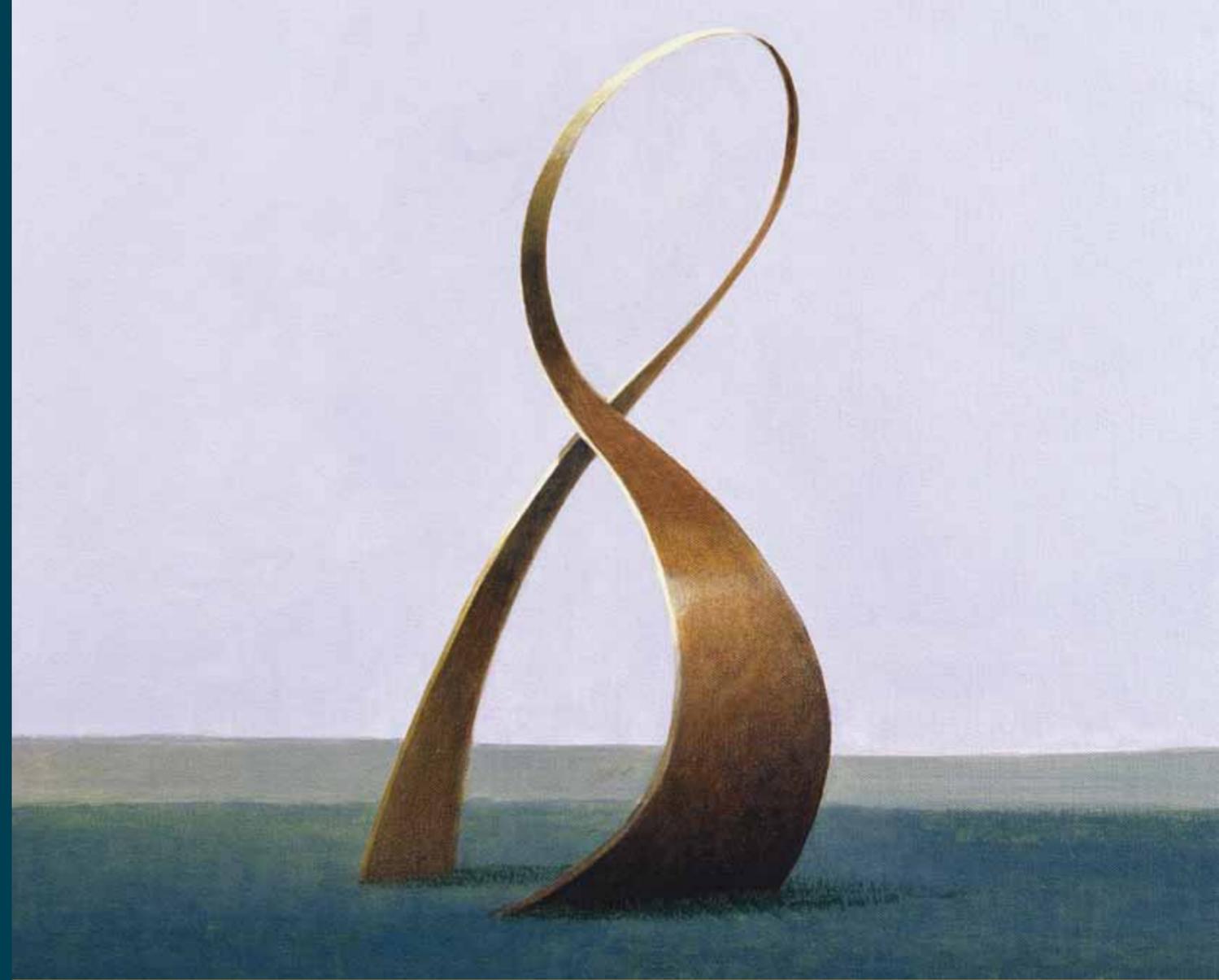


Centre for Learning and Teaching  
University of Brighton  
M104 Mayfield House  
Falmer  
Brighton  
BN1 9PH

Tel: 01273-643115  
cltadmin@brighton.ac.uk  
<http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt>



Centre for Learning and Teaching

# Social purpose and creativity - integrating learning in the real world

Articles from the Learning and Teaching Conference 2008



**University of Brighton**



**University of Brighton**

# Social purpose and creativity - integrating learning in the real world

Articles from the Learning and Teaching Conference 2008

Eds: Joyce Barlow  
Gail Louw  
Mark Price

University of Brighton Press  
Centre for Learning and Teaching

Published by University of Brighton Press  
Mithras House  
Lewes Road  
Brighton  
East Sussex  
BN2 4AT

First edition published 2009

© University of Brighton

ISBN: 978-1-905593-60-6

For further information about this  
publication please contact:

Lynda Marshall  
Publications Co-ordinator  
and Editor, CLT Publications  
Centre for Learning and Teaching  
University of Brighton  
Mayfield House  
Brighton BN1 9PH

Tel: 01273-643116  
lm179@brighton.ac.uk

<http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt>

Cover image: *Infinity* by Lincoln Seligman, Private Collection/Bridgeman Art Library

# Contents

## Editorial Introduction

Joyce Barlow, Chair of Conference Organising Committee ..... 4

## Keynote

**Student as producer – risk, responsibility and rich learning environments  
in higher education**

Professor Mike Neary, University of Lincoln ..... 6

## Articles

**Working with nature – an ecopsychological approach to role transition**

Chris Wilton and Sue Sully, School of Nursing and Midwifery ..... 14

**Helping students link their academic study with reflective-self awareness  
through engagement with personal development portfolios**

Jelena Timotijevic and Jess Moriarty, School of Language, Literature and Communication ..... 20

**A new approach to research supervision**

Dr Cristina Poyatas Matas, Griffin University, Australia ..... 28

**A creative assessment strategy to improve student motivation  
and engagement in biochemistry**

Dr Jacqui Elsom, School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Science ..... 33

**Collaboration and conflict in the making of a group-based creative  
process journal for a ‘real world’ student art exhibition**

Claire Scanlon and Paul Grivell, Northbrook College ..... 41

**Deconstructing fashion design: integrating theory and practice in design education**

Richard Walker and Steven Dell, Northbrook College ..... 48

**Using podcasts and videocasts to complement traditional teaching methods**

Dr Derek Covill and Dr Deshinder Singh Gill, School of Environment and Technology ..... 60

**A journey into the use of online assessment in higher education**

Pippa Hillen, School of Nursing and Midwifery ..... 67

**Students’ views on teaching and learning compared with models of good practice**

John Webber and Hilary McQueen, School Applied Social Science ..... 74

**The art and craft of journalistic writing**

Rob Steen, Chelsea School ..... 82

**Improving postgraduate student learning for sustainable social development,  
research capacity building and personal growth**

Professor Gina Wisker, School of Education and School of Language,  
Literature and Communication ..... 88

## Editorial introduction

Brighton's annual internal Learning and Teaching Conference is well established, and every July it brings together colleagues whose role involves teaching and learning, whether directly or in support roles. Both the keynote presentations and the parallel sessions offered by colleagues from across the institution are a popular feature of the event each year.

The theme of the 2008 Learning and Teaching Conference - *Social purpose and creativity – integrating learning in the real world* - provided scope for a wide range of contributions. The articles in this publication capture and develop some of the innovative ideas presented and discussed in a selection of the sessions.

### Keynote

**Professor Mike Neary**, in his opening keynote, gave a helpful and thought-provoking exploration of the role and purpose of universities in the modern world and the experience that they offer students in terms of intellectual and social development. He emphasised the importance of engaging students as active partners in academe and of helping the undergraduate experience to be holistic rather than narrowly discipline-focused. He concludes his article by relating these points to helping students become creative, socially responsible, problem-solving contributors in their lives.

The themes of support and creative challenge emerge in the articles based on the seminar contributions, along with contributions about innovative methods and approaches, often with explicit theoretical underpinning, and throughout there is an implicit professional real world agenda.

### Support

**Willton and Sully** lead us directly into a remarkable nature-based method to support role transition and development of the human side of new nursing practitioners. **Timotjevic and Moriarty** write about their provision for students' personal development in their transition into university level study, and **Poyatas Matas** contributes a student-focused developmental model of research supervision.

### Creative challenge

**Elsom** gives a lively account of her distinctive solution to the challenge of engaging students and helping them learn from each other and develop their own creative, collaborative and presentational skills. **Scanlon and Grivell** also place their students in a demanding, group-based scenario, this time to prepare a professional art exhibition. They write about its influence on the quality of student learning and development.

### Theory and practice

**Walker and Dell** take us into the learning experience of fashion design students against the background of Derrida's deconstruction theory. **Covill and Gill** describe their introduction of podcasts and the video facility of Camtasia to enable flexibility and independence for their engineering design students. Their theoretical underpinning is a customised version of the Kolb Learning Cycle. **Hillen** gives an extensively referenced account of the challenges of introducing computer-based assessment, taking account of ethical considerations, and staff and student concerns and feedback. The project succeeds in activating students' contributions to an assessed blog and provides a refreshing and more inspiring approach to formal assessment.

### Meta-learning

**Webber and McQueen** encourage students to explore their own beliefs about what makes for effective learning and to thereby prepare them to be more aware and responsive partners in both FE and HE level teaching and study contexts. **Steen** also encourages his students to become more thoughtful about the enterprise they are in – preparing themselves to become practising sports journalists. Steen's dilemma involves inadequate levels of literacy alongside his task of helping students find their own style.

### Real world contribution

In a sense all the contributions are about student development for effective real-world citizenship. This comes full circle with **Wisker's** piece about the social contribution of successful PhD students following an international distance learning programme.

### Joyce Barlow

Chair of Conference Organising Committee

# Student as producer: risk, responsibility and rich learning environments

Professor Mike Neary

## Abstract

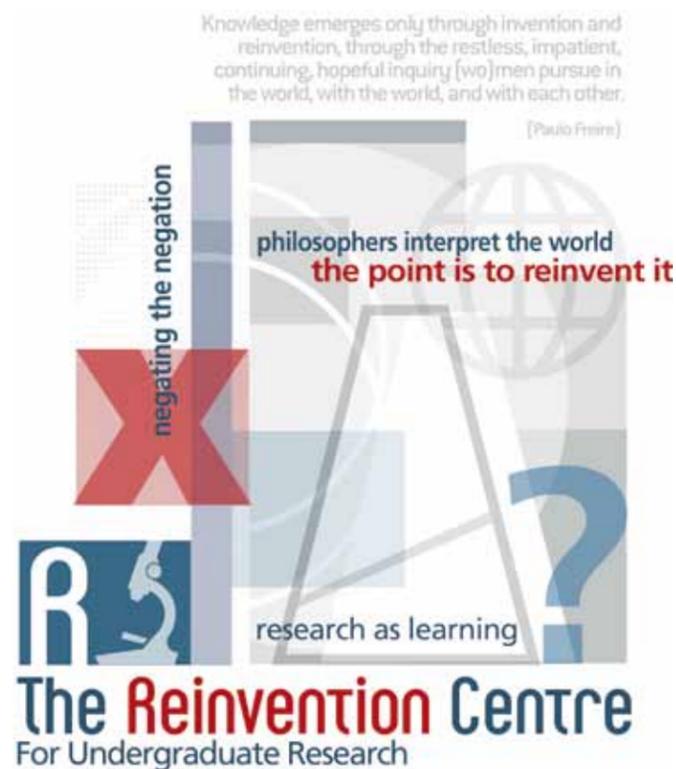
This presentation looks at the implications of designing a university education that is creative and full of social purpose. The paper is grounded in the intellectual tradition of critical pedagogy (eg Paulo Freire and Walter Benjamin), as well as the notions of 'the scholarship of teaching and learning' (Ernest Boyer). Based on the notion of 'student as producer' rather than 'student as consumer' the paper draws on work done by the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research at the University of Warwick, a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and ongoing work at the University of Lincoln. The main point of the paper is that designing a curriculum that is both socially useful and genuinely creative means not only rethinking the teaching and learning experience, but also requires that we fundamentally rethink the nature and purpose of higher education.

## The idea of the university is up for grabs

As the growing body of literature testifies, the role, function and nature of the university are subject to increasingly intensive debate as higher education undergoes profound transformations at the national and international level. There is no longer any consensus about the 'idea' or the 'uses' of the university (Newman 1873; Kerr 1963), if there ever was. Universities are being 'realised and reshaped' (Barnett 2000; 2005), 'rethought' (Rowland 2007) and 'redefined' (Scott 1998). While some regard these transformations positively, others feel that these changes undermine the academic mission of the university, leading to 'crisis' (Scott 1984), 'deprofessionalisation' (Nelson and Watt 2003), 'corporatisation'

and 'commercialisation' (Bok 2003; Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Callinicos 2007), 'ruination' (Readings 1996) and even the 'death' of the university itself (Evans 2004).

A key issue of concern for those who feel the academic mission of the university is being undermined is the way in which the student experience has been consumerised (Boden and Epstein 2006). The concept of student as consumer is based on a market led model of corporate governance, within which risky activity is motivated by profit driven imperatives. In this paper I argue for a different model of risk, one which is based on taking progressive risks with the curriculum in order to give students more responsibility for their learning, and – in so doing - provide much richer learning environments. I describe this model not as student as consumer



but student as producer (Neary and Winn 2009). This model may be at odds with the market driven paradigm, which sees universities as providing a service for students, but it has the potential, I argue, to provide the basis of a framework for teaching and learning in higher education which promotes social responsibility as the key organising function of the university, making it better able to deal with the social emergencies that underpin its own crisis of identity.

## Universities - research and teaching

Let us start with the core activities of the university itself – teaching and research. While teaching and research are the central functions of a university it has been well documented that higher education is characterised by a severe imbalance between these two areas of activity, which leads to what has been called an 'apartheid' between student and teacher (Brew 2006). As Brew puts it:

'The relationship between teaching and research is intricately embedded within ideas about what universities do and what they are for. It is fundamental to what is understood as higher learning and to ideas about the nature of the academy. Understanding this relationship raises substantial questions about the roles and responsibilities of higher education institutions, about the nature of academic work, about the kinds of disciplinary knowledge that are developed and by whom, about the way teachers and students relate to each other, about how university spaces are arranged and used, indeed, it raises fundamental questions about the purposes of higher education' (Brew 2006,3).

My point, following Brew, is that in order to rethink the role and function of the university we need to focus on the relationship between teaching and research.

## The Reinvention of research - intensive universities

Re-engineering the relationship between teaching and research is a key issue in the work of Angela Brew (2006). She gets much of her inspiration from the work of Ernest Boyer. Writing in the US in the 1990s Boyer, pointed out the imbalance between research and teaching, arguing for a reconfiguration of teaching and research, with teaching recognised as an important and fundamental part of academic life. Boyer provided a framework and a benchmark against which to consider the relationship between teaching and research. Boyer was concerned with reinventing the relationship between teaching and learning in HE in the US:

'The most important obligation now confronting colleges and universities is to break out of the tired old teaching versus research debate and define in more creative ways what it means to be a scholar' (Boyer 1990a:xii).

Boyer formulated this debate with the creation of four categories of what he referred to as 'scholarship': the scholarship of discovery – research; the scholarship of integration – interdisciplinary connections; the scholarship of application/engagement – knowledge applied in the wider community; and the scholarship of teaching – research and evaluation of one's own teaching (Boyer 1990). In 1999, a commission set up in Boyer's name and with the full title: The Boyer Commission, the Reinvention of the Research set out to create an Academic Bill of Rights for students, which included the commitment for every university to provide 'opportunities to learn through enquiry rather than simple transmission of knowledge' (Boyer Commission 1999).

## The Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research

In 2002, while at the University of Warwick, I established the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research, a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The Centre, as the name suggests, was inspired by the work of Boyer and the Commission established in his name. The core aim of the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research at the University of Warwick and Oxford Brookes University is to 'reinvent' the undergraduate curriculum through the promotion of research-based



Mike Neary speaking at the Reinvention Centre

learning. In so doing, the Reinvention Centre is attempting to re-create the notion of an inclusive academic community where learners, teachers and researchers are all seen as scholars in the common pursuit of knowledge. The activities of the Reinvention Centre are intellectually grounded in the previous work of those involved in research-based learning at the two institutions, providing a framework within which progressive educators now working with the Centre are able to develop their work in collaboration with each other and with

students in an atmosphere of mutual support and an ever-expanding academic network ([www.warwick.ac.uk/go/reinvention](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/go/reinvention)).

### Walter Benjamin: Author as Producer

The Reinvention Centre utilised Boyer's liberal humanist progressive pedagogies as a basis for its work, but it also found inspiration in the work of other more radical thinkers, including the work of Walter Benjamin. In fact the title 'Student as Producer' is based on an article by Benjamin, written in the 1930s. In this essay, which was entitled 'Author as Producer', Benjamin sought to find a role for progressive intellectuals in an increasingly dangerous society, faced with the crisis of capitalism and the rise of fascism.

Benjamin argued that intellectuals never merely work on products, but always and at the same time on the means by which the work is produced, that is to say, the *process* of production. Each work, therefore, is part of the organising function of society. It is only by progressively reinventing the dominant organising function that society itself can be transformed and crisis averted. The organising function within which Benjamin was writing was the social relation of capitalist production, defined through the logic of waged labour and private property. For Benjamin, the imperatives of capitalist production had led to the horrors of Bolshevism and Fascism. Therefore, any alternative form of the organising principle must be antithetical to these extreme types of political systems and be set up on the basis of democracy, collectivism, respect for legitimate authority, mutuality and social justice.

Benjamin found examples of this alternative organising principle in the most progressive forms of political art: Dada, Brecht's Epic Theatre and in the experimental Russian Avant Garde movement. Key to these art forms was involving the reader and spectator in the process of production: not only are they the producers of artistic content, but collaborators of their own social world, the subjects rather than objects of history:

'What matters is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first, to induce other producers to produce, and, second, to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, readers or spectators, into collaborators' (Benjamin 1934,777).

My argument is that it is possible to apply Benjamin's thinking to the context of the contemporary university by applying it to the dichotomous relationship between teaching and research, as embodied in the student and the teacher; and, using Benjamin's formulation, to reinvent the relationship between teacher and student, so that the student is not simply consuming knowledge that is transmitted to them but becomes actively engaged in the production of knowledge with academic content and value.

This process of turning the student as consumer into the student as producer can be achieved by

providing more research and research-like experiences as an integral part of the undergraduate experience. In doing this students can become productive collaborators in the research culture of the departments at their universities. This is particularly important in a context within which students have been forced into the position of consumers in a service culture that many academics regard as antithetical to the academic project of the university (Lambert et al 2007).

I want now to give two examples of how these ideas have been made concrete in my own work: in the design of a classroom at the University of Warwick and the publication of a journal for research produced by undergraduate students.

### Reinventing the classroom

The problem for the Reinvention Centre was how to design a space that allowed for closer collaboration between student and teacher. Key to the Reinvention Centre's commitment to research-based learning is a critical pedagogy which challenges the idea of students as passive consumers of education and emphasises the importance of their being active producers of real knowledge and an integral part of the research culture of departments and universities. In this model, hierarchical relationships between student and teacher are transformed to produce more fluid and elaborate collaborations between producers of scholarly work. Addressing these theoretical issues in practical ways calls for a critical rethinking and reinvention of the spaces in which students learn. The Reinvention Centre's teaching space has been designed in order to offer a creative response to these demands (Lambert 2008).

The classroom is a rectangular block: 120 square metres of light and colour, stripped of all decoration – white walls, blue rubber floor, primary colour cubed seats, round yellow bean bags and long monochrome grey and black benches. There are no tables and chairs, nor is there any obtrusive technology, only ethernet connection points, electric sockets around the walls and a Wi-Fi capability. There are no fixed screens or projectors to create focal points where the teacher might stand to deliver a lecture. The space is lit by a sophisticated lighting system, including a system of spotlights set in the floor that shine up through the rafters into a slanted roof.

Stripped of its tables and chairs the room is not for sitting in for long periods, but has been designed for movement and dynamic interaction between student and teacher, emphasising the importance of non-cognitive aspects of learning, including body and other forms of non-verbal language. This sense of movement is captured by the leaning rails, like a dance studio.

The room melds the energy of the performing arts with the energy of fine art, and the critical sensibility that pieces of art generate. This artistic sensibility is seen through the ways in which art is used to inform the teaching space. The artistic influences of the classroom are Purism and Neoplasticism, utopian art movements that emerged in the 1920s as a protest against the chaotic carnage of the First World War. The main exponent of purism was Le Corbusier: the classroom contains a replica of his seminal *chaise longue*, designed in 1928 with other Purist artists and known as the 'relaxing machine' ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le\\_Corbusier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Corbusier)).

The space is grounded in the historical materiality of the real world. This embeddedness in social reality is manifest by the significance given to the area that acts as a reality-check for the whole room: the floor. The floor provides a sense of gravitas and gravity for the entire space. The floor is a surface for working on as well as walking on. The floor is heated and rubberized, providing an all-around feeling of warmth and comfort. By making the floor more than something to be trampled on, the space recognises the significance of the floor as a site of social interaction, and, with its emphasis on the symbolic importance of the floor, is a reminder of the ways in which floor space is used by other cultures, giving the room a racial and ethnic intelligence.

As for technology, the room has state of the art audio-visual equipment, set on wheels and transportable around the space, providing multiple points of focus and disturbing the traditional one-dimensional

lecture-style lines of sight. These multiple sight-lines counteract the traditional perspective of classrooms, which are built around a focal point which serves to establish the teacher as the dominant presence within the room. Taking into account these power dynamics of space, the room is organised so that there is no obvious place for the teacher: each space needs to be negotiated and claimed by the student and the teacher. This lack of a dominating focal point reflects the cubist anti-perspectival sensibility, consolidating the utopian tendency of the room, which presents the future as something to be constructed rather than ready-made. There is no fear of the future in this space: no 'future-proofing' (Miller 2001).

The Reinvention classroom is a serious space, but the colours and shapes of the furniture emphasise a playful sensibility, recognising that there are ways to learn ethics, values and responsibility through activities that are serious, yet enjoyable and fun.

### Academic literacy: *Reinvention*: a journal of student work

While I was at Warwick I led a team that set up *Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research*. This is an online, peer-reviewed journal, dedicated to the publication of high quality undergraduate student research. The journal welcomes academic articles from all disciplines and is produced, edited and managed by students and staff at Oxford Brookes University and the University of Warwick. It is published bi-annually and only publishes papers written by undergraduate students. The launch issue of the journal contained papers from the Reinvention Centre's two host institutions, Warwick and Oxford Brookes Universities. Volume 1, Issue 1 includes a 'guest' paper from an undergraduate student studying outside the Reinvention Centre's two host institutions. Subsequent editions are open to submissions from all undergraduate students in the UK and overseas.

Manuscripts submitted to *Reinvention*, undergo a double-blind peer review. The peer reviewers may include undergraduate and postgraduate students but at least one review of each paper will be completed by a faculty member and recognised authority in the field of interest. As well as teaching students how to appraise research critically, this protocol will ensure that papers included in *Reinvention* are of a comparable standard to those published in traditional journals. The peer review process utilised by *Reinvention* ensures academic rigour and maintains confidence in the journal itself.

David Metcalfe, the student editor of *Reinvention*, says:

*'The journal itself represents an addition to a growing number of undergraduate research publications which have arisen around the world. The journal team itself is unique in that it reflects true collaboration between students, academics, and administrative and technical staff. Students and academics will, for example, work together as subject editors to elicit submissions and coordinate peer review within each individual faculty and school. Indeed, the collaboration theme of Reinvention is reiterated throughout its multi-disciplinary content and in the fact that its governance is spread across Oxford Brookes University and the University of Warwick .... It is hoped that, in this way, Reinvention may also help to promote undergraduate research and that the experience gained by authors will encourage them to produce papers for high-impact journals within their own areas of interest. Should this journal succeed in reinventing the passive student as an active researcher, it may claim some credit for changing the undergraduate experience and, perhaps, for a number of academic careers forged as a consequence. In this way, Reinvention may yet have a greater impact on academia than any of its proponents might now hope or imagine'*([www.warwick.ac.uk/go/reinventionjournal](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/go/reinventionjournal)).

### University of Lincoln

Since 2007 I have been working at the University of Lincoln as the Dean of Teaching and Learning where, together with colleagues and students, I have been taking forward some of these ideas at an institutional level. There are plans for a student journal, 'Neo', that will feature text and visual research, building on

Lincoln's strengths in the creative arts. The journal will feature some of the undergraduate research that is already taking place within the university, including work done as part of the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Scheme (UROS). This is a bursary programme through which undergraduate students can engage with the research activity of academics; there are 39 research projects currently underway (<http://www.lincoln.ac.uk/cerd/uros.htm>). While UROS is extra-curricula, Lincoln is committed to developing research and research-like activity within the undergraduate curriculum, building on ongoing work across the university. The ambition at Lincoln is to design undergraduate degrees as research-based degrees.

What is very distinctive about the work that is ongoing at Lincoln is the awareness that, following Edwards and Usher (2003):

'space and spatiality have become central to any discussions about the nature of teaching and learning'.

Thinking about the spatiality of teaching and learning is conceptualised by the concept of 'Learning Landscapes'. This has been defined as: '...the total context for learning experiences, of opportunities in virtual as well as physical space. Learning happens anywhere now, enabled by network information systems, wireless access and mobile devices...to provide a network of places for discovery, learning and discourse between students, faculty staff, and the wider community' ([www.degw.com](http://www.degw.com)).

At Lincoln this includes redesigning classrooms to encourage not only collaboration and engagement between teachers and students, but also recognition and solidarity between groups of students (*Contact* 2008). Websites and mobile technologies are being developed to provide not only virtual online environments but also to generate capacity for autonomous and independent forms of student learning (<http://learninglab.lincoln.ac.uk/>). The university holds campus-wide conferences each year based on the learning landscapes theme. The aim of these is to engage with students and colleagues from all parts of the university on the theme of how to build a contemporary university that not only engages with its own academic community but also with the external world (<http://www.lincoln.ac.uk/cerd/>).

As well as redesigning its own teaching and learning spaces, the University of Lincoln is leading a national project funded by HEFCE, HEFCW and the SFC<sup>1</sup> which includes other major British universities (<http://learninglandscapes.lincoln.ac.uk>). The purpose of the project, which is called Learning Landscapes: Clearing pathways, making spaces: involving academics in the leadership, management and governance of estates in higher education, is to look at ways in which innovation in the design of teaching spaces can be taken forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What is key about this project is its interest in the decision making process by which innovations in the design of teaching and learning spaces are operationalised; the ways in which classroom design reflects contemporary developments in teaching and learning; and, uniquely, the ways in which the academic voice is included in these debates. By academic voice I do not mean simply what kind of furniture teachers want in their classrooms, but the academic voice in terms of the ways in which space and spatiality have been intellectualised by academics and how these intellectual sensibilities might be reflected in classroom design (Neary and Thody 2008; Neary and Thody 2009).

### Postscript

At the end of my keynote in the summer of 2008, I concluded that it was important to reinvent undergraduate education, so that students can have a more holistic experience of the academic project. I argued that this more complete experience of academic life was important not only in the sense of giving them a more broadly integrated sense of their subjects and how they relate to other disciplines, but also that it was key in assisting the academic community in rethinking how to deal with global emergencies. I used the work of David Orr (2004) to make the point

<sup>1</sup>Higher Education Funding Council for England, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Scottish Funding Council

'...in the modern curriculum we have fragmented the world into bits and pieces called disciplines and sub-disciplines. As a result after 12 or 16 or 20 years of education, most students graduate without any broad integrated sense of the unity of things..' (p.11).

'the great ecological issues of our time have to do in one way or another with our failure to see things in their entirety. That failure occurs when minds are taught to think in boxes, and [are] not taught to transcend those boxes or to question overly much how they fit with other boxes' (p.95).

Since giving the talk the risks appear to have become bigger and more immediate. The organising principle that generated the ecological crisis has now manifested itself as a world-wide financial crisis. While politicians struggle to avert catastrophe, and while they may succeed in the short term, in the long run the underlying causes of the crisis are not being addressed. My point, like Orr, is that in order to avert global catastrophes we need to fundamentally rethink the nature of academic enquiry. As academics working in universities, we can start by looking at the ways in which we engage with the world, and, in particular, how we engage with our students. By taking more progressive risks with our teaching and learning, and by treating students as responsible members of our academic community we might be able to create not just richer learning environments, but also to invent new approaches to some of the very real emergencies that are confronting both the university and society as a whole.

