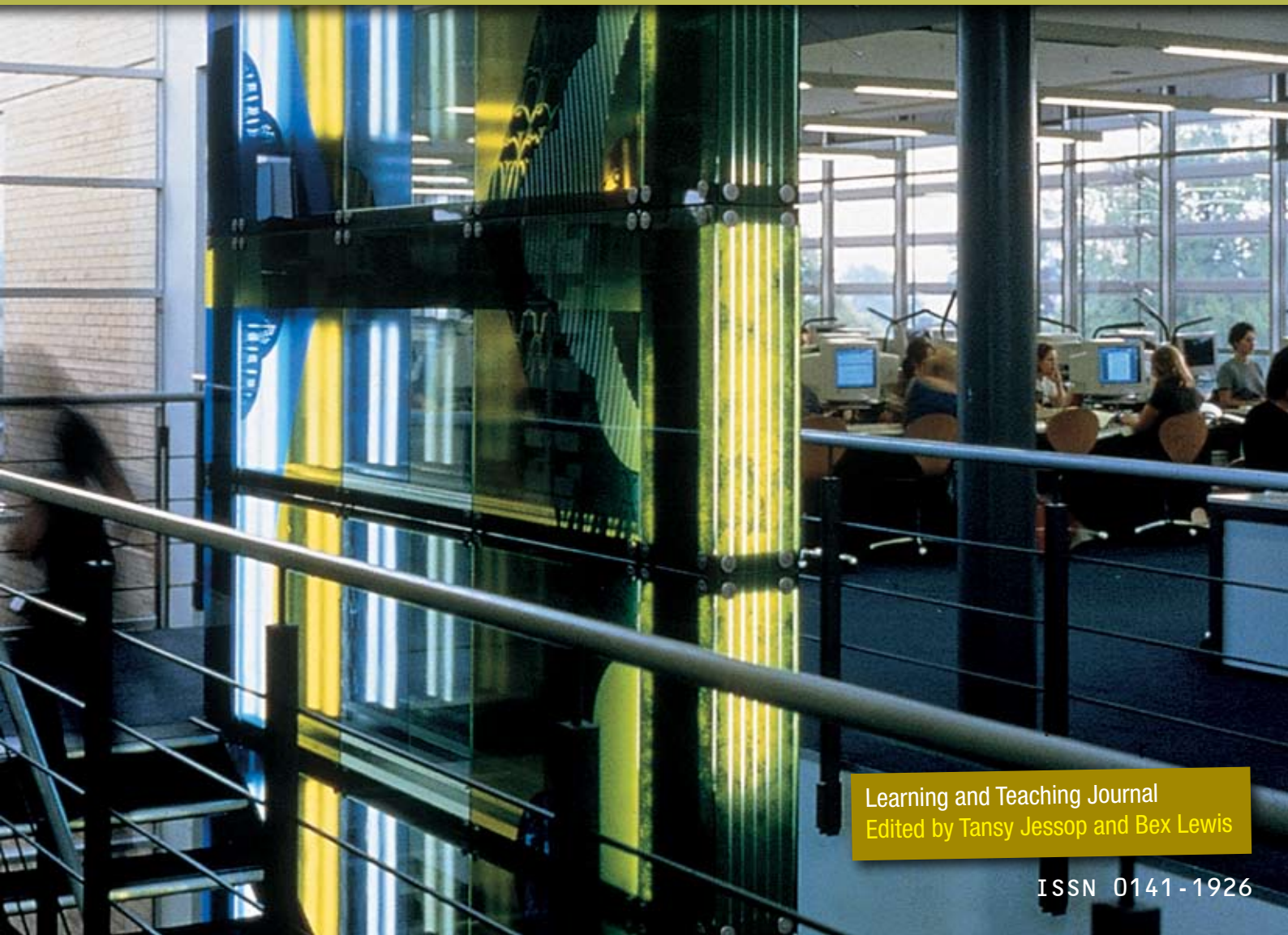
Capture

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

Conversations about pedagogy and teaching underpinned by research enquiry



Learning and Teaching Journal
Edited by Tansy Jessop and Bex Lewis

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Contents

Foreword

The launch of our second edition of CAPTURE is a wonderful achievement for a small yet deeply passionate University. It is filled with fantastic articles, research projects, interviews and new programmes/initiatives here at the University of Winchester. The content, although varied, does have a strong alignment with the University's Learning and Teaching themes for development which include: Research Informed Teaching; Assessment; Collaborative Enhancement of Teaching; Learning and Teaching Methods/Practice; Blended Learning and Work Based Learning.

A number of people have contributed to the journal and many of these have either been funded by Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund and/or have been supported by the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) during the academic year 2008-09. Promisingly, this edition features research of those studying on the Postgraduate Certificate of Learning and Teaching in HE and on PhD programmes contributing material about the student learning experience.

The second edition of CAPTURE demonstrates the growing maturity of the University and the Learning and Teaching Development Unit, as it is launched alongside ALFRED, a student journal showcasing undergraduate student research, completing the LTDU publication profile nicely. CAPTURE and ALFRED draw on the interesting and varied research of both academics and students, and their contribution to learning and teaching and research informed teaching at Winchester is invaluable. Special thanks must go to the editors of CAPTURE, Tansy Jessop and Bex Lewis. Their work in drawing a wonderful variety of topics together has been tireless whilst covering some pertinent themes which are strongly valued by L&T in the institution.

While only identifying a few staff here at the University, this publication should also acknowledge the positive environment for L&T enhancement on a wider scale. The University has always prioritised L&T and the student and staff experience and this publication really draws out some great aspects of the environment. Additionally, the willingness of staff to share their practice and research and 'gems' of wisdom confirms my suspicion that staff are keen to share conversations and ideas around best practice. This dispels the myth of the protective or secretive lecturer and embraces the ethos of academia as a genuine learning community, something which CAPTURE is aspiring to promote.

Yaz El-Hakim
Director of Learning and Teaching

Editorial

The second edition of Capture reflects the University's commitment to learning and teaching, in nurturing a community of academics who are interested in pedagogy. In 2008/9, Senate Learning and Teaching funded a range of Research Informed Teaching (RIT) and L&T projects which are represented here. For the first time, new lecturers on the PGCLTHE and a PhD student have submitted papers which relate to the student experience of learning at Winchester. This demonstrates widespread interest in adult learning theory and practice at the University, and underlines our commitment to excellence in teaching and learning. This second edition profiles four new courses running in the faculties, showing the vibrant and creative culture of our relatively new university.

The journal begins with an interview with the University of Winchester's first National Teaching Fellow, Loykie Lomine – passionate pedagogue, *Tintinologist* and 'mobile' lecturer, who stands in the vanguard of technology. Carolin Esser's paper on her pilot project using wiki assessment illustrates the potential of technology to open up new forms of learning and assessment, which resonate with many 21st century students. Similarly, Mick Jardine's interview, based on his and Matthew Sauvage's research project, combines the themes of formative assessment and online quizzes to suggest dynamic ways of engaging students in critical thinking on two English modules. Steve Allen picks up the theme of assessment in his paper exploring the student experience of feedback in Media and Film studies, which demonstrates a progression in student perceptions of grades and developmental feedback.

The subject of student motivation is tackled in Chris Evan's fascinating interview about student ways of being, and the impact of first year habits on subsequent achievement. His paper presents a compelling argument to make first year marks count for more than progression only. Helen Ryan's action-research paper pursues the theme of student engagement, and provides a persuasive case for problem-based learning (PBL). PBL develops student capacities for independent learning, research and collaboration, all at the heart of social-constructivist pedagogies. In Richard Cheetham's 'pedal-power' paper about a volunteering scheme involving students and disabled cyclists, he advances active learning and teamwork as key employability skills. The subject of disability and inclusion is explored in a case study of disabled students' perceptions of the web and the university web pages. Jessop, Edwards and Lewis's paper disturbs the notion that web accessibility is a technical preserve, and takes the position that 'universal design' includes democratising the skills of making web content more accessible.

