship).

Here I report on ‘Breaking into the V&A’, a museum-based module for second year art and design students. This aimed to enable students to explore a series of ‘ways in’ to using museums, with the V&A as a central example, but also using other museums. It should be of interest to HE tutors from a range of disciplines who use museums, archives or collections of objects in their teaching, or who are interested in doing so. First, I will give some background on the development
Rebecca Reynolds

and content of the module. I then give examples of activities, an example of student work and a summary of student feedback on the course. I then reflect upon the module as a whole, highlighting some areas, which could be developed and used in different contexts.

Background

The module was developed and taught as part of my role as higher education officer for the Centre For Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD), a five-year partnership between the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Royal College of Art (RCA), the University of Brighton and the V&A. One of the aims of CETLD is to embed the use and understanding of museum and archive collections in the experience of design students. I am one of a three-strong team based at the V&A for the duration of the partnership.

The module was optional and could be taken by any student from the Faculty of Arts as part of the faculty’s extension studies programme, whereby students choose from a range of courses to take in addition to their core studies. There were nine weekly sessions. Seven of these consisted of a three-hour taught session at the university, and two were day visits to the V&A, one to explore the displays and one to visit behind the scenes. So far, the module has been taught twice and is due to run a third time in the autumn term 2009-10. A course ‘map’ is shown below:

‘Ways in’ to using museums included:

Exploring different conceptions of the roles and ideology of museums, both now and in the past: Activities here included analysing pictures of different museum interiors from different periods; students independently visiting local museums and speaking to visitors and museum staff to establish the purpose of these museums and their audiences; analysing different galleries at the V&A.

Exploring motivations for collecting, and different types of collection: Activities included discussing collections made by students and tutors using Susan Pearce’s categorisation of collections as ‘systematic’, ‘souvenir’ and ‘fetishistic’ (Pearce 1991) as a way of understanding personal collections and museum collections.

Testing the museum environment: Activities included doing mildly unacceptable things during a visit to the V&A, such as lying on the floor, listening to music on MP3 players and running.
The purpose of this was to identify some boundaries of acceptable behaviour in the public space of the museum and consider how these may affect our relationship with objects within them.

**Drawing out different significances of objects within different places and within different exhibitions:** For example, in one activity students considered a watch with a picture of Saddam Hussein on the face, and considered different exhibitions this could be part of, for example, an exhibition on dictators, or moustaches, or the ‘axis of evil’. The purpose of this was to see how an object’s significance could change according to the context it was placed in. Students then drew diagrams of different aspects of objects which could be highlighted when interpreting them (one is shown here).

**Finding out about the different areas of museums’ work and different museum-based resources students could draw on:** This included talking to artists in residence at the V&A, touring the conservation studios, and visiting the V&A art and design archives.

**Analysing galleries:** For example, during the first visit to the V&A, students were invited to analyse galleries in two ways. The first drew on their knowledge of the history and purposes of museums and focused on the gallery’s design, type of collection and the way in which the collection was displayed. The second way invited a more lateral and imaginative approach, for example imagining films that would be shot in the space, or what kind of personality the gallery might have.

These ‘ways in’ were explored during the first half of the course, and students could draw on them in the second half of the course when they focused on the final task, which was to design an exhibition or piece for an existing exhibition. The rationale for such an approach to course design is supported by a comment by the eminent museum educational theorist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill on the complex educational role of the museum: ‘It is not enough to focus only on the learning strategies of individuals, and the educational potential of museums and their collections, it is also necessary to place this within a knowledge of the social and cultural roles museums play’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1999:22).