## References

- Barnett R (2005) *Reshaping the University: New Relationships between Research, Scholarship and Teaching*, Open University Press, Maidenhead.
- Beck U (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Sage, London.
- Bok D (2003) *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialisation of Higher Education*, Princeton University Press.
- Benjamin W (1934) 'The author as producer' in Jennings M W, Eiland H and Smith G (Eds.) (2005) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol.2, 1927–1934. Harvard University Press, Harvard.
- Boden R and Epstien D (2006) 'Managing the Research Imagination? Globalisation and Research in Higher Education', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 4(2)223–236, Routledge.
- Boyer E (1990a) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, Stony Brook, New York.
- Boyer Commission (1999b) *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: a blueprint for America's research universities*, Carnegie Foundation for University Teaching, Stony Brook, New York.
- Brew A (2006) *Research and Teaching: beyond the divide*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Callinicos A (2007) *Universities in a Neoliberal World*, Bookmarks Publications, London.
- Contact (2008) in-house magazine, University of Lincoln.
- DEGW (2006) 'Working to Learn, Learning to Work: Design in Educational Transformation', 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Foundation Lecture, available at: [www.degw.com](http://www.degw.com).
- Edwards R and Usher R (2003) *Space, Curriculum and Learning*, IAP, Greenwich, CT.
- Evans M (2004) *Killing Thinking: The Death of the University*, Continuum, London.
- Kerr C (1963) *The Uses of the University*, Harvard University Press, Harvard.
- Lambert C, Parker A and Neary M (2007) 'Entrepreneurialism and critical pedagogy: reinventing the higher education curriculum', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(4), 525-537.
- Lambert C (2008) 'A Creative Open Space? Teaching, Learning and Research in the Reinvention Centre at Westwood', *Interactions*, University of Warwick.
- Miller A (2001) *Einstein, Picasso: Space, Time and the Beauty that Causes Havoc*, Basic Books, New York.
- Neary M and Winn J (2009) 'Student as Producer: Reinventing the Undergraduate Curriculum,' in Bell L, Neary M and Stevenson H (Eds.) *The Future of Higher Education: Policy, Pedagogy and the Student Experience*, Continuum, London.
- Neary M and Thody A (2009) 'Learning Landscapes – the classroom of the future' in Neary M, Stevenson H and Bell L (Eds.) *The Future of Higher Education: Policy, Pedagogy and the Student Experience*, Continuum, London.
- Nelson C and Watt S (2003) *Office Hours: Activism and Change in the Academy*, Routledge, Abingdon and New York.
- Newman J H (1996) *The Idea of a University*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

Orr D (2004) *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment and the Human Prospect*, Island Press, Washington, DC.

Readings B (1996) *The University in Ruins*, The estate of Bill Readings, USA.

Scott P (1995) *The Meanings of Mass Education*, Society for Research into Higher Education and the Open University, Buckingham.

Scott P (Ed) (1998) *The Globalisation of Higher Education*, Society for Research into Higher Education and the Open University, Buckingham.

Scott P (2002) 'A lot to learn: we are all researchers now', *Education Guardian*, 8 January, available at: <http://www.education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,628918,00.html>. Currency Doubleday, New York.

Slaughter S and Leslie L (1997) *Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Temple P (2007) 'Learning Spaces for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Review of the Literature', Higher Education Academy.

## Biography

**Professor Mike Neary** is the Dean of Teaching and Learning at Lincoln and the Director of the university's Centre for Educational Research and Development. Mike was the founding director of the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research, a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning based at Warwick and Oxford Brookes Universities. The aim of the Reinvention Centre is to introduce research-based learning into the undergraduate curriculum. Mike combines his teaching and research activities through writing about his own teaching practice in the context of national and international educational policy. Mike has been an adviser and consultant for the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre Network and is a National Teaching Fellow.

# Working with nature – an ecopsychological approach to role transition

Chris Wilton and Sue Sully

---

## Abstract

This paper provides a narrative introduction to a unique programme which offers ecopsychological experiential learning focused upon preparation for professional role transition to student nurses in the final six months of their pre-registration programmes. The context of ecopsychology and its epistemological underpinnings is briefly addressed. The intentions and outcomes of the workshops are described both in terms of personal development and skill acquisition. The rationale for offering these workshops at this time is predicated upon the potential dehumanisation/disconnection which can arise in modularised and heavily assessed professional programmes. The paper presents the process in narrative form in an attempt to engage the reader's imagination as well as understanding, as this is fundamentally an experiential process to which abstract language does not do justice.

---

## Night camp

It is 10.30 pm. In the heart of ancient woodland in East Sussex, a group of student nurses are huddled around their campfire. They talk quietly, while making notes of their experiences, thoughts, memories, feelings and impressions from the most recent exercise. They have just returned from spending time alone in the wood at night.

We have offered this process to student nurses within the School of Nursing and Midwifery at the University of Brighton over the past 10 years, as we recognise the potential for full time professional programme students to become disconnected from themselves, and often from their motivation for the work they are training to undertake. Three years of a modular programme, half practice, half theory, produces an enormous number of hurdles for the student to negotiate. This can have a 'conveyor belt' effect, where surviving the course and passing theory and practice assessments devour the core motivation of the student. We consider it essential to nursing practice, that the nurse is able to be as human as they can be, which means being themselves and using all their abilities in engaging with the



Night camp at Powdermill Woods

people they are privileged to care for. These weekends are designed to help students remember who they are and strive to be all that they can be as they undertake the transition to being an autonomous nursing practitioner. We have found that explanations of the underpinning theory of this way of working make more sense once the group has some experience of the process. Bearing this in mind, we present the process initially in narrative form.

At six o'clock on a Friday evening, 15 student nurses arrive at Powdermill Woods near Battle in East Sussex, where they are met by the facilitators. The students are laden down with sleeping bags, bedrolls, clothes, food and the occasional tent, ready to start the first of two intensive weekends, both of which will last from the Friday evening until late Sunday afternoon. The students are in the last six months of a three year pre-registration programme leading to their qualification as a nurse, with either a BSc (Hons) or a Dip HE. They have chosen to undertake these workshops, at a very pressurised time in their course, to focus on personal development as a preparation for their role transition from student to registered nurse.

Their first evening is spent setting up their camp in a specially prepared, private area of the woods. They sit together with the facilitators around the main campfire, where they are introduced to the focus and outline of the first weekend, practical issues of camp and woodland living, and spend time talking about the purpose of the workshops within the context of their anticipated role transition. They have the opportunity to ask any questions, explore concerns and state their hopes and fears about the process they are embarking upon. This is where the fears around Bush Tucker Trials, swinging rope bridges, climbing to great heights and catching, killing and preparing their own food tend to surface - of course we disabuse them of these ideas.

Once this is completed, the facilitators leave, and the students set about preparing food for the evening and settling into their environment. They are asked to take a little time alone away from the camp during the evening once the main activities are completed, to be still and listen to the sounds of the wood around them, noticing where they are and allowing themselves to arrive.

On Saturday morning we return to start the experiential exercises. We set three rules for the exercises; No Food No Company No Shelter. These are put in place to help students immerse themselves in their immediate experience whilst out in the wood. As students leave the camp they are asked to mark a threshold in some way – eg draw a line on the ground with a stick or find two trees that look like a gateway so that once they have stepped over or passed through their gateway they are in exercise or 'threshold' space. It is explained to students that when they are out on exercise, everything they experience – see, hear, smell, touch, remember, the direction they walk, anything they think, feel and imagine is important - so they are asked to notice everything they can. The students' interaction with the natural environment acts as a mirror for them, so that each exercise and the telling of each story provide increasingly rich experiences and reflections of themselves. When they return to camp, they make notes of their experience whilst it is still fresh in their mind.

We begin with the 'South' exercise, associated with physicality, youth/childhood sensuality, anger and sexuality. An example of a South exercise which is often used is that students are asked to head out into the wood and to play for an hour. This may mean playing as they did when they were children, or remembering what they were not allowed to play and doing that. Whether the student roams around the woods or finds their own special place to play in, is up to them. Some may wish to bring something from the wood back with them to camp to help them tell their story. It is impressed upon students that there is no right or wrong way to do the exercise, only their own way. When it is done they can return to camp early if they wish. If they choose to break the rules, that is part of the story. The exercise is theirs.

The late morning and afternoon is taken up with students telling their stories and having them witnessed, with comfort breaks usually after every two stories, and a lunch break when everyone is hungry enough.

The 'West' exercise takes place after sunset, once there is full darkness. For winter groups, this might be at 7pm, and in the summer, it might mean waiting until 11pm. The West is associated with adolescence, fear, self doubt and the intrapersonal world in which we relate to ourselves. Typically, students are asked to spend no more than 45 minutes alone in the dark of the wood. Some students choose to roam around the wood looking for deer, badgers and foxes and others choose to sit just beyond the edge of the campsite with their backs to the camp. Once again, it is emphasised that there is no right or wrong way to do this, only their own way. After all the students are back safely in camp, we leave them to write their notes and dream their dreams. The stories of the night walk are spoken and heard throughout Sunday morning and into the afternoon. We spend time sitting together, talking about the experiences of the first weekend, how some of the skills learned can be adapted for use in nursing practice and how to make the transition between being in the wood and returning to the world outside (leaving the real world for the unreal one, cut off from nature and ourselves).

We meet again twelve days later at six o'clock on the Friday evening of the second weekend. Time is spent together settling back into the wood and hearing about the two working weeks since the first weekend and their thoughts and feelings of the participants about the first weekend.

We begin on Saturday morning with the 'North' exercise, associated with adulthood, thinking, planning, anticipating, organising and adjusting, to make the world safe for children to be in. This means not only literal children, but also our own needs to be 'a child in the world' and still keep ourselves safe. An example of a North exercise might be for students to spend an hour and a half in the wood, thinking of something in their lives or those of people close to them, which is wrong, broken or difficult in some way. In threshold space, the student is asked to take whatever they find in the wood that might be useful, to find a place in the wood that feels right to be in, and to do something to symbolically make right what is wrong.

The telling and witnessing of the North stories takes the rest of the day. During the evening, students are asked to find and decorate a stick to represent themselves, ready for the 'East' exercise in the morning. This will normally be mentioned to students at the end of the first weekend, so that they can bring materials from home to decorate their 'stick-selves, if they wish to.

Sunday morning brings the East exercise, associated with old age, imagination, creativity and renewal. After checking in at the campfire, the students stand in a circle with us and each one in turn presents their 'stick-selves' to the group, saying whatever they wish to say about their representation. The students then walk to a boundary of the wood with their stick and turn to face into the wood. The wood boundary they have chosen is their threshold and the exercise begins as they step forward into the wood.

Students are asked to try to walk into the wood in as straight a line as possible for 350 paces. As they reach their 350<sup>th</sup> pace, they plant their stick into the ground or prop it against whatever is there and continue to walk straight on for a further 350 paces without looking back. At their 700<sup>th</sup> pace, they stop, turn around and try to find their stick, metaphorically hunting themselves. Once they find their stick or decide that they cannot find it, the student returns to camp and the exercise is over. Students may bring their stick back to camp with them, or decide to leave their 'stick-selves' in the wood. As before, it is entirely up to the students how they perform the exercise. It does not matter if they find their stick or not, what matters is how they find or do not find their stick. This is the story that is told and witnessed through the late morning and early afternoon.

There is also a fifth narrative that is not told, but witnessed – the thread woven by the four stories each student has told across both weekends. As will be noticed from this description of typical exercises, most of the time and energy is spent on the telling and witnessing of stories.

We use the term 'witnessing' to differentiate this form and focus of hearing and responding to stories from more traditional forms of therapeutic responding which have an analytical/deductive intent and are

inherently reductive. Witnessing is additive, responding to and celebrating what is human and even heroic in the story, and thus bringing the individual story to a space where it can teach us all about our humanity. The individual and collective myths which begin to take form in common with all myth, teach us something about what and how we can be, as well as reminding us who we are.

Storytellers are given an amount of time (usually 15 minutes) in which to tell their story. A 'talking stick' is used with the understanding that only the person holding the stick can talk. This means that the person speaking is heard without interruption.



Round house in which students can tell their stories

When witnessing, we respond to what moves us in the story and what we are reminded of by the story. Often the story as heard is initially retold in full or in part in the third person. This allows the storyteller to hear the story of a woman who .... of a man who .... thus helping to make their story accessible to them as a human story. Then the facilitators and members of the group respond (using 'talking stick discipline') to what the story has evoked in them from what they know – it may be the memory of song lyrics or a poem, ancient myth or an episode of *East Enders*.

The processes described above are rooted in ecopsychology – a branch of transpersonal psychology. The facilitators have adapted approaches and frameworks developed in rite of passage and vision quest work in California (Foster and Little 1992), to the culture, traditions and contexts of working with health profession students within the United Kingdom.

From a transpersonal psychological perspective, humans experience phenomena and are capable of connecting to others in ways which are beyond their normal ego boundaries (Assagioli 1991). Engaging therapeutically with individuals in a natural environment reflects the intimate interdependence with nature which contained our evolution. As a consequence, core symbols of our unconscious are derived from the natural world, and we gain a richer experience of ourselves when we are able to be immersed in natural environments.

The term ecopsychology is much used, and so far poorly defined (Fox 1995). Ecopsychology addresses the deep and seamless interrelationships between humans and the natural world (Roszak et al 1995). Humans are part of the natural world, and living fully requires coming to terms with this. When we connect with nature, we are connecting with our larger self. We are more at home and more whole. Similarly, when we care for the natural world, we are caring for the larger self. Ecopsychology stands in contrast to what Steven Foster (1998) called, 'the Big Lie', the illusion that humans are disconnected from the natural world.

'Ecopsychology, or eco-psychology as it is sometimes called, is situated at the intersection of a number of fields of enquiry, including environmental philosophy, psychology, and ecology, but is not limited by any disciplinary boundaries. At its core, ecopsychology suggests that there is a synergistic relation between planetary and personal well being; that the needs of the one are relevant to the other' (Fox 1995).

The positive impact of these weekend workshops on participants is very well attested to by the evaluations we have received. At the beginning of the paper we stated that one of the aims of the

workshops is to help students remember who they are and strive to be all they can be as they undertake the transition towards autonomous nursing practitioners. These quotes are from recent workshops:

*'Thank you for helping me find myself again and I know that although I can hide my real self and protect it, it will never go, which is a really lovely thing. I have noticed a difference in my behaviour and that of others, and feel that it has really helped me to be more understanding. It was such a powerful time, and I am so glad to have experienced it'.*

*'I am truly moved by what I have seen and heard and felt. I feel there is a point, a substance, spirituality to me at a time when I was beginning to doubt my belief in myself and in my ability to be a nurse'.*

*'If I have learnt one main thing during the weekends it is the power of simply listening to another's story and learning from the experience. I have no doubt that this will have a significant impact on my professional development and my ability to care for others'.*

Participants have given us numerous examples of how they have been able to adapt this process and some of the techniques they have learned, to their nursing practice with good effect. A longitudinal evaluation of participants' responses to the workshops up to three years post qualification, is currently underway. We continue to be amazed and moved by the power of the process every time we engage with students in this way.

Returning to the problem that this exercise is designed to address, namely integrating the human being and nurse practitioner, we are pleased with our findings, which have established the ecopsychological element within the core professional development of our students. There are a number of areas for further study arising from this work. These include:

- Consideration of wider application of this process to other groups and contexts.
- The further development and application of transpersonal and ecopsychological techniques in education.
- Investigation of the application of ecopsychological techniques to clinical nursing practice.
- Study of professional role transition as a rite of passage.
- The interplay between the relationship developed with the facilitators and working in nature.

## References

- Assagioli R (1991) *Transpersonal Development*, Crucible, London.
- Foster S and Little M (1998) *The Four Shields: The Initiatory Seasons of Human Nature* Lost Borders Press, CA.
- Foster S and Little M (1992) *The Book of the Vision Quest: Personal Transformation in the Wilderness*, Fireside Books, New York.
- Fox W (1995) *Toward A Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, Resurgence Books, State University of New York Press.
- Roszak T (1992) *The Voice of the Earth; An Exploration of Ecopsychology*, Bantam Press, Touchstone, New York.

## Biographies

**Chris Willton** completed Vision Quest leader's training with the School of the Lost Borders in California in 1995, and since then has led groups in the UK, integrating ecopsychology principals into the symbolic traditions of these islands. He has a background in education, counselling and psychology, is a registered general and mental health nurse and is a principal lecturer at the University of Brighton, School of Nursing and Midwifery. Chris is a member of the International Wilderness Guides Council. He passionately believes in restoring meaningful therapeutic and growth promoting experiences through connection with this land.

**Sue Sully** has been leading groups involved in rites of passage work for 11 years. She is the Netkeeper for English Speaking European Wilderness Guides Network. Sue is a senior lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery and the School of Applied Social Science, counselling and psychotherapy team. For seven years she was involved in palliative care education and this has brought her to a realisation of the importance of connection for people who are facing the final threshold in their lives. She believes that this can be most effectively achieved if individuals have the opportunity to mark transitions into different phases of their lives and connect with the environment within which we as humans have evolved.

# Helping students link their academic study with reflective-self awareness through engagement with Personal Development Portfolios

Jelena Timotijevic and Jess Moriarty

---

## Abstract

This paper will analyse and reflect on a number of findings that have arisen from the implementation of Personal Development Portfolios (PDPs) at the School of Language, Literature and Communication (SLLC), at the University of Brighton. We will refer to staff and student feedback and compare and contrast the findings with the results of a small-scale research project that was undertaken 2006-07 where the aim was to better understand the first year undergraduate experience within the SLLC. The paper will consider the issues raised by both students and staff who participated in the 2007-08 pilot programme and analyse the impact of this initiative on the SLLC in terms of retention and student support and guidance. The paper seeks to make recommendations, based on our findings, as to how PDP can be effectively facilitated.

---

## Introduction

Following recommendations from the Dearing Committee in May 2000, Universities UK issued a joint policy statement on Progress Files in Higher Education. The subsequent implementation of Progress Files was to take place over five years from 2005. The government has since relaxed the implementation deadline because of the Quality Assurance Audit's recognition that the HE Institutions (HEI's) are at different stages of development in relation to Personal Development Planning. It was therefore recommended that the implementation should be phased, enabling HEI's to introduce the initiative in a more structured manner, relevant to individual schools and departments. As part of this initiative, the SLLC at the University of Brighton incorporated PDPs into the undergraduate degree programme for 2007-08 with the aim of linking students' academic study with reflective self-awareness, and to build a culture of inclusion and a sense of identity amongst, in particular, first year students. Student and staff feedback has been captured in order to analyse and evaluate the impact of the pilot year. In this paper we will recommend alternatives to this initiative based on our findings, and reflect on how the pilot study has influenced and developed other initiatives within the SLLC, with particular reference to issues of student support and retention.

## Students' feedback from 2006-07

A small-scale research project was conducted with first year undergraduates in order to find out in broad terms, about their experience of the university and the SLLC during the first few months of their studies. More specifically, the aim of this research was to explore issues around the students' sense of community and to ask if they felt part of the university, and what their experience of Induction Week was like. By capturing their views on those first days at the university, it was hoped that the SLLC would be able to enhance its future Induction Week programme to fulfill student expectation and needs. One emphasis of the study was to extract students' views on the importance of the relationship with their personal tutors, as the school felt that this was where the students' personal development was then being facilitated. In addition, students were asked to comment on academic and personal support systems that were available to them. Based on the students' feedback, the SLLC hoped to identify potential methods for addressing issues that students had raised via this research exercise. From the feedback, the following picture emerged:

In 2006-07, the school had 130 first year students on different strands of the combined degree English Language and Linguistics/Media/Literature, English Studies and Linguistics/Media/Literature, German

Studies and Linguistics/ Media/Literature and French Studies and Linguistics/Media/Literature. There were 71 responses, of which 22 were male students and 49 female. The majority of respondents were studying English Language and Literature (33), English Language and Media (22) and English Language and Linguistics (17).

The majority of the students found the Induction Week useful (59); two students found it very useful, and 10 did not find it useful. The students who responded positively to this question mainly gave the following reasons:

- they were made aware of a number of services the university and the school offered, mainly Student Services and personal tutoring
- they were given information about the course

However, the following feedback was given from both those who responded positively and those students who did not find the Induction Week useful:

- they were overwhelmed with information; not everything was explained clearly
- they did not have enough time to get to know their personal tutors and other staff; opportunities were not available for the students to have initial discussions and introduction with their personal tutors in order to build that relationship from the start
- some of the general university talks were not helpful – they would have preferred to spend time in their own school with other students and staff
- timetables for Semester one should have been given out in Induction Week in order for students to become familiar with the campus, teaching resources, and generally build a picture of the weekly commitments and responsibilities.

Students were asked to provide more specific information about the services that are made available by the school and the university. They were also asked to comment whether, during the Induction Week, they had an opportunity to familiarise themselves with some of the specific roles university staff hold and what kinds of services are available to them. The aim of this question was to ascertain whether appropriate support was given and whether students knew how to seek it. What emerged was that they heard of many of the specific roles, but there was no way of gauging if this information was relevant or appropriate in terms of helping students identify where they could go for specific support.

In order to investigate whether or not the students' sense of community was enhanced during Induction Week, the students were asked to comment on what kind of contacts the school's Induction Week had fostered. They responded that it had been helpful in terms of meeting:

- New friends: (57)
- Other students on the course: (60)
- Course tutors: (58)
- Student liaison tutors: (19)
- Second and third year students on the same course: (1)

Finally, the cohort were asked to comment and suggest ways that could improve the Induction Week at the school; the results were:

- 38 students wanted clearer course information
- 30 students reported that they would have benefited from sharing experiences with second and third year undergraduates, including some team-building
- 21 students suggested that more information about the university overall would have been useful
- 19 students would have like more information about Brighton
- 13 students reported that they would have benefited from spending more time with their personal tutor and addressing individual questions at the very start
- 18 felt that a more detailed introduction to study skills would have been a great help throughout their degree, particularly in the first year.

The students' feedback pointed in two directions: firstly, it raised an issue of the overall need for better links between the specifics of their academic study and experience, and the more generic support and feedback which, in many ways, complement their academic performance. The generic support mainly related to possibilities to discuss the option modules, which shape the diet of students' degrees, general assessment issues, help with managing time, dealing with different approaches to study, reading, assessment tasks set by different tutors, balancing academic study and other commitments, dealing with personal issues and so on. The second issue pointed out concerns over a general lack of the sense of community and 'belonging' to the school and university in general – students felt that more should be done by the school to enable students to share their experiences, be it within their own cohort or with second and third year students.

#### **The School's response to students' feedback**

The SLLC's response to the above feedback coincided with plans to implement Personal Development Planning, as recommended to all HEI's by the Dearing Report and via the QAA. The overall aim of our initiative for 2007-08 was to link students' academic study with reflective self-awareness and to build a culture of inclusion and a sense of identity amongst, in particular, first year students. The specific changes are explored below.

#### **Changes to the Induction Week**

The revised planning and preparation of the Induction Week programme for the academic year 2007-08 enabled colleagues involved in the process to prepare activities and sessions with first year students that would address the issues raised above. Students now had timetabled sessions with their personal tutors towards the end of the Induction Week. Those sessions were designed to enable students to meet in their specialism groups (ie Linguistics/Media/Literature) throughout the week, and at the end of the week when their personal tutors would address some of the key pieces of information students had been exposed to for the duration of the week. In addition, this was an opportunity to have more personalised sessions in which students were able to ask individual questions of concern and clarification. Further, PDP became part of this revised programme.

In order to enhance a culture of inclusion and a sense of identity some fun activities were also introduced, one of which was the treasure hunt, which the school organised with the support of Student Services. As before, great care was taken to ensure that students were integrated, with opportunities to meet and begin to build a sense of community in the school.

#### **Changes to the personal tutoring system for first year students**

For 2007-08 somewhat radical changes took places in the personal tutoring system at the SLLC, with a view to aiding the implementation of the PDP programme. These changes are indicated in the next section. The focus of the pilot year was on first year undergraduates, second and third year students followed the

existing personal tutoring system, which involved other members of staff in the school.

#### **Implementation of the Personal Development Programme**

The first year undergraduates were split into 10 tutorial groups, and were allocated a personal tutor depending on their specialism. The structure for the personal tutoring and integration of PDP for this pilot year has been as follows:

- five timetabled tutorial sessions for each group (three in the first semester and two in the second)
- online support and discussion via [community@brighton](mailto:community@brighton)

The main aims of the Personal Development Plan are:

- to support the development of first year students' personal and academic skills
- to develop a sense of community amongst students and to provide an initial support network with the school and university
- to help first year students get to know their personal tutor by establishing timetabled sessions for group meetings and one to one tutorials
- to facilitate students' action planning in relation to their studies and other commitments.

The generic aims of PDP as set out by the QAA<sup>1</sup> suggest that students will:

- become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners
- understand how they are learning and relate their learning to a wider context
- improve their general skills for study and career management
- articulate their personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement
- develop a positive attitude to learning throughout life.

The Student Services Department at the University of Brighton produced a Student profile folder in accordance with the aims set out by the QAA. The folders contained a variety of pro-formas that gave students the space to reflect on relevant topics. The PDP group sessions were designed to enable students to discuss the different topics and to make links between their learning, personal and vocational development, and to reflect on these under the headings of:

- Initial review
- Action planning
- Reviewing progress
- Professional development
- Presenting yourself

#### **Impact of the pilot programme in 2007-08: feedback from students and staff**

The sessions that took place in the Induction Week were well received by both students and staff. It was an excellent opportunity for students to start building relationships with other students on the course, and to recognise that many of the initial concerns, worries and anxieties were common to almost everyone. Furthermore, all five members of staff reported excellent attendance records, good engagement with students and generally a positive and supportive atmosphere. One of the tutors leading the sessions commented:

<sup>1</sup><http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressfiles/archive/policystatement/default.asp>

*'The first session was useful for building relationships between students and between the students and the personal tutor'.*

Additionally, during the first session, students were introduced to the idea and basic concepts behind the Personal Development Planning programme and how the remaining sessions in the academic year would aim to help students by raising awareness of the skills that they may need, and help them to acquire those skills through academic study and extra-curricular activities. It is essential to note that the role of personal tutors' was also to provide individual and confidential support to each of the students within their tutorial group, as applicable, and students were informed of this at the start.

The second two sessions had a mixed response from students and staff. Below is the summary of the shared views:

- attendance is a serious issue
- students have not been enthusiastic enough about some of the issues tackled in those sessions: the staff have agreed that it has been difficult to find a balance between reflecting on certain activities/ experiences and not patronising students.
- online PDP has proved problematic – students have not found it engaging and stimulating

The final two sessions of the pilot programme were replaced by individual tutorials because of the problems encountered previously, namely issues of non-attendance and students' and staff concerns that the content of the sessions dealt with issues that both groups found unhelpful at times, and often patronising. As a result of this change, positive feedback was received from both students and staff:

*'Much more productive and useful. Students actually engaged with the tutor and were able to talk about the course and their concerns in general' (tutor).*

*'Much better! Actually productive in most sessions' (tutor).*

*'One-to-one personal tutoring sessions remain, for me, the most useful aspect of this programme' (tutor).*

*'I think individual sessions with the tutor are a lot more productive in terms of your own personal development' (student).*

*'...have more regular personal tutoring – this is vital for communication'! (student).*

*'It's good to touch base and know that there is someone I can talk to if I have any issues' (student).*

Questionnaires were designed to investigate the impact of the new structure, specifically the introduction of PDPs, on both students and staff. The two groups were asked to reflect on the key aspects behind this pilot scheme, namely:

- the content and usefulness of Personal Development Planning as a new initiative
- group sessions
- individual tutorial sessions
- online set up

Both students and staff were asked to make recommendations for possible changes to the programme, based on their personal experiences. 130 first year students were targeted; and 67 responded. Here are

some of the results:

- None of the students attended all of the group sessions
- 75 per cent of the students attended two sessions
- 42 per cent of the students did not find the group sessions useful
- 52 per cent of the students attended individual sessions and found them useful
- 81 per cent of the students did not use the online facility
- 39 per cent of the students did not use the PDP folders
- 75 per cent of the students reported that a mechanism of individual personal tutoring sessions would support them effectively with their studies and personal development

Here are some of the most common responses from the undergraduates:

*'Mandatory personal sessions would be more helpful as I wouldn't want to discuss anything personal in front of other students. Group sessions are good for collective problems with specific course/tutor'.*

*'I think individual sessions with the tutor are a lot more productive in terms of your own personal development'.*

On the subject of PDP folders:

*'...felt too much like school...'*

*'Didn't learn anything I didn't already know. Just a waste of time'.*

Staff involved in the initiative reported similar concerns to those of the first year students. Overall, the idea behind the Personal Development Planning is a useful one, however the consensus was that this should be incorporated into the students' current academic programme, rather than separating some of the activities. It was further felt that personal development is a responsibility of individual students and that the school should engage with the students and help facilitate this development in a more structured way. Here are some of the views captured on personal tutoring and PDP respectively:

*'Personal tutoring is essential, it has played a very important role in helping to manage the changes to the school engendered by the expansion and introduction of so many home students [in] what had been a very small school. The support offered by this school at all levels is exemplary but can only be effectively delivered through one-to-one sessions'.*

*'Personal tutoring is a good way of keeping in touch with students and ensuring that there is a dialogue going on. It is important that students see their personal tutors on [a] regular basis and perhaps build a good relationship with them so that they can seek advice [and] consult their tutor on a range of issues (this eventually includes writing references for those students)'.*

*'[PDP] is viewed by the students as patronising and childish. I am sure that they would rather have the resources allocated to what they have come to university to actually study'.*

*'[We should] provide an initial group session to get students acquainted with each other. Have a mid-year one-to-one session scheduled. Give the personal tutor some time for trouble shooting'.*

## Ways forward

The consensus amongst the group of staff involved in this initiative is that personal development is an important part of students' overall educational experience, however some key changes will be implemented for the academic year 2008-09:

- First year students will be allocated their personal tutor in exactly the same way: both student groups and the allocation of hours for staff will remain the same, as this has worked very well in 2007-08. The students that these arrangements facilitated reported a sense of belonging and that they generally felt comfortable with this approach.
- Timetabled sessions in groups are to remain in the Induction Week, including their content. This was very well received, and it was useful to bring all the students together again towards the end of the week to go through some of the information that they had received by then. It also helped with getting to know each other better and getting to know their tutors.
- The only group sessions taking place will be those in Induction Week. There will be two compulsory meetings with each student once in each semester on a one-to-one basis.
- PDP will remain in a form of a personalised contact with students – in other words, we would introduce the rationale and aims of the PDP in the Induction Week and give out folders, but leave it up to students if they wish to follow this through in tutorials.
- community@brighton will not be used, as it has been very difficult to navigate and students did not take to it.