An interview with award-winning film and TV producer, John Pett, uncovers the joys and challenges of international collaboration on a student film production project, and pursues the theme of making our graduates competitive in the employment market. Tim Gully's comparative research on risk discourses around child protection in the UK and Romania ventures a fascinating insight into how the media and political culture have influenced the conduct of

social work as a profession. Boxley, Clarke, Fletcher, Phethean and Witt's paper explores the global theme of environmental sustainability through a multi-methods approach to changing pedagogy and the culture within a Faculty. The launch of an international journal on writing for children is the subject of Andy Melrose and Vanessa Harbour's catchy paper on this new venture. Finally, Capture profiles new courses, Journalism, MBA, Childhood Youth and Community Studies, and Social Work, to show the fruits of much behind-the-scenes curriculum development, and to articulate for the wider community how these new courses are distinctive in their ideas about learning and teaching.

My thanks go to all the contributors to this bumper edition for their time and effort in providing material, and for their evident passion about research and teaching. Special thanks to Bex Lewis who stepped into the breach to help conduct interviews for this edition. Thanks also to the Learning and Teaching Development Unit team for their encouragement and keen proofreading of the journal. Finally, thanks to Victoria Putt and Tim Griffiths for their tireless efforts to make the journal both accessible and attractive.

Tansy Jessop

Dr Tansy Jessop
Editor

Teacher Extraordinaire

Capture editors interviewed Dr Loykie Lominé, the University of Winchester's first winner of a prestigious National Teaching Fellowship Award, and the youngest academic ever to be granted an NTF Award

What is a National Teaching Fellowship (NTF), and what is it meant to achieve?

The concept is very easy to understand, as you know Hollywood has its Academy awards, so the UK Higher Education Academy has its awards as well. It's not the award for the best actors/film directors, but for the best teachers, and the scheme has several aims. One is to recognise and celebrate individuals who impact the student learning experience, but it is broader than that. It goes beyond rewarding individual professionals. It's also about asserting that teaching ought to be valued and recognised, and I think this is very important, especially in the context of institutions, where it is traditionally the people who do research and publish books who get promoted to professorships. Now the HE Academy is trying to redress this imbalance, to remind universities that they are first and foremost sites of learning and teaching.

What was the significance of this award for Winchester, and for you, professionally and personally?

Firstly there is the kudos of being a University which has a National Teaching Fellowship. More concretely, however, with a pocket of excellence in learning and teaching, at a very pragmatic level, it has enabled the University to access some special funding for L&T projects. Just recently the University was awarded £200,000 for the "Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment" project, and without me, it would not have been able to access this money.

Professionally in the UK, it has given me more credibility in other Universities. Not abroad, as it's not recognised in Europe, but there's a similar scheme in Canada, and I've joined a semi-international network of National Teaching Fellows, largely from Canada and the UK.

Personally, I would say it's given me more confidence in my abilities, and I would regard it as important as my PhD. It's the starting point, not an end in itself. You know, the day after your PhD, you think, "Well, I've done it. What happens next?" But it's only a means to something else. So there are those two dimensions, one about confidence, reassured that my senior peers, specialists on learning and teaching, thought my professionalism was good enough to be awarded one of 50 annual NTFs. Also, it's a starting point. It's on my CV, and I now have those letters after my name, so it's about looking for the next steps.

What contribution do you think being French, your national identity, and your international profile played in your NTF award?

You know, I think it's all about accents! I think an accent certainly helps, because it makes you stand out, when you're talking at a meeting and so forth,

people suddenly will pay attention, thinking "he's not English". I've just published a chapter in a book called "*Teaching with Accents*". My chapter focused on Erasmus and academic mobility within Europe - the challenges and opportunities. With regards to national identity, I slightly moved from the idea of being French and passionate, to the idea of having an accent. Having an international profile certainly helps. Most of the work I do in Europe is through an organisation called the European League of Institute of Arts (ELIA), of which Tony Dean is one of the main pillars. Anyway, this organisation has been amazing for me, and I'm sure has helped me get the NTF.

What academic areas do you teach in?

My role here in Winchester is two-fold. I spend half my time leading and managing Enterprise Education university-wide, teaching business start-ups and freelance. It's a scheme I started here 6 years ago: the NTF is partly due to the success of that scheme, and the way I teach enterprise. The other half is leading and managing an MA in Cultural and Arts Management, based in the Faculty of Arts. It's a very healthy MA, with 15 students at the moment, and recruitment is good for next year as well. I divide my commitment between the two. As part of Knowledge Transfer, and linked to the Enterprise scheme, is the Business Start-Up Scheme. Through this we've helped about 25 students/ graduates/ staff set up their businesses in and around Winchester. The funding for that comes from HEIF, and is third stream, so not for teaching or research. Up to now this has all been very much curriculum based, but this last year we had boot camps, and increasingly we're going to create more extra-curricular activities in programmes as the scheme has become bigger and bigger. Five years ago we had around 60 students, this year we had 200 students! On the Research Training Programme we are trying to help our research students see how they can make some money using their research skills, as otherwise they will tend to look at themselves as a PhD student, rather than someone who can be a freelance researcher and make some money out of it.

What do you enjoy most about teaching?

What I enjoy most is experimenting, and in having fun in experimenting. For example, last year with my MA students, we did a seminar in *Second Life*, and we recently did one seminar on Skype. There is always a danger of technology not working, but it's about experimenting and having fun doing it, and knowing that it might fail, but that not being a problem. It's also possible to experiment in front of large audiences. Last February I did a lecture on business planning in front of 200 students, using only images from films on my PowerPoint slides, to which the students responded well. I really enjoyed myself, and it's all about being creative and experimental, and taking risks: when I chose those images, I wondered, will 20 year olds know *Forrest Gump*, *The Wizard of Oz*, or *Breakfast at Tiffany's* for example?

In a nutshell, what is it that makes your teaching special?

In a word 'elusive', as an MA student of mine described my teaching. For me, it meant enigmatic, and at first I didn't like the idea. Now, however, I love this phrase, as it's the notion that the teacher disappears, so from a constructionist pedagogy, very much my own teaching style, where learning still takes place even in the absence of the teacher, as the students learn and discuss with one another, with my role simply to facilitate their learning.

Has your professional life changed since you received this award, and in what ways?

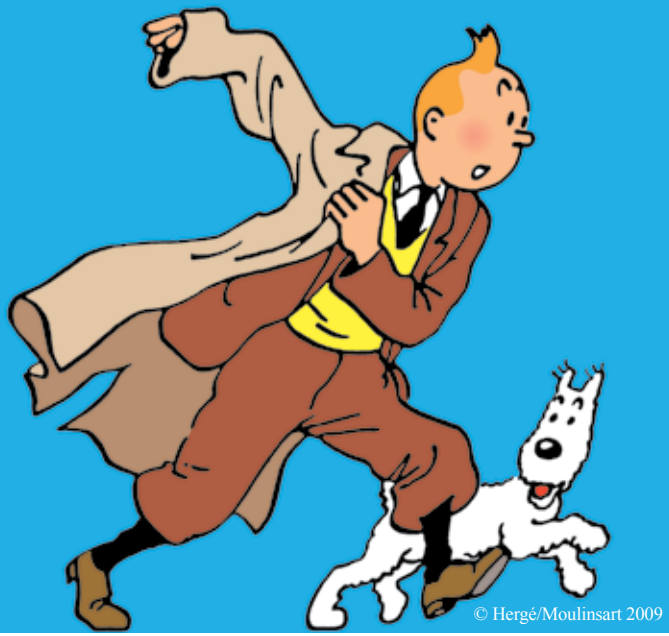
It's busier than ever. I'm receiving more invitations to review bids and projects and papers than ever before. I'm also related to the subject centre Palatine (HEA Centre for Dance, Drama, and Music), as there are very few NTFs that are linked to the Arts. Most NTFs tend to be from the sciences and engineering, with several from Education, but few from the Arts, and because I am one of them, when Palatine needs someone they turn to me. Although the Fellowship didn't ask me to specify a theme, people kept asking what the Fellowship was about, so the theme I have chosen is m-learning. I will be at an ELIA conference in Bulgaria next week, where I'm presenting a paper entitled M-learning: Texting (SMS) as a Teaching and Learning Tool in Higher Arts Education. M-learning is all about the use of mobile technologies for pedagogical purposes, and I'm particularly interested in SMS. I've done some work with my MA students on that, and produced a couple of articles, and in a way the Fellowship has forced me to identify an area in which I want to do my research.

What advice would you give to colleagues who are interested in pursuing an NTF award?