Another statement by the same author provides something of a challenge to those using museums with their students in HE courses: ‘Accessible exhibitions can lead to greater enjoyment and more effective learning, even though the nature of the learning is probably rather unfocused;
‘leisure-learning’, a stirring of interest, an extension of something already known’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1999:24). This characterisation of much learning from exhibitions as ‘leisure-learning’ and ‘a stirring of interest’ is attractive and is in my view, accurate as a description of learning in museums by many visitors. However, ‘leisure-learning’, may be taken as only a partial description of the optimum use of museums in formal education and in HE courses, particularly those such as design where object-based learning is central. Part of the aim of the module was to explore how students could be encouraged to engage more deeply with museums and their collections.

Impetus for course development also came from baseline research carried out by CETLD at the V&A into the use of collections by HE design tutors and students. This showed that students would welcome support in using collections, but help ‘must not appear to demystify, simplify, and underestimate’ (Fisher 2007:14). It also showed that museums and practising artists had similar priorities in desiring to display works effectively, write descriptions of work, and market it to the public through sales and advertising. Insight into museum work might therefore help artists and designers commercially. This research also showed that barriers to students visiting the V&A included lack of knowledge of what it offered, difficulties with orienting oneself within the museum, high exhibition charges, lack of opportunity to handle objects, crowds in the museum, and distance.

**Student feedback**

At the end of the module students filled in a feedback form on the different parts of the course, numbering each according to how interesting they found it. Below is an average mark given to each part, taken from feedback from 15 students (out of the 20 who have taken the module). Each part of the course received a mark from between 11 and 15 students (some students were absent for some parts). To get the end total, all the marks were added together and then divided by the number of students who gave them. They are given here in descending order, with selected comments from students are added.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of course</th>
<th>Number from 1–5</th>
<th>Student comments</th>
</tr>
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| Visit behind the scenes                                                        | 4.7             | a great opportunity to see what happens to objects before they end up in the museum.  
|                                                                                |                 | it unglamourises the V&A.                                                        |
| Explore significances of objects                                               | 4.4             | it got me thinking of a simple object in so many different ways.                   |
| Explore types of collection and motivations for collecting                    | 4.3             | helpful in both history of museums and human activity.                            |
| Design an exhibition or piece for an existing exhibition (final task)          | 4.1             | allows for a more creative application of theory.                                  
|                                                                                |                 | never thought about holding my own exhibition before.                              
|                                                                                |                 | stressful and very time consuming, but useful.                                    
|                                                                                |                 | it makes a change from writing essays.                                            |
### Museums and higher education

| Investigate purposes of museums | 3.9 | very interesting – made you think about why and how already learnt a significant amount from my course (visual culture). |
| Visit to archives | 3.9 | I thought it was a great opportunity to find out about new research sources. I had no idea that you could access these – very good database and interesting a bit boring |
| Explore history of museums | 3.8 | some stuff I didn’t know. |
| Test the museum environment | 3.6 | makes you question museum environment. although uncomfortable ultimately useful |
| Explore your learning preferences | 3.5 | was fun – but didn’t agree with result! |
| Investigating virtual resources (V&A website) | 3.3 | new source, but I didn’t find it all too useful alright – not so enlightening |

### Reflection

The module contained many elements, which could be developed further and used on other courses and learning contexts. These include:

- learning how to use different museum resources – displays, archives, web-based resources and so on
- analysing museum displays
- exploring collections and motivations for collecting
- exploring different significances of objects
- learning about different aspects of museum work

Parts of the course which needed to be improved upon, included students analysing how they best preferred to use museums. Many students already had strong preferences about this. What generally interested them more, was learning about the strategies of others for using museums, and thus considering alternatives to their own. Another part that needed improvement, was investigating virtual resources. Some students found visiting the V&A website helpful and surprising, but others did not. What might be more interesting here is including an element in the course which compares virtual and real resources more generically, for example by asking whether an object’s three-dimensionality is affected if it is behind glass and cannot be touched, and investigating types of resources which the web offers which cannot be offered in any actual museum.
Conclusion

On the basis of the course I would suggest that ‘museum literacy’ involves more than knowing what is available in museums, and that it cannot be assumed that students, even those who are practised at working with objects, will be able to get the most out of museums without support. However, if we return to the continuum in museum involvement in HE mentioned at the beginning of this article, it is likely that different tutors will give differing emphases to the role of museums in courses, depending on factors such as the nature of the discipline, available museum collections, preferred teaching approaches and so on.