In addition to the above, there will be other opportunities for students to reflect on their studies and general experience, including providing feedback on the overall course and individual modules. Those sessions will take the form of focus groups. They will be timetabled to take place once in each semester.

## Other initiatives within the school: student support and retention

In recent months, a more apparent link between students' academic performance and their need for welfare support has been recognised and reported nationally (<http://education.guardian.co.uk/>). Further, this link extends to an overall concern for students' mental health issues and their ability to cope with university study and outside pressures. This trend has been recognised at the SLLC. There is a considerable increase in the number of students seeking support from the liaison tutors, and in many cases, this support need requires onward referral to professional counseling help.

When addressing the changes in the personal tutoring system and support within the school, the above concerns were taken into consideration. From the group of five personal tutors, three are the school's student liaison tutors who support all undergraduates. This enables closer monitoring and support for those who may need it. It was anticipated that the link between the two roles (personal and liaison tutors) would enable the school to detect potentially serious problems much earlier. In addition, the group of five personal tutors offer continuous support to each other in order to maintain consistency in the support given to the cohort. Furthermore, training has been made available for staff on dealing with initial welfare and mental health issues that students might face.

As a result of a more integrated and supportive personal tutoring system, (which is also a vehicle for students to address generic issues in relation to their academic and personal skills), it was felt that students would also be able to use this forum for other more complex and pressing issues that they might be facing. We note here that confidentiality is at the forefront of our work and the support that we give. This is further linked to the retention initiative in the school, which uses the information available from the personal tutoring team to help students through difficult periods and enable them to complete their degrees.

## Conclusion

The research, as well as our analysis and evaluation of the feedback from the groups involved, is still at an early stage. However, we can say that linking students' academic study with reflective self-awareness remains problematic. The diversity of students and the variety of their needs presents a challenge to us all and is too complex to address by a single strategy such as PDP. We therefore remain sceptical that personal development planning in its proposed format will meet the desired outcomes.

## References

- Cook A and Rushton B S (2008) 'Student Transition: Practices and Policies to promote Retention', *SEDA*.
- Crosling G, Thomas L and Heagney M (2008) 'Student success and retention', in Crosling G, Thomas L and Heagney M (Eds.) *Improving Student Retention in Higher Education. The Role of Teaching and Learning*, Routledge, Abingdon.
- Dennis M J (1998) *A Practical Guide to Enrollment and Retention Management in Higher Education*, Greenwood Press, Westport, USA.
- Dumbrique C, Moxley D and Najor-Durack A (2001) *Keeping students in Higher Education: Successful Practices and Strategies for Retention*, Routledge, London.
- Flake S (2008) *Teaching Unprepared Students: Strategies for Promoting Success and Retention In Higher Education*, Stylus Publishing, Va.
- Koen C (2007) *Postgraduate Student Retention and Success: A South African Case Study*, HSRC, Press.
- Krause K, Hartley R, James R and McInnis C (2005) *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: Findings from a Decade of National Studies Final Report*, Department of Education Science and Training, Canberra.
- Martinez P (1997) *Improving Student Retention: a Guide to Successful Strategies*. Further Education Development Agency.
- McGivney V (1996) *Staying or Leaving the Course: Non-completion and Retention of Mature Students in Further and Higher Education*. National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.
- Simpson O (2003) 'Student Retention in Online, Open and Distance learning' in *Open and Flexible learning*, Routledge, London.
- Yorke M and Longden B (2004) *Retention and Student Success in Higher Education*. Open University Press.
- <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/progressfiles/archive/policystatement/default.asp>. Accessed June 2008
- <http://education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,2259748,00.html>. Accessed February 2008.
- <http://education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,2261661,00.html>. Accessed February 2008.
- <http://education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,2259746,00.html>. Accessed May 2008

## Biographies

**Jess Moriarty** is a senior lecturer in the School of Language, Literature and Communication at the University of Brighton. She teaches undergraduates on the degree programmes that have received excellent feedback and she has extensive experience in facilitating writing workshops and retreats for students and professional alike. Jess is currently writing her paper for a doctorate in education and also her first novel. She has written in a variety of genres and carried out research into staff development and writing techniques.

**Jelena Timotijevic** is a senior lecturer in linguistics at the University of Brighton. Her role further extends to that of student liaison tutor and she is also one of the project co-ordinators for the Retention Project at the School of Language, Literature and Communication. Jelena has been teaching at the university for eight years and is nearing completion of her PhD in Linguistics. Her publications and research interests are in the areas of modality in English and German, semantics and pragmatics, student retention and teaching and learning.

# A new approach to research supervision

**Dr Cristina Poyatos Matas**

---

## Abstract

This article introduces an innovative research supervision approach developed during the last six years, which received a national Carrick Institute Citation Award for outstanding contributions to student learning in Australia in 2006. This approach aims to promote a balanced approach to research learning among honours and postgraduate students. The first part of the article outlines the theoretical foundations of the supervisory approach. The second part, introduces briefly the major aspects of the two tools that support its implementation: the Academic Life Balancing Skills (ALBS) programme, and the candidates' and supervisors' logbooks.

---

## Introduction

For most of us, balancing our work and home hemispheres is a challenge that poses risks to our physical and emotional health which is rarely recognised, even within relatively sympathetic collegial settings. The balance is particularly skewed for higher degree students in the arts and social sciences, where research can be highly individualistic, and team approaches are relatively rare. In a sense, this model, which could be called monastic, is almost considered the archetypal supervisor-candidate model. Regardless of the discipline, the research path is often rocky, poorly lit, and ill defined.

Not surprisingly, in Australia, Canada, Britain and the USA, attrition rates amongst doctoral students are between 30 and 50 per cent (McAlpine and Norton 2006,3). Arts and social sciences doctoral students are at the high end of this curve (Dux 2006,26). In some countries, this has generated a generic skills debate in research higher degrees (Gilbert, Balatti, Turner and Whitehouse 2004;Woodward-Kron 2007). Students frequently describe their research learning experience as a difficult and long process in which they work alone, in an atmosphere of uncertainty (Haksever and Manisali 2000; Nightingale 2005).

Many doctoral students writing a thesis or dissertation experience such a tilt of the balance between 'a life' and their research work, that they experience ill health and, worryingly from the perspective of the host institution, 'quitting' presents its own rewards (Dux 2006). Honours and masters students experience similar levels of anxiety and isolation, citing personal problems in requests for periods of leave of absence and for withdrawing from their programmes. The whole person action-based research approach described in this chapter has been used with honours, masters and doctoral candidates (hereafter referred to collectively as 'research students').

To date research students have experienced a fragmentation between the three domains of learning (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) (Bloom 1956; Krathwohl, Blook and Bertram 1973). Little importance has been attached to how stress interferes with learning, yet it is received wisdom that stress is a contributing factor in research student attrition, as well as an outcome of research students experiencing social isolation.

The inspiration for the approach came from the author's own postgraduate experience as an honours and masters student in the UK and a PhD student in Australia, the latter experience running parallel to full-time employment and motherhood. The classic complaints of difficulty in achieving completion, vague supervision, a sense of isolation, financial difficulty and wavering interest (Dux 2006,26) were experienced by the author. In later years, as an academic, the author became a supervisor, working with honours, masters and PhD students in the School of Languages and Linguistics and the School

of Cognition, Language and Special Education (CLSE) at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. As a supervisor she went on to explore the use of different techniques and approaches to enhance the research learning experience of her students. The author advocates the importance of a whole person approach to teaching and supervision acknowledging the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains to enhance the learning experience of research students.

## An alternative to the monastic model of research learning

In developing a more holistic approach to research supervision, the author drew on a range of research streams rarely pulled into the world of research supervision. Concepts such as 'wellbeing' (Kahnemann 1999; Hamilton 2003), 'the habits of highly effective people' (Covey 1989; 2004), 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman 1995), 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998) and 'coaching' (Joyce and Showers 1980; 1981;1982).

Hamilton (2003) identified five dimensions of wellbeing which can be linked to the world of the research student. These include *social*, which Wenger singled out for special emphasis (1998) (relating to the dimensions of communication, relationships and communities); *intellectual* (relating to the rewards related to analysis); *physical* (including basic requirements such as nutrition and sleep and higher level needs such as laughter); *emotional* (sense of personal growth, reduction of stress, and sense of satisfaction); and even a *philosophical/spiritual* dimension (relating to values and meaning and intellectual integrity).

Covey's well-known work on what he termed 'highly effective people' provided one of the more tangible elements of the whole-person approach, insofar as he highlighted the value of goal setting, and more particularly, linking those goals to a written weekly planner. The physical toolkit developed for the whole-person approach included a logbook not just for the student, but also for the supervisor, subtly encouraging the supervisor to become a research coach and provide a more structured and regular level of feedback and feedforward for the student.

The supervisor's logbook includes a calendar, space for recording meeting reports, and a section to encourage the principal supervisor and co-supervisor to self-assess their own performance, and to assess the research student's performance. The logbook acts as both a mnemonic and a research supervision guide: a mnemonic to encourage the supervisor to cover the issues that students raise time and time again as being pivotal in producing a positive research experience, and as a guide to assist the supervisor in clearly defining and monitoring research supervision and research student priorities and goals.

Similarly, the research student's own logbook helps to keeps the student 'on topic and track'. It also includes a calendar, meeting reports, and space for the research student self-assessment of their performance, and the assessment of the principal supervisor and co-supervisor's supervision performance. This latter section includes 'to do' elements. The logbook not only acts as a motivational tool and record of goals, priorities and progress, it also tips the equity balance, which has traditionally heavily favoured the supervisor, in the direction of the research student. This has the effect of increasing the supervisor's accountability for the effectiveness of the process as experienced by the student.

The power of the logbook as a distinct variable in the transformation of the supervisor-candidate relationship should not be underestimated. As one Griffith University academic noted, the logbook 'enables supervisors engaged in multiple academic tasks to better track progress, and thereby provide encouragement and preempt serious emergent problems, across a range of thesis projects' (Munro 2006, email communication).

The tangible 'toolkit' of the whole person approach to research supervision is relatively easy to grasp and implement. Parallel to this, however, is a broader approach to research supervision, which could be described as 'dialogic supervision' influenced by Freire's educational philosophy (1972). This approach engages supervisors in the creation of learning environments that support and promote the integral

development of the research student, both as a new researcher and as the multi-dimensional person in an academic context that they have already become.

This second aspect of the whole-person research learning and supervision approach can best be described by outlining the contents of the 'Academic Life Balancing Skills' programme, a seven week course developed by the author with Dr Jennifer Tannoch-Bland to assist research students in integrating and attending to the different aspects of their lives as new researchers.

In the first week, the facilitators of the programme assist participants in conducting self-audits along five dimensions: *intellectual, physical, emotional, social and philosophical/spiritual*. Prior to commencing, students are taken through a brief yoga session, which is mirrored in each session, along with a period set aside for refreshments. The process has proven effective in breaking down social barriers within the group (O'Keefe 2005; Poyatos Matas 2005, 2008). In week two, the focus turns to the *intellectual dimension*. The facilitator takes the participants through a process of goal setting, developing time-management skills and a 'how to' on working with the weekly planner. In the third week, the group addresses the *physical domain*. It begins with a session on laughter yoga, and deals with issues related to sleep, nutrition and fitness. Students conduct self-audits on their physical status, and homework includes using self-audits to incorporate physical health into their weekly planners if they deem this necessary. Week four sees the participants address the *emotional domain*, being introduced to emotional transformation techniques. The fifth week addresses the *social domain*, in particular relating to the experience of the student, the supervisor-candidate relationship, and strategies that can improve communication. Again, students complete an audit of their supervisory relationship, and are introduced to their supervisory logbooks, and given a presentation on their use. Week six focuses on the *philosophical/spiritual dimension* of the lives of the research students. The session is conducted by a senior practitioner in mindfulness meditation, and different meditation practices are taught and practiced to help the students to reflect on their performance and lives. The concluding session sees the students work on the development of a *community of practice*, using the group that have attended the seven week programme as a seed to grow a larger support community.

While the particulars of this seven week programme were shaped at least in part by the strengths of the facilitators and presenters, the content was driven by the broader notion that there is more to research than simply choosing a research question, buying a lab coat and burying oneself in books. Students who took the course did not suddenly switch their exercise programme to yoga, but they started to make some fundamental changes to the way in which they live the research learning experience, as this PhD student reported:

*'I started at the gym and I plan to do other things beside study, [such as] time for family and friends and 'me time'.*

### The impact of the whole person approach

The 'whole person' approach is not just about helping students appreciate that there is more to life than study. Nor is it simply about helping postgraduates realise that these other aspects of life are not simply impediments on the road to a higher research degree, but components that need to be attended to, and in some cases harnessed to help them realise their academic dreams.

More broadly, it is about changing the balance of traditional approaches of supervision which put the emphasis on the supervisor, to approaches which are more focused on the research student. In developing the whole person approach the primary question was 'how do we improve the supervision of the research student?', but a secondary question emerged: 'are we supervising supervisors?' Keeping dual logbooks shares the onus of monitoring the supervision process between the student and the supervisor/s. The logbooks become part of the evidence of the research learning journey. Beyond

the primary role of the logbooks; (to aid the student toward completion) they can also be linked to the administrative record of the research student.

The student evaluations of their research learning experience showed a distinct change as a result of their participation in the 'Academic Life Balancing Skills' programme, not just within the intellectual domain. Students reported a broad range of positive outcomes as a result of the programme, including: adopting regular exercise, reduction of anxiety, and an improvement of the supervisor-candidate relationship. The programme was valuable in highlighting the many faces of the research experience 'other than just 'the intellectual', as one PhD student noted dryly:

*'The use of the logbook has enabled me to not only plan my research (on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis), but for the most part has enabled me to actually complete the tasks I have planned and to track my progress'.*

Another research student reported:

*'In addition, the use of the logbook has made me focus on non-academic areas of my life (in particular diet and exercise) which needed attention, thus establishing the foundations for a healthier life-style and enabling me to sustain my academic performance as a researcher'.*

Overall, as a result of implementing the whole person approach using research and supervision logbooks and the Academic Life Balancing Skills programme, students and supervisors reported an improved research learning and supervision experience.

### Bibliography

- American Journal of Health Promotion available from: <http://www.healthpromotionjournal.com/index.html>. Accessed 7 April 2006.
- Australian Centre on Quality of Life – The Australian Unity Index of Well-Being, available from [http://acqot.deakin.edu.au/index\\_wellbeing](http://acqot.deakin.edu.au/index_wellbeing). Accessed 7 April 2006.
- Covey S (1989) *The 7 habits of highly effective people: restoring the character ethic*, Simon & Schuster, London.
- Dux M (2006) Quitting has its own rewards. *The Australian Newspaper*, April 12,26.
- Freire P (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Gilbert R, Balatti J, Turner P and Whitehouse H (2004) 'The generic skills debate in research higher degrees', *Higher Education Research and Development*, vol.23,no.3;375-388.
- Goleman D (1995) *Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam, New York.
- Kahnemann D (1999) *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*, Sage, New York.
- Haksever A M and Manisali E (2000) 'Assessing supervision requirements of PhD students: the case of construction management and engineering in the UK'. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, March,1-8.
- Hamilton C (2003) *Growth Fetish*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
- Hamilton C (2006) 'Wellbeing Manifesto', available from <http://www.wellbeingmanifesto.net/about.htm>. Accessed 2 April 2006.
- Joyce B and Showers B (1980) Improving in-service training. The messages of research, *Educational Leadership*,vol 37,no.5,379-385.
- Joyce B and Showers B (1981) 'Transfer of training. The contribution of 'coaching', *Boston University Journal of Education*, vol.163,no.2,163-172.
- Joyce B and Showers B (1982) 'The coaching of teaching'. *Educational Leadership*, 40(1),4-10.
- Lea C (1986) 'From didactic to student-centred teaching', in Brandes D and Ginnis P, *A guide to student-centred learning*,167-170,Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- McAlpine L and Norton J (2006) 'Reframing our approach to doctoral programmes: an integrative framework for action and research', *Higher Education Research and Development*, vol. 25,no.1,3-17.
- Nightingale P (2005) *Advising PhD candidates*. HERDSA: Milperra, New South Wales.
- O'Keefe B (2005). Awakening energy for learning. *The Australian Newspaper*, July 13,32.

Woodward-Kron R (2007)'Negotiating meanings and scaffolding learning: writing support for non-English speaking background postgraduate students', *Higher Education Research and Development*, vol.26,no.3,253-268.

Wenger E (1998)'Communities of practice: Learning as a social system', *Systems Thinker*, June 2006, available at: <http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml>. Accessed 7April 2008.

## Biography

**Dr Cristina Poyatos Matas** is a senior lecturer at Griffith University in Australia, and a member of its Educational Excellence Committee. Her active involvement in enhancing the learning experience of students has been recognised through numerous awards from institutions such as the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA), the University of Queensland, and Griffith University (Individual Excellence in Teaching award 2001). She was granted a HERDSA Fellowship in 2003 and joined the HERDSA Executive. The Academic Life Balancing Skills programme, which she developed in collaboration with Dr Jennifer Tannoch-Bland to support research students, was nominated for a Griffith University Teaching Award in 2007. Cristina has disseminated her disciplinary research and teaching scholarship at universities in Australia, France, Canada, England, Malaysia, Spain and America.

# A creative assessment strategy to improve student motivation and engagement in biochemistry.

**Dr Jacqui Elsom**

## Abstract

This paper discusses the rationale for the introduction of an alternative assessment strategy designed to improve motivation and engagement in biochemistry students and explains how the new assessment was structured to support student learning. It then explores how the results of the assessment reflect an improvement in student self-efficacy through deeper approaches to learning, and how student feedback supports these findings.



Frames from a student film that uses sponges and playdoh to illustrate the process of atherosclerosis

## Introduction

This study arose from my desire as a teacher to improve my students' confidence in adopting deeper approaches to learning in biochemistry, as previous dialogue with students had highlighted negative preconceptions about their ability to perform well in the subject. Comments such as *'it's too difficult, there are so many pathways to learn and so much detail to cover'* and *'I didn't do very well at chemistry, so biochemistry is going to be even worse'* revealed their awareness of biochemistry as being cognitively demanding, as well as highlighting how previous learning experiences could instigate a negative self-fulfilling prophecy about their ability to succeed before they had even started the module! I was encouraged by the work of Bandura (1986) to promote a change in this attitude to one of increased self-efficacy (a situation-specific form of self-confidence) in learning, to encourage motivation, and support positive academic performance. Bandura's work on social cognitive theory places self-efficacy as a common cognitive mechanism for mediating motivation and behaviour thus 'students expectations of their ability to perform well can shape the outcome of their efforts and ability to succeed'. This theory predicts that self-efficacy is developed through the influence of four principal sources of external information: previous performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, emotional arousal, and verbal persuasion. This theory was therefore used to provide a framework to select and implement pedagogic strategies to improve motivation and learning behaviour (see figure 1 over).

Using this model led to the incorporation of a student presentation session as part of the module assessment strategy, whereby small groups of students were given a selected biochemical topic to research and present. It was anticipated that this would provide a collaborative learning experience both within each group (researching their chosen topic) and across the cohort through their presentations to each other during a special seminar session. Peer assessment of the presentations was also included, in order to provide feedback and to encourage self-reflection. It was anticipated that

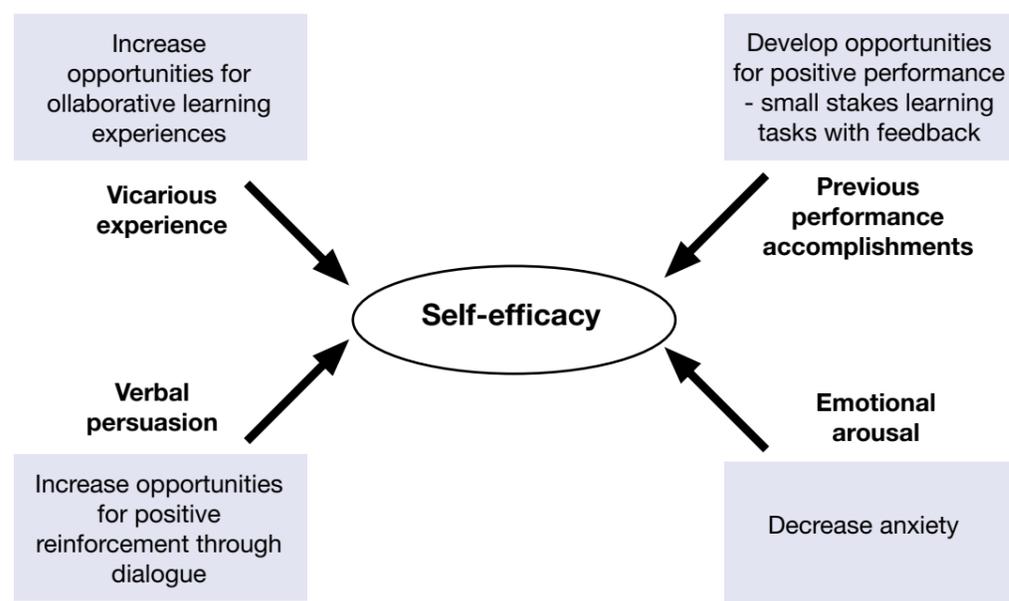


Figure 1 illustrates the four key sources of external influences on motivation and behaviour which can be targeted with pedagogical strategies to improve students' self-efficacy in deep approaches to learning

this strategy would promote the following outcomes, identified as having potential to positively influence self-efficacy in learning:

- encourage student collaboration on problem solving
- develop ownership of learning
- incorporate self and peer assessment to enhance learner autonomy
- develop self evaluative and reflective skills
- provide a mechanism to promote student dialogue and feedback

This strategy however, proved to have a number of disadvantages, which became apparent through informal interviews with students after the exercise. The performance related anxiety associated with giving the presentations had hindered the students' ability to relax, concentrate and learn from each other during the seminar. For example when asked if they listened or learned during the presentations one student commented:

*'I am not thinking about what other people are saying, I am not even listening, in my head I am running through what I am going to say'.*

They were apprehensive about their own presentation, and this epitomised the general feeling of the cohort. In addition, students who didn't feel anxious about their own presentational ability said that their empathy for the nervousness of their peers detracted from their ability to relax and learn:

*'Even if you are not nervous, when you watch someone else, and they are, you are thinking, come on it will be all right, you feel for them and you concentrate more on this than what they are saying'.*

As well as not learning from each other during the presentations, it became clear that developing understanding of the topics within the group was also questionable, as giving presentations did not appear to be valued as a learning tool:

*'You just have to memorise lots of facts to get out in the seminar, you don't really remember it afterwards'.*

*'Once it's done you forget about it, you think god I am glad that is over'.*

Further comments suggested that students were not motivated to work collaboratively on such exercises. They usually shared out responsibility for discrete aspects of the presentation, which were then put together just before the presentation session, thus failing to promote discussion of the topic or develop a shared understanding within each group:

*'we split the topic up and everyone went away and researched their bit'.*

On reflection, it became clear that this assessment strategy was not fulfilling the intended outcomes of developing student self-efficacy, although an alternative solution was not immediately apparent. The catalyst that seeded the idea to use films as an assessment tool was provided by an inspirational seminar given by Avril Loveless at the CLT Learning and Teaching Conference in 2006. This seminar discussed the use of digital video technologies to allow student teachers and primary school children to introduce creative aspects into the primary curriculum, and demonstrated how the features of such technologies could be exploited to make 'distinctive contributions to activities that could not be done as effectively, if at all, using other tools' (Loveless 2006). This became apparent from a number of films that were shown during the seminar. Making these films had allowed the children to communicate their ideas in original, emotive and highly sophisticated ways. It also highlighted that using such technologies provided opportunities for interaction, participation and the active demonstration of creative processes (using imagination, a fashioning process, pursuing purpose, being original and judging value) as defined by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCE 1999,29). I was intrigued as to whether a similar approach could be used to replace the traditional presentation exercise and whether this might provide a more motivational assessment strategy for my students. I went on to develop an alternative film-presentation assessment, with the help of the Media Services team.

### The assessment strategy

At the start of the module students were told that they would be asked to work in groups to make a four-minute digital video to explain a particular topic in biochemistry. They would be allowed to choose a topic that interested them from a list of options which involved exploring concepts fundamental to understanding human metabolism. Expert tuition and support was provided throughout the semester by the Media Services team, starting with a tutorial on planning, storyboarding and filming visual narratives. This session provided a platform for discussion of ideas and expectations (ours and theirs), along with the setting of ground rules for acceptable and appropriate contributions. The style of the film presentation was left entirely up to them. A few examples of previous films were shown to the second cohort, but they were limited, so as not to inhibit the students' own creative exploration. In addition, to ensure a safe environment for the students to explore their creativity, they were assured that the films themselves would only be accessible within the cohort. Permission to use the films for wider dissemination was obtained after the module had finished.

In order to help with time management of the assessment, students were required to submit an initial storyboard of ideas part-way through the semester. This provided a platform for discussion in two subsequent tutorial sessions, one with the media team and one with the biochemistry lecturer. These enabled the development or revision of ideas and/or the giving of reassurance and encouragement to progress, as appropriate. The students were also required to book their own camera equipment and plan and book time for editing the films. This scheduled time for editing ensured that expert assistance was available to the students in producing the film. The finished films were submitted in conjunction with a portfolio showing evidence of individual contributions and the collaborations that had contributed to the final product (research notes, dialogue, scripts, storyboards photos etc.). All the films were

viewed in a seminar session at the conclusion of the module, during which the students peer and self-assessed them using criteria provided at the beginning of the assignment.

### What were the outcomes?

A significant and surprising finding of the project was the level of student enjoyment: many students commented on how much fun they had had whilst carrying out the assignment. This became evident in discussions during tutorials (when they were planning their films); during the final seminar session when the films were shown; and also from the films themselves, as nearly all of them contained a significantly humorous element. Because viewing the films was so entertaining it was easy to think that the students had been a little frivolous, but the ability to view the films again revealed that a great deal of research and planning had gone into developing what were, in many cases, sophisticated strategies to portray the concepts involved. This is supported by others, who cite fun, playfulness and humour as essential elements in developing innovative, creative-thinking and problem-solving skills (Janowska 2008).

The films were diverse and original in their approaches, and it was clear that the students had been active in using their creative and imaginative skills. Many of the films were also of a surprisingly high standard considering that the students had little prior media production experience. There was evidence of concern for accuracy, and attention to detail on the part of each of the student groups, showing clearly that they had engaged at a much deeper level with the subject content and developed a greater understanding of the topics involved than would otherwise be anticipated. For me it was apparent that the assessment had significantly increased the students' engagement and cognitive development and so it was, on reflection, not surprising, that the one almost unanimous negative comment was that *'it was a lot of work'*.

Students' cultural experiences clearly influenced the films that they produced, in that many parodied daytime TV chat shows, documentaries, news reports, game-shows and educational shows. Students invented personalities for things like cells, hormones, enzymes and substrates which allowed them to develop dialogues to express tensions that exist in metabolic pathways or pathological processes. Specific affinities between molecules were expressed by having them 'flirt on the blind-date show', auto-immune mediated cell damage was presented as a dramatic 'breaking news' event and glucose and insulin were seen in a heated debate about who was more important on a daytime chat show. As well as acting in the films, students used all manner of props to develop their scenarios, including coloured sweets, paper shapes, plasticine, pipe-cleaners and flash animation, which allowed the unseen world of biochemistry to be 'brought to life'. Thus the exercise had allowed the students to transform abstract biochemical concepts, which are often only accessible as text or static illustrations, by presenting them in alternative contextual formats. This was indeed something that fed substantially into the students' understanding, and many commented on an increased ability to understand and retain information presented in such a visual way.

This visual literacy in 'seeing' biochemical events is something that comes with deeper or more divergent thinking and is not easily demonstrated using other assessment formats. Many students recognised the value of being able to be creative to achieve these aims, which is something often overlooked in assessment strategies used for science students. Thus the use of the digital video technology had indeed allowed the students to do something that could not be done using other tools, even in a subject not normally associated with being creative.

### How was the assessment strategy evaluated?

Student opinion of the assessment strategy was invited both by questionnaire and through informal discussion. This enquiry was focused upon how the experience compared with previous oral presentations, and covered areas such as planning and consideration of the communication process; listening; learning (both during preparation of the films and the seminar session); and self-reflection.

The anonymous questionnaires included questions relating to the themes listed above and provided an option for scaled responses (less or more) as well as questions designed to encourage further, less self-censored comments (ie telling me what they thought rather than telling me what they thought I wanted to hear). Further qualitative evaluation was carried out by informal dialogue with students, both during the tutorials and in the seminar presentation session. This followed similar themes to those listed above, as well as following directions initiated by the students. All comments obtained are cited verbatim.

### Student responses and discussion

#### On listening and learning

When asked about listening, 89 per cent of students felt that they had listened more during the film seminar than they did during oral presentations, and some (23 per cent) felt this had been a marked contrast, supported with amazing comments such as;

*'better than giving a presentation, more informative, I actually listened!'*

Many other comments related to how the films had increased the students' attention span and thus their capacity to learn. For example, responses to the question 'Did anything surprise you?' included:

*'Yes, my level of concentration and how much attention the others (students in seminar) were paying' and 'attention span is longer and you learn more'.*

This increase can easily be attributed to the short length and diverse nature of the films:

*'variety of novel presentation ideas captured my attention'*

but students also commented on the situated nature of the science discussed. When asked about why they liked particular films they said:

*'it was very close to real life'*

*'seeing science in relative context'*

*'it's what we watch in our leisure time, what context we will relate to most'.*

It could be argued that this increased attention simply reflects the fact that students are good at watching television. However, it is more likely to be indicative of their culture of familiarity with a rich array of information and communication technologies. For example, cameras and mobile phones now have digital video capabilities that permit sending of text, sounds and images, and social networking sites permit sharing of personalised digital films on the net (YouTube™, Facebook etc). The students may also be influenced by mainstream television programming, as directors and scientists increasingly collaborate with the specific intention of adding educational elements to the products they design (Steele 2001). Given these influences, it is likely that students are more confident in engaging with digital technologies to explore and communicate their ideas.