I would recommend they do not waste time on office politics, faculty stories and departmental debates, because it can be time-consuming, as it's not what their mission is about – their mission is about excellence in teaching. I know very little about what goes on in this university, as I prefer to concentrate on my work. This is not specific to universities. I teach business management, and we cover issues of organisational politics, and the impact they have on decision making, and the corporate culture. Such gossip can be very healthy but I just know it is not for me, so I stay out.

You were awarded Tutor of the Year by the Open University in 2008. Can you tell us about the contribution that your work at the OU has made to your excellence as a teacher?

Working for the OU is the best form of professional development I have ever had. My work for the OU has made me realise the importance of assessment criteria and of feedback. In many universities there is poor practice, where one looks at an essay and says, "That's First Class - let's give it 72%". The marks at the OU are all criteria-based, very specific, so the student, whether they get 5% or 68%, will know exactly why. The other part is writing feedback, and I see many instances of bad practice where the teacher might have written very long feedback on the cover sheet, mostly re-summarising what the student has done. Feedback is about acknowledging the strengths and skills of that particular essay, regardless of whether they got 40 or 60 or 80, and making some suggestions and recommendations - how to score higher the next time round. Even someone who scored 90% can be given ideas for how they could do it differently, or what was missing there. Because the OU is all about correspondence tuition, I teach students through the feedback that I give them through their assignments. It takes roughly an hour for OU tutors to write feedback on each assignment - very different from the time we spend here, which is fully understandable as we spend most of the time teaching the students in classes and tutorials, but at the OU the model is different, as there's some tutorials/workshops, but most of your time will be spent giving feedback to students. It's a lot more individualised, based upon assignments that they send you, where you can comment on their strengths and weaknesses and help them do better next time.



> “Tintin fits the idea that education doesn’t have to be boring. He is about risk, exploration, about being ‘elusive’ and about being a free-thinker.”

You have humorously described yourself as a Tintinologist. What life lessons do you draw from the intrepid journalist and explorer?

He’s my hero! It must seem strange to hear someone who is a strong educator referring to some cartoon first drawn and published exactly 80 years ago, in 1929. Tintin fits the idea that education doesn’t have to be boring. He is about risk, exploration, about being ‘elusive’, about being surrounded by good people including maverick friends like Haddock (who break the bounds of convention), and about being a free-thinker. Tintin was able to relate to the humble and to children, but also to kings and people in high positions. He was at ease in a range of settings. We need to see what Tintin means for us, seeing the relevance as a model for an educator: being a communicator, and going to the right level with people. ■

Multiple choice meets literary criticism

Dr Mick Jardine and Dr Matthew Sauvage were awarded a Learning and Teaching Fellowship to pilot computer assessment in the Department of English. Mick and Matthew constructed quiz items - with a difference - in two first year modules. Their project has pushed the boundaries of the multiple choice quiz, providing a critical approach and valuable formative assessment for students. Capture interviewed Mick about the project.

Can you tell me about the background to your project Mick?

It goes back a couple of years when I received a phone call from a friend and colleague at a Spanish university in Valencia and he was due to go to Ecuador to set up an English project in Esmeraldas, and he asked me if I could go along with him for a couple of weeks. That was really the first time I'd been introduced to computer software developed in Spain, called Paris. It's a very versatile, very impressive 'all whistles and bells' computer software, and I could see that it had potential for working in English literature because it was just so sophisticated, so that was really what planted the seed. I was wanting to try to use computer assisted software to address certain problems that had been rumbling on in our department for years.

What were the problems you were hoping to address?

The main things were turn-around of assessed work and the growing problem with students not preparing for lectures and seminars, which in English literature is a crucial thing. I'd always been quite hostile to quizzes, because I had some awareness of how they were used in America, and as far as I could see they were limited to who wrote *Wuthering Heights*, and when was it published.

What was the purpose of the project?

The purpose of the project was to move away from that quiz type, based on regurgitation and test of memory, and to try to devise items which do a lot more than that, which involve understanding, which the students will only be able to manage if they have read not only the primary text but also the secondary material. We particularly wanted to do this with first years, because it's in the first year that we want to introduce students to critical theory, what we call 'ways of reading', because if they don't master the theory, they struggle, and you see it in their final year projects.

How have you used it in the first year?

In one of the modules, it actually contributed to the module mark, which makes all the difference of course. In the other one, we told them they had to do the assessment as part of the course, and they did it, 'no questions asked'. But that's something for the future, we want to get the quizzes as part of the module mark. We've carried on this semester in a smaller project, in another module, and the students

are now more aware that this is something that is formative. We have 'badged' it as something that is designed to assist them in preparing for taking the examination, and nearly all the students have taken it. I think the students understand its formative value.

You've mentioned formative assessment. How does the design of the quiz feed into students' learning?

Our online assessments feed into their normal module assessments. We devised our online assessments to come about two weeks before each of their module assessments. What we are hoping to introduce for next year are fortnightly quizzes, which would give us a lot more material. Currently the assessments help prepare students. It also keeps them working more consistently across the module. I think that students are much more mechanical about how they approach their work and assessment, perhaps because of the school system. It may also be to do with the fact that students have part-time jobs. If they don't have to read a book, why should they? Culturally they are not doing a lot of reading – it's tailed off. They do what it takes to get by. That's hopeless in terms of weekly seminars. Seminars then don't work – tutors have to work their socks off to get the seminars to work. These sort of changes in the module structure need minor validation though, and we need to have the support of colleagues to that.

How easy is it to persuade colleagues of the value of this approach?

The next big push is to get other colleagues to take this on and develop it. It's really difficult. There needs to be a real culture shift to get this disseminated and to get more people doing this, and quite frankly, there's not enough status for colleagues doing pedagogic research. There's so much pressure for people to publish, particularly early career people, to say, "get into L&T stuff, and spend your time doing it". That's something we've got to work on. If publications come out of it, which increasingly they can, you can persuade colleagues that it, as well as their more traditional scholarly stuff, may be an avenue that they can use. For example, we are giving a paper at an e-learning conference in Barcelona on this work.

> With the quiz, we build in feedback for each answer. The student makes a choice, and each gives feedback at a glance, instantly.

What would you say are the main advantages of the quiz approach?

The advantages are manifest for students. It has clear advantages in that it takes us away from this summative approach, where students don't get work returned until week 7 or 8. With the quiz, we build in feedback for each answer. The student makes a choice, and each choice gives feedback at a glance, instantly. For our purposes, particularly in these first year courses, it is so important because it helps us to know where students are struggling. It feeds into all sorts of areas including plagiarism. Weak students are much more likely to cheat, and if they are getting feedback and they know what is expected of them, then they are much less likely to wander into that sort of 'criminal' activity.

How secure is the software in terms of you knowing the identity of the person completing the quiz?

It's not secure. If we got into levels 5 and 6 it would be a totally different ball game because the marks count towards their degree. It may be that this stops at Level 4. At level 5 and 6 you would need to sit all the students in a computer room and do the assessment under timed conditions. The way we've done it for first years is to leave the assignment open for a week, and we are quite happy for them to do it in groups, because our design is for them to learn from it. It's collaborative. Their desire is to maximise their mark, so we're not quite on the same page with our purpose being more formative.

How might the quiz results inform your teaching?

You would look at the results and identify, let's say, for example that the quiz has covered Marxism, Feminism, psycho-analytic theories, and post-structuralism. Looking at the quiz results you would see that the students seem to have understood structuralism but they are really struggling with Freud, and you can see that there's been a real dip in the marks. Then you can address that, and see what has worked and what hasn't. There are real benefits in terms of the pedagogy.

How have you disseminated your research findings?

We've done a fair bit of dissemination at faculty and university development days. When people come along, they are pretty enthusiastic about it. But it's a big leap from that to getting people to devise their own items, and to embed them into their teaching. Quite frankly, Matthew and I have only been able to do it because we got financial backing and it was fortuitous that Matthew had the time as an associate lecturer to spend time on it. The development of the items is a time-consuming exercise. To get a good item is complex. It's a million miles from, "give me the names of five Shakespeare plays"! It invites colleagues to think in different ways about their teaching and assessment.