References


Biography

Rebecca Reynolds is the CETLD Higher Education Officer at the Victoria and Albert Museum. She undertakes research and develops learning resources, focusing on higher education students’ use of museums, including the V&A. She also teaches museum-based and creative writing modules to art and design students at the University of Brighton. Previously she worked at the Language Centre at the University of the Arts, giving English language support to art, design and fashion undergraduates and postgraduates.
From pedagogy to publication
Developing a taught skills programme into a student workbook and published textbook

BOB SMALE AND JULIE FOWLIE

Abstract
This article first reports the development of a taught programme focused upon the development of personal, academic and job search skills at Brighton Business School, and then the development of the taught materials into both an internal student workbook and an externally published textbook. The article reports upon the writers’ work and commitment to student development over a period of more than 10 years. This work is based upon a belief that students can develop their skill set, learning the rules of academic life whilst achieving employability and ongoing personal development. The article recognises the contribution of colleagues to the taught programme, and the processes and issues involved in constructing the workbook and those entailed in writing a book for publication.

Introduction
This article is intended to tell the story first, of the development of a taught programme that focused upon the development of personal, academic and job search skills, and then the development of the taught materials into both an internal student workbook and a published textbook. Together, these developments represent a large part of the writers’ work and commitment to student development over a period of more than 10 years. This has been the product of an ongoing reflexive process informed by interaction with both students and colleagues, which has led to modification and redesign of the taught programme. The approach is essentially that of ‘action research’, with the writers learning more from each run of the programme (Lewin 1943).

Modules intended to develop students’ personal, academic and job search skills have been developed at Brighton Business School (BBS) over many years and delivered to level 1 undergraduates under various titles including; 'Personal Development', 'Personal Transferable Skills', 'Personal Academic Skills', and most recently 'Professional and Academic Skills' which is known by students and staff alike as PAS. Within BBS, there are also variants of the original PAS programme which have been tailored to the needs of law, accounting, economics and finance students. However, the majority of BBS undergraduates taking either single or joint honours business courses complete...
the modules to which this article specifically applies. All these programmes are directed at facilitating the successful transition of new students into university life (Boyatzis 2001; Fowlie 2009; Wingate 2007), and beyond in order to achieve the long term goal of employability called for by Dearing (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997), and as envisaged by others (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2002: Confederation of British Industry 1998; Department of Education and Employment, 2000: Department for Education and Skills 2003; Knight 2002; QAA Subject Benchmarking 2007).

The underlying ethos that drives our work, both in this programme and in other modules can be encapsulated in the following three core beliefs:

• That everyone has a skill set and that this can be upgraded with the right help and encouragement.

• That there are rules of academic life which must be learned in order to succeed, and that part of the academic role lies in demystification of the processes of higher education.

• That every student should have the best chance of employability and be encouraged to continue his or her development after university.

These beliefs are underpinned by the work of many writers, including those in the fields of pedagogy (Boud 1986; Honey and Munford 1972; Knowles 1980; 1989; Kolb 1975; Moon 1999, 2006; Prosser and Trigwell 1999) and emotional intelligence (Boyatzis 1982; 2001; Goleman 2000; 2001).

The taught modules

These modules have been the subject of progressive development and improvement over the last 10 years (Lewin 1943; Kolb 1975). An annual review meeting is held after the end of each academic year in which the team consider feedback from students together with ideas from team members, and thus much of what we have learned over the years is from colleagues. The current programme therefore represents a collaboration of ideas, from staff and students, past and present, together with the product of our own reflective practice (Moon 1999; 2006). We are concerned to point out that our work has been largely to assemble and present the most relevant material in a coherent form, rather than to create every element of it.