#### Perceived value and impact on collaboration

Students were asked if they had planned more or thought more about how they would communicate their ideas compared with other assessments. Nearly all students reported that they had, and many attributed this to the structured nature of the exercise - they had to organise themselves in order to submit the storyboard ideas, book cameras and time for using the editing suite. However many comments revealed that increased planning and consideration had taken place because students had taken the exercise more seriously and wanted to do well:

*'we wanted a more professional outcome'*

*'more analysis of details was required, to think about how facts could be conveyed'*

*'more interesting assignment, encouraged to do something new'.*

Discussions with students revealed that the novelty of the film exercise had a significant impact on their motivation because overuse of the oral-presentation strategy in education was demotivating

*'we have to do them all the time, they get boring' and 'once you have seen one presentation you have seen them all'.*

These comments support findings from other studies, in which novelty has been cited a key motivator for creative engagement (Janowska 2008), and this clearly had a major effect here in increasing the students' motivation. This in turn appeared to increase their level of collaboration when working on the assessment, which is reflected in comments such as:

*'time required to share ideas and understanding in developing film ideas'*

*'important working in a group not to let the other group members down'.*

This was in marked contrast to comments made during earlier discussions, in which students admitted that they had worked in isolation on aspects of collaborative assignments.

Clearly then, the novel and creative nature of this assessment strategy was a welcome alternative to the usual diet of assessments (laboratory reports, essays, posters etc), and as such had increased motivation, collaboration and engagement with the exercise. Wanting to do well, and having the opportunity to be creative, resulted in more focused research and collaboration than in other assessment tasks and allowed students to develop innovative strategies to present their findings.

### Evidence of increased reflection

When students were asked if they had reflected more on how they had communicated their ideas in carrying out this type of assessment, 89 per cent indicated that they had. Questions designed to gain further insight into their reflection, such as: 'did you reflect differently' and 'did the finished film convey your ideas as intended?' supported this perceived increase in reflection. Comments such as:

*'it was clear and concise'*

*'made us realise that we hadn't conveyed the information as clearly as we had thought'*

*'Yes, although I would have included more scientific content in future'.*

demonstrated that during and after the seminar presentation session they were able to identify areas for future development whilst still retaining a sense of achievement. Part of this increased reflection could be attributed to the fact that they were able to 'view' their own presentation in a way that they would not normally be able to, but additionally this would have been enhanced by the requirement for self and peer assessment of the films that took place in the final session.

### Use of the films as a resource for future learning

When asked if the students would watch the films again after the film seminar, 91 per cent of students said that they would, and not just their own. When asked if they saw the films as a learning resource, 82 per cent said yes, and added comments such as;

*'Yes, since this would give me an outline to conduct the relevant detailed study'*

*'kept me interested and the ideas in each topic concisely put together which allows you to get your head around a subject before learning the detail'.*

The films have also provided insight for me as a lecturer in seeing how the students perceive certain concepts, which will help in developing more useful teaching strategies for future cohorts.

### Making learning memorable

As a final note, a number of students who graduated this year (nearly a year after making their films) listed in their yearbook under the heading of 'most memorable moments', 'having so much fun making the biochemistry films'. Surely making learning this much fun should at least be valued for the positive way in which it impacts on the student experience as a whole, as well as its ability to promote motivation and engagement in a subject which is perceived by many students as being particularly complex. Such enthusiasm and excitement expressed by the students is promising and has confirmed to me that this is a worthwhile exercise to develop for future cohorts.



Frames from a film demonstrating the process of atherosclerosis, by Jacqueline Thompson, Azrina Siddiqui, Melissa Graham and Natalie Sullivan

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Janette Grabham, Ian Spalding and Phil Riley from the Watts Media Centre, without whom the project would have been difficult to run. I would also like to thank Joyce Barlow for her support and encouragement during this project.

### Bibliography

- Allam C (2008) 'Creative activity and its impact on student learning – issues of implementation', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, vol.45, no.3, 281-288.
- Bandura A (1986) *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*, Prentice Hall, London.
- Einstein A (1929) 'What life means to Einstein: An interview by George Sylvester Viereck'. *The Saturday Evening Post*; 26 October, 17.
- Jankowska M. and Atlay M (2008) 'Use of creative space in enhancing students' engagement', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, vol.45, no.3, 271-279.
- Loveless A (2003) 'Creating spaces in the primary curriculum: ICT in creative subjects', *The Curriculum Journal*, vol.14, no.1, 5-21.
- Loveless A, Burton J and Turvey K (2006) 'Developing conceptual frameworks for creativity', *ICT and teacher Education, Thinking Skills and Creativity*, vol.1, 3-13.
- NACCE (1999) *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*. National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, DfEE and DCMS, Sudbury.
- Steele M (2001) 'Ambush or Seduction? Some creative approaches towards motivating learners', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, vol.38, no.2, 112-118.
- Sternberg R J (2006) 'The Nature of Creativity', *Creativity Research Journal*, vol.18, no.1, 87-98.

## Biography

**Jacqui Elsom** is a senior lecturer in the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Science. She initially trained and became a registered biomedical scientist in clinical biochemistry before attaining her PhD in analytical chemistry and epithelial cell biology. After a period of post doctoral research with the Protein Design Group at Sussex University she came to the University of Brighton to teach clinical biochemistry and laboratory techniques and is currently course leader and year 1 tutor for biomedical science. Her research interests include developing creative strategies to increase student motivation, learning and confidence.

# Collaboration and conflict in the making of a group-based Creative Process Journal for a 'real world' student art exhibition

**Claire Scanlon and Paul Grivell**

---

## Abstract

This paper reports on a specific case study considering the use of a group creative process journal (CPJ) in the subject area of art and design. It places the case study in the broader field of a research project considering a range of approaches to creative processes and their documentation. Both the case study and the broader research project are particularly concerned with the tension between the development of creativity and the requirements of assessment within art and design higher education. We discuss our approach to research methods in terms of our broader field of enquiry, and raise the importance of student participation as active research agents, and in relation to their evaluation of their experience in the case study presented.

---

## Introduction

Our conference workshop session 'Collaboration and conflict in the making of a group-based Creative Process Journal for a 'real world' student art exhibition', presented as a case study the experiences of a group of undergraduate media arts students working collaboratively towards the production of an external public art exhibition. This case study formed part of a much wider CLT funded research project exploring how embedded models and procedures of documenting the creative process aid learning in an art education context.

Importantly a number of the students involved in the making of the group-based CPJ participated in the workshop, offering their personal perspectives and providing valuable reflective critique. The physical object of the CPJ provided the focus of the session. With this focus, students and staff discussed their collaborative experience in relation to the broader research questions of our CLT research project entitled 'Working in the dark – encouraging, enabling and rewarding students' risk-taking and experimentation in a processes orientated model of creative practice'.

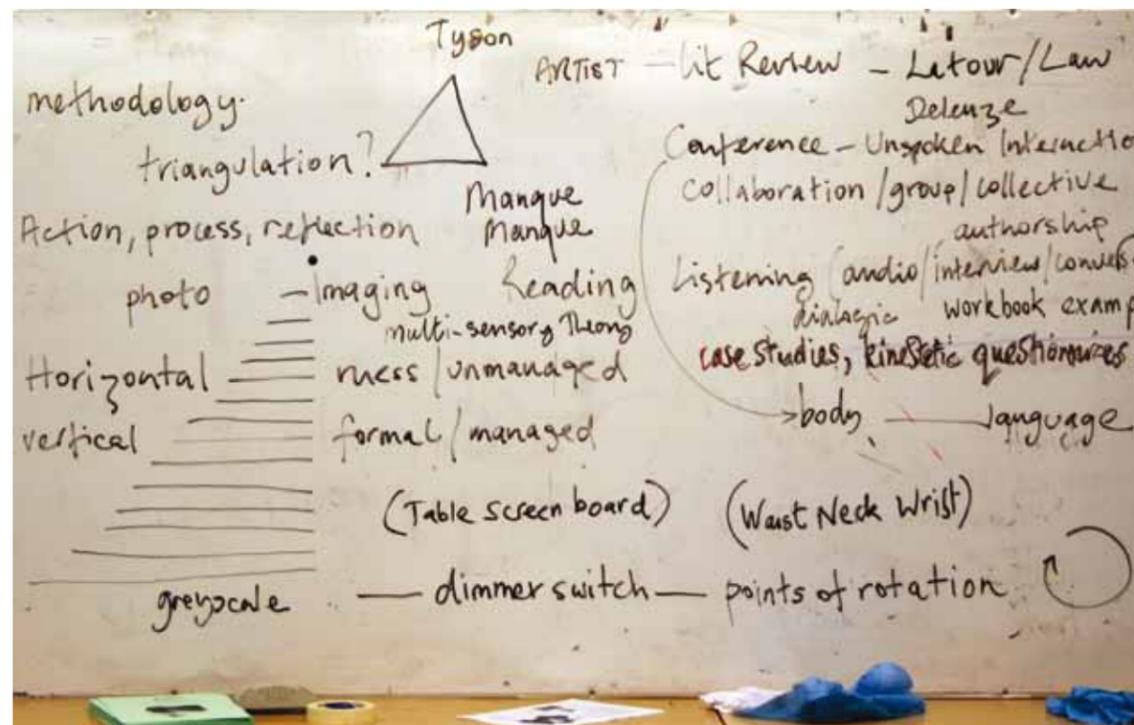
*'We work in the dark - we do what we can - we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art'* Henry James, *The Middle Years*, 1893.

It is widely accepted that the artist's sketch book or journal plays a significant role in the creative process of its maker and is often coveted by art historians and archivists for the 'behind the scenes' insight such documents afford into the musings, observations, thought and production processes of the artist's mind and practice. Art education traditionally encourages the use of workbooks, sketchbooks or journals as good documentary practice in the development of students' creative processes. This is often reinforced by the demand that these documents function as evidence in the formal process of assessment.

The wider research project began with an observation that the format and aesthetics of some student CPJs appeared to 'fall into' unreflective, institutionalised modes of production (mind-maps/spider diagrams, silver pen on black paper, reams of internet 'research'), often pre-established and readily conforming to models of practice uncritically learned in prior education. We noticed that these accepted approaches had a tendency to 'get stuck' rather than develop in tandem with the critical and creative development of the practice itself. This observation led us to identify a number of questions about the role

and function of the CPJ which we sought to critically and creatively investigate by engaging the students collaboratively in the research process.

It was also clear to us that our methodology needed to be reflexively aware, and to encompass our own creativity and work within the conditions circumscribed by our institutional context. This involves 'delivering' HE within a predominantly FE establishment, with all the attendant cultural and economic implications. To this end we began to observe our own practice through photographic documentation of our working space. In the process of this observation we recognised that our 'analysis' was becoming spatialised; the vertical axis (the white board) enabled us to 'think ideas through' in a more deliberate or managed way; the horizontal axis (the office table), was a kind of unmanaged flux which nevertheless gave an insight into the 'thick of things' in which we were engaged. Furthermore, the office environment is shared by other staff in the department and their activities. Their engagement in our inquiry through informal conversation highlighted the fluid, unpredictable and often unacknowledged social aspects of the research process and its embeddedness in the day to day aspects of our teaching practices.



Vertical axis: the whiteboard

The idea of reflexivity, and the importance of 'situatedness' in creativity and in qualitative research processes, was brought more sharply into focus later on in the course of the literature review. In particular we were informed by Derek Pigrum's writing in which he draws on a range of perspectives to consider the importance of place in creativity. Specifically we were interested in his focus on the workbook as a locus which travels with the artist in the manner of a peripatetic studio. Pigrum and Stables (2005,7-8) state that:

'... the physical place where analysis is conducted can alternatively be seen to correspond to Heidegger's notion of 'place-as-pragmatic-as the realm of worked-on-things .... [and in which] .... .... artistic concerns, labour, problems, and solutions present themselves not as a fixed configuration of objects but in ever-changing relationships of near and far, juxtaposition, overlap, and dispersion'.

We were also particularly interested in notions of messiness in research methodology as elaborated by John Law (2004). Law argues against the convention that 'messy' findings are a consequence of poor

research. He claims that in attempts to present tidy findings we often filter out many of the valuable realities which are by their nature vague and ephemeral. We were keen to hold on to these aspects of our work and wished to include this 'messiness' as evidence of our understanding that to be 'involved' (subjectively) in our own research was a necessity not a choice.

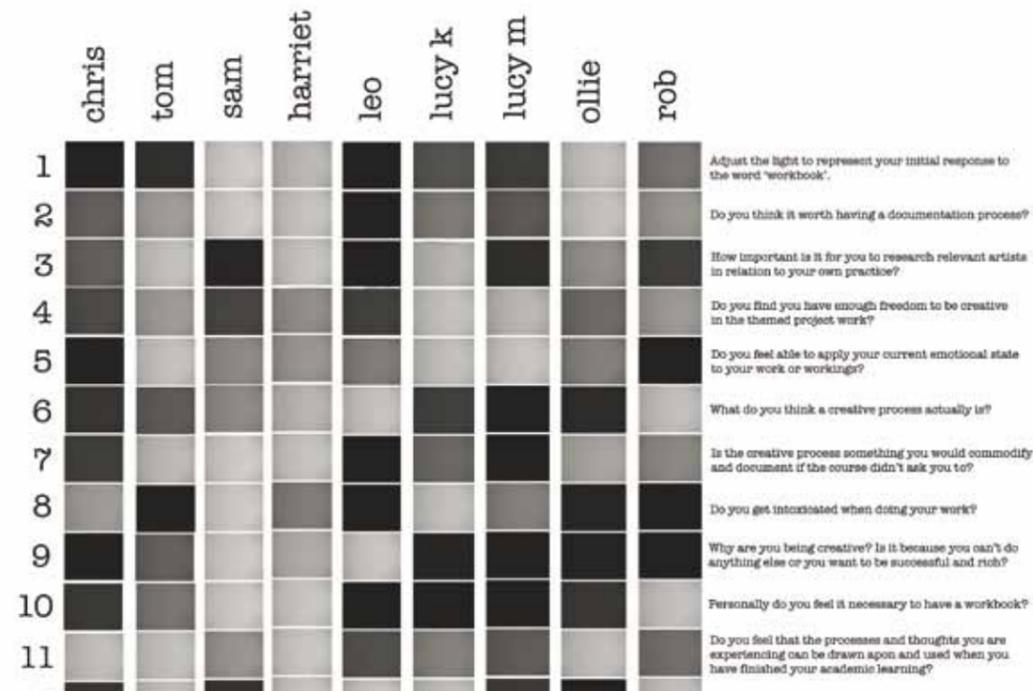


Horizontal axis, the office table

With Law in mind, we aimed to move beyond conventional text orientated and quantitative research methods towards predominantly visual and audio forms. In parallel with our use of photography to document spaces and activity we developed unorthodox questionnaires with visual interfaces. We also prioritised (recorded) dialogue and conversation between ourselves and the students, over more conventional reading and writing.

Importantly, we have resisted the transcription of sound/dialogue, seeking to maintain the specificity of the medium rather than transforming it into the standard text based form required by academic publication. This range of multi-sensory approaches was supported by a broad literature review which included pedagogic and social theory, literature, poetry and philosophy. In essence we were developing a spatialised 3-d model of a CPJ embracing all of the uncertainties and productive mess of creativity.

The CPJ is a complex document that in theory reflects the creative and learning processes of the student through its multi-modal form. These aspects range from highly personal and often confessional drawing, doodling and writing to contextual research. They serve as a memory supplement in the form of notes from technical workshops, seminars and lectures and post-rational project self-evaluations. The various formats of a CPJ include loose leaf folders, mixed media boxes, objects and fold-outs, but conventionally they conform to the sketch book, and as such encourage linear production. The tension between the freedom to use the CPJ as a place of creative risk taking (personal reflection, desultory observations, lateral thinking) and the need to evidence the learning process for assessment, gives rise to one of the central questions of this research: if authentic creative practice needs privacy, space, time, dialogue and critical reflection, then how does the necessity to relinquish this document for shared public consumption



Dimmer switch questionnaire responses

and assessment affect the student's sense of creative freedom and ownership of their work? Alternatively, it may be that this public requirement encourages the student to be more ambitious and productive and enables them to evidence learning that would otherwise remain unseen or unrealised. In other words, is it true that nothing grows as a result of being measured?

These questions emerged as a particular issue in the production of the group workbook in the Year 2 BA media and photo arts collaborative exhibition project, which was the focus of the Learning and Teaching Conference workshop.

The format of the workbook (100 metre roll of lining paper) was creatively pre-determined with the intention that its scale and linear form would accommodate shared production and reflect the progress of the project over time. It was introduced to the group with the invitation, (pending their ethical consent), to participate as student researchers in the CPJ project.

At the start some students were concerned about how they would be assessed on the group CPJ, and whether it would replace the need to produce an individual workbook. We suggested that the group CPJ would be a means to share the research process and subject knowledge around the general issues of mounting an exhibition - including artists and curatorial practice, exhibition management and development, and production issues. However it was emphasised that this approach would not replace or reduce the need for them to pursue their individual creative investigation into the process of producing work for the exhibition.

We were particularly keen to pursue the idea of collaboration with the students to encourage their abilities to work as a team in rehearsal for their year 3 degree show. Thus the development of professional practice in the mounting of an exhibition was key, and in this collaborative context we also sought to develop student understanding of, and critical engagement with, ideas of audience inter-activity through an introduction to the theory of Relational Aesthetics drawn from Nicholas Bourriard's writing.

In reality, our idealism in these motives was challenged by the problems posed by group dynamics that



The group workbook was conceived as a research experiment designed to reflect the collaborative nature of this project and to act as a focus for group meetings and seminars

overtook the project at half way. Personal disagreements and conflict within the group threatened to destabilise the entire venture and required staff intervention in order to keep the project on track and maintain momentum. We were surprised to find that the group CPJ surprisingly exacerbated the conflict, as it served as a locus for issues of control and ownership. At the outset of the project each student had agreed to participate and had taken ownership of the CPJ by signing their names and laying down some self-imposed rules of engagement. What happened in effect was that the natural competencies and abilities of some students became apparent in the designation of roles, including the maintenance and responsibility for the safe-keeping of the CPJ (which was in some respects a fairly unwieldy and weighty object and responsibility). Thus the question of access to and ownership of the CPJ. became a source of conflict within the group and was therefore to a certain extent self-defeating. This matter was raised by the students in their evaluations of the project and by the volunteers who participated in the discussion at the conference presentation, who were also, perhaps inevitably, the ones who took most responsibility for the production of the CPJ.

*'Shortly after these developments, our group hit a snag revolving around some personal disputes between several members of the group. This situation got to the point where a tutor led meeting was called for, and the suggestion made of splitting into two groups. I felt that this was a bad move to make, as our project was set as a 'group' endeavour for all of us to participate in. It should therefore involve us all working together, regardless of personal politics. After much heated debate between those involved in the dispute, I made the suggestion that if any members felt incapable of functioning within the group, they should leave and accept the consequences rather than set up a 'rebel' group, which I felt would have been counter-productive to the task in hand. In the end, it was decided to keep the group together, and many of the tasks were divided in such a way as to avoid those with personal issues working together' (Student evaluation).*

As the project developed, it became increasingly evident that those students who took most responsibility

by acting as coordinators for student led meetings, also took the lead in decision making and the general project management of the exhibition as a whole. This worked well for some, who discovered leadership abilities and gained confidence in the process, while others, whose ideas and contributions did not meet with consensus became disenfranchised and began to opt-out of group work to focus on their own interests. There were also a number of 'passenger' students who were happy to benefit from the work of others, or to be directed towards tasks that needed fulfilling.

We are aware that the research conducted around the CPJ to date had neglected to prepare us for the inevitable issue of group dynamics in this project. Though it is a concern of teaching practice in general, much was learned by us as a result of the additional attention brought to these matters in the work around the group CPJ.

Other matters raised by delegates at the conference workshop concerned student gender and maturity. The student participants at the workshop (all of whom were female and one of whom is a mature student) fielded these questions in terms of their own experience. This contradicted the idea that there had been a gender bias in the sharing of responsibility for the project as a whole, or the CPJ in particular. In retrospect, it is our view that these political matters would bear greater scrutiny and will certainly be of interest to us in our future research. Another broader, though equally pertinent issue that emerged was the tension between our perception of good pedagogic practice in taking an appropriately heuristic approach in this project, (with all the concomitant 'risk' of instructive failure) and managing the public relations concerns of the institution with regard to student work in the public domain.

On balance the group CPJ was a success. As an artefact/document it was admired for its formal qualities and ambitious scale by those conference delegates who attended our session. We feel it occupied the documentary vacuum between the individual student's experience and that of group work - a natural part of which is conflict, hence our title.



The group CPJ

Predictably this work has raised more questions than it has addressed. One key issue raised in student feedback concerned the balance between our guiding and determining direction in a relatively prescriptive manner, and our desire to enable students to take control and be self-determining in their learning. Some students clearly felt underconfident in this respect and wanted us to take more responsibility in directing their experience. Inevitably this balance is always finely struck, and varied between different learner groups and their abilities. Certainly it has become an issue in HE generally, as students increasingly anticipate a mode of learning based on their experience, and currently they tend not to be given an opportunity for this in the early stages of their studies.

Our intention now is to extend the remit of future research in this area to focus further on students' pre-conceived and already learned approaches to the use of the CPJ, looking more closely at how their understandings are shaped

by the experience of pre-degree education and assessment demands. Much more remains to be done.

## References

- Beckett S (1983) *Worstward Ho* (Beckett Shorts vol.1V) Calder Publications, London.
- Belzer H and Birnbaum D (2007) *Teaching Art*, Stadelschule, Frankfurt am Main, Cornerhouse Publications, Manchester.
- Bourriaud N (2002) *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du Reel, Dijon.
- Feyerabend P (1975) *Against method*, Verso, London.
- James H, (1893) 'The Middle Years' in *Collected Stories*, David Campbell Publishers, London.
- Harrison C (2007) 'From a Dark Space' (paper), 'Memory, Narrative, History: the Politics of Representation' Symposium, University of Brighton.
- Ings R (2004) *The Inventive Answer – Thoughts on Creativity and Young People*, Ignite! Nesta Fellowship Project.
- Latour B (2005) *Reassembling the Social, An introduction to Actor- Network-Theory*, Oxford. University Press.
- Law J (2004) *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*, Routledge, New York.
- Mallarmé S (1897) *Un Coup De Dés Jamais N'abolira Le Hazard*, EHRC, France.  
<http://www.tonykline.co.uk/PITBR/French/MallarmeUnCoupdEdes.htm>.
- Meyer J and Land R (2003) 'Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within Disciplines'. *Occasional Report 4*, ETL Project, <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/publications.html>.
- Pigum D A (2007) The 'Ontology' of the artist's studio as workplace: researching the artist's studio and the art/design classroom', *Research in post-compulsory education*, vol.12, no.3, October, 291-307.
- Pigum D and Stables A (2005) 'Qualitative Inquiry as Gegenwerk: Connections between art and research', *International Journal of Qualitative methods*, 4,(4)article 2, available at: [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/4\\_4/pdf/pigum.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/4_4/pdf/pigum.pdf).
- Wareham T (2008) 'Creative graduates: enhancing teaching research in the creative disciplines', briefing paper, *Creative graduates: learning and research in the creative arts* Symposium, HEA/Palatine, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.
- Wittgenstein L (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

## Biographies

**Claire Scanlon** and **Paul Grivell** work together as course leaders on the photography and media arts degrees at Northbrook College, Sussex. Northbrook is an affiliated college of the University of Brighton.

Claire is an exhibiting artist and academic. She has worked as a visiting lecturer and practitioner in a number of HE institutions in London and the South of England. She is interested in how the subjective and experiential nature of aesthetic practice interrogates knowledge.

Paul's background is in photographic education though his interests range widely in the field of arts practices. He has worked in formal and informal education, including primary and secondary schools, further education and in the community. He has particular interests in the role of creativity in education, and the role of education in creativity.

# Deconstructing fashion design: integrating theory and practice in design education

Richard Walker and Steven Dell

---

## Abstract

This project, funded by the Sussex Learning Network, arose from an initial proposal to conduct a broad study evaluating the role of Cultural and Supporting Studies (CASS) in BA (Hons) degree courses in art and design at Northbrook College. This has been focused on the collaboration between myself, Richard Walker, the tutor responsible for the level 1 students' CASS input, and Steven Dell, the course leader of BA (Hons) Fashion Design Course. Our aim has been to plan and assess strategies intended to integrate theory and practice in the delivery of teaching on this course.

---

## Northbrook College

Northbrook College is an FE College in Sussex, which has for over 10 years, developed an expanding HE provision. This is part of the move to a widening franchise in continuing education, which serves a constituency of students with a variety of needs and abilities. These include mature students returning to education, students for whom English is a foreign language and those in need of additional learning support. At Northbrook, as in art and design courses in general, we teach students with a range of academic abilities, many of whom need additional help, particularly given the high percentage of students with dyslexia that is a prominent feature of art and design education.

## The Coldstream Report and the role of art history in art schools

Questions about the relationship between theory and practice in art and design have been part of an ongoing discourse since the Coldstream Report was published in 1960. In reforming art and design education, William Coldstream's committee proposed implementing a three year Diploma in Art and Design which would provide an equivalent level of education to the university sector. In order to ensure this standard the report insisted that 'the history of art should be studied throughout the course and should be examined for the Diploma' (Coldstream 1960). Since the Coldstream Report and the inception of degrees in studio based art and design courses, the role of academic input has continued to be an issue.

In the 1970s, art history and cultural studies were expanded and revised by a variety of theoretical perspectives, including continental philosophy, the political interventions of feminists and Marxists, and the critiques of post-colonialism. This broadened the basis of theoretical and historical input in the art and design curriculum away from a series of narrow canonical 'survey' lectures, the content of which could be criticised for a tendency towards a male, Eurocentric and elitist emphasis. However, it could be argued that this has resulted in such a diversity of approaches, and such a range of theoretical terminology, that it seems to have little relevance to the production of images and objects. Moreover, the specialist knowledge such theory relies upon can lead to divisions between cultures of research and teaching and between academic and practical staff.

Conventionally 'art history', 'cultural' or 'critical studies' have been included in curricula almost as an afterthought - a supplementary activity which is divorced from studio practice in terms of teaching style and delivery. Moreover lecturers in this area are familiar with the perception from students that this may be irrelevant or of low priority in comparison to their practical work. These issues have become prominent in art and design education and have been the focus of pioneering studies undertaken by projects such as

'Writing Purposefully in Art and Design' (Lockheart 2003).

The questions remain then, if art and design studies are to be accorded parity with other awards of higher education degrees, what theoretical input should be taught, how can this be productively and beneficially applied in students practical work, and how might this best be assessed?

## Project aims

The problem of how to make academic research, reading and writing relevant to studio practice is the key issue this project seeks to address. In order to engage with problems arising from the issues outlined above, we have set out to examine the following:

- how can we better integrate theory and practice?
- how can we encourage students to engage with theoretical ideas from textual sources and apply these concepts in their design?
- how can we use reading, writing and discussion to explore the relevance of these ideas?
- what kind of design practice are we aiming for?
- how can we encourage students to become innovative and creative designers?
- how can we improve our own teaching practice to ensure our students continue to improve as designers?

## Integrating theory and practice in fashion design education

The first part of our project to integrate the elements of theory and practice in the curriculum has been focused on a design brief entitled 'Fabric Initiative: Deconstruction'. This is essentially a studio-based project which encourages students to find innovative ways of constructing garments, whilst at the same time developing their familiarity with, and awareness of, the use of fabrics.

The project theme draws on the ideas of Deconstruction Theory as proposed by the French Post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose strategies of literary and philosophical 'deconstruction' have been applied to avant-garde fashion by designers such as the Belgian group the Antwerp Six and Martin Margiela (see figures 1a and 1b over).

## Rationale for applying Deconstruction Theory

There are advantages and disadvantages in setting out to introduce this particular branch of theory to students. We would be the first to admit that these ideas are difficult to understand. Derrida's writing, reflecting, as it often does, on the relationship that words have to meaning, is full of unusual terminology and neologisms. Furthermore these ideas relate to philosophical notions apparently far removed from art and design history or practice.

However as mentioned, there is already a precedent for the application of these ideas in design practice, given the extent to which they influenced fashion designers such as the Antwerp Six and the earlier impact that they had upon architectural design. The term 'Deconstructivist Architecture' has been applied to the work of Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Daniel Libeskind and Frank Gehry and originates from an exhibition of the same name held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1988.

Therefore, introducing the topic provides an opportunity to show students instances of contemporary fashion design practice, to make connections, with their theoretical reference points, and with examples of the congruence of practice within other design fields such as architecture.



Figures 1a and 1b: Slides from Steven Dell's presentation showing the work of Martin Margiela

A further rationale was in the nature of deconstruction as a creative process in itself. Just as Derrida's ideas were developed out of a political critique and presented a challenge to overturn the moribund nature of literary analysis, a deconstructive approach to fashion design encourages students to think critically about fundamental assumptions about clothing and fashion and to subvert conventions or tease out multiple meanings, ambivalence and ambiguity.