Matthew and I are also involved in an English Subject Centre project, funded by Hefce, with three other universities, and the whole point of it is collaboration and dissemination. The project is called Humbox, and this is meant to be about sharing best practice. We've been asked to put forty items from the quiz into the Humbox, but we are still humming and ha-ing about

it because we are slightly concerned about intellectual property rights and the commercial dimensions. There are mixed signals about competition and collaboration in the sector, and it's difficult to have both/and. It's a very fraught area – we've held off until we are sure about the form in which we can send items.

How much support does this new method of assessment require?

The university and management and those in L&T need to put their thinking caps on because it's not going to happen unless it's resourced properly. To get it started it needs resources.

What are the workload advantages for staff?

In one of the modules where the online assessment has replaced the standard assessment task, all that marking was stripped out, so about six tutors would have had quite a chunk of marking to do. So there are time-saving things there. This was a library task, getting students to reference, looking at style sheets and presentation skills and how to use the library. In the past, we used to get students going round the library and doing tasks related to the Dewey system – now we have replaced that and the quiz format is a much better way of assessing this.

How would you describe the quiz items?

It's much more fun for students than traditional assessment. There's variety. We don't have all of them complex. We do throw in a few quiz questions. We have diagrams, visuals - there are paintings we ask questions about. There's quite a range of items. We have had module feedback on this, and a lot of students wrote about the quizzes. It wasn't all

> "The development of the items is a time-consuming exercise. To get a good item is complex. It's a million miles from "Give me the names of five Shakespeare plays"

complimentary. About 5% of students complained about teething problems, like the system crashing or a couple of items that had no right answer, so they were really cross about it. But most students liked it. We were really pleased with the way it went, as a trial run. The students themselves can see the individual benefits. It did create a buzz. Our students are very computer savvy, so they were very relaxed about using that approach. They liked the variety, they found it interesting, lively, challenging. The complex ones are complex! There was quite a range of time spent on completing the items.

Were there any surprises for you?

One big surprise result for us was that the spread of marks was pretty much as it would be for a normal assessment - nobody was getting more than 75%, and nobody was getting less than about 35% - it was all bunched as would have normally happened.

What are the limitations of this form of assessment?

I would be wary about introducing it in second and third year just because I could see all the litigation coming down the road, Computer crashes, problems with security and identity. You would need to use it in timed conditions. It can be done. But I can see practical implications. There is the resource implication and the development cost. I've floated

the idea of having a specialist L&T person in faculty who could be on call for all programmes, a part-time appointment, someone who could set these things up, but there are not the resources. Because lecturers don't have time to set these this up, and they may be sceptical about it for the value of their academic careers.

How have you gained from doing this project personally and professionally?

Personally, it's got rid of a sort of scepticism about the value of e-learning. That was a big thing for me, particularly teaching for many, many years. I've come to this quite late in my career. It's revolutionised the way I think about the possibilities and the benefits of these approaches. Professionally, it opens up a new area, setting aside the pedagogical advantages, in that there are opportunities to convert that L&T material into scholarly work. We've already started doing that. We've produced one paper and we will produce more in the future, individually or collaboratively. Actually, the other interesting aspect of this has been the discovery that it is much easier for me to work collaboratively on L&T research than to write a paper on early modern drama, for example. It will enhance my CV and I've enjoyed doing it. It's been a refreshing change. ■

Can Wikis make Students Think (Differently)

Carolin Esser, Faculty of Arts

In this paper Dr Carolin Esser charts the development of a module based on using wikis as a way of deepening student interaction with text analysis. The project arose out of Learning and Teaching Fellowship.

Rationale for using Wikis

Wikis are part of Web 2.0, the interactive type of internet which is more and more replacing static sites for passive reception. Its most famous (or infamous) representative is, of course, Wikipedia. A wiki could be defined as a simplified website which can be edited by a group of people. Ward Cunningham, the developer of the first wiki software, WikiWikiWeb, originally described it as "the simplest online database that could possibly work" (2002). The language underlying it all (called markup language) was created by Cunningham in the 1990s in order to create a system that would make communication between his colleagues easier. He named it after the Honolulu International Airport shuttle bus, which was named wiki-wiki after the Hawaiian word for 'quick'.

The most prominent feature associated with wikis is their collaborative nature. Clarke defines them as "online applications that allow a group of people to share in the creation of a document…it therefore offers a means of collaborative working in order to create a shared outcome" (2008, 18). The wiki's capacity for group work is the main motivator for implementation documented in most studies. It is, however, not its only relevant characteristic. As Bower et al. state, "the flexibility of wikis to dynamically restructure and hyperlink information contained within a web space obviously affords educational developers a myriad of learning design opportunities" (2006, 2). Next to the collaborative nature of the wiki, another distinctive feature is its non-linear structure.

The wiki's nature as hypertext encourages conceptual networks rather than the logical progression characteristic of linear forms of assessments. The promotion of non-linear structures and conceptual maps, for example in form of mind maps, shows an awareness of their applicability for reflective thinking from secondary school onwards. The integration of such methods and skills into the higher education assessment portfolio is still in its beginning stages, however. Wikis allow students to demonstrate a different set of skills which are desirable for the workplace (see www.prospects.ac.uk) and are also more natural for many neurodiverse students.

Studies concerning dyslexic students identify linear thought as their main difficulty (Brain.HE, 2009). The number of dyslexic students is growing. It therefore becomes more important to add new assessments to the existing portfolio which are more conducive to this student group. While formats such as the traditional essay place questions of structure in the background by offering students a type of blueprint to be followed

in all instances, assessments such as the wiki have structural considerations as a prominent part of their reflective element. Such a structuring of knowledge and content could be integrated as learning outcome in its own right. Students, subject, and learning outcomes therefore all impact on the successful implementation of a wiki as assessment. Such a different form of structuring, especially alongside a new subject area, needs an appropriate amount of support. As the wiki is created online, it is continuously accessible to student and tutor alike. It thus encourages a more formative approach of assessment with a number of built-in feedback stations.

Methodology

In order to study the effectiveness of this type of assessment as well as the student and tutor experience, Christina Welch and I embarked on Whether Wikis Work, a project funded through a University L&T fellowship. Our aim was to document reflections on the work with wikis at various stages throughout the assessments. The main concern of the study was to observe the student experience with the wiki as non-linear and as formative assessment, as technical tool, as part of the whole module, and as personal journey. Student perception was prominent in our consideration. Both modules were small (Text Analysis: 15 students, Paganism: four students), and the study took a qualitative approach.

Seven out of twelve students rated their computer skills middle to meagre. Seven of the students had never heard of wikis before. The connection between wikipedia and the wiki was not prominent, it seems.

Three main stages were set up in order to document the student experiences:

- Preliminary Questionnaires (electronic) would allow us to assess the expectations and previous experiences with which the students embarked on the module.
- The students also kept wiki diaries, which gave us insight into the attitudes towards the ongoing projects.
- Final Interviews, held at least a month after the actual assessment was completed, allowed a reflective evaluation after the entire process was completed (and after the assessments had been marked).

Findings
User Experience: Technology

Technical difficulties were a demotivating factor for 38% of the students in the first of two studies conducted by Ebner, Kickmeier-Rust, and Holzinger (2008). Such a high percentage among students of civil engineering and computer programming suggested that the technical side would be even more challenging for our less computer literate Arts and Humanities students. Nervousness about the technical dimension of the assessment was one of the prominent concerns of our respondents before they embarked on the modules. During the project, the relatively new Moodle platform went through a phase of instability. This affected the students directly. Complaints about flaky text formatting and the loss of the extended editor feature in Internet Explorer were the main concerns mentioned in diaries and interviews. The time spent on ‘fixing’ formatting and the small window open for editing work are the two main factors which seem to have reduced the enjoyment for the majority of students. These problems have now been fixed.

If we put these temporary issues aside, the picture looks much more positive. Within the first contact

week with wikis, students were surprised at how easy it is to get a wiki started:

'My experience of the wiki itself was surprisingly pleasant. Having never encountered such a programme before my initial feelings were ones of distinct apprehension. However, despite my distinctly average computer skills, the wiki revealed itself to be rather quick and simple to set up' (Student diary).

Surprisingly, the two most adept computer users were the ones with the most technological discontent. It seems that the lack of features available for web design and html programming was disappointing to them. Another concern among some was whether to trust the promise that the wikis would be marked by content and structure, not on 'computer wizardry'. This also needs to be clarified frequently in order to avoid a pre-occupation with the technical side of things.