Students commencing business degree courses are introduced to both the school and the PAS programme in two intro-week workshops. They receive their PAS workbook at the first meeting to enable them to both access the information contained within it, and start to interact with the material by completing activities. Through their first academic year, they will have the opportunity to attend a further 20 one-hour weekly workshops, four of which are devoted to review and reflection on their progress, and to the completion of personal development plans (Entwistle and Marton 1984; Moon 1999; 2006). Students are encouraged to make plans that are ‘SMART’, an acronym standing for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (Locke 1975). Personal development planning is a key element of the programme and students are encouraged to complete and update their plans during the four reflective sessions through the year. Their final personal development plan is submitted as part of the semester 2 assignment.

PAS modules delivered to business degree students currently include a number of additional features designed to aid students in their transition into university life. Within their first few weeks, all students complete an online library quiz developed by colleagues in the Aldrich library, together with quantitative skills and information processing support activities developed by our colleague Kevin Turner in the Business School. Each student is given a comprehensive source-referencing book prepared by our colleague, Tracey Taylor. Students are also introduced
to studentcentral, the University of Brighton’s virtual learning environment and through this to relevant online materials.

During their first term, students are encouraged to book up for one of a series of ‘team skills development days’. These are organised by our colleague Babak Sodagor, again from BBS, in coordination with a team of professional instructors. These days involve students attending an outdoor activity day. Students are mixed into teams that can choose between tasks, each with a prescribed level of difficulty and by completion of these, they can earn points for their team (Katzenbach and Smith 1993; Belbin 1993; 2000). Feedback from students on the day is almost universally positive.

First year students are introduced to a final year mentor in their first term. They are expected to arrange a programme of one to one meetings and in the second semester mentees attend a mentor-led assessment centre. These sessions replicate assessments used by many major employers for graduate recruitment, and are set up and run entirely by the final year mentors as part of their ‘Managing People’ module. The mentors themselves will tend to be in the process of attending assessment centres as candidates for graduate entry level positions with employers, and will therefore tend to make the role-play activities highly realistic by replicating much of their own experience (Clutterbuck 2003; Lindsey and Whitcutt 2001; Spencer and Spencer 1993; Woodruffe 2000).

Module content in Semester 1 workshops is geared to the needs of the new student, focusing upon communications, interaction and self-analysis together with study skills (Fowlie 2009; Smale and Fowlie 2009). Students complete a literature review assignment to demonstrate their successful acquisition of academic skills. The programme then turns to the needs of the successful graduate in terms of negotiating the job search, application and selection processes. Students complete a job search portfolio, including job search documents and a reflective statement (Association of Graduate Recruiters). There is also some time given in semester 2 for revision of academic skills and the development of examination techniques.

The PAS modules are delivered through a combination of interactive workshops and experiential learning (Kolb 1975). Workshop sessions are supported by electronic resources available through studentcentral. Assignment completion is supported by formative work in seminars together with video clips on studentcentral. Each workshop is based around clear learning objectives, stated in the workbook (Prosser and Trigwell 1999). The workbook is designed to be interactive and includes spaces for student completion. Activities include individual, pair, small group and large group work together with small amounts of tutor input. The emphasis is on student participation and interaction together with frequent opportunities for reflection and self-analysis. All workshops end with a reflective session in which students complete a learning log based around questions that encourage them to think about what they learned, and how they will use it (Moon 1999; 2006). Students are also required to engage in self-assessment of their assignment work (Boud 1986).

In the academic year 2008-09, the PAS team took over the personal tutoring of level 1 students within the school and thus freshmen attending the Business School now have the same person as both their PAS workshop tutor and personal tutor. This has brought greater coherence and continuity to the student experience (Fowlie 2009; Katanis 2000), as a smaller number of dedicated staff are able to build closer relationships with their tutees.
Bob Smale and Julie Fowlie

Development of the PAS workbook

From taking over module leadership in 2000, we developed ‘standard issue’ workshop handouts that were given to the whole team. Currently the team comprises five lecturers who deliver the modules across the business courses to around 20 seminar groups. Whilst each team member brings something of themselves to the delivery, the provision is essentially the same across all courses and seminar groups.