### Derrida and Deconstruction theory

Most importantly, in this context, is the method Derrida began to employ and which has come to be known as 'Deconstruction'. This entailed a careful interrogation of texts, through which Derrida sought to unravel their contradictions rather than their consistencies. Through a deconstructive reading, Derrida looked for the 'absence behind presence', that is, what was ambiguous, ambivalent or marginalized within a text. Fundamental ideas were often based on dichotomies, for instance between 'god' and 'man', 'mind' and 'body', 'writing' and 'speech'. Implicit in such binary oppositions, was a hierarchical relationship in which some concepts were 'privileged' whilst others were 'subordinated' (see figure 2b). One strategy Derrida adopts is to reverse this relationship by overturning the terms. However, he is not so much intent on simply replacing one hierarchical relationship with another, rather he is seeking to destabilise the assumed interrelation and produce a 'free-play' in which the meanings shift and vacillate, are 'undecidable', and do not divide easily into categories.

### Deconstruction and design

The link between these apparently esoteric philosophical discussions and design is not immediately apparent. However, since these ideas began to circulate in the 1970s, they have had an impact outside of philosophical circles and have entered the broader arena of discourse, including design practice and critical writing on visual culture. The reflexive and critical nature of a deconstructive approach to architecture, which would subsequently influence fashion too, is well summarised in John A Walker's definition of the term as it applied to design:

'Deconstructivist architects were said to use the critical tactics of Deconstruction in order to question accepted architectural notions of form, function, permanence, harmony, order, meaning and beauty' (Walker 1992).

Just as Derrida questioned the fundamental metaphysical notions which provide the foundations or 'grounding' terms of western philosophy, it is easy to see how designers in any field might seek to question the assumptions underpinning their own disciplines. Since its impact on architecture in the 1970s and 80s, Deconstruction has had an invigorating influence on fashion in the 1980s and 90s, as designers sought to interrogate the fundamental precepts underpinning clothing and fashion.

## Jacques Derrida & Post-Structuralism

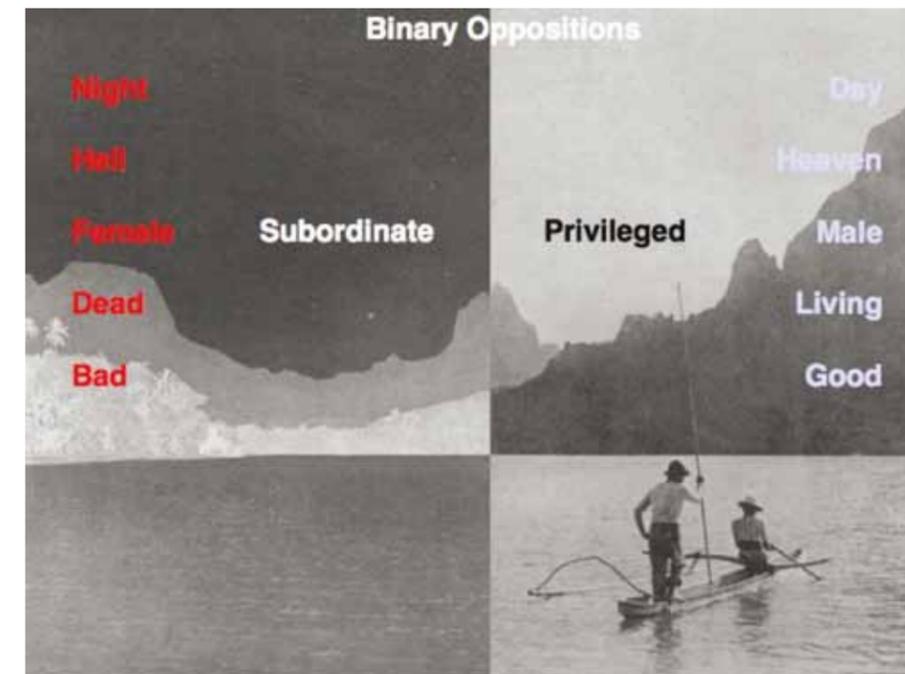
### Binary Oppositions

For Derrida such binary oppositions were important since they were at the core of metaphysical belief. The foundations on which **metaphysics** are based are expressed as oppositions such as 'man' and 'god', 'nature' and 'culture', 'mind' and 'body'.

Furthermore, he argued that such oppositions occupied a **hierarchical relationship**. Certain terms were 'privileged' whilst others were 'subordinate'. For example he observed a preference in traditions of **Western philosophy** to privilege the 'spoken' over the 'written' word.



*We can see how **Binary Oppositions** fit into a **hierarchical relationship of 'privileged' and 'subordinate'...***



Figures 2a and 2b: From Richard Walker's presentation showing Jacques Derrida and Binary Oppositions

This entailed examining formal aspects of construction (seams, hems, linings), notions of 'inside/outside', (underwear/outerwear), conventional generic categories of dress (formal/informal) as well as essential relationships signified through clothing, such as codes of gender, status and origin. Moreover, the reflexivity of such practice often sets out to critique the very nature of fashion and its influence on our social relations and modes of production. As Alison Gill observes in her discussion of the correspondence between fashion and philosophy prompted by the intervention of Deconstruction theory:

'Deconstruction in fashion is something like an auto-critique of the fashion system: It displays an almost X-ray capability to reveal the enabling conditions of fashion, the concepts of ornamentation, glamour, spectacle, illusion, fantasy, creativity, innovation and the principles of its practice through form, material, construction, fabrication, pattern, stitching, finish' (Gill 1988,27).

As well as providing a helpful pathway of reference points to a significant trend in contemporary practice, Deconstruction theory provides a framework of critique through which students can recognise structures inherent in fashion and clothing, both as a system of meaning and as a strategy through which they can derail and reconfigure these signs and structures.

### Project development

The project was planned through a series of meetings between myself as CASS tutor, and Steven Dell, the course leader and tutor for the project. We revised the original project brief and prepared additional materials to provide support and reference for the students. These included PowerPoint briefing presentations from Steven, which focused on the application of Deconstruction theory to design, and from myself, offering an art historical and theoretical overview. These presentations have now been made available as an online resource (figures 1a,1b, 2a and 2b).

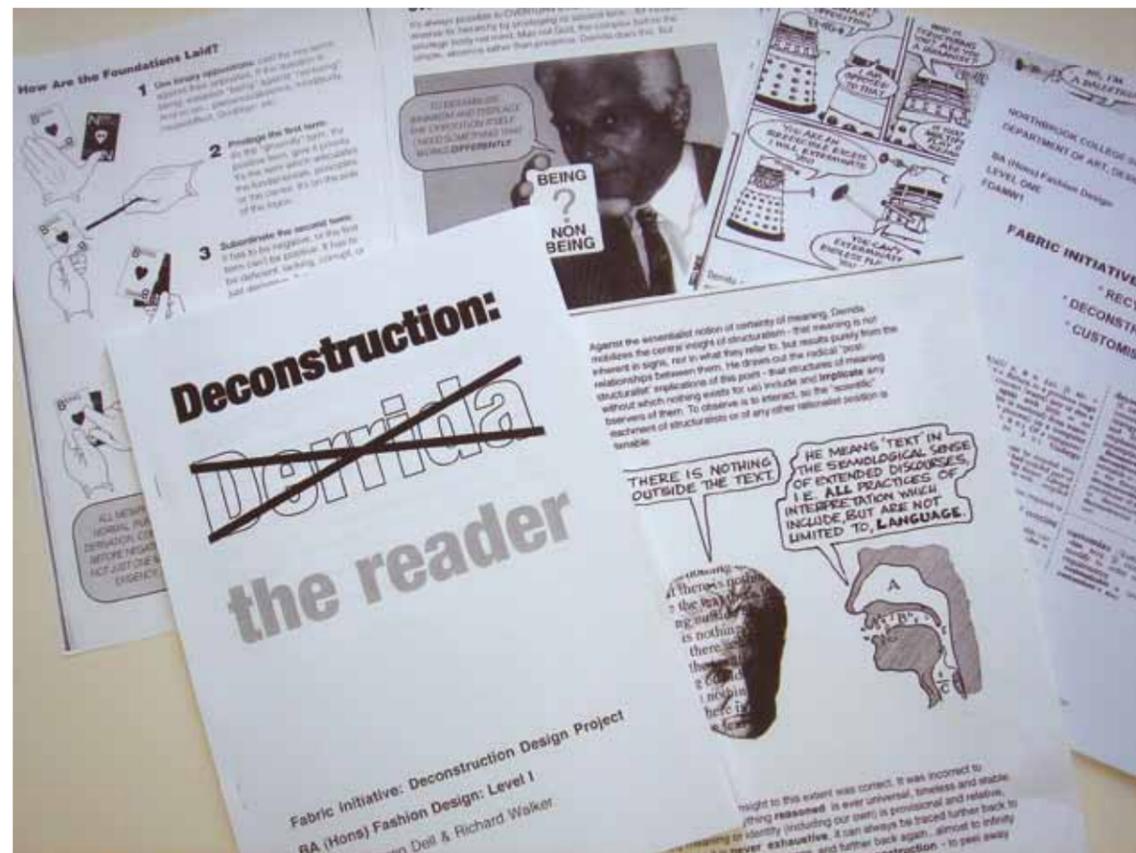


Figure 3: The course reader and related materials

In addition to the project brief, which includes a schedule and details of project requirements, we provided a supplementary glossary of critical terminology, together with a 'reader' with a selection of secondary texts on Derrida and Deconstruction and articles relating to the application of these ideas in a fashion design context. Bearing in mind the visual bias of our students, these have been selected with the aim of providing relatively accessible short segments of reading, which are also prominently illustrated (see figure 3). In both these instances we are hoping to encourage students to understand theory through presenting it in a visually stimulating way. As the *Writing PAD* primer observes; 'can there be more integration of the visual - which can be 'read' with the writing?' (Lockheart 2003).

### Deconstruction project studio sessions: radical recycling and reconstruction

Studio sessions featured visiting lecturers such as J J Hudson (aka Noki) and Robert de Niet, a senior lecturer in Graphic Design at Epsom, who helped students to prepare digital illustrations of design ideas. Like his clothes, J J's company name *Noki* makes an iconoclastic revision of existing elements (ie the name reverses the word 'ikon'). Finding used and disfigured branded clothes, J J reconstructs, reconfigures and recombines these into recycled one-off garments that subtly subvert the brand image. Working with the students directly on blocks, (dressmaker's mannequins) J J helps students reconfigure discarded garments from sources such as charity shops. By presenting recycling, deconstruction and reconstruction as a radical and subversive strategy, he provides a practical example of how students can apply the theoretical aspects of deconstruction to undermine expectations about the design and construction of clothing.

### Project outcomes and evaluation

One of the initial tasks students were asked to complete for assessment was a visual illustration of their 'Design concept' accompanied by a brief written abstract of the themes and the ideas these referred to. These illustrations on A2 sheets (see figures 4a and 4b), were scanned so that the students could use the data projector to present them to staff and students during seminar presentations. These sessions were supplemented by tutorial and seminar input from Steven and myself, some of which were documented



Figures 4a and 4b: Rhea Field's design concept boards



**Jodi McGee: Warphenia**

Oppositions: *Establishment / Sub Culture*  
*Uniform / Fashion*  
*Masculine / Feminine*

Grafting

**Anna Moxon: You've got sole**

Oppositions: *Bottom / Top*                      *Grafting & Displacement*  
*Function / Decorative*

Overturing: *Footwear / Clothing (Privilege / Subordinate)*

Figures 5a, 5b, 5c and 6a, 6b, 6c: Student Deconstruction project from Jodi McGee; Warphenia, exploring the oppositions between the fashionable, sub-cultural style of the Mods and the uniformity of military garments

Figures 7a, 7b, 7c and 8a, 8b, 8c: Student Deconstruction project from Anna Moxon; You've Got Sole, based on 'overturing' the relationship between costume and accessories, 'grafting' the functional qualities of the training shoe onto a shirt as decorative elements

on video. We conducted tutorials with students so that they could consolidate, reflect and evaluate their progress with the project. As well as the final designs, which are the practical outcomes of the project, these tutorials focused on refining a short statement, or abstract, elaborating their theoretical approach to their completed designs. We also asked the students to reflect on the relation between these different aspects of their work (see figures 5,6,7 and 8 for project examples).

**Outcomes**

We are very pleased with the standard of work that resulted from the project. As usual, the assessment of student work resulted in a range of grades. However, the overall standard shows a high degree of technical accomplishment and creative design. Formative assessment was based on the evidence

of research, documentation, development and preparation before the final production of garments. Therefore students were not simply assessed on their completed design but on the design process involved in reaching it.

**Feedback and documentation**

The final phase of the project involved giving the students a questionnaire designed to enable us to assess their responses and level of engagement with the work, together with their familiarity with the theoretical ideas that were introduced. Another aspect of documenting and reflecting on the students' experience of the project, was a series of video interviews with a selection of participating students.

## Questionnaires

Feedback from the questionnaires shows that students were happy with the presentation of the project and the supporting materials, although as one student remarked 'there was a lot to take in'. However, whilst they found these ideas and concepts challenging and hard to understand, they also found them productive and stimulating. Another student remarked:

*'even though there was room for improvement I tend to remember the terms which I found interesting and [that] sparked ideas'*

Moreover most students have stated that the project has changed their approach to designing in the future and given them a more analytical framework for creating inventive design outcomes:

*'I wasn't familiar with the concept of deconstruction, it allows room for experimentation'*.

The fact that students had overcome the difficulty of the material in the project and became acquainted with the terms was made evident by the way in which they discussed their work in the interviews. For the sake of brevity, one of these responses is summarised as a sample case study, although all of those interviewed had interesting comments to make.

## Student Case Study

### Helena Terhani

In selecting her themes of life and death and the way in which these have been variously signified through costume in Eastern and Western culture, Helena's notions of oppositions were more obviously connected. As she explained her choice:

*'The title for my project was 'Steps Before Life and Steps After Death', the themes I used for the basis of my project research were; funerals and birth, christening gowns and .... things associated with life and death .... The concepts I used from the deconstruction work were binary oppositions using colour; black and white as a main focus and also with the materials using Ava lace incorporated into my work, as opposed to making into a funeral garment and predominantly black. The oppositions I used were black and white and life and death. I used the Chinese tradition of reincarnation as one of my main focuses, because they use white at their funerals with the opposites of the Western Culture, which uses black'.*

In common with the other students, as well as engaging with deconstruction, Helena was demonstrating a more elementary theoretical concept from semiotic theory, that images and objects, even the choice of materials, can carry symbolic connotations. Encouraging such sensitivity to materials and the ideas they might convey, through choices in the design process, was one of the main aims of the brief. Although her conclusions about the implications of Derrida's theories of Deconstruction with regard to the metaphysical aspects of life and death could be challenged, it is nevertheless notable that Helena was considering how to explore and express philosophical questions through her work. For her, the interpretation of these ideas implied that:

*'life and death doesn't just stop at life and death, it is just a cycle, it's the life cycle, it has to be accepted'.*

Helena's response to the brief, and her remarks during our interview, confirmed an unexpected bonus to encouraging students to consider theoretical aspects of research to this extent. Helena explained that her design work had a personal and emotional significance:

*'It was a personal project for myself, because I had lost someone close to me and they were quite young when they passed away .... It was my grieving and I wanted to bring it into a project*

*for myself .... Deconstruction .... actually helped that mourning process because it tells you that life and death doesn't just stop at life and death, it is just a cycle, it's the life cycle, it has to be accepted .... it helped that little bit more .... it was good to bring it through to the project. It became more of a relief for me as opposed to just working on a project. At the beginning I didn't really do work with feeling into it .... but I think since this I have put a lot more of my feelings and personal stuff into my work. Which is a little bit scary because then you're pieces become a part of you, which I never really did before. I thought that's your work and then you have your personal life. But my work is me now ....'*

Finally, Helena was amongst other students who articulated our most ambitious aim in this project, that by incorporating theory and practice, students can develop a conscious strategy for designing which helps them explore ideas creatively.



Figure 9: Helena's fabric board

*'I think theory and practice is like the phenomenal foundation, of the whole thing. If you don't incorporate both theory and practice, I think, for me, I wouldn't have been able to have done what I did and now be approaching and developing my abilities any further because I wouldn't actually have that foundation'.*

## Conclusions

In terms of documenting and evaluating the project, the video interviews were a surprisingly rich source of reflection and discussion between students and staff, providing insights not only into individual student's work, but also the issues raised by the project and its implementation. The feedback provided in student video interviews highlighted several key benefits from the integration of theory and practice:

- The deconstruction project enabled students to make connections between what might have been haphazard, visual juxtapositions and provided the theoretical framework to interpret what these things might signify and begin to communicate meaning themselves. Students gained confidence and an increasing ability to 'read' design and to critically analyse meanings within fashion and clothing.

- Students were encouraged to read more as well as understand the importance of reading, especially where visual research is supported through greater knowledge of chosen research/subject themes.
- The project provided students with a solid foundation of theoretical and analytical approaches that can be developed and applied to new projects.
- The project also highlighted and fostered a personal and emotional culture within the students approach to both theory and practice.

### Reflections on the project

In concluding the project, evaluating its outcomes and preparing material to disseminate our findings, Steven and I were struck by a number of ways in which we can use the theoretical methods we encouraged students to explore, to reflect on the relationship between theory and practice as it is taught in art and design education in institutions such as ours. We have included these thoughts in a figure we used to conclude our presentation of findings.

It is worth noting that one of Derrida's preoccupations was with the value accorded to speech over that of writing. As we have seen in the summaries above, in order to elevate the qualifications of art and design courses, academic studies have been integrated into the curriculum. These subjects have often been taught in isolation, in different teaching environments, with different staff and different learning outcomes. In contrast to philosophical traditions, there has also been an emphasis on the written word, particularly as it can be examined through academic writing such as essays and dissertations and

given priority over verbal expression. In this project we have sought to narrow the gaps between the activities of thinking, speaking and writing with that of making. In many senses we have just scratched the surface. However, in the attempt to integrate these activities we are learning from our students. An unexpected and rewarding by-product of these efforts has been the video interviews with students. These bridge a gap between formal and informal reflection on the students' work and provide a form of documentation which we hope to use as examples for the next cohort of students. It is one instance of the way in which the methodology of our research practice has changed the nature of our teaching. In future practice, and in collaborations on further research, we would hope to challenge the established relationships between the conventional oppositions represented in figure 10 (above). We would seek to question these false dichotomies, by 'overturning' the apparently natural character of their hierarchical relationship and in so doing, provide new avenues for students and staff to explore creative and imaginative projects.

#### Implications: further research

This project has raised a number of issues, which on reflection we might apply a 'deconstructive' approach to. These would involve challenging the assumptions founded on the relationships between:

Theory	Practice
Academic	Studio practice
Lecturer/teacher	Student
Classroom/lecture theatre	Studio/workshop
Writing	Speech
Concept/idea/abstract	Concrete/object/design
Intellectual/mental	Physical/practical/haptic
Theoretical/objective/detached	Personal/subjective/emotional
Research/Researcher	Teacher/learner

Figure 10: The project findings

### Bibliography

- Burlington Magazine (1962) 'Art History in Art Schools' no.716, November, 451.
- Coldstream W M (1960) *First Report of the National Advisory Council on Art Education*, HMSO, London.
- Derrida J (1978) *Writing and Difference*, Bass A (trans.) Routledge, London.
- Durgnat R (1969) 'Art Schools: the Continuing Malaise' in *Art and Artists*, vol.4 no.7, October, 6-8 and no.8, November, 4-6.
- Gill A (1998) *Deconstruction Fashion: The Making of Unfinished, Decomposing and Re-assembled Clothes in Fashion Theory*, vol.2, Issue 1, London.
- Osborne R (1992) *Philosophy for Beginners, Writers and Readers*, New York.
- Quinn M (2006) 'Art History and the Art School - the Sensibilities of Labour', Association of Art Historians Conference, Leeds, 7 April 2006.
- Raatz C and Project Team (2002) 'Primer report', *Writing Purposefully in Art & Design*, <http://www.writingpad.ac.uk>.
- Symonds H (2005) 'Designing effective curriculum for dyslexic students within Art and Design in Higher Education', Discussion Paper for *Writing Purposefully in Art & Design* [http://www.writingpad.ac.uk/index.php?path=photos/20\\_Resources/07\\_Discussion Papers/11 Designing effective curriculum for dyslexic students within Art and Design in Higher Education/](http://www.writingpad.ac.uk/index.php?path=photos/20_Resources/07_Discussion%20Papers/11%20Designing%20effective%20curriculum%20for%20dyslexic%20students%20within%20Art%20and%20Design%20in%20Higher%20Education/).
- Walker J (1992) *Glossary of Art, Architecture and Design since 1945*, Hall G K, Boston.

### Exhibitions

- 'Skin+Bones: *Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, (2008) The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, exhibited in Somerset House, London.
- Deconstructivist Architecture* (1988) Museum of Modern Art.

### Biographies

**Steven Dell** studied fashion at Epsom School of Art and Design and since graduating in 1990, has had a successful career as a designer within the fashion industry. He launched his own company Jensens Dainties in 1998, an eccentric British knitted underwear and fashion label, sold through exclusive boutiques and department stores throughout the: UK, USA, Japan, Sweden, France and Italy. The label has received press coverage in the fashion magazines: ID, Vogue, The Face, Dazed & Confused and US Vogue and featured in the 'Inside Out' exhibition at the Design Museum, organised by the British Council.

Since 2004, Steve has been the programme leader of the BA (Hons) Fashion Design course at Northbrook College, where he focuses on the development and teaching of fashion education that nurtures creativity and innovation. He has worked in academia for over ten years as a senior lecturer in fashion studies at the Surrey Institute, London College of Fashion and Ravensbourne College of Art & Design.

Formerly an itinerant saxophonist and freelance illustrator, **Richard Walker** has taught cultural studies and design history for the last twenty years at various levels from foundation to masters. This has included teaching at Middlesex University, Wimbledon College of Art and Northbrook College, where he is based. His research interests include the way in which identity is expressed through visual culture, and the impact that technology has on the way we understand and represent the world around us.

# Using podcasts and videocasts to complement traditional teaching methods

Derek Covill and Deshinder Singh Gill

## Abstract

Podcasts and videocasts (a recording of a lecture with audio and video content) are valuable teaching resources which provide a flexible and engaging learning environment and accommodate a wider variety of learning styles. Getting students to generate videocasts of their work can give teachers a valuable insight into how students approach problems and the depth and breadth of their knowledge in the relevant subject area. A database of student videocasts can encourage a community approach in learning, where students can learn from the knowledge, tips, dead ends, tricks and approaches of their peers. Practical issues associated with the use of online teaching material and assessment methods are included. Key issues to consider include the perpetuation of course content and logistical issues such as file sizes, recording times and techniques of recording.

## Introduction

Kolb (1984) provides a digestible cyclic model for experiential learning which highlights that the learning process can begin with any of the key stages in this cycle. These key stages in the cycle are: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Figure 1). The cyclic model suggests that an experience of 'doing' is not necessary for learning to take place, but the stages must be followed in sequence for the learning to be successful.

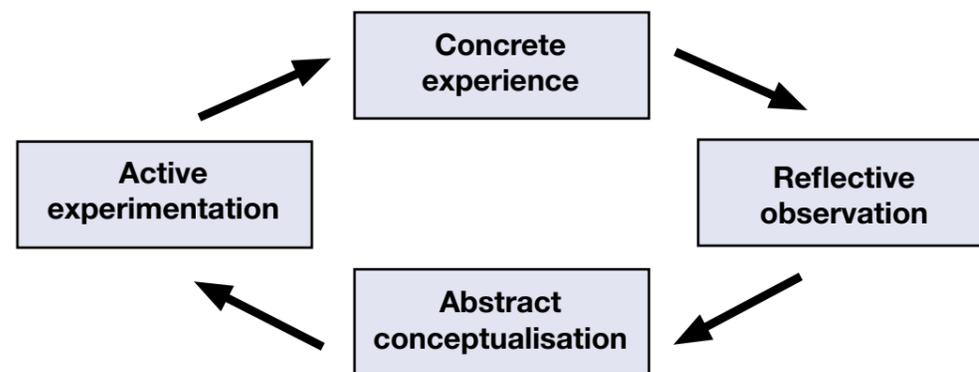


Figure 1 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb 1984)

As educators we have a responsibility to accommodate as many student learning styles in our delivery and assessment as possible. In some cases not all styles are being accommodated. As a result students miss out on key stages in their learning according to the Kolb cycle. This may be the case for a variety of reasons, such as existing traditions in teaching specific subjects, large class sizes, a lack of awareness of teaching staff, and perceived time constraints restricting change.

This paper looks at issues surrounding the implementation of such a cycle in our programmes of teaching engineering and design at the University of Brighton in the School of Environment and Technology. It can be broken into three main parts. The first stage looks at the effect of introducing online learning methodology into the learning cycle. The second looks at the effects of multiple iterations of the cycle on the learning process, with an emphasis on new assessment strategies and techniques. The third stage looks at the practical issues associated with the use of online teaching material and assessment methods.

## Recording lectures

Traditional lectures have their place in giving information to a large number of students. For smaller classes, lectures can become more interactive. One way to support the learning for the student is to record live lectures and the interaction that follows. This can be done using 'podcasts' (audio only) and 'videocasts', a term we have used to describe a recording of a lecture with audio and video content. Once in electronic form, the podcasts and videocasts are easily publishable in standard Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) such as Blackboard.

In our school some students have little time at their disposal. Spare time is often spent working to provide financial support for their studies. Consequently, students have less time to interact with tutors after lectures to seek clarification. Some students find that they cannot attend some lectures because of personal difficulties. Making a recording of the lectures can help to alleviate such problems. It is our belief that teaching material that is recorded live in a lesson and uploaded to an online resource gives flexibility and freedom. Students can access taught material in their own time and they can do this remotely from their home or when travelling. Anecdotally, these strategies support students, and they feel this complements rather than supplements such delivery methods (Covill et al 2008).

This approach, despite initial investments of time, can also save educators time in the long term. Covill et al (2008) demonstrates the value of publishing 'how to' guides to using software. This approach can be adapted for standard lectures, software demonstrations and can be used in creative assessment methods to support the Kolb Learning Cycle.

## Podcasts

Several methods were used to make an audio recording. These included using a specialist audio recorder (dictaphone), a palm top computer, an onboard microphone in a laptop and using a lapel microphone with the audio recorder. The most appropriate method was found to be the audio recording device (dictaphone). This device was very easy to use, had an indicator when recording was on, and saved the files in a standard MP3 format, which made it very convenient and easy to upload to the VLE. Students could then download the audio files and play them from the PC speakers or portable MP3 player. Although this was a helpful resource for reviewing lectures, several limitations were highlighted with the audio-only format:

- timing the transition between slides with the audio was difficult (unless prompted verbally)
- coordinating the slideshow with the use of the whiteboard during the lecture was difficult.

## Camtasia and videocasts

Students appreciated the use of audio podcasts, but with their knowledge and awareness of online video technology they began to request videocasts. A recently invented software package called Camtasia Studio by Techsmith records lectures with slideshows, and provided a remarkably convenient facility to enable us to respond to this request. Camtasia allowed us to record keystrokes and slides projected onto the big screen so students could have a permanent audio and visual record of what was done in the lecture. This was adapted to include a webcam video stream for activity on the whiteboard. Although easily implemented in Camtasia, this required considerable editing later.

Figure 2 is a screenshot of the generic options in Camtasia, including screen or window recording, audio only, a PowerPoint slideshow, or importing media (audio, video, images etc) from elsewhere. This figure also provides an option to open recent Camtasia projects and gives links to tutorials for getting started with Camtasia, how to record material, how to edit material, how to produce as a usable video file, and how to share with others.



Figure 2 Camtasia studio options

The layout of Camtasia is shown in figure 3 below: the options for adding material, editing and producing the video are shown on the left, the clip bin with all the material ready to use in the centre, a preview of the video on the right, and the timeline with audio, video, and other tracks (extra audio, video, transitions, images etc) is shown along the bottom.

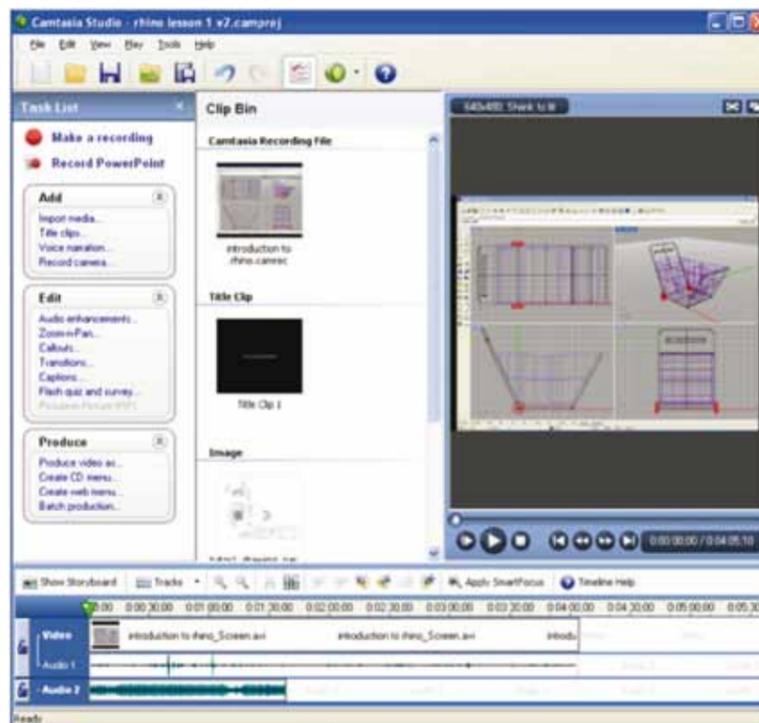


Figure 3 The Camtasia studio interface

Figure 4a (below) shows a screenshot of the video taken from the webcam attached to the laptop, b) illustrates the facility for the lecturer to highlight a section of a word document projected on the screen, and c) illustrates that one can combine both the video of the whiteboard as well as the projected screen. All of these were part of the same lecture.