Work on the wiki had a positive effect on the technical confidence among those who perceived themselves as less computer literate. The three least capable interviewees considered themselves to have risen two to three points on a computer savvy-ness scale from 1 – 10. In a number of students, the experience has taught them to interact with websites and other e-media more reflectively: "I have been paying more attention to websites I use, how I am linked to other material and how they look on screen, how simple or difficult they are to use" (Student diary).

User Experience: Non-linearity

Only a few of these students expressed awareness that in a non-linear format, the traditional structure of the essay needs to be replaced by a different structure. Rather, they seemed to equate 'non-linear' with 'no-structure'. An awareness of the shift in structure is vital for a successful wiki, and the few people who tried to transfer the essay format struggled most. Not every student enjoyed work on the wiki. Only two students could not see a use for the wiki assessment in the degree, however. One of them summarized it thus:

'I hated it. It goes against everything we are taught in the first two years of the English degree about building a linear argument coherently from point to point ending in a conclusion' (Student diary).

n this statement, the student offers the best argument for the inclusion of non-linear assessments in a degree which is otherwise focussed so much on linear argument. The ability to switch between both types of thinking is an important transferable skill. Other students confirm an awareness of this, including one

who saw the importance of the wiki exactly in the fact that she prefers the linear argument. It forced her to step out of her comfort zone and to challenge herself.

An equal number of students preferred the non-linear structure to the linear. It allowed them to think from a different perspective, to create something close to conceptual maps. They realised also that they needed to structure the wiki "in a way which others could follow" (Interview). This need to view the wiki 'from the other side' inspired one student to share her work with her housemates in order to try out her structure and navigation. Since then she "doesn't hesitate to show her essays to others for proof reading" (Interview). All students who have had this realisation have become much more aware of their readers in the way they write. The willingness to share also encourages a step towards collaborative work and (by extension) less inhibition towards group wikis.

Each student decided how much his or her wiki would emulate a word text, a website, or hypertext, and this decision could vary depending upon the context of the individual page. In all cases, however, the layout was a conscious decision which itself was influenced by the effort to produce a successful text. One student, for example used an image in connection with her rationale in order to demonstrate how her checklist would function if applied to a specific text.

User Experience: Formative Assessment

In the module, students received feedback in three wiki workshops subsequent to seminars, and (more formally) in weeks 2 and 6 via email. They could also ask for feedback electronically in between these fixed points. The formative aspect was continued between the first and second assessment for the module, as the second, a text analysis, was conducted with the help of the checklist established in the first. Contrary to the traditional collaborative mode of the wiki, ours were student wikis, designed by individual students and accessed only by that student and me, unless they wished to share it.

For the students, reflection on and evolution of the wiki were crucial factors on the way to success:

"This week was extremely helpful as we got to look at other people's wikis. This helped me grasp more fully what is expected from this exercise" (Student diary).

"In the past few hours however, after an individual tutorial, I am feeling much more positive regarding the route along which my wiki will continue to travel" (Student diary).

"The online diary function was very helpful, especially in the first weeks when I was uncertain" (Student diary).

Others shared similar worries:

" You posted back generic responses to the whole group. That way you could address all directly. That we could put all our small worries into the diaries, all the silly things that you wouldn't go to your tutor for – it gave you the opportunity to respond to them to all of us" (Interview).

The importance of feedback is prevalent in all the diaries and interviews. From friends, peers, but mostly from the tutor, feedback tells the student whether they are still on the right track and makes individual explorations of new borders in wiki assessments possible. Inevitably this means additional work for the tutor.

The wiki was very tutorial intensive, both face-to-face and electronically. The experience was also very rewarding for the tutor, as tutors do not often get the opportunity to work so closely with their students and witness the process of exploration and understanding in such a direct way. Part of the intensity was also dictated by the pioneering function of the wiki. Once the students are used to the format, work on successive wikis will need much less attention from the tutor. The feedback stages alone will at some point suffice in order to give the students the feeling of 'not being alone' and encourage them to engage formatively with the material.

Most students also found the follow-up assessment of the text analysis itself much easier, as it built directly on the reflections they had put into the first assessment.

"With the wiki you weren't doing any analysis, it was more like an explanation, with the analysis in the second half of the module" (Interview).

"There were no problems finding the argument for the text analysis. The argument was created for you. You simply had to follow your checklist – and reap the rewards of the work and research put into the first part of the module" (Interview).

Conclusion

As Ebner, Kickmeier-Rust, and Holzinger conclude, the natural use of wikis will need to 'wait for the growing "give-and-take-generation"' (2008, p. 203). Similarly it will take time for our students to get used to the more responsible work format and the lateral thinking which a non-linear structure such as that of a wiki requires. Tutors can encourage this by promoting its more work-intensive beginning in our modules today. This study has shown that wikis contribute to widening the horizons of students, forcing them out of more habitual forms of thought and structuring. In some cases, this is an act of liberation of less demonstrated talent dormant in our students. In other cases, it is a more painful process.

The potential of wikis as research aid also became apparent. We should, however, not underestimate the mental shifts which such a structure and new format demand of us as tutors, because marking non-linear work online needs to be done in a non-linear fashion at the computer. And as our students have to reflect a new way of creating cohesion, so do we need to consider new ways of evaluating the final output. While much still needs to be considered, our findings from the study about Whether Wikis Work have provided us with an answer: Yes, if conducted in the appropriate academic and pedagogic context. For the Text Analysis module, at least, the context has proven appropriate indeed.

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Ways of being a better student

In this interview we explore key findings from Dr Chris Evans' PhD thesis "Becoming a Student, Being a Student, Achieving as a Student: Motivation, Study Strategies, Personal Development and Academic Achievement at two UK Universities".

What generated your initial interest in this topic, Chris?

In my previous career in business, corporate culture and employee motivation were important factors affecting performance, yet student culture and motivation do not seem to be given the same prominence. The literature on student motivation is quite thin, particularly in the UK. This led me to wonder what the goals and aspirations of our students were, how these might change whilst at university, and how they might affect the benefits they gain from their time at university.

What were you attempting to find out in the research?

There were four principal research questions I was asking:

1. What are students' motivations towards university study?
2. How do students and their motivations, change during their time as an undergraduate?
3. How are students' motivations related to the way in which they approach their studies?
4. How are students' motivations and their study practices associated with their achievement at university?

How do you define 'achievement' in the research?

My starting point was to recognise that individual students have different aspirations for their time at university, reflected in their individual patterns of motivation. Some might aim to gain employment skills or a qualification; others set goals based on academic achievement or personal development. The focus of my study was on academic achievement, measured through assessed marks. A mean of all modules was taken.

What research methodology did you use?

The main research method was a quantitative analysis. A complementary interview study of 30 students was also conducted. The quantitative research involved a series questionnaires conducted over the 2005/6 and 2006/7 academic years at Winchester and the University of the West of England. Most participants were Psychology students but a substantial number of Sports Studies' students and a small number of Educational Studies students, both at Winchester, were included.

887 students participated. There was a representative spread of participants across age at entry, prior family experience of university, and between 'day' and 'residential' students. The findings were supported by sufficient data to ensure acceptable statistical power. The study is relatively large compared to those

in the published literature. Most of the findings can be generalised to other students at Winchester and similar universities.

Were you surprised by any of your findings?

I was expecting to find that students changed and developed over their university years – at least in terms of their academic engagement and approach. This is a common assumption, but it was not supported by my research; I found there was very little change in a students' motivation, study behaviours and other factors over the three university years. I was massively relieved to be told by my PhD external examiner that he was about to publish some similar findings, and that he also had been concerned that they ran against common expectations.

This introduces the important concept of *ways of being* a student. It seems that students quickly settle into a particular way of being whose characteristics significantly affect how they will perform, academically. One important but unanswered question is how *ways of being* are formed. To what extent are they already present in the new student – to what extent do the early weeks of exposure to 'university culture' have a formative role?

Your thesis describes four characteristics which help students to achieve. What are these characteristics?

Students whose *ways of being* demonstrate four characteristic patterns of behaviour have a better prospect of achieving higher marks. These are:

- a determination to achieve - and so choosing to put study first if necessary
- taking personal responsibility for performance - and so regulating study in order to achieve
- being organised - eg time management, working steadily in an organised way, maintaining effort throughout difficulties, and
- studying seriously - avoiding uncritical memorisation, engaging with study material, focusing on the assessment requirements.