In summer 2008, we commenced work on bringing all the hand-out materials and other relevant documentation together into a workbook. This includes all the materials the student will need to complete the module successfully, and involved putting all the documents into a consistent format in order to ensure a high standard of graphic presentation. The workbook is page numbered, has a contents page for easy reference and is fully source referenced in the text and in a comprehensive reference list. It is presented to students in an A4 loose leaf folder so that they can easily remove certain documents, such as the reflective learning logs, which have to be submitted as part of their assessment, but can also retain the folder in order to develop materials throughout their course. The process has been built upon what might be considered as good pedagogic practice (Prosser and Trigwell 1999). In practice, the workbook has proved popular with students and the teaching team. In particular, it has allowed students to work through missed sessions and has saved staff a great deal of time giving out materials, especially to students who miss workshops or arrive late. It has also given the students something to refer back to and carry through their time here and potentially beyond.

Development of the textbook

In spring 2004, we were approached by Sage Publications, asking us to turn the PAS programme into a book but we did not feel that we could undertake this at that stage, due to pressure of work. We had a second approach from Sage in the spring of 2006, and after some consideration, agreed to a write a proposal which took shape over the early summer of 2006 and was submitted with a draft first chapter. By the autumn of 2006, we had received a series of reviews commissioned by the publishers, which had to be answered. Whilst there was a good deal of positive feedback in the reviews, one was critical and suggested that there was no need for job search skills in an era when employers were competing to recruit graduates. However, it would seem that history may have vindicated us on this point. As a result of successfully rebutting the criticisms, contracts were awarded in November 2006 and the work of writing the rest of the book commenced.

As this was our first experience of book publishing, the next two and half years were something of an unfolding mystery. We soon got into a routine of writing and reviewing chapters as an iterative process, and were successful in submitting the completed draft on time in spring 2008. Then commenced a process which involved academic reviews, copy editing, typesetting and indexing. At each stage, we had some work to complete in terms of checking the output of the various stages of the publication process. In March 2009 came the excitement of publication and seeing the book (How to Succeed at University: an Essential Guide to Academic Skills and Personal Development) in print for the first time, and two months later holding a well attended launch event at BBS.
From the outset, we developed a series of design considerations and agreed how the book should be written and presented. The initial point of concern was that the book should be holistic, in the sense that it would as far as possible, cover everything a student might need in order to be successful. This included the transition to university life, completing academic work successfully and achieving employability. In line with our taught programme, the book covers academic, personal and job search skills. However, the book goes deeper into many other areas such as managing your emotions, looking after your health, taking exercise and healthy eating (Bird and Pinch 2002; Boyatzis 2001; Chopra 2001; Kermani 1996; Pert 1999; 2007).

We also felt that the book should be friendly in tone rather than didactic or prescriptive. We know that when we tell students what they should do, they are less likely to do it than if we engage them in a dialogue. In this respect, the book was intended to be thought provoking and to ask a lot of questions of the reader. In order to do this the book would have to be interactive, with plenty of activities interspersed within the narrative. We were concerned from the outset that the book should be user friendly and pressed the publisher to ensure that it would be well indexed. In this respect, we were not disappointed as our indexer did a comprehensive job.

A further concern was that the book should be attractively laid out and that it would make a good 'first impression' on its potential audience (Ambady and Rosenthal 1992; Ambady 1993). When submitting the sample chapter, we established how we saw the book in terms of graphic presentation. Our commissioning editor, who was at all times very supportive of the project, told us not to worry about layout, but to concentrate on content. However, we continued to focus upon the format of the book because a part of our vision for the book lay in its appearance. It is interesting to note that the final layout of the book is remarkably similar to the original submission. The only major change was to the icons, and this was done in order to avoid copyright infringement.