Figure 4 Camtasia screen shots a) full screen video only b) project screen only, c) both shown simultaneously.

Figure 5 shows the presentation of content on studentcentral for this electrical engineering module. It is advisable to describe the contents of the multimedia file in the titles where possible, for example describing the content as being a topic in Digital Television (DTV).

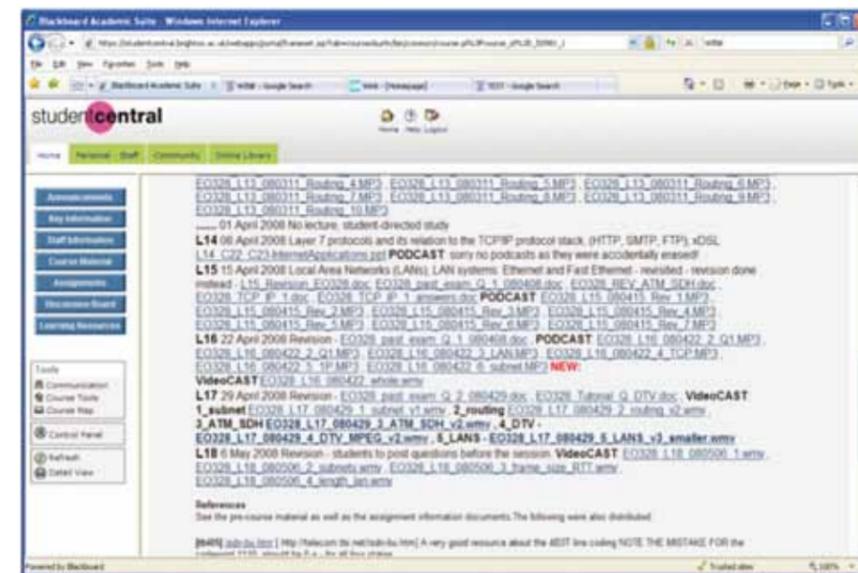


Figure 5 Publication of the podcasts and videocasts on studentcentral

Using podcasts and videocasts with blogs in teaching this module has enabled students to adopt a more interactive and flexible approach to their learning. Students can effectively enter the cycle at any stage, rather than having the entry point prescribed by the lecture content. Feedback can be sought from staff via the blog and students can access the teaching material at any time. Students are encouraged to reflect on the learning that takes place in the lecture and during the subsequent activities. A tailored version of Kolb's cycle for this electrical engineering module illustrates how blogs are used to complement the videocasts and podcasts to promote further learning. This is shown in Figure 6.

#### Assessed student activity

Whilst podcasts and videocasts can be used to assist and even promote learning, they can also be used to assess student learning. In another module called 'Communication' for first year product design

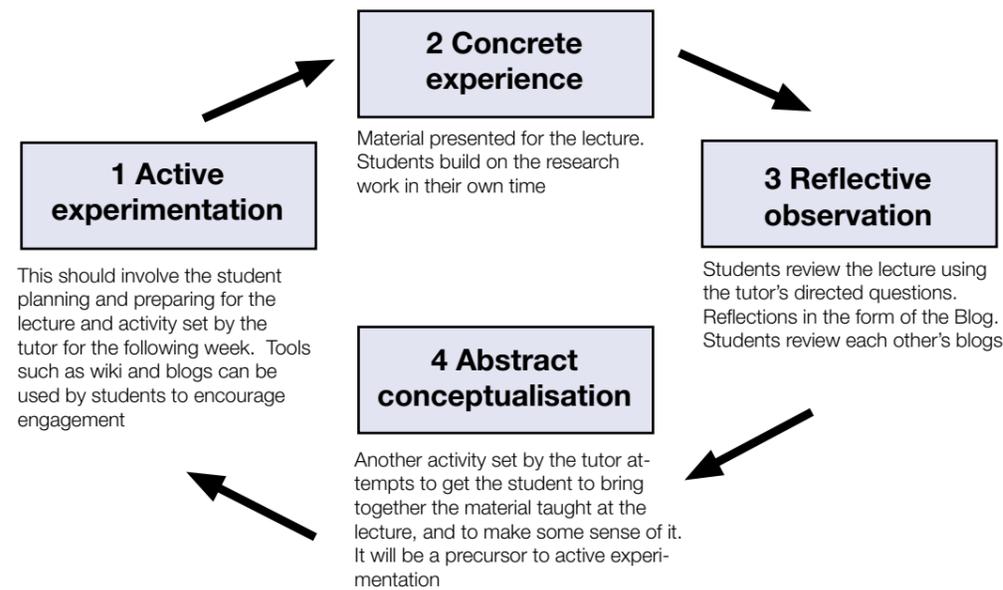


Figure 6 The revised Kolb cycle for the electrical engineering module

students, videocasts, as well as being used by teaching staff to record lectures, were also introduced to assess student work in Computer Aided Design (CAD) work.

In previous years, this module only involved two types of assessment: the group presentation/report and the individual portfolio of CAD work. This year however, students were also required to produce an online demonstration of a CAD model. The rationale for this was based on the limited information that could be gathered from a CAD portfolio: how was it created? was this approach correct? could it be created more efficiently? was it even the work of that student? Although most of these issues could be addressed by getting the student to state their approach and by working closely with the students on their CAD work, much more detailed information could be gathered by getting students to produce their own online demonstration. Furthermore, it was reasoned that if students were able to share and discuss their videocasts, then they would be able to learn from each other as well as from the teacher. Students were shown how to use the software and were introduced to the online tutorials provided by the software developers. Students were required to submit their videocasts to the online discussion board on studentcentral (Blackboard). Guidelines were given (similar to the ones used by the teacher above) for preparing (planning, rehearsing), editing (mistakes are acceptable, but no swearing) and producing (file type, size, resolution, frame rate) the videos. This facility allowed students to comment on each others' work, and staff were able to provide feedback and grade the work.

After a slow response students engaged with the assessment well, and produced some informative videocasts. In fact, the videocasts gave such an insight into the approaches, tools used, and shortcomings in the students' work that it was a valuable opportunity to provide feedback. It was often the case that students were able to demonstrate a new feature that proved useful to them but which hadn't been covered in class. They were pleased to be promoting the use of these to their peers, and this provided an obvious sense of satisfaction. The assessment was particularly timely for students, since they were in the process of developing their portfolios and this feedback could be directly implemented in their modelling, and also since they could gauge where other students were at in their understanding of the package. They were then ultimately exposed to a variety of new techniques, tools and approaches and information on these could be accessed at any time. A rich variety of student work included: a glossy finish to a fully packaged frisbee with labels, a set of lit traffic lights, a toy robot and the application of light types.

The criteria for this assessment included the following:

- clarity and coherence of voiceover
- clarity of presentation structure
- level of detail in discussion

These were chosen to ensure that students paid attention to how they presented themselves and their work and how they structured and prepared their presentation. It also placed an emphasis on their critical awareness of the package in terms of options available, alternative approaches, and the limitations of various tools.

By getting students to produce a small portfolio and develop their own videocasts of their work we are effectively giving them the opportunity to go around the Kolb cycle twice. Firstly, when they are learning to use the CAD software they are exposed to various techniques and are required to reflect as they learn and to produce a portfolio of work. They are then required to go around again, as they communicate their work in a different manner as a video for others to learn from. An added advantage of this is that they are also required to peer assess each other, and this gives them an opportunity to learn from others in the group. They gain a variety of perspectives, learn a variety of tips and techniques and also learn from the mistakes of others. This is potentially a very powerful and empowering approach to learning CAD (and of course, other skill and knowledge based areas). However, there are potential traps to note, including the danger of excluding slower learners or those whose communication skills aren't adequate.

#### Discussion of practical issues

The fundamental premise for this paper was to introduce and evaluate the use of online material in teaching and assessing, with the aim of improving the student learning experience and supporting the use of the Kolb cycle. It is believed that overall, students responded well to the podcasts and videocasts and that this enabled them to develop skills more efficiently and more interactively with other students and with the teacher. A positive outcome was that none of these students felt that online demonstrations should supplement the live equivalent. The reasons given for this were mostly that they were able to ask questions (Covill et al 2008). Whether or not students will respond in the same way should the online demonstrations be more interactive or should the novelty of this exercise wear off, remains to be seen. It is doubtful, however, that this would be the case, especially for first year students and since the classes themselves were interactive rather than being delivered as a straight lecture. Having easily accessible and hence easily shareable material available to students can potentially leave teachers vulnerable to intense scrutiny and may be shared outside of the context of the institution leading to intellectual property issues. However, with careful planning of material (and since students themselves can develop online demonstrations) it is thought that they may take more responsibility and ownership with how they respond to this activity.

For those students generating videocasts (who for reasons of illness, disability or a difficulty in learning) progress more slowly than others in the group, isolation may result from such an activity. This was highlighted by a number of comments which may have been flippant or intentional but did highlight that students may feel more despondent as a result of this activity. Nonetheless, it is an issue worth addressing by teaching in a responsive and supporting manner, working closely with students.

Generating such material would ensure that new staff would have a better idea of how to take over a module from a retiring member of staff if such recordings were made available. It was also found that using recorders which produce MP3 files saved a significant amount of time in the post processing stage. Audacity is a package that can be used for further post-processing of the podcasts. It is advisable to name the files appropriately to reflect the content of the file and to ease selection.

The online videocasts were a novelty for students and they responded well to those made available online by the teacher and other students. It was generally felt that these tools added value to the traditional teaching methods of live lectures and written tutorials, and enhanced the students' learning experience. In cases where students generated their own videocasts, they were able to gauge their progress against that of others and could learn something in doing so. It is believed that the teacher and peer videocasts also allowed the students to progress faster and with more insight into the approaches, techniques and tools available in these packages. One danger to be aware of is the isolation of students who for one reason or another fail to progress at the same rate as others.

### Conclusion

The authors have demonstrated the use of podcasts and videocasts using two different approaches; lecture led and student led. Both were found to engage students by accommodating a wide variety of learning approaches and also by enabling a flexible, reflective approach to learning according to the Kolb cycle. By using videocasts in assessing students, teachers receive a valuable insight into how students approach problems and the depth and breadth of their knowledge in the relevant subject area. Furthermore, a database of student videocasts encourages a community approach in learning, where students can learn from the knowledge, tips, dead ends, tricks and approaches of their peers. This method in conjunction with traditional assessment methods can allow students an extra iteration of the Kolb cycle, giving them access to a richer learning experience.

### References

- Covill D, Katz T, Morris R (2008) Teaching and assessing CAD using online demonstrations, *EPDE08: New Perspectives in Design Education*, vol.2,681-686.
- Kolb D (1984) *Experiential Learning*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- Salmon G (2000) *E-moderating – A Key to Teaching and Learning Online*, Kogan Page, London, London.
- Salmon G (2004) 'All things in moderation' (based on the book by Gilly Salmon, *E-tivities - The key to online learning*) available at <http://www.atimod.com/e-tivities/intro.shtml>. Accessed 5 July 2008.
- Salmon G and Edirisingha P (2006) *E-tivities and Podcasting (the IMPALA model)*, Handout and Reminders: Have a go yourself! available at <http://www2.le.ac.uk/projects/impala/documents/useful-documents/e-tivitieswithpodcastingmay106.doc>. Accessed 5 July 2008.
- <http://www.camtasia.com/camtasia.asp>. Web link to download a trial copy of Camtasia. Accessed 5 July 2008.
- <http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/experience.htm>. Source of the diagram for the Kolb model. Accessed 5 July 2008.
- [http://www.resources.scalingtheheights.com/Kolb per cent20Cycle.htm](http://www.resources.scalingtheheights.com/Kolb%20per%20cent20Cycle.htm). Web resource highlighting Kolb's cycle Accessed 5 July 2008.

### Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creativity (CETL-C) fund at the Universities of Brighton and Sussex.

### Biographies

**Dr Derek Covill** is a senior lecturer in the Division of Engineering and Product Design in the School of Environment and Technology (SET). His areas of expertise lie in computer aided design/engineering, finite element analysis, heat transfer and mechanics of solids. He is a keen sportsman and an urban shepherd.

**Dr Deshinder Singh Gill** is a principal lecturer in the Division of Engineering and Product Design in SET. He has been involved in a number of initiatives using new technology in enhancing the student learning experience, including another project funded by CETL-C using BLOGS to encourage creative reflective practice using studentprofile.

## A journey into the use of online assessment in higher education

Pippa Hillen

---

### Abstract

This paper explores the challenges encountered in implementing online assessment in a level 2 public health module taken by student nurses. There was a need to ensure that the use of an online examination and an assessed blog would effectively assess whether the module learning outcomes had been achieved. Such concerns on the part of module team members needed acknowledgement. Support from the Information Technology team was invaluable and literature searching helped to place the project in context.

Student feedback was captured during delivery: in module evaluations, through their performance in the assessments, and in a research project. The online examination ensured that students needed to engage with the whole of the module content. The use of assessed online discussion was enjoyed by students and challenged them to critically use and share resources available on the internet and in hard copy. The research can now be placed in the context of an established assessment experienced by six cohorts of students.

---

### Introduction

This paper explores a journey through the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the use of online assessment within a level 2 public health module. The journey was sometimes painful but has resulted in an assessment that both students and lecturers enjoy using. The assessment provides an innovative alternative to the traditional essay form of summative assessment. The paper draws on a small piece of research on the reaction of the first cohort of students to undertake this different form of assessment, which is now established within the Diploma in Nursing course.

The journey was challenging. No one in the public health team had previous experience of using e-assessment within the curriculum. Developing the assessment challenged us to debate how module learning outcomes could be tested in non-traditional ways. It meant working closely with Information Technology (IT) colleagues and developing new skills in order to make effective use of the interface within a managed learning environment.

### Background

The literature demonstrates how many different universities and faculties are exploring how learning technology can form an integral part of learning, teaching, and assessing in higher education by enhancing rather than compromising standards (PASS-IT Project 2004; Clamers and McAusland 2003; Nicol 2008). Blended delivery (Gulc 2006) enables face to face teaching to be combined with the use of virtual learning communities within discussion boards, blogs, and wiki wikis (Dron 2006; Wilson and Whitelock 1998; Maier and Warren 2002) and by the use of formative computer assisted assessment (CAA) (Cox and Clark 2006). The latter gives students feedback on their learning and enables them to feel prepared for summative CAA (Lowry 2005). The testing out of questions formatively enables lecturers to ensure that the questions are challenging and fair (Harper 2003).

### Using Blackboard

The team worked with the brief of developing a web-based assessment. Time with IT colleagues identified what might be possible using the available managed learning environment of Blackboard.

Time was spent identifying what kinds of questions could be marked electronically and considering the potential for assessing student contributions to an online discussion. Question types selected included multiple choice, multiple answers, matching questions, jumbled sentences, and true-false questions.

IT colleagues highlighted ways in which Blackboard can minimise marks awarded for opportunistic guessing (Harper 2003) by using a system of negative marking for question types such as multiple answers. This judicious use of partial credit can be used to prevent the weakest students achieving a 40 per cent pass mark. Advice was sought from learning support staff in Student Services to ensure that the questions were written and presented in a way that would be accessible to students with identified learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. The module leader also consulted widely with subject specialists, students, the examinations officer, the external examiner, and other colleagues.

The literature makes it clear that online assessment is labour intensive initially and requires considerable commitment from academic subject specialists and support from IT specialists (Chalmers and McAusland 2003). It is possible to write objective tests that assess higher levels of learning but this requires skill (PASS-IT Project 2004). The literature identifies a diverse academic community who are sharing their work on how to enhance learning and assessment using learning technology (International Conference on elearning ICEL 2006). It has been helpful meeting with colleagues across and outside the university at events such as the elearning pathfinder events.

### Supporting quality learning

Members of the team needed to feel assured that questions marked online were capable of assessing understanding and analysis as well as recall of knowledge (Bothel et al 2002). Creating the pools of questions created debate about how module team members taught, and what knowledge and understanding was considered most important (Brown and Glasner 2003; Maier and Warren 2002). It also raised questions about how much the assessment determines what and how we teach or facilitate (Albon 2003). Some members could see the value of formative online questions but had more difficulty with a summative online exam (Cox and Clark 2006).

The questions were informally piloted with students at the proposer's base site and with academic staff from the module team, and beyond in a mock exam and a test area on studentcentral. Some of the initial piloting indicated that this type of assessment would require the students to have breadth of knowledge across the module and also indicated that computer marked questions could test higher level knowledge by requiring students to apply knowledge to context, to analyse data, and to discriminate between several possible right answers.

### Potential pitfalls

The literature warns that the use of learning technology can be threatening and challenging for staff at least as much as for their students (Lauder et al 1998; Blair 2002; Atack and Rankin 2002; Fox 1996; Taylor 2003; JISC 2007). Innovators and early adopters of online learning and assessment may meet some resistance from colleagues at least initially (Bach, Haynes and Smith 2007). It was essential to allow space and time for module team members to express doubts and anxieties. Leading the project through the development stage was demanding and could feel lonely.

It is important to demonstrate that innovation has been introduced in order to enhance learning rather than for financially pragmatic reasons (Gardner, Sheridan and White 2002; McDowell and Sambell in Brown and Glasner 2003; Habeshaw, Gibbs and Habeshaw 1993) and that the students' experience of using online learning is evaluated and researched (Baggott and Payne 2004). The team needed to be sure that the assessment would be a fair way of assessing level 2 work. There were concerns about how easily students and lecturers would be able to engage with e-assessment and about the possibility of the technology failing.

### How the assessment works

Students are assessed on their contribution within a shared blog on an identified public health issue. This is set up on the first day of the module. It is hoped that the online discussion within the blog facilitates students across sites collaborating together to share and reflect on their developing knowledge of a public health issue (Hammond 1998; Maor 2003). Students contribute to the blog during the taught module using allocated guided study time (Maier and Warren 2002) and are supported by optional group tutorials. They present and discuss their blogs in small groups on the last day of the module, providing the opportunity for academic debate and for formative feedback from peers and the facilitating lecturer. The blog is marked using a level 2 marking grid adapted for use with the blog as agreed at the Course Board and by the external examiner.

The first cohort of students had been alerted to the type of assessment in the pre-registration newsletter and had participated in a blog during the previous six months. They had experience of doing some sample questions in a taught session and in a formative test area on studentcentral during the module. A considerable amount of learning material had been placed on studentcentral alerting the students to useful areas to revise for the exam. The taught IT session includes the setting of ground rules (Wilson and Whitelock 1998) for participating in the blog and advice on undertaking the exam.

The assessed blog was completed during the two week intensive module and an online exam with over 20 different types of questions was taken three months later. Questions were selected from the question pool by the module team to ensure coverage of the module content and that papers contained questions of equal difficulty. 10 per cent of the marks are given for the blog and 90 per cent for the examination. A mark of 40 per cent overall is a pass, and high marks for the blog can enable a student with a borderline examination failure to pass the module. Examination conditions were created in the computer pooled classrooms, and the module ran for the first time in March 2007. Students were required to keep a tally of their answers on paper to ensure that they had a record of their work in case the network should fail.

### Evaluation

The reactions of the first cohort were assessed by an online questionnaire delivered at three key points, as recommended by Maor (2003). JISC has identified 'the importance of getting our assessment practices right for our students' (Computer Assisted Assessment 2007). The questionnaire combined Likert style questions with questions inviting free text responses. Although using just Likert style questions would simplify data analysis, the information gathered is more likely to be meaningful if combined with questions requiring thematic analysis of the responses. We fulfilled the requirement for a longitudinal study by running the survey three times. This was designed to avoid factors such as the results being skewed by a positive or negative exam result. The completion of three questionnaires provided insight into how the students' perception of the experience of using this type of assessment changed as they went through the process of preparation, completing the exam and receiving marks and detailed feedback.

Questionnaires have limitations when trying to capture the subject's experience. Even questions inviting a free text response will provide less rich data than qualitative research methods such as unstructured or semi-structured interviews or participant observation. The sample size was too small to make the findings statistically significant, but the research could provide pointers on the student response which can be placed in the context of subsequent cohorts' feedback and achievement during the module and assessment.

The first cohort comprised a total of 57 students: 42 from Brighton, 10 from Hastings, and five from Eastbourne. The students completed proforma module evaluations on the last day of the module but the research sought to capture data at three keypoints after this: after the module but before the exam; after the exam but before the results; a couple of months after the results. This data was placed in the context of the students' free text contributions in the summatively assessed blogs and of the cohort's performance in the mock and summative online examination.

The inclusion/exclusion criterion was that all students engaging in the first online assessment were invited to take part regardless of age, gender, or any specific learning needs such as dyslexia. The surveys were anonymous and voluntary and the students opted in to participating. The invitation to participate was by group email. A consent form was not required, as consent was assumed by participation in the questionnaire in the survey. The questions in the survey varied slightly at each of the three points the survey was collected.

### Ethical issues and research findings

The ethical issues of not making the students feel coerced into completing the survey are very important as there can be a significant power imbalance between lecturers and students, especially at pre-registration level. The use of an anonymised survey method meant that students could be confident that whether and how they responded would have no influence on their progress on the course. The disadvantage of such an approach is that the response rate for the three surveys may be poor (Barrett et al 2001) and that it may not be possible to link the sets of responses to individuals. The participation rate was 30 per cent on the first survey reducing to 16 per cent on the third survey. This can be placed in the context of consistently positive end of module evaluations for the first six cohorts and a high pass rate in the summative assessments.

The Likert style questions were collated electronically. The free text answers were analysed for themes. The results were placed in the context of the students' summatively assessed free-text blogs and with these and later students' performance in the mock and summative online examination. The managed learning environment of Blackboard provided a detailed breakdown of the students' examination performance.

Although the survey indicated that a few of the respondents had difficulty seeing how their blog entries related to their revision for the exam., some entries indicated that the students enjoyed the opportunity to participate in debate with their peers across sites:

*'The blogs were different, informative and made us look and understand other people's opinions more'. (Survey 1)*

A couple of comments indicated that a blog enabled quieter students to have their voice heard in a way that could be difficult in a classroom setting. For example:

*'The use of a blog was great for quieter people such as myself who have plenty to say but do not like to get the opportunity to speak in class'. (Survey 1)*

*'The blog meant that people who didn't like to speak up in class still get to have their say'. (Survey 2)*

The survey also indicated that over 50 per cent of students had not had previous experience of participating in blogs, but this was not reported as a problem by most students. Prior to receiving their results students expressed a need for more practice questions and more specific guidance on what to revise for the exam. For example:

*'More mock questions would be helpful; more information about what would be in the exam'. (Survey 1)*

After receiving pleasing exam results the comments reflected for example, a realisation that they knew and understood more than they had thought:

*'I really enjoyed doing the blog and the online exam. I think by looking at our results it is clear that we all understood and I believe more modules should have online exams rather than essays. I feel that I have learnt a lot more revising for my online exam than I ever will doing an essay as the stress of doing an essay makes you uninterested in what you are writing about'. (Survey 3)*

In the third survey 67 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that revising for the exam helped their understanding of the module and 89 per cent felt participating in the blog facilitated virtual communication with group members. For example:

*'Participating in the blog helped my understanding of the module and of the topic I covered in the blog and I learnt a lot from being focused on just one thing. I thought that a blog was an excellent way to do things, as it was more informal than an essay, so more enjoyable'. (Survey 2)*

No students disagreed with the statement that this form of assessment was an appropriate method for assessing level 2 learning with 10 per cent strongly agreeing in the second survey, rising to 67 per cent in the third survey. The managed learning environment enabled students to be able to access detailed feedback on their exam performance. 67 per cent of students found this helpful. Instructors could access detailed information on the performance of the cohort on each question.

### Taking stock of the innovation

The research from the first cohort of students can now be seen in the context of five subsequent cohorts. The team have developed more confidence with this method of learning and assessment. Both lecturers and students have suggested that in the future an assessed blog could count towards more than 10 per cent of the final mark. Within the Diploma in Nursing programme other module teams are exploring and using variations on formative and summative blogs and online questions.

Using online assessment is not labour free. Developing and updating question pools requires commitment and time. Marking and moderating blog entries is time consuming, especially when the team is unfamiliar with this form of assessment. Ensuring students' work is safe from computer failure requires students to back up their online answers with a paper copy.

Student guidance on blog entries has been increased to discourage copying and pasting and to indicate that lower marks will be awarded to students who do not contribute entries until the second week. The first two cohorts achieved a 100 per cent pass rate, although with considerable variation of marks between the weakest and strongest students. Partial credit, as indicated above, makes it harder for the weakest students to achieve a 40 per cent pass mark.

There have been significant rewards at this stage in the journey. Marking of online exams is instant and the moderating process has become straightforward now that the team are familiar with how to view the information. The external examiner now has access to the learning and assessment material as an instructor within the module area. The team have been reassured about the robustness of the assessment for level 2 work. Both the blog and the exam are able to discriminate between stronger and weaker students. Students have produced some outstanding work in their blogs with a few students receiving full marks for these. The experience of blogging is received positively by students, for example:

*'I have found blogs to be a new and exciting way of us all sharing our knowledge...as the blogs progressed I found it less restricting than an essay but still underpinned academically'.*

### Conclusion

Engaging with this form of assessment was challenging for the team. It has been refreshing to consider a different way of assessing and to gain insight from the experiences of others both inside and outside the university. It has been encouraging sharing this experience with others both at the Learning and Teaching Conference and in the elearning pathfinder community and SNM staff development diary of events. A key aim of the Pre Registration Division in Nursing is for learning and teaching to be fun and innovative. The module team's journey aimed to help enrich the students' learning experience of public health. This

student's blog entry suggests that we may have succeeded:

*'This has been an incredible journey and I have learnt such a lot so thank you to my fellow bloggers'.*

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the NJ275 public health module team who went on this journey with me. I thank Les Ellam, Information Technology Advisor, for his patience and continued support. I thank the adult branch Diploma in Nursing students for engaging in a different form of assessment and Zoe Fernay for her permission to quote from her blog.

### References

- Albon R (2003) *Assessment drives the learning: Raising the bar*, Curtin University of Technology.
- Atack L and Rankin J (2002) A descriptive study of registered nurses' experiences with web-based learning, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (40),457-465.
- Bach S, Haynes P and Lewis Smith J (2007) *Online Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, Open University Press, Maidenhead.
- Baggott G K and Rayne R C (2004) *Student Perceptions of Computer-based Formative Assessments in a Semi-Distance Module* In: Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Computer-Assisted Conference, Loughborough University.
- M Ashby and R Wilson (Eds.) 29-31. Available at: <http://www.caaconference.com/>.
- Barnett I, Galbraith J, Gee P and Jennings F and R (2001) *Online student feedback: a pilot study*, ALT-J 9 3)17-25.
- Blair J (2002) Elearning: a virtual challenge for educators, *Nursing Times* 98, 31,34-35.
- Bothel-Richard T (2002) 'Epilogue: a cautionary note about online assessment,' *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 91,99-104.
- Brown S and Glasner A (Eds.) (2003) *Assessment Matters in Higher Education, The Society for Research into Higher Education*: Open University Press.
- Chalmers D and McAusland W D M (2003) *Computer Assisted Assessment: The Handbook for Economics Lecturers*, Caledonian University, Glasgow.
- Cox K and Clark D (2006) *The Use of Formative Quizzes for Deep Learning*.
- Dron J (2006) 'Social software and the emergence of social control', Paper: 6<sup>th</sup> IEEE International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies.
- Ford-Michele L (2002) 'Preparing Students for Assessment in the Online Class' *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 91,77-82.
- Fox N J (1996) 'IT culture in medical education', *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 12;78-88.
- Gardner L, Sheridan D and White D (2002) 'A web-based learning and assessment system to support flexible Education', *Journal of Computer Assisted learning*, 18,125-136.
- Gulc E (2006) *Using Blended Learning to Accommodate Different Learning Styles*. Higher Education Academy.
- Habeshaw S, Gibbs G and Habeshaw T (1993) *53 Interesting Ways to Assess Your Students*, Technical and Educational Services Ltd: Bristol.
- Hall R (2002) 'Aligning learning, teaching and assessing using the Web: an evaluation of pedagogic approaches', *British Journal of Educational Technology*,33 (2);149-158.
- Hammond M (1998) *Learning through online discussion: what are the opportunities for professional development and what are the characteristics of online writing*,7(3); 331-346.
- Harper R (2003) 'Correcting computer-based assessments for guessing', *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*,19,2-8.
- International Conference on elearning (2006) Abstracts for papers selected for presentation ICEL.
- JISC (2007) *In Their Own Words: exploring the learner's perspective on elearning*, HEFCE.
- Jones-Marshall G and Stephen-Harmon W (2002) 'What Professors need to know about Technology to assess online student learning'.*New Directions for Learning and Teaching*,91 19-30.
- Lauder W, Currie S, White J and Scott B (1998) 'An evaluation of the development of IT in a college of nursing and midwifery', *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 14; 183-194.
- Lowry R (2005) 'Computer aided assessment - an effective tool', *Chemistry Education Research and Practice* 6 (4) 198-203.