These four characteristics have a strong feeling of 'common sense'. Many students recognise that academic success is a function of these things and that life should be kept in balance - yet they often adopt quite different *ways of being*. For many residential students the first year is not about study – it is about fun. In general, day and mature students tend to be more serious about study and less interested in the social. There are signs that in the second and third years the social emphasis declines a little, but general differences in *ways of being* persist.

What are the most important predictors of academic achievement at university?

The most important factor in predicting course marks is prior academic achievement. UCAS entry points, explain about 10% of the variation in students' marks. They are probably a measure of academic ability, albeit as demonstrated in the school environment. For second and third year students the marks gained in their previous university year are a much stronger predictor of marks, explaining 40% of the variation in marks. This increase in explanatory power is not surprising as prior year marks will also reflect how the student has adapted to university study requirements, their learning in first year, and the relative importance that they have chosen to give study.

What motivates students at university?

My research focused on two aspects of motivation: a high-level measure that I termed 'university orientation', and an exploration of the factors that affect day-to-day levels of effort and motivation. I describe university orientations in four ways:

- *Non academic orientation* is marked by an emphasis on social experience and personal development;
- *academic interest orientation* by strong intellectual interests and pursuits;
- *achievement orientation* by ambition to achieve, career ambition and the desire to develop the 'academic self';
- *'university' purpose* by compliance with external influences and deferring entry to the workplace.

The higher the levels of *achievement orientation* and the lower the levels of *non-academic orientation*, the better the marks gained. Most students reported high levels for both – it is the *difference* between the levels of these two orientations that matters.The *academic interest orientation* was not a significant predictor of performance, perhaps signifying that a deeper approach to study is not necessarily rewarded in the assessment system.

What role does assessment play as a 'motivator'?

Assessment deadlines are a very important factor for almost all students – whether this was a basis for planning their time or simply a prompt for a burst of last-minute studying. Most students only did work that was assessed, and was necessary to avoid embarrassment either as a group member, or when at risk of being called upon in a seminar. Setting work that needs to be presented either in class or for marking is the main lever that lecturers can pull to achieve student engagement.

Marks and feedback were a further motivational factor. Marks, rather than the comments, were the major influence. Many students took their marks as an indication of their ability. When they gained a succession of poor marks, this became their low level of aspiration for future performance. In the first year there was a tendency to pay less attention to marks, which may have led to a lowering of subsequent performance goals and an acceptance of mediocrity. The opposite effect was often seen in mature students who can be pleasantly surprised at how well they do in their early assignments, and adopt relatively high future goals as a result. Working towards stretching goals is an important part of what psychologists call the self-motivational and self-regulatory process; unfortunately evidence of self-regulation in younger students was hard to find.

What study patterns influence student achievement?

I describe two study practices which influence academic performance, *study management* and *learning approaches*. To some extent students either adopt a good set of study practices or a poor one, and this is related to their overall attitude to study. On arrival, a younger student's work ethic is likely to be an extension of their school or college behaviour. The fresher period seems to place previous good habits at risk. For those whose study was externally regulated, driven by parental or school regulation, the absence of external monitoring imperils their study practice. Even those who arrive with a more autonomous

positive ethic still need to find the social scene and to form friendships. This social focus can result in good practices being discarded, perhaps temporarily.

How important is time management and personal organisation in positive student 'ways of being'?

Both are very important, and they tend to be found together. Students who are more organised prioritise time, begin work early enough and then work steadily, putting in enough effort, prepare for and attend lectures, and try to do their best. Many students talked about what I term their use of time strategy. This is an omnibus factor to capture the ways in which students talk about how they intend to use time. One strategy, described by many, is to take it easy in the first year and step up the effort as time goes by. Students' strategies capture the relative importance of study compared to social enjoyment, paid work, family and other commitments. The more time is constrained by other commitments, the more likely students are to plan their time carefully.

Were some students better at managing their studies than others?

Those with higher levels of a learning approach demonstrate a determination to learn enough to meet the assessment requirements. They show low levels of surface learning, (eg. memorising and emphasising disconnected facts), they engage sufficiently with study resources, and monitor progress toward study goals. They are more likely to be 'deep' learners, integrating, analysing and making connections with the content. However, adopting a deep approach to learning is not a strong predictor of good performance in assessed tasks – perhaps due in part to the nature of those tasks. Mature students tended to demonstrate better study practices, both study management and learning approach; female students tend to be more organised than their male counterparts.

How important are student perceptions for student success?

High levels of self-efficacy, and related conceptual measures of students' perceptions of their academic competence, contribute to student success. In my research model, a measure of perceived competence was also a significant predictor of academic success. Students who believe they can succeed at a task are more likely to commit themselves to the task and succeed. Those who do not have such self-belief are more likely to avoid and delay study, and to complete it in a cursory manner.

It is possible that inappropriate perceptions may be damaging to academic success. Some possible examples: that it is possible to put off work until the second year; that it is only necessary to spend 7, 10 or even 15 hours a week in private study – I have found that the average in year one is around 7 hours; that it is possible to start work on an essay only a few days before the deadline and do well. Perceptions can be changed. Competence perceptions are best changed by encouraging feedback during the learning process and early success in the work. Negative feedback that is construed as a comment on ability is unhelpful, whereas feedback that is perceived as helping to develop skills and performance is helpful.

How does students' sense of personal responsibility feature in their academic achievement?

This factor was measured in the research using a version of the academic 'external perceived locus of

control' (EPLOC) scale. EPLOC did not have a direct influence upon performance, but it was an important underlying influence upon several of the factors we have already discussed.

People differ in the extent to which they think personal effort, as opposed to the situation or other external influences, lead to success or failure. Those with a high external perceived locus of control are more likely to attribute success or failure to external factors. Those low on such a scale display a commitment to taking the steps necessary to succeed; they take responsibility and do not act as if luck or fate controls their lives. Such students are more likely to be organised in their studying, have a better perception of the link between teaching and assessment, and demonstrate a positive personal work ethic. When disappointed by their marks, they are more likely to take responsibility and try to do better next time. They may be less inclined to 'follow the crowd' when their friends are socialising.

The empirical findings showed that a low EPLOC was related to having high achievement motivation, high perceptions of competence, being organised in studying and with low use of a surface approach to study. This suggests that ways of encouraging students to take responsibility for their own performance, rather than blaming external factors would be valuable.

How can the university help to create the conditions that maximise student learning?

I hope that my findings stimulate discussion amongst academic staff about ways in which we might influence students' commitment to and engagement with their academic studies. In the spirit of stimulating such discussion I suggest we should consider two questions. First, how can academics influence students' appreciation of the importance of positive study characteristics? Second, how can we structure our modules and assessments, particularly in the first year, to increase student engagement in meaningful weekly study rather than the current tendency towards working only for impending deadlines?

> "The challenge is to help students to become independent and pro-active learners"

One concrete set of actions is already in train. I am working with the Learning & Teaching Development Unit to develop a questionnaire to evaluate students' study characteristics against those found to be beneficial. It is planned to use this to offer personalised information to first year students, including suggestions of changes they might make to their study practices.

Information provision alone is unlikely to effect much personal change – people still continue to smoke despite knowing it may kill them! More proactive encouragement and persuasion may be needed to ensure students understand and buy into the need for meaningful study engagement. The challenge is to help students to become independent and pro-active learners. One way of approaching this might be to structure the beginning of the first year to be rather more like the school experience. Drawing on examples from some current modules, we might consider that:

- All first semester modules require work between each lecture that is handed in. This would not need to be marked but could be reviewed at a glance.

- Setting preparatory reading questions each week and choosing students at random to present their answer to the group – introducing the risk of embarrassment and thus increasing the chance that the work is done.

It may also be worth considering the way we assess work in the first year. We might encourage more regular and immediate study engagement by making the first assignment portfolio-based, with hand-ins each week as the final assessed product is developed. More controversially we could consider whether there is some acceptable way of making the first year marks matter. In the minds of students first year marks don't count, except to secure progression. Many students interpret this as implying that the first year is for fun and not work, and fail to understand the foundational nature of much of the first year content. First year marks are a very strong predictor of second and third year marks.