Each chapter is written in the same format and contains the following features (Smale and Fowle 2009).

- **Overview**: this gives a series of bullet points, which outline the content of the chapter.
- **Diagnostic test**: this enables the reader to assess their own needs for the particular chapter by asking them to score themselves out of 10 for each of 10 questions related to the chapter content.
- **Introduction**: this provides a short synopsis of the content of the chapter and why it might be important to the successful student.
- **Narrative**: this introduces and discusses ideas, links to activities and is fully source referenced using the Sage interpretation of the Harvard convention.
- **Activities**: these link the narrative to the individual student’s needs.
- **‘A student told us’**: these boxes relate real student experience to illustrate points.
- **‘Time for action’**: provides a checklist of follow up activities.
- **Further reading and websites to look up**: this provides students with ideas for finding further help and encouragement.
- **Review and reflection**: this provides space for the reader to log their reflections in response to trigger questions.

This is an academic book for students, supported by theory at key points and fully source referenced, unlike many of our competitors, whose texts are generally a series of useful guides and tips. We believe this gives the book greater legitimacy and authority as a higher education text.
Bob Smale and Julie Fowlie

A key aspect of this project has been the quality of the working relationship (Guirdham 2002). We have worked together for over 10 years and have completed other projects together, and so knew each other well from the start. We decided at the outset how to divide the work and royalties. In practice, we both contributed ideas and content, Bob Smale was the lead writer, wrote up new content, edited and developed existing material and was ‘custodian’ of the manuscript. Julie Fowlie was a contributor, reviewer, editor and most important, motivator (Goleman 2001). Working together has required a high trust relationship based upon mutual respect built over many years. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the project is that we are still friends.

Conclusion

This article has reported on the development of the taught Professional and Academic Skills programme, delivered to business students attending BBS, the production of a student workbook and publication of a textbook. The taught programme is the result of long-term development by ourselves and others, and our role has largely been to bring disparate elements together into a cohesive programme. This comprises interactive workshop sessions, together with other activities including online tasks, a team skills day, personal tutoring, a first to final year mentoring programme and attendance at a role-play assessment centre.

The workbook grew out of materials designed for the taught programme. It gathers together all the materials that the student will need to complete the PAS module, and provides a comprehensive ‘tool kit’ for the student to use, in year 1 and beyond. The textbook offers even more help and encouragement to the reader, with much broader content, more activities and shared experiences. Our work is underpinned by the belief that with the right encouragement, students can develop their skill set and learn the rules of academic life whilst achieving employability and ongoing development. Our work has been collaborative, involving contributions for colleagues and feedback from students together with our own reflective practice. It has required mutual trust and respect. Together we believe these developments provide a valuable resource and we hope, inspiration for students at BBS and through the textbook, far beyond.

References


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Biographies

Bob Smale is a senior lecturer at Brighton Business School where he has been closely involved in developing the Professional and Academic Skills programme with Julie Fowlie. His teaching includes aspects of organisational behaviour, human resource management and employee relations. He has research interests in employee relations and pedagogy. Bob has a background in the banking industry and employee relations, was formerly a part-time professional musician and is a qualified aromatherapist. He has worked in further, adult or higher education for over two decades, as well as delivering personal skills training, mostly in the public and voluntary sectors.

Julie Fowlie is a senior lecturer at Brighton Business School, where she has been closely involved in developing the Professional and Academic Skills programme with Bob Smale. Her teaching includes aspects of management, organisational behaviour and human resource management. She has research interests in emotional intelligence and pedagogy. Julie previously worked in the finance industry in a senior management position having also had experience as a bond dealer. She is also a qualified swimming coach and lifeguard. Julie has taught in further, adult and higher education and runs her own training business, most recently designing and delivering a management development programme.
From spark to flame –
Creating and sustaining motivation and inspiration in our learning community

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