Maier P and Warren A (2002) *Integrating Technology in Learning and Teaching: a practical guide for educators*, Kogan Page, London.

Maor D (2003) 'Teacher's and students' perspectives on online learning in a social constructivist learning environment', *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 12(2),201-218.

McDowell L and Sambell K (2003) 'The Experience of innovative Assessment; Student Perspectives' in Brown S and A Glasner, *Assessment Matters in Higher Education*, Open University Press.

Nicol D (2008) '*Transforming Assessment and Feedback: enhancing integration and empowerment in the first year success: integration and empowerment*', QAA Scotland.

PASS-IT Project for Preparing Assessments in Scotland. (2004) 'Good Practice Guide in Question and Test Design' available from: <http://www.pass-it.org.uk/>.

Speck-Bruce W (2002) Learning-Teaching-Assessment Paradigms and the Online Classroom, *New Directions for Learning and Teaching*, 91;5-18.

Taylor L (2003) 'ICT skills learning strategies and histories of trainee teachers', *Journal of Computer Assisted learning*, 19,129-140.

Wilson T and Whitelock D (1998) Monitoring the online behaviour of distance learning students *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 14,91-99.

### Biography

**Pippa Hillen** (M.A. FHEA RN RM RHV RNT Nurse Prescriber) is a senior lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at the University of Brighton. She is the course leader of the Diploma in Nursing programme and until recently the subject group lead for Public Health and Primary Care. Pippa has worked in higher education since 2002. Her professional background is in nursing, midwifery, and health visiting (specialist public health practice).

# Students' views on teaching and learning compared with models of good practice

John Webber and Hilary McQueen

---

## Abstract

What do students believe is important for their learning? Two recent research projects sought to explore those beliefs of students at a local further education college. The first project involved asking students to judge the relative importance of different factors within the college's working model of teaching and learning. On this basis, the extent to which the model fitted students' preferences and expectations of teaching and learning was investigated (McQueen and Webber 2008). A second, pilot project reviewed students' ideas of what makes someone an effective learner and the extent to which those ideas match standard criteria. Both projects aimed to further our understanding of how students' conceptions of learning, and themselves as learners might facilitate or inhibit learning. This understanding appears important if we are to assist students in becoming more effective learners in further and higher education, training or employment.

---

## Background to the projects

Much attention has been given in post-16 education, to promoting teaching strategies that engage students more actively. This is evidenced in government investment in, for example, the Subject Learning Coach and The National Teaching and Learning Change Programme (NTLCP). These have received major government investment in further education and are demonstrably more 'student-centred and experiential' (Huddleston and Unwin 2002,82). However, the approaches adopted in response to this intention bring their own risks. In particular, the attention can remain on the teacher and the quality of their teaching rather than on empowering students to learn more effectively. In the worst case, such developments could actually increase student dependency rather than cultivate their development as skilled independent learners. This in turn has implications for students' ability to achieve successful transitions into HE or employment.

This research started from the premise that, to enhance students' learning and their development as effective adult learners, it is not sufficient to change what teachers do. To achieve real benefits students themselves need to respond to these changes appropriately. How they respond to such a challenge may in turn be shaped by their beliefs about teaching and learning. There appears, to date, to have been only a limited exploration of students' beliefs about learning and the impact of this on their approach to learning. Teaching staff in both FE and HE report that students increasingly expect to be spoon-fed rather than to be challenged as learners. The recent intensity of focus on measures of success, whilst well intended, may be impacting negatively on the development of students' learning strategies. It can also lead teaching staff to adopt exam-focused teaching at the expense of more independent learning experiences.

All of the above highlights the need to understand both teacher and student perspectives when introducing changes in teaching practice (Moore and Kuol 2007). Clearly students and teachers may not agree on what good teaching is and furthermore students' perceptions could be 'invalid and misleading' (op.cit;134). However, where there is a mismatch between a student's conceptions of effective teaching and learning and the approach adopted by their teachers, this can undermine the effectiveness of that approach. For example, if a student believes teachers are the only legitimate source of knowledge and expertise, their engagement with peer learning or other alternatives to didactic teaching will be reluctant at best and hence potentially ineffective. This provides a further reason for engaging in dialogue with students in this domain.

## Two models

This research took as its focus two models, the first about effective teaching and the second about effective learners. Both were developed at Sussex Downs College.

### a) The model of effective teaching and learning

The model of effective teaching and learning (see Appendix 1) was developed in consultation with staff at the college. It takes into account elements of both 'instructional' and 'nurturant' approaches (Joyce et al 2002,36). It has a strong explicit structure highlighting six key areas that were judged as critical to effective teaching and learning. The first four sections focus on:

- establishing the conditions for learning, including resources and the socio-emotional environment
- the clarity, appropriateness and communication of learning aims and outcomes
- the need to help learners form connections between current and prior topics as well as wider learning objectives
- the importance of engaging the learner in learning as an active process and seeking to provide challenge to all learners.

The fifth and sixth sections both relate to monitoring and evaluating learning in relation to the intended outcomes. However, whilst the fifth is teacher led, the sixth highlights the intention to engage the learner in reflection on their own learning.

### b) The model of effective learners

To balance the teacher-centric elements in this model, it was supplemented by a second initiative that drew attention to the need to support students' development as effective learners. Identifying the characteristics of effective learners proved challenging and productive in itself. It stimulated both positive interest and debate in many areas of the college (see Appendix 2).

According to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES 2004) effective learners 'have the skills to learn on their own'. The research of Carol Dweck and others (Dweck 2000) has shown that the way in which students engage with learning is closely linked to their beliefs about intelligence: whether they believe ability is fixed (entity theory) or can be developed (incremental theory). Guy Claxton (2002,17) has proposed four 'Rs' of effective learners. Effective learners need to be 'Resilient' (for example, to persist when something is difficult and be ready to try again after initial failure), 'Resourceful' (for example, be able to use a range of appropriate strategies), 'Reflective' (for example, to reflect on their approach to learning) and to 'Reciprocate' (for example, to engage with other learners effectively).

Claxton and colleagues at Bristol have also developed the 'Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory' (University of Bristol and Lifelong Learning Foundation 2008). Its seven dimensions 'describe a person's motivation or power to learn'. They assert that, 'Over time and particularly through the course of formal learning, children currently become weaker as learners, particularly in one key area – creativity. At the same time, they become more dependent on teachers and others to help them learn, and less able to cope with mistakes and failure'. (University of Bristol 2008).The implication here is that educational policy and practice has resulted in a disabling of effective learners.

The model of effective learners was also informed by the inventory of 'Personal, Learning and Thinking Skills' (PLTS) identified by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and assessed as part of the new Diplomas (QCA 2008). This list has been created in consultation with HE and employer bodies such as the CBI. It covers six categories of attributes believed to be important to success in lifelong learning:

- team workers
- independent enquirers
- self-managers
- reflective learners
- effective participators
- creative thinkers

## Method

The research reported here took place in phases.

### a) The model of effective teaching and learning

In the first phase, 374 students aged 16-19 were asked to sort 21 statements derived from the teaching and learning model (see Appendix 1) in terms of perceived importance to their learning. Participants were asked to divide the statements into three categories, 'very important', 'quite important' and 'less important'. Scores were awarded to statements (three for every time a statement was selected as very important, two for quite important and one for less important). These scores were used to identify the seven highest and seven lowest ranking statements. This was followed by nine interviews designed to explore reasons why particular statements were judged to be more important (McQueen and Webber 2008).

### b) The model of effective learners

In the second phase, 99 students on a range of courses formed 11 focus groups. Each focus group lasted up to 45 minutes. Students were asked what an effective learner is, how their views of being an effective learner have changed since they were at school, and who, if anyone, has helped them to become a more effective learner. They were then asked to complete individually a questionnaire indicating how well the selected statements about effective learners matched their own ideas and practice. This was designed as a pilot investigation which will be followed by a longitudinal study to explore whether students' beliefs about the key characteristics of an effective learner change during their time at the college.

## Findings

### a) The model of effective teaching and learning

The survey indicated that young people studying A-levels place a high priority on positive learning environments in which they feel emotionally secure: an environment where, for example, 'everyone is treated with respect'. It appears likely that this is in response to the emotional challenge of learning which commonly involves a passage through 'conscious incompetence' and hence vulnerability. It is perhaps especially worth noting how many students selected 'The ability to ask questions and say when you don't understand' as very important. This further suggests that the importance of feeling safe is that it enables learning. They also prioritised being well prepared for exams and coursework along with being interested or inspired. Interestingly the high ranking responses changed very little between students in their first and second years. This suggests that whatever views they hold towards the end of year 1 in the college aren't significantly affected by the learning in year 2.

This is not to say that the structural, mechanistic, 'nuts and bolts' of teaching are not important. Perhaps it is the case that those aspects are almost taken for granted by students and it is the interactional aspects of learning that become highlighted because of positive or negative experiences and, consequently, because of their greater impact on affective states. However, there was a potentially positive, albeit small, shift in the second year of study towards viewing challenge and independent learning as of greater (although not great) importance. This shift is critical from the point of view of

education staff in both FE and HE and for employers. Arguably more attention needs to be given to explicitly fostering this move towards independence and challenge.

### b) The model of effective learners

The focus groups provided a valuable forum for discussing some of the sources of effective learning and the characteristics of effective learners. There was some disagreement about the meaning of the term, partly dependent on whether effective learning was simply equated with achievement. Some students were doubtful about how being an effective learner can be adequately measured beyond these results. It was evident that students varied considerably in their degree of autonomy. The degree of support that students received also varied markedly. Some parents, for example, appeared to be instrumental in providing students with help and guidance. Other students relied more on teachers or friends. Vocational students in particular valued strong, trusting relationships with staff and students. Without this quality of relationship, help might not be sought.

There was little talk in the groups about skills for learning, perhaps because of the tendency to view ability in subjects as fairly fixed, and possibly linked to 'stereotyping', for example sporty or mathematical. This 'typing' may be reinforced by the emphasis commonly placed, especially in the FE colleges, on discovering individual students' learning styles (Coffield 2004). The argument appears circular. Effective learners are already good at what they do, therefore they must be effective. The references to others needing to show the students what they are good at implies uncertainty about their own skills. It also highlights the potential for parents, teachers and tutors to strongly influence these beliefs.

This latter point is reinforced by student responses to the pilot questionnaire. Amongst the statements ranked as most consistently important to their learning were '*I treat others with respect even when their views differ from mine*' and '*I listen to others contributions*'. This choice probably reflects students' adaptation to the expectations of the situation in which they completed the survey, namely the personal tutor group, in that they reflect the culture of collaboration which personal tutors prioritise. This poses both a methodological challenge and a further topic for research. Would students respond differently if asked these questions in a classroom, studio or workshop, in the company of their teacher, rather than their personal tutor?

Perhaps most telling were the statements where there was the greatest difference between what students ranked as important and what they felt they confidently achieved. Students frequently ranked self-management statements such as 'I can concentrate and avoid being distracted', 'I can balance competing pressures', 'I can plan ahead' as highly important, but they reported that they didn't feel confident in their ability to do this. This is suggestive of an emerging recognition of their need to acquire these skills which are clearly instrumental in their becoming effective independent learners. They are likely to form part of the challenge students face in transition to HE and suggest an area for further attention in preparation for this.

It was notable that 'practising skills' was rarely talked about. The implication is that most students will 'just do something once'. The exception was with coursework, although here, students emphasised their need for clear guidance on how this could be improved, putting the emphasis back onto the effectiveness of the teacher. This begs the question whether students need to be more effectively engaged with self- and peer assessment to move them on from this arguably passive, dependent position.

## Conclusion

The participants in this research were a wide cross section of students in a successful, but not atypical, mixed sixth form and vocational college. These students had previously been taught, and arguably acquired many of their beliefs about learning, in a number of different state-funded secondary schools across Sussex. It is likely therefore that they are representative of many students at this stage of their development.

From a practitioner's perspective, the research draws out points for discussion in terms of students' ideas about what helps them to learn. These ideas are likely to influence how students respond to different teaching strategies and classroom cultures. Practitioners may particularly need to engage with student preconceptions about learning when introducing them to new approaches. It emphasises a need to consider how one achieves development in learning, that is, how one moves students from a state of unconscious incompetence, through conscious incompetence and conscious competence, to one of unconscious competence (Howell 1982) in a way that empowers students in their learning.

The objective of students acquiring the skills, beliefs and behaviours that will enable them to become effective learners clearly depends on a partnership between student and staff. This partnership must be one that promotes intrinsic motivation, self-development and, we would argue, insight into learning. The experiences of those involved in this research project suggests that valuable reflection can result when we engage students (and indeed staff) in discussion and debate about what constitutes an effective learner. This initial research has opened a range of further questions including the degree to which students' beliefs about learning, and about themselves as learners, change over time. Research by Dweck and others (see for example Dweck 2000) strongly suggests that students' beliefs can be shifted at least in the short term by a number of strategies including feedback that focuses on things students can change rather than attributes they may believe are fixed. As discussed in the previous section, the effective engagement of students' with self and peer assessment that uses these principles may achieve a further benefit, helping them progress from teacher-dependent to effective independent, yet collaborative, learners, well prepared for the challenges of higher education and employment.

**Note:** The authors would welcome contact from anyone interested in collaborating in further research related to this paper especially around effective learners. Please contact them via email to: john.webber@sussexdowns.ac.uk.

## References

- Claxton G (2002) *Building Learning Power*, TLO Ltd, Bristol.
- Coffield F, Moseley D, Hall E, Ecclestone K (2004) *Learning styles and Pedagogy in post-16 learning - a systematic and critical review*: Learning and Skills Research Centre
- Department for Children Schools and Families (2008) Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS) available at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&andsid=3&andpid=386&andctype=TEXT&andptype=Single>. Accessed 8 July 2008.
- Department for Education and Skills (2004) 'Pedagogy and Practice: teaching and learning in secondary schools' available at: [http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/downloads/sec\\_ppt1044004u17dev\\_effect.pdf](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/downloads/sec_ppt1044004u17dev_effect.pdf). Accessed 8 July 2008.
- Dweck C S (2000) *Self theories: Their role in motivation, personality and development*, Taylor and Francis, Philadelphia.
- Howell W C (1982) 'An Overview of Models, Methods, and Problems' In Howell W C and Fleishman E A (Eds.) *Human Performance and Productivity*, vol 2: Information Processing and Decision Making. Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ.
- Huddleston P and Unwin L (2002) *Teaching and Learning in Further Education*, 2nd Ed: Routledge, Falmer.
- Joyce B, Calhoun E and Hopkins D (2002) *Models of Learning - Tools for Teaching*, 2nd Ed. Open University Press.
- McQueen H and Webber J (2008) 'What is Very Important to Learning? A student perspective on a teaching and learning model'. Under Review.
- Moore S and Kuol N (2007) 'Retrospective Insights on Teaching: exploring teaching excellence through the eyes of the alumni', *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 31(2), 133-143.
- QCA (2008) A framework of personal, learning and thinking skills available at: [http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/Media/PLTS\\_framework.pdf](http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/Media/PLTS_framework.pdf). Accessed 8 July 2008.
- University of Bristol (2008) Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory' available at: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/education/enterprise/elli>. Accessed 8 July 2008.
- University of Bristol and Lifelong Learning Foundation (2008) Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory available at: <http://www.ellionline.co.uk/>. Accessed 8 July 2008.

## Biographies

**John Webber** (BSc, PGCE, PGDip Couns) is the Teaching and Learning Development Manager at Sussex Downs College. He moved from scientific research into teaching over 20 years ago and has since taught at every level from primary to postgraduate. He has contributed to staff development and teacher training over the last 12 years. For several years his role in the college was to support the introduction of technology to enhance teaching and learning but more recently this has widened to the promotion and development of effective, evidence-based practice whether or not it uses ICT. Innovation and development in teaching and learning remains a particular interest and he is currently leading a college-wide initiative that focuses on the development of students as effective learners.

**Hilary McQueen** (BA, BMus, PGCE, LLCM, PhD) investigated motivation in relation to enrolment, retention and achievement at A-level for her PhD. Her interest in motivation grew out of teaching experience in music and psychology. Formerly head of psychology in two institutions, she has just completed a research fellowship year at the University of Brighton as part of the Educational Development Research in the School of Applied Social Sciences investigating widening access and the role of social motivation in transitions to and through HE. Hilary is also an Open University tutor and has recently set up a network for researchers in educational matters at Brighton and Sussex Universities with Hilary Lawson [[www.rilc.org.uk](http://www.rilc.org.uk)].

## Appendix 1

### Statements from the model of effective teaching and learning

1 It is OK to ask questions or to say when you don't understand or can't do something	2 Clear ground rules are agreed and maintained so that everyone can work well	3 Everyone in the class is treated equally and with respect by both teacher and students
4 You feel recognised and supported as an individual learner	5 There is a positive atmosphere in which people enjoy learning	6 Teaching spaces are well equipped and have appropriate resources
7 You are helped to meet the expectation that you will take an active part in your own learning	8 It is clear what you are meant to be learning	9 Teachers set appropriate expectations ie not too easy or too difficult
10 Lessons provide good preparation for exams and coursework	11 You are helped to see how today's topics link to previous things you have learnt	12 You understand the relevance of the lesson to the exam or coursework criteria
13 You can see the importance of topics to the wider world including work or future study	14 Lessons use a variety of approaches and activities that engage different learning styles	15 You are actively involved in the lesson rather than simply listening/taking notes
16 Lessons use learning styles that work well for you (such as listening, using visual aids, discussion or practical work)	17 Lessons contain work that is challenging to you	18 Lessons interest or inspire you
19 Teachers check your learning during class and through your submitted work	20 You are given feedback that show you where you are doing well and how you can improve	21 You are helped to review your own learning and to plan your further study or practice

## Appendix 2

### A sample of statements from the model of effective learners

The following statements are drawn from the model of characteristics of an effective learner used in this research.

#### **Expectations of learners** (eight responses, including):

- I attend classes regularly
- I bring the right equipment

#### **Attitude to learning** (six responses including):

- I am keen to develop my knowledge and skills
- I recognise that intelligence and ability aren't fixed but can be learned and developed (eg I don't just say 'I can't do this')

#### **Self management** (three responses, including):

- I can plan ahead and organise myself to achieve my goals

#### **Learning behaviour** (six responses including):

- I will try again if I fail or do badly at something
- I use constructive criticism or feedback to help me learn and develop

#### **Skills for learning** (six responses including):

- I can identify what I have done well and how I could improve
- I can judge how relevant or trustworthy my sources of information are

#### **Working with others** (seven responses including):

- I contribute to discussion
- I listen to other people's contributions

# The art and craft of journalistic writing

**Rob Steen**

---

## Abstract

Textbooks for journalism students are ten a penny, yet published advice about writing style is scarce. Literacy standards among undergraduates are such that I see myself largely as a remedial English teacher, yet the abler students complain that there is little scope to develop their writing skills. This study aims to tackle both these shortcomings.

The questions are myriad. How can you combine your duties, to inform accurately and entertain, with a readable writing style? Should you write as you talk? Does this advice differ depending on the publication for whom you are writing, or on the subject? How, indeed, do we define 'good' journalistic writing? Or is it wrong to seek to make such a subjective distinction? Having conducted interviews and questionnaires with students as well as leading practitioners, the results confirmed expectations: undergraduates are ill-equipped to analyse linguistics and professionals diverge greatly in what they believe constitutes effective journalistic writing. Of especial interest is the debate over the merits of using 'conversational English' and the difference that still exists between the written and spoken word.

---

## Context and rationale

Countless times I have heard journalists in press boxes from London to Sydney declare, with ill-disguised contempt, that so-and-so, whose work I respect, 'can't write'. This is because defining 'good' or even 'bad' writing is like trying to construct a foolproof template for a chart-topping single.

This makes teaching journalistic writing a daunting task. Those difficulties, moreover, are scarcely tempered by the fact that, in my experience, the vast rump of students enter university ill-equipped. In effect, I am a remedial English teacher. Most first years do not know how to use an apostrophe. Punctuation in general is a pitch-black forest. Few can tell the difference between affect and effect, even with recourse to a dictionary. Seldom is there time for nuances. While writing a textbook for undergraduates, *Sport Journalism – A Multimedia Primer*, I decided not to dwell on such nuances, convinced as I was that there were other priorities. However, when one of my abler students complained about the lack of specific guidance on writing style in my first-year module – I explained that I was obliged to focus on the literacy shortcomings of the majority – I felt it was time to address this. Concern for the art and craft of journalistic writing is therefore the rationale for this paper.

My aim is to enable my students to develop their writing style, in order to help them stand out from the competition, and hence find regular work at a time when, courtesy of the record number of degree and training courses and the parallel reduction in staffing levels at newspapers in particular, journalism has become one of Britain's most archly-competitive industries. In researching this study, therefore, I sought the views of students and leading practitioners, the former to discover the extent of their awareness of why they like the writing of certain journalists and how this might help them, the latter to elicit advice for the students that complements, and expands on, my own.

## Student questionnaire

The questionnaire I sent to my students asked them to discuss the journalists they enjoy reading. I hoped to glean an indication of how they thought about the use of words and styles of writing, and hence how best to approach my teaching. While there was virtually no discussion of word choices or structure, the replies were instructive, focusing primarily on tone, rhythm and accessibility.

One respondent sang the praises of Neil Custis, a football reporter for *The Sun*:

*'I enjoy reading Neil's work because he conveys his reports/columns like a fan .... his work is punchy, fast moving .... I find it accessible, enjoying and thought provoking'....*

Is it awful of me to confess that, were I ever to publish these comments, I would replace 'enjoying' with 'enjoyable'? And insert a hyphen between 'thought' and 'provoking'? In the words of the Vicki the teenager in *Little Britain*, 'Yeah, but no'.

Tellingly, the student who came closest to the desired line of response was in his sixties:

*'I tear my hair out when I see 'different to' and I hate split infinitives. Structure and good punctuation underpin the choice of words and add to the whole...'*

To obsess about such niceties is to obsess about clarity and impact – never a bad obsession for a journalist. This was the only respondent who focused on the use of language and words. As the quotes above show, others were fairly articulate in expressing what they liked about a writer's style – the ability to convey information in a witty and digestible manner was widely admired – but there was little depth to their analysis. Overall I was somewhat disappointed in the results.

## Practitioner interviews

Not unexpectedly, the interviews with practitioners, building on those I had conducted for my textbook (Steen 2007), were more revealing, both in the way they talked about how they found their voice as writers and the principles they followed. I was particularly struck by the following piece of advice proffered by one respondent:

*'Whenever somebody asks me how to write, rather than prattle on about technical matters such as the use of understatement and double negatives, of short sentences and long, of dictionaries and Thesauri – all of which are heartily endorsed – I would rather point them in the direction of a good writer'.*

To the question 'What advice would you give to an aspiring journalist?', Nick Pitt, formerly *Sunday Times* sports editor, contented himself with: 'Write conversational English', (ibid). The implicit point was that we should not write what we would not say, a point he was happy to elaborate on: 'I always ask myself: 'How would I tell this story to a mate in the pub?'.

William Zinsser (1985) believes adjectives and adverbs clutter; sub-editors the world over will nod vigorously. If writing beyond a prescribed limit, the first words to be cut will be adjectives and adverbs. Zinsser and Engel concur with Pitt. Nothing annoyed Engel more than 'elegant variations' – 'strip' or 'park' instead of wicket or pitch; 'park', 'arena' or 'stage' rather than ground or field. I respectfully disagree.

Repetition jars with many journalists, hinting at both a narrow vocabulary and laziness. Hence our tendency to seek alternative ways of expressing a word or phrase. I also cited the words 'fantastic' and 'great' – the latter in the qualitative sense – as examples of the difference between the spoken and written word. So frequently are these words now used (and abused) in everyday speech – 'fantastic' is seldom used negatively; greatness is only attainable over time – their meaning has been diluted, diminished, even perverted. I discourage my students from employing these words unless they are describing something extremely rare, barely credible, extraordinarily good and/or unforgettable. The same, out of respect for those who suffer fates of genuinely tragic proportions, goes for 'tragic'. To use the same word to describe a defeat for a football team is to diminish that suffering. I call this perceived ailment Great Fantastic Tragic Syndrome (GFT Syndrome).

In a possibly futile effort to find an antidote to this malaise of involuntary exaggeration, I once asked a first-

year class to offer alternatives to 'great' and 'fantastic'. The responses flowed thick and fast: tremendous, dazzling, brilliant, terrific, fabulous, excellent, impressive, superb, superlative, marvellous, magnificent, stupendous, magical, incredible, astounding, astonishing, awesome, wonderful, wondrous, stupendous, immense, colossal, staggering, amazing, remarkable, stunning, mind-blowing .... and so on. Problem solved, or so I thought. Then the first years became second years and, under pressure when composing a live match report, the 'greats' and 'fantastics' returned by the dozen.

So much depends on formative experiences. Engel remembers 'an English teacher called Mr Tobin, who I didn't care for much, especially when he underlined half the phrases in an essay of mine and put 'cliché' in the margin by each of them. I thought he was ridiculous. He was of course 100 per cent right'. English teaching, however, changed direction after Engel's schooldays, accentuating the intended meaning while de-emphasising the means of expression, the grammar and punctuation – the accuracy and clarity. Which is nothing if not a contradiction. One of my first year students recently admitted that she was unable to distinguish between a noun and an adjective. Verbs? What were they?

### Practitioner views on changing standards

So how do practitioners feel journalistic writing standards have changed during their career? Engel's response was nothing if not balanced:

*'In some ways, much better...now there's much more individualism. But there's a lot less knowledge and understanding'.*

The most scathing reply came from Gideon Haigh, in many eyes cricket's pre-eminent contemporary chronicler as well as a longtime business journalist. His life has been spent primarily in Australia, but his conclusions are fairly universal.

*'Journalists have become a bunch of well-paid, well-dressed conformists peddling a slick, shiny dross; they are quick to excitement, slow to care, and entirely too enamoured of their own opinions'.*

I have always tried to stoke passion, prevent cynicism and thus better meet the wants and needs of the reader, whose interests must always be paramount, despite the competing clamour of editor and ego. The key elements are use of language and the development of a comfortable and effective style. To the question 'What advice would you offer an aspiring journalist in terms of developing a distinctive and effective writing style?' Haigh's recommendation was precisely the same as the one I give to each new cohort: 'Read, widely and constantly'. Unfortunately, reading is not something students do with a great amount of willing. 'Journalism,' reasons Engel, 'generally has to be crisper than book-writing because there's less space and you have to compete harder for the readers' attention. It's always interesting to me that when papers hire a star novelist (Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie) to write about some event, it's usually an expensive mistake because their writing is paced wrong'.

While re-reading one of Engel's older articles, I suddenly realised that I was guilty of a curious contradiction. I had always thought it was his blend of wit, irreverence and perceptiveness that inspired me. Now, however, I became aware, belatedly, of another, more subtle factor: Engel communicates so well because you really do feel as if you and he are having a private, if somewhat one-sided, chat in a pub. And yet because our native language has changed so much in recent times, I would still contest the notion that 'conversational English' is the best or only option. 'Write conversational English', while sound advice, supplies the student journalist with insufficient clues. It is not as simple as that.

Sports journalism students also have to contend with commentary-speak: a form of spoken English that is neither wholly natural nor especially literate. Then again, a commentator's job is the antithesis of the journalist's: filling 90 minutes with meaningful words may not be any trickier than boiling five pages of notes into a 400-word match report, but where we are constantly self-editing, they are trying to stretch

and expand, and at pace, scarcely enhancing clarity. Who among us, after all, speaks in orderly, well-constructed sentences assembled from aptly-chosen words and appropriate punctuation? The term 'conversational English' also implies that there is a conversation in the first place. At best, though, writing, even in the blogosphere, is a monologue.

### Advice to students

As the dearth of adequate books on the subject testifies, there are no absolute dos or definitive don'ts. Most 'style' guides deal with 'house' style: how words should be displayed - weights and measures; a capital or lower case G for 'Gypsy'; whether to spell out the number 10; whether the F-word is spelled out or represented as a string of asterisks. The aim is uniformity, and hence clarity. Of those that directly tackle how journalists express themselves on the page, the most helpful is *New Hart's Rules* (2005), which delves even further into punctuation than Lynne Truss's worldwide bestseller *Eats Shoots and Leaves*.

So varied are contemporary tastes, so subjective our judgements, the very idea of imposing rules seems less an indication of concern for mankind's well-being than evidence of an arrogance at which some of the world's most successful fascist dictators might have blanched. At school I was told never, ever, on pain of almost certain death, to start a sentence with 'And' or 'But'. It took me a couple of decades, but eventually I rebelled. And it works. For pacing. For dramatic emphasis. But only, as with all literary ploys, if used sparingly.

Battle-hardened journalists will testify to the obstacles, to the need for a thick skin. It takes a particular kind of resilience to have one's copy slashed and rearranged by a sub-editor and still maintain confidence. Beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder, as is ugliness. I readily confess to being a somewhat flamboyant writer, yet Simon Kelner, until recently editor of *The Independent*, once urged me, when sports editor of the *Sunday Correspondent*, to 'put some top-spin' on an article. Most go the other way. Did anyone ever try to flatten Matthew Engel's distinctive style of writing? 'Of course,' the *Financial Times* columnist assured me. 'But mostly I've been very lucky in my editors'. He was being modest, but the role of luck should on no account be underestimated.

Journalism treads a fine line. Clarity, as a means of conveying information, is absolutely crucial, more so than other key ingredients such as pace, rhythm, tone and sound, all of which serve that clarity. Grammar serves clarity too, though it remains a minefield to most, including myself. Steven Pinker (2008) refers to the 'anticausative alternation', which 'converts a transitive verb to an intransitive by ejecting the causal agent'. I would not dream of trying to translate that for an 18-year-old. Nor do I see much point.