Is your research bad news for students who just want to have fun?

I don't mean to promote a puritanical view of university life, especially for those younger students who leave home to come and study, as university offers great opportunities for personal development and greater independence as well as academic and employment skill development. The greatest benefit from these experiences is likely to be gained by those whose *way of being* a student balances study with the other elements of university life.

While mature students with family commitments can face great time pressures, for most students there is enough time in the week to study, enjoy a good social life and if necessary undertake some paid work. But time needs to be organised, study practices need to be effective, and study needs to be given sufficient priority. Some students bring a strong personal work ethic from school or college to university, and balance this with the other aspects of university life. Those who take less personal responsibility for their studies and only get down to work when a deadline is looming, are likely to do less well.

If university is about developing independent learners, our challenge is to find ways support this independence and a genuine engagement with study alongside the other benefits of a period at university. The challenge is most acute in the first semester as students rapidly settle into a fairly stable way of being a student. ■

Assessment feedback: A case study

Steve Allen

Dr Steven Allen is a senior lecturer in Media and Film Studies (MFS) at the University of Winchester, who has recently completed two modules of the PGCLTHE, our accredited course for new lecturers. As part of his 'Practice of Teaching' portfolio, Steven conducted a small scale project with two groups of MFS students, exploring their engagement with assessment feedback. This paper is a summary of his findings.

Rationale

Assessment feedback is a central concern of HE students, academics, and the national media (BBC, 2007; Lipsett 2007). It has prompted wide-ranging pedagogic research (Ramsden 1992, Brown and Glasner 1999; Higgins et al. 2001; Higgins et al. 2002; Rust 2002; Mutch 2003; Pitts 2005). The centrality of assessment in teaching and learning is underlined in the literature (Gibbs and Simpson 2004-05, Snyder 1971, Miller and Parlett 1974), with Ramsden stating that for students 'assessment always defines the actual curriculum' (1992: 187).

Despite this strong emphasis on assessment feedback, the National Student Survey (NSS) persistently returns low satisfaction scores on feedback. The scale of satisfaction with assessment and feedback at Winchester is in line with much of the sector, with 61% of students in 2006 and 65% in 2007 expressing satisfaction (NSS 2007). This modest university-wide improvement correlated with Media Studies programmes at the University, which includes Film Studies (NSS 2007). MFS student responses to the statement 'Feedback on my work has been prompt' were 26 percentage points lower than any of the other four statements in the category at 42% (NSS 2007). The figure was comparable to English studies (43%) but significantly lower than Education studies (74%). The data is problematic, as it does not disaggregate combined honours student comments. As a result, analysing NSS data for students doing combined honours is complex.

Consistently low scores on the NSS prompted a University-wide Learning and Teaching research project on student perceptions of assessment feedback (Jessop 2007). The report recommended a series of action points on feedback including word processing, applying a 'feedback sandwich' of positive comments, using specific examples and offering guidance for improvement. This project will examine the alignment between the experiences of MFS students with the findings, including the volume of feedback, which some students considered insufficient (ibid. 12).

In working for the Open University (OU) I have been encouraged to provide detailed and extensive feedback. Students at the OU 'receive fifty times as much feedback on assignments over the course of an entire degree programme as do students at conventional universities' (Gibbs and Simpson 2004-05: 9). Its strategy matches the characteristics outlined by Cole et

al. (1986) for effective feedback, and these correspond with what students want (Roberts 1996). Furthermore, OU feedback is monitored, within a systematic process of tutor comments being assessed for quality. However, colleagues at Winchester have warned against too much written feedback as being an excessive and inefficient learning tool. Even the Higher Education Academy (HEA) advises against giving too much feedback (Bright 2007). This small-scale research project was an attempt to explore these contradictions and to test my assumption that more guidance, not less was required, including subject specific feedback and generic study skills comments.

Methodology

The study, undertaken in 2007, utilised a questionnaire given to two seminar groups, one Film Studies (Year 1) the other Film Studies and Media Studies (Year 2). The former, had two discrete assessments; the latter had linked assessments, with feedback on a proposal informing the final project. The anonymous questionnaires were completed before the second assessments. There were eight responses for Film History (out of 16 students in the group), and 16 (from 22) for Researching Media and Film. The questionnaires were distributed (alongside module feedback forms) in the respective final seminars for the semester (which contributed to low response rate in Film History). Although a small sample, they offer enough consistency across the population and correlation with the university-wide survey to indicate validity.

Students were informed that participation was voluntary, they had the right to withdraw at anytime, and that all responses would remain anonymous and confidential (forms were returned without names to the faculty office). The methodology was scrutinised by the head of the PGCLTHE programme and a Faculty RKE representative.

Responses

The key findings support the university-wide study's guidelines that the majority of students wish to be addressed by their name in feedback and preferred word-processed comments (Jessop, 2007). The latter has evidently not become common practice, with only 25% of respondents reporting that they had received word-processed feedback from other tutors. The findings corresponded with the NSS, for example, students felt they received sufficient feedback on the assignments (the combined total of 75% matched the NSS figure for 2007). Formative feedback was noted by some students in their comments, with one Year 2 student stating 'the feedback allowed me to understand ways of progressing, without a muddle of opinion mixed with ways of improving that most other modules have', and a Year 1 student commenting, 'Most lecturers only list strengths/weaknesses but do not give suggestions on how to improve. X does all three which is the most beneficial way for me as a student'.

Film History: Year 1

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important
Mark/grade	100%	0%	0%
Tone of comments	50%	50%	0%
Explanation of issues	50%	50%	0%
Justification/ explanation of grade	100%	0%	0%
Recommendations for improving the grade	100%	0%	0%
Raising questions for you to consider	25%	75%	0%

Researching Media and Film: Year 2

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important
Mark/grade	87.5%	12.5%	0%
Tone of comments	62.5%	37.5%	0%
Explanation of issues	75%	12.5%	12.5%
Justification/ explanation of grade	50%	50%	0%
Recommendations for improving the grade	75%	25%	0%
Raising questions for you to consider	25%	50%	25%

The survey asked students to rate on a three point scale what they found most important in their feedback.

The results demonstrated a strong interest in the grade, but interestingly there were shifts in what students considered important between Year 1 and 2: There was a shift in what was rated 'very important' between the two year groups, with a drop from 100% listing mark/grade as very important in Year 1 to 88% at Year 2. We may interpret the change positively as indicating students recognising that grades need not be the primary function of feedback; conversely, students may be resigned to achieving a grade they have repeatedly attained. Explanation of issues increased by 25 percentage points to 75% of all students citing it as very important at Year 2, but worryingly, 'recommendations for improving the grade' dropped from 100% at Year 1 to 75% at Year 2. This suggests that students are not necessarily finding our formative feedback helpful, or seeing it as consistent, and may be sceptical that it is based on lecturers' preferences, rather than assessment criteria (Jessop 2007: 26).

A more positive development was that the proportion of students reading coversheets more than once increased from 75% in Year 1 to 87.5% in Year 2. For specific assignments, with linked assessment tasks emphasising direct formative feedback, 100% of students read the coversheet more than once (in comparison with 75% normally), and 87.5% reread comments on the proposal before writing up the project. However, in Film History, where the portfolio had no direct link to the exam, only 50% read the feedback more than once, even though all students felt the breakdown in marks on the coversheet was helpful, and the one student who had seen the feedback from other tutors (who did not disaggregate the grades) stated it was more helpful to have marks broken down "especially for loads of separate pieces of work like [that] in the folder". This suggests a need to ensure alignment of assessment and feedback strategies, and supports Rust's contention that aggregated marks obscure learning outcomes (2002: 147).

Although the Year 2 module is designed around continuous peer feedback, with the majority of seminars based upon students sharing research experiences and advising each other, only two students listed these seminars as the 'best' way to receive feedback; a one-to-one tutorial with a lecturer was considered best by 50% of respondents, with 25% citing the coversheet, and 12.5% stating 'all' feedback. Nonetheless, the value of coversheet feedback is revealed by it being the only form of feedback rated as 'very useful' by all students.