'Given the choice between grammar and clarity of meaning, go for clarity,' advocates Paul Weaver of *The Guardian*. He cites the celebrated columnist Keith Waterhouse, whose *Waterhouse On Newspaper Style* started life as an in-house guide, *Daily Mirror Style – The Mirror's Way With Words*, before evolving into 'a manual on newspaper style for the general reader with an interest in words as well as for journalists, trainee journalists, teachers and students of English' (Waterhouse 1989). The aim was 'a polemic against tired, shoddy journalese and a plea for fresh, workmanlike writing' (ibid). The advice is priceless. 'There are basically only three types (of opening paragraphs in a news story) .... the one that starts to tell a news story, the one that starts to sell a news story, and the one that starts to tell a story' (ibid.) Given the premium placed on space, moreover, succinctness is equally imperative, likewise sound punctuation, the cement that binds sentences. And yet, particularly for those who write about popular culture, there is also a duty to entertain.

As Raymond Queneau demonstrated so vividly (1947), even the smallest change in punctuation can completely alter tone and sense. A story can be told in innumerable ways, via different words: the journalist's stock-in-trade. If punctuation is our cement, words are our bricks, and because we write so

many of them, on essentially the same subjects, we are constantly seeking new ways to say the same thing – was that goal/film/CD/book ‘tremendous’, ‘fabulous’, or merely ‘excellent’?

Sportswriters, book, music and cinema reviewers share a love of description. We seek to recreate the drama, do justice to the beauty, always teetering on the tightrope between accuracy and embellishment. An overdose of metaphors, adjectives and adverbs is never far away. Excess, over-emotiveness and overkill, the sworn enemies of objectivity, succinctness and clarity, are not unknown.

Engel commends due consideration of the following:

- *No one likes a smartarse*
- *The last paragraph is as important as the first*
- *Use words as individual building blocks not as part as some prefabricated construction*
- *When you're finished writing, read the story to yourself in your head, however hurried you are...you'll catch mistakes and understand the rhythms of your own writing.*

It is the last point I most heartily endorse. Every week I invite my first years to read their work aloud in class; the better to establish the rhythm of their sentences, and hence the most effective punctuation. As journalists, I say, the reading we do while editing is strictly silent but no less vital.

Now consider the following extract from the *Wisden Cricket Monthly* style guide by the award-winning editor Tim de Lisle (1997):

**Brackets:** Use sparingly, and only when avoiding them would mean losing a train of thought.

**Brevity:** Is not just the soul of wit, it is the heart of all writing. Keep it tight; don't waste words.

**Brilliant:** Fine in conversation, tired in print. Try one of its friends and neighbours: sparkling, scintillating, outstanding, excellent, fabulous.

Note the breadth of subject matter, a stark contrast to most style guides. Note, too, the implicit insistence that what works in speech does not necessarily work in print. My 'great', furthermore, is his 'brilliant'.

In summation, then, I propose a toast, to a new journalistic language: 'Literate conversational English'.

## Conclusion

This study has already had an impact on my teaching. While the student survey may not have reaped the fruits desired, it reinforced my belief that the best way to develop their writing is to encourage students not just to read but to analyse what they read. The survey also bore out my conviction that the critiques of match reports and interviews I ask students to write in their first year should remain an integral part of that process, however reluctant some are to stand in front of the class. The difference between the writing standards of my current second years compared with a year ago, in terms of literacy and creativity, bears this out.

The insider views I gleaned from other practitioners were, if anything, even more invaluable, underlining my original assertion about the diversity of opinions on what constitutes effective journalistic writing. My aim as a lecturer is to offer students guidance in mastering the essential requirements of the profession, but also to embolden them, to help them acquire the skill and confidence to express themselves. To affirm that there is no explicitly right or wrong way to write, that so long as they obey the central precepts of accuracy and clarity they have a remarkable degree of freedom, is part of that process.

## References

- All Out Cricket*, (2008) June.
- Author Interviews with Matthew Engel, Gideon Haigh, Nick Pitt and Paul Weaver – January to June 2008.
- De Lisle T (1997) *Wisden Cricket Monthly* Style Guide (unpublished).
- Deeley P (2006) *Copy! Boy! – A 'black' from Brum*, Oxford: Parchment Press.
- Fink C C (2001) *Sportswriting –The Lively Game*, Iowa State University Press.
- Hagerty B (Ed) (2006) *British Journalism Review*, March, Vol.17,No1, Sage, London.
- Menand L (2004) 'Bad Comma – Lynne Truss's Strange Grammar', *The New Yorker*, June 28.
- Oxford University Press (2005) *New Hart's Rules: The Handbook of Style for Writers and Editors* (adapted from *The Oxford Guide to Style* by R M Ritter), Oxford.
- Pinker S (2008), *The Stuff Of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*, Penguin, USA.
- Queneau R (1947,reprint 1998), (trans.) Wright B, *Exercises in Style*, John Calder,London.
- Questionnaire by students on University of Brighton's BA Sport Journalism course.
- Steen R (2007) *Sports Journalism – A Multimedia Primer*, Routledge, London.
- The Observer* Style Book (2004).
- The Times* (2008) May 15.
- The Word* (2008) June.
- Waterhouse K (1989) *Waterhouse on Newspaper Style*, Viking, London.
- Zinsser W (1985) *On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, Harper Collins,USA.

## Biography

An author and journalist by trade, **Rob Steen** has written for - and served on the desks of - most if not quite all the national newspaper titles in England and Australia, notably the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Financial Times*, the *Melbourne Age*, the *Sunday Telegraph* and *Sunday Times*, where he was deputy sports editor. A contributor to magazines ranging from *India Today* and *Marxism Today* to *Observer Sports Monthly* and *Mojo*, he has also written more than a dozen non-fiction books, winning the Cricket Society Literary Award for his biography of David Gower and the runner-up medal for the William Hill Sports Book of the Year with *Spring, Summer Autumn*. His study of 1970s football, *The Mavericks*, was recently named one of *Four-Four-Two* magazine's 'Top 50 Football Books You Must Read'. In 2005 he won the UK section of the "For diversity, against discrimination" EU Journalism awards, for an investigation into the decline of Anglo-Caribbean cricketers. In 2007, Routledge published his first textbook, *Sports Journalism - A Multimedia Primer*, and Cricinfo, the world's leading cricket website, began publishing his blog, 'Rob's Lobs'. His latest publication is a reissue of his 1993 biography of the former world heavyweight boxing champion, Sonny Liston (JR Books 2008).

# Improving postgraduate student learning for sustainable social development, research capacity building and personal growth

Professor Gina Wisker

---

## Abstract

PhD graduates are both a 'hidden cohort in the labour market' (*UK Grad 2006*) and uniquely placed to effect change in society, and the workplace. An increased focus on broad skills, research methods development, and employability in the education of postgraduate students, can be seen to lead to sustainable social development and research capacity building, two outcomes answering the question 'for what?' in relation to improving postgraduate student learning.

Research in progress reported here is set in the context of the Higher Education Academy and Quality Assurance Agency interest in the quality of research development programmes and increased expectations of postgraduate student outcomes (Winter et al 2000). Building on 10 years of research with international cohort based PhDs studying largely at a distance (Wisker, Robinson, Trafford et al 2003; Wisker, Robinson, Shacham, Lilly 2005; Wisker 2001; 2005). The research focuses on the outcomes and achievements of PhD and masters students. It includes considerations of students' awareness of their own learning leaps (Wisker, Kiley Aiston 2006); the impact their research achievements have had on their professional lives; its impact on their society or social context in terms of change; sustainable development; research capacity building; the construction of knowledge, and their personal lives.

Postgraduate subjects also report having achieved enhanced conceptual levels of learning and a continued fascination with learning, their own learning, and the ways in which learning transforms experience through completing the PhD and moving beyond it. The data have been drawn from email and face to face interviews, exploring graduates' awareness and experiences of the development of meta-learning (Flavell 1979; Vermetten, Vermunt, and Lodewijks 1999; Gourgey 2001; Hartman 2001; Veenman and Verheij 2003) and conceptual threshold crossing (Meyer, Land, Cousin et al 2006) leading to lifelong learning changes.

---

## Introduction – context

Over 10 years working with and studying international PhD students on a cohort based PhD, we, a team of three UK and three Israeli researcher/supervisors, began to realise the enormous richness of the students' potential to change knowledge, and behaviours in professional, cultural and social terms. Our study focuses on part-time professionals, international students studying in a second language at a distance, who have taken their professional work areas as a focus for their study. It can therefore be assumed that they intend there to be some professional impact.

This accords with a growing interest in the UK and Australasia in what PhD graduates do with their achievements beyond the PhD, and a recognition of the importance of the impact of postgraduate study on knowledge economies, research capacity building and sustainable development in terms of learning capital and individual benefit in broader social and cultural terms.

The skills agenda for postgraduate development (*UK Grad 2004*; Roberts Report 2002; Cryer 1998), and the trends in recruitment of postgraduates in the arts and humanities (Arts and Humanities Research Board), the social sciences (*UK Grad*) and the sciences in the UK, Australia and Germany, has largely

focused on standard age postgraduates undertaking full and part-time research degrees, closely following their undergraduate degree, on what might be defined as traditional postgraduate study routes. Work recently carried out by Terry Evans from Deakin University, Australia (Evans 2002) on adult professionals involved in the Education Doctorate (EdD) and Professional Doctorate (PrD), explicitly focuses on the impact of these professional postgraduate routes, whose aim is to enable students to pursue professionally orientated study that will assist them in contributing to their own places of work. Our research focuses on the relatively conventional PhD route and is part of ongoing action research over the period 1998-2008, which in earlier publications shows the effectiveness of meta-learning (Wisker et al 2003), emphasising conceptual threshold crossing or moments when postgraduates start to express their learning at a more conceptual not merely 'busy' level, and the building and maintaining of communities of practice sustaining development and nurturing research capacity.

A threshold concept or key learning concept may be defined as:

'...akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something... a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of comprehending a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even world view' (Meyer and Land 2003).

While our own work has identified moments at which students start to learn and express that learning at a more conceptual level ie conceptual threshold crossing (Kiley and Wisker 2008). Some of the concerns and questions underlying our study into the varied impact of completing a PhD are:

- Why do people undertake PhDs - is it to change their professions? enhance job prospects? change as people? contribute to their culture, society, workplace?
- What do 'we'- societies, knowledge cultures, need researchers to be able to do? And how are they perceived in the knowledge economy?
- How and what do their country, their professions, workplaces, subject areas expect of them? What is the contribution sought?
- What is the role of research development programmes and the skills agenda in equipping PhD graduates for the labour market?
- How does successful achievement of the PhD affect graduates as people, learners, workers?
- What is their contribution over time to the knowledge economy, research capacity building and sustainable development?
- How does achieving a PhD affect graduates' lives in a more personal sense?

The impact of doctorates on work, professions and the knowledge economy has recently been the focus of several studies concerned with broad issues of employment, or the specific focus of the PrD, EdD, or Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA). Recent research provides indications of the jobs undertaken by PhD graduates (*UK Grad 2008*).

There are now professional models of doctoral 'training' which are based on a shifting version of what postgraduates can be expected to do, and the ways in which they need to engage with a broad area of skills useful for life and careers upon graduation.

Enders (2005) argues that:

'At the crossroads of current innovation policies towards a European Research Area (ERA) and a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) lies an important province of higher learning and research: doctoral training and the further careers of PhD graduates. Achieving a PhD or other forms of doctorate can clearly be seen to have an impact on graduates' own careers, publications, knowledge production and professional practice' (Enders 2002,493).

#### Destinations of all PhD graduates

PhD graduates are more geographically mobile, and more fully employed than less highly qualified graduates. Not only is their unemployment rate at just 3.2 per cent less than half that of first degree graduates, but only 1 per cent are in 'stop gap' jobs which bear no relation to the level of their qualifications. The data also challenge the view that a PhD leads only to a career in academia or research. In fact less than half of this cohort are employed in the education sector, fairly equally divided between teaching and postdoctoral research. Significant numbers are found in all sectors of the economy.

#### Key Statistics

12,520 (1) PhD researchers graduated in 2003 from UK universities. 58 per cent were UK domiciled, 12 per cent from other countries within the European Union (EU) and 30 per cent from countries outside the EU.

Of the 7,270 UK domiciled PhD students eligible for the survey, 4,695 responded (65 per cent)

- 81 per cent are in employment (2) in the UK
- At 3 per cent the unemployment rate is significantly below the rate for first degree graduates (7 per cent)
- 8 per cent choose to further their careers outside the UK

If we look in more detail at the 3,765 UK domiciled PhD graduates working in the UK, 48 per cent work in the education sector, predominately in HE

- 22 per cent work as postdoctoral researchers in HE
- 17 per cent as teachers or lecturers
- 16 per cent work in manufacturing (principally the pharmaceutical and chemical industries)
- Organisations in health and social work attract around 16 per cent of PhD graduates
- Overall 1,375 respondents (36 per cent) work in research occupations, both in academia (22 per cent) and outside of academia (14 per cent)

Source: [http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home\\_page/Resources/What\\_Do\\_PhDs\\_Do\\_/Destinations\\_of\\_all\\_PhD\\_graduates/pleaLbbeg](http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Resources/What_Do_PhDs_Do_/Destinations_of_all_PhD_graduates/pleaLbbeg)

He indicates links between academe and the labour market which could change the shape of the PhD and research training (Enders 2005,119).

In the context of the changing expectations of postgraduates, versions of the doctorate itself have changed, as outlined by Boud and Tennant (2006), who explore the development of the PrD, EdD and DBA for professionals; the challenges for academic practice in doctoral education; the impetus for new forms of doctoral education, and what these imply for the diversity of current provision. They discuss target populations for new, professionally orientated doctorates: 'new knowledge workers' who operate in areas not covered by specialised doctorates and who wish to negotiate transdisciplinary programmes, and they highlight the issues universities face in meeting their needs, particularly in terms of developing new 'academic cultural practices' (Boud and Tennant 2006,293-306).

Their work refers to the changed expectations of and behaviours of academics, who are now expected to research, teach and manage, and develop professional practice and work related partnerships. Achieving a PhD or other forms of doctorate can clearly be seen to have an impact on graduates' own careers, publications, knowledge production and professional practice. There are also indications that the personal impact could be even greater than the professional impact.

In Leonard's study, the personal is an important change area:

'a study of alumni who completed theses in education in 1992,1997 and 2002 in the UK argues that although the doctorate plays a key role in continuing professional development in this field, the benefits of the doctorate are perceived *post facto* as equally, and for some more, in terms of intrinsic interest and personal development. Graduates also acknowledged research experience, gains in confidence, writing skills, friendships, professional contacts and, the development of an international outlook' (Leonard et al 2005,140).

Among aspects of personal development Leonard included:

'an altruistic sense of making a contribution and becoming a better, more critical professional' (ibid.141).

Chris MacDonald and David Barker (2000) found a variety of outcomes both professional and personal:

'In looking at why respondents went on to do PhD study, it is apparent that both career focus and personal enjoyment and fulfilment are important factors in the PhD decision equation and it is suspected that many postgraduates find it difficult to unbundle one from the other. Long-term financial rewards, however, do not seem to have been at the forefront of the respondents' minds when considering PhD study' (MacDonald and Barker 2000,4).

Most studies focus on career path postgraduate students studying full-time, rather than part-time mid-career professionals, but there is evidence that many students no longer fit traditional moulds. Research capacity building is not always the outcome. Two years after graduating with a PhD, just 36 per cent of Australian postdocs who found employment in the non-academic workforce continued to be 'extensively' involved in research, while only 56 per cent of those in academic employment (other than those with postdoctoral fellowships) were so involved. Not all want to continue with research. Many trained in research are frustrated at not being able to implement and extend that training through appropriate employment; others who have the opportunity do not have the desire. (Bazeley 1999, 333-352). In the UK, George Gordon considers the nuances and complexities of the concept of the career life cycle of researchers (Gordon 2005,40-55).

We can no longer expect postdoctorates to move naturally into continuing research careers. Terry Evans (2002) notes that part-time research students are potentially better placed to have an impact in terms of both their research skills and their research findings; however, this is an area that could benefit from research, as there is little more than circumstantial evidence to rely upon. Links between the skills agenda and postgraduate impact emerge in the development of the new route four-year PhD and skills debates – 'What do PhDs Do?' (*UK Grad* 2004), the answer being that they provide 'a comprehensive edge in a rapidly expanding market'. These students have both a research and work skills development 'edge' in a labour market which is full of qualified people. McWilliam et al (2002,44) indicate in their study of professional doctorates in Australian universities that employers typically see credentials as a kind of proxy for a potential employee's skill level. To meet this expectation there is greater emphasis on postgraduate skills, both those focusing directly on the practice of research, and those on broader personal qualities and interpersonal skills. Research and skills development are clearly useful for professional development and enhance the quality of learning and work in a variety of areas for UK based students.

Traditionally, for students studying in the UK from abroad, there has been an intention that they would take their newly enhanced knowledge and research skills back home to their own countries and further the research capacity there, solve problems, develop the economy. In all these instances, research development and skills are expected to feed into culture, society, and professional work based practice.

#### Our research: Communities of practice, meta-learning and threshold concepts

Work we have carried out to date has focused on communities of practice during and beyond the PhD development process (2005). We have also investigated meta-learning (Flavell 1979), which postgraduate students develop through active engagement with the learning processes involved in research. Most recently, our research on threshold concepts focuses on points at which and ways in which postgraduates make learning leaps, both in terms of the specific disciplines or inter-disciplines with which they are involved. The threshold concepts of the disciplines, once understood, provide a conceptually robust and developed awareness of the ways in which the disciplines see the world and construct

knowledge. We argue that when students cross conceptual thresholds they begin to work to approach their reading, theorising, data analysis and arguments in a more conceptual way. They engage with ideas, articulating and working together, and hone their abilities to enter the dialogue of the areas in which their questions and research are situated, and they learn to express themselves clearly and coherently in a theorised, well argued manner.

These threshold crossing moments represent significant developments in the levels of thinking and researching and thus in the changes possible in doctoral students' work as researchers. Our research is set against the broad background of our previous work with cohorts of international PhD students. The current interest in what PhDs can contribute to the economy, society, and students' own self development focuses on experience, and the professional and personal impact of completing work on a PhD. Our research with postgraduate students uses inductive research methodology and takes place within the context of action research with students and supervisors alongside a five stage research development programme. This enables us all to focus on, share, and subsequently enhance the learning experience and contribute to the building of learning communities of practice, which feed into ongoing change in the workplace, professions, culture and society. (Wisker, Robinson, Trafford et al 2003; Wisker, Kiley and Aiston 2006).

### The students

The international middle-eastern student group which is the subject of our research chose the PhD rather than the EdD or DBA, largely because of its traditional recognition. They also chose to study part-time in order to fit in with professional and other responsibilities. One might speculate as to why students chose the PhD when the PrD, EdD and DBA might be more suited in theory to their own research and work trajectory. In the case of those with whom we have been working, their intention was to gain the recognition of a traditionally, and internationally accepted PhD, to study part-time alongside work demands, and to involve their own professional development as part of their studies. Their aim was to impact on their professional organisation, their workplace, on the sector more broadly, and on the conceptualisation and practices of their work areas. These students developed postdoctoral yearly symposia to share their work at conferences and in published form. The maintenance of a postdoctoral academic community emphasised the impact of their work on their professions, society and culture.

### Methodology and methods

Previous research with these cohorts of students has been constructed using a variety of inductive methodology, mixed methods and an action research format. This recent strand of our research combines a) face to face interviews both in the UK and abroad and b) semi-structured, open-ended questions by email which enabled students to explore broad areas related to the impact of their PhD. In accordance with the longitudinal diversion of the study, a short email questionnaire was sent out during 2007 to 50 of the graduates of the international programme (there are now over 100 graduates), with whom the previous range of research has been conducted over a period of 10 years, in order to track their responses.

The research involves students from a wide range of disciplines and these are reflected in the questions asked:

- what kinds of impact does achieving a PhD have in professional, social and cultural terms?
- how might research development programmes, institutional support, supervisory relationships, student communities support the kind of conceptual personal and professional/work orientated growth which leads to impact, change?
- what kind of personal impact has the PhD had?

These questions about felt impact focused on the postdocs as individuals; as learners where this might be ongoing learning in relation to research skills acquired; or learning which affected the workplace; or their profession. It also concerned social or cultural contexts, and their contribution to professional, social and cultural impact.

### Results and discussion

Graduates indicated that they were aware of the changes and developments produced through their engagement in the programme and their research once they had graduated in terms of the impact on their lives, their learning development, and on their professional, cultural and social contexts. They noted the importance of working in a cohort, being full members of the action research which fed its results into improving their programme, and involvement in the postdoctoral symposia. Our early research work revealed broad categories of concern, support and development:

- Personal
- Learning
- Institutional

Latterly, these three categories have again emerged as useful thematic organisers of responses from interviews with postgraduates. Responses varied in relation to the discipline area; the research question; the research intention (though many changes were unintentional); and the methodology and methods involved. From student responses it is possible to say that action research, professional practice, and direct engagement were likely to lead to changes resulting from their studies. PhD study has made a considerable difference to their working and personal lives.

### Case study: students and their changes – Student E, the sport science student

Student E is an example of someone noting significant change in each category - personal, learning, and institutional (of course there are overlaps).

There were a range of changes reported as a result of undertaking and completing the PhD and being part of the community. Some talked of developing friendship groups, and E (right) found that his family life and status changed markedly.

Changes as a learner were also reported by other students:

*'The main thing that was changed, was the feeling that now I have to be good enough. The feeling that I need to write and analyse materials in a meta-level. I felt much more obligated to quality'* (Student C).

This student has changed and developed both cognitively and in terms of her desire to continue to be a researcher, to use the skills. Others felt that undertaking and completing research enabled their professional development and helped career prospects:

#### Student E - Personal change

Student E said: 'My wife fell in love with me more, she appreciates me more, [there is a lot more respect] especially from my father in law. My students too – they appreciate me and they were my catalyst for my research. I dedicated this research to my students while other people usually dedicate their PhD to their family'.

#### Student E - Personal, learning, and institutional change

He is seen as: 'A role model in the practical area and in the cognitive area - a doctor and a professional'.

#### Student E - Personal and institutional change

'...Usually, when I publish or when I participate in conferences, professional development courses or workshops then the title is meaningful'

'The close society – family and colleagues – appreciate this, including my students who are proud of their lecturer who is perceived as a role model'.

'As a researcher I feel that doors have opened for me, that my ideas and research are taken more seriously, as if having that degree entitled me to more serious consideration than just my MA' (Student B).

Students B and C acknowledge changes in their learning behaviours. Further data indicates social and cultural impacts. (For further discussion see the longer version of this article in *Improving Student Learning* (2008) no.15, Oxford Brookes University).

## Conclusions

The continuing PhD research provides conclusive evidence of impact on professional practice and on social and cultural development. This impact is augmented by epistemological and ontological developments in terms of knowledge construction, and a sense of changing as a person. Further work could explore the personal changes involved in undertaking and achieving a PhD, and could also look more closely at the impact on the professional workplace, society and culture. Fuelled, supported by, and contextualised in their communities of practice, postgraduates and postdoctoral students continue to impact on their professions, knowledge construction, society and culture, and on themselves in terms of learning behaviours, confidence and identity.

## References

- Bazeley P (1999) 'Continuing research by PhD graduates', *Higher Education Quarterly*.
- Boud D and Tennant M (2006) 'Putting doctoral education to work: challenges to academic practice', *Higher Education Research and Development*,25,3;293-306.
- Cryer P (1998) 'Transferable skills, marketability and lifelong learning: the particular case of postgraduate research students', *Studies in Higher Education*,23,2;207-216.
- Enders J (2002) Serving many masters: 'The PhD on the labour market, the everlasting need of inequality, and the premature death of Humboldt', *Higher Education* ,44.3-4 (October),493 (25).
- Enders J (2005) 'Border crossings: Research training, knowledge dissemination and the transformation of academic work', *Higher Education*,49.1-2 (January),119(15).
- Evans T (2002) 'Part time research students: are they producing knowledge where it counts?' *Higher Education Research and Development*, 21, 2;155-165.
- Flavell J H (1979) 'Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive developmental inquiry', *American Psychologist*, 34,Part 10;906-911.
- Gordon G (2005) 'The human dimensions of the research agenda: supporting researchers throughout the career life cycle', *Higher Education Quarterly*,59 (1);40-55.
- Gourgey A F (2001) 'Metacognition in basic skills instruction', in Hartman H J (Ed.), *Metacognition in learning and instruction: theory, research and practice*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, The Netherlands.
- Hartman H J (2001) 'Developing Students' Metacognitive Knowledge and Skills', *ibid.*,33-68.
- Kiley M, Aiston S and Wisker G (2006) '*Learning Leaps supporting postgraduate student learning*, paper from the Quality in Postgraduate research conference', Adelaide.
- Kiley M and Wisker G (2008) 'Threshold concepts in research education and evidence of threshold crossing', *Higher Education Research and Development*.
- Leonard D, Becker R and Coate K (2005) 'To prove myself at the highest level: the benefits of doctoral study', *Higher Education Research and Development*,24, 2;135-149.
- MacDonald C and Barker D (2000) *Post PhD - 'What next? A follow-up study of PhD postgraduates of the School of Biological Sciences'*, available at [http://www.lmi4he.ac.uk/documents/post\\_per\\_cent20PhD.doc](http://www.lmi4he.ac.uk/documents/post_per_cent20PhD.doc). Accessed 2 January 2008
- McWilliam E, Taylor P G, Thomson P, Green B, Maxwell T, Wildy H and Simons D (Eds.) (2002), '*Research Training in Doctoral Programmes: What can be learned from professional doctorates*'? Canberra, ACT: DCITA.
- Meyer J H F and Land R (2003) *Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge - Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising in Improving Student Learning Ten Years On*, Rust, C (Ed.) Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.
- Meyer JHF, Land R, Cousin G et al. (2006) 'Implications of threshold concepts for course design and evaluation', in Meyer J H F and Land R (Eds.) *Overcoming barriers to student understanding: threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge*, Routledge, London.

UK Grad (2006) *What do PhD graduates offer the labour market?* available at: [http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home\\_page/Resources/What\\_Do\\_PhDs\\_Do\\_/What\\_Do\\_PhD\\_graduates\\_offer\\_the\\_labour\\_market/plebfaakL](http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Resources/What_Do_PhDs_Do_/What_Do_PhD_graduates_offer_the_labour_market/plebfaakL). Accessed 2 January 2008.

UK Grad (2004) 'What do PhDs do?', report, available at: <http://www.grad.ac.uk/downloads/wdpc.pdf>. Accessed 2 January 2008.

Veenman M V J and Verheij J (2003) 'Technical students' meta-cognitive skills: relating general vs. specific meta cognitive skills to study success', *Learning and Individual Differences*,13:259-272.

Vermetten Y J Vermunt J D and Lodewijks H G (1999) 'A longitudinal perspective on learning strategies in higher Education – different viewpoints towards development', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69, Part 2;221-242.

Winter R, Griffiths M and Green K (2000) 'The 'academic' qualities of practice: what are the criteria for a practice-based PhD?' *Studies in Higher Education*,25, (1);25-37.

Wisker G (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*, Macmillan.

Wisker G (2005) *The Good Supervisor*, Palgrave Macmillan, Macmillan.

Wisker G, Kiley M and Aiston S (2006) 'Making the learning Leap: Research Students Crossing Conceptual Thresholds', paper, Quality in Postgraduate Research conference, Adelaide, 2006.

Wisker G, Robinson G, Shacham, L (2005) 'Communities of Practice in PhD', paper delivered to the EARLI conference, Nicosia, August 2005.

Wisker G, Robinson G, Trafford, Lilly, Warnes, (2003) 'Achieving a Doctorate: Meta-learning and Research Development Programmes Supporting Success for International Distance students', *Studies in Higher Education*,25(1);25-37.

Wisker G (2008) 'Improving postgraduate student learning for sustainable social development, research capacity building and personal growth' *Improving Student Learning 15*, Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brookes University. Websites

AHRB (2005) Report of the AHRB working group on doctoral research in the arts and humanities, available at [http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/images/4\\_96361.pdf](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/images/4_96361.pdf). Accessed 2 January 2008.

Destinations of all PhD graduates, available at: [http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home\\_page/Resources/What\\_Do\\_PhDs\\_Do\\_/Destinations\\_of\\_all\\_PhD\\_graduates/plealbbeg](http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Resources/What_Do_PhDs_Do_/Destinations_of_all_PhD_graduates/plealbbeg). Accessed 2 January 2008.

'What do PhDs do'? 2004 report, available at: <http://www.grad.ac.uk/downloads/wdpc.pdf>. Accessed 2 January 2008.

UK Grad (2006) '*What do PhD graduates offer the labour market*'? available at [http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home\\_page/Resources/What\\_Do\\_PhDs\\_Do\\_/What\\_Do\\_PhD\\_graduates\\_offer\\_the\\_labour\\_market/plebfaakL](http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Resources/What_Do_PhDs_Do_/What_Do_PhD_graduates_offer_the_labour_market/plebfaakL). Accessed 2 January 2008.

## Biography

**Gina Wisker** is Head of the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Brighton, where she is Professor of Higher Education and Contemporary Literature. Gina is Chair of the Heads of Educational Development Group, co-editor of the SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association) journal *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, and sits on the council of SRHE. Her recent publications are in the above bibliography.