All Year 2 students declared that advice on developing their work was helpful ("don't just say what I've done wrong, tell me how to improve it"), with 37.5% suggesting a form of 'sandwich approach' combining positive and negative elements. The most unhelpful elements of feedback were personal or unnecessary criticism, mentioned by 50% at Year 2 "when they say they're really disappointed as that can be quite disheartening and discouraging" and a lack of explanation. A quarter of Year 2 respondents criticised the focus on grammatical and style errors,

which suggests a failure to establish the benefit of such generic skills (Jessop 2007: 13), or students' inability to make use of them through the mechanism of assessment feedback alone. The work of ASKE Centre of Excellence in Oxford Brookes suggests that technicalities of grammar and punctuation are best expressed through written feedback, and that deeper processes may benefit from more interactive approaches of feeding back to students.

Summary

The project demonstrated a strong correlation between Jessop's (2007) recommended best practice with students in Media and Film Studies' perceptions. The study supports the need for intervention and improving the nature, volume and consistency of lecturer feedback, as "it is impossible to overstate the role of effective feedback on students' progress" (Ramsden 1992: 193). A more balanced coverage of study skills comments (validated by tutor-student discussions of learning outcomes and assessment criteria), with subject specific criticism, combined with positive suggestions, would encourage student belief in future success, a key factor in stimulating deep learning.

Students clearly have much to contribute to our discussions regarding assessments, and their comments might be introduced into the feedback loop with an online Frequently Asked Questions forum and a section by the previous year's cohort stating what they had wished they had known before completing the assessment for a module. These would feed-forward into the assessment, not merely feedback. In summary, the project demonstrates the benefit of reflecting upon why and how we provide feedback so that "we create feedback exercises that force students to actively engage with that feedback" (Rust 2002: 152).

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Spotlight on St Petersburg, Paris & Winchester

Professor John Pett, a lecturer in Film and Cinema Technologies, was awarded a Learning and Teaching Fellowship to develop an International Student Co-Production project. John is an award winning film and TV director and producer, and his credits include three episodes of *World at War*. During his 30 year career, John has received two Emmy awards for outstanding documentary work, in addition to many festival awards. Capture interviewed him about his L&T project.

Tell us about the background to your project, John.

Well, it started when we had an International Student Film Festival here, based on the Screen Production programme, which I was running with Greg Naughton. Students from the International Film School of Paris and St Petersburg University for Film and Television submitted some of their students' work, and invited me back to discuss ideas for an exchange programme. Rather than having a standard tutor/student exchange, we wanted something more innovative - of practical benefit for the students. I suggested an international co-production, where students would work together to make a film, with each unit composed of an English, French and Russian student who were required to work together. At Easter 2007 we had our first 10 day workshop at the University of Winchester, to discuss the kind of films they wanted to make.

Did you set a particular topic for them to work upon?

For the first project we had a general idea, which I think was a mistake. We focused on the universal subject of alcohol, referring it to each different county, but it was too simplistic. Unfortunately the French students that came here, met with English students, and concentrated on beer – the national mythology, of course! In France our students wanted to film about the way monks make wine, but unfortunately there are very few monks who still make wine. The film made in Russia focused on alcohol dependency in young people and drugs. Having said that, the first project worked fairly well, and we got three films out of it that were quite reasonable.

How has the project developed in its second year?

The L&T money helped us run another workshop. The groups are maintaining contact with each other through methods such as email and YouTube, working out how, where and what they're going to shoot. Each unit is composed of around 4-5 per team, with either a Russian, French or English director, along with a producer, researcher, camera person and sound person. They don't have to work in the documentary genre, but if they're not, the feeling is that they should be focused on drama-documentary, as we don't have the finance for screen work. This year we have created a contract with a deadline for completion on it, and allowed the students to work on their own stories, so they could be about anything, and will emerge from July onwards.

Does their production form part of their assessment at each university?

So far the project has been voluntary. From the University of Winchester around 12/15 apply each year, explaining why they'd be interested in doing this, from whom we choose 6. Last year most were final year students, although funnily enough most of them this year are first years. It's not currently attached to a particular module, although in future we plan for this to be so, but all the tutors will look at the films made. It's a tremendous thing for the students to have on their CVs, to have been involved in this, as it's highly practical.

What are the main learning outcomes for students?

I think it's largely learning to live together with different cultures, more specifically different film cultures, which is important as there are certain technical differences. It's introducing them to those skills of working across cultures, across teams, and across universities. The team's official language is English, although each group can choose, and the English/Russian films are always subtitled. The point is that when they leave here they will be working in multi-national co-productions and they will need to work with other people. I think you'll find that every film, and every BBC and Channel 4 production now will not be commissioned at 100% cost. They will be looking for co-production to raise the rest of the money. There's a real competitive element there.

Are there strongly identifiable differences between the film cultures of the three countries that are important?

The French work tends to be emotional, low-key, and beautifully put-together. The Russians come from a different tradition, where the shooting is very good, and the narrative is mostly good. In the English tradition our stories are not very good, probably largely because we don't teach that here. English students have very good research skills, because that's the way we've trained them, and a number of them

have good editing skills. They're not, however, good at setting up productions, so, should a new degree be set up, we'd like a strand focusing on economics.

I was particularly impressed by the French and Russian student work, and when we showed the English students this work, they were daunted. We want to show the students what they are capable of, and help them believe that they are capable of it. And I think that element is really important as it raises the level, and anything that does that is important, and quite a motivating thing for them to see. The French are very fortunate, as their film school is in the middle of a production area. For visiting students they can see what the professional environment looks like, and they can see expensive new technology which we'd never be able to give them here. At both the University of Winchester and St Petersburg they work within the University complex, rather than in a studio context.

What are the periods of time they spend with each other physically?

They have two weeks in July editing films, having already had a week at the workshop. The idea is that they should correspond with between units, and with each other, through electronic means. Someone has set up a way of communicating where they can show films to each other, and that's an essential part of the course. The students didn't pay for any of their costs, and that's the way we'd like to keep it, although due to resource implications, this may not be realistic.

At Russian student film festivals, students and tutors meet together to assess their films. This is one of the most exciting things I've seen for a long time, and we would love to do this here.

"We want to show the students what they are capable of, and help them believe that they are capable of it"

What would you say have been the benefits for colleagues here, for those involved in it?

Steve Hawes, Karl Ellisson, Greg Naughton and Alex Mavrocordatos were all involved in the Easter workshops, otherwise it has been a one-man-band, in Russia and France as well. In Paris, we work with a woman who is a real livewire. One of the problems of being a one man band is that the administration of it is quite a complex undertaking, particularly with regards to visas in Russia.

What are the limitations to the project?

I think there should be more students involved, but that's down to both finance and student motivation. Should the course be made part of the Film and Cinema Technologies module, this should encourage further participation. Unfortunately students don't tend to recognise the value of these things until they've left, and we want enthusiastic students, rather than having to proselytise for it.

Have there been any surprises for you in the process of doing this?

Through the International Student Film Festival, students from other countries started to send work in. We had work submitted from Slovakia, Portugal, America, Norway, and there is potential for further links. The South African School of Motion Picture and Live Performance in Johannesburg was interested

in taking part in the project, as were several other places, including a Danish school. Until we have more facilities this is not possible, but the idea of an international network is very appealing, as students are getting used to working on co-productions.

We were surprised by the small number of people signing up for this, and we introduced the contract this year as all students seemed to find it difficult to stick to deadlines. I think the real surprise was the quality of the work in Russia, and there was one particular French film which you could have shown on any television, and there was one Russian film from around three years ago which won a prize in America. There are some bad films as well, but the general high quality of films exposes our students to a high quality environment, and raises the bar, which they need to live up to.

How would you say that you've gained from this project personally and professionally?

Meeting people, particularly the excitement of being at the Festivals in Paris and Russia, as the enthusiasm from the students was palpable. The most beautiful thing this time was to see the international students sitting together and talking about their work. As the project continues, we hope to see it develop in less of an *ad hoc* manner, which will truly improve things. ■

Problem based learning: a case study

Helen Ryan, Faculty of Business Law and Sport

Latest figures indicate that by the end of 2009 three million people could be out of work, and with at least 40% of these predicted to be under 25 years old (Frean, 2009). With the average student graduating with debts of £15,000 plus (Brown, 2009), the responsibility to provide opportunities for students to gain these 'employability skills' rests with universities. Helen Ryan's paper examines the potential of Problem based Learning to develop employability skills.

The University of Winchester's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (2009-11) highlights employability as one of its strategic aims:

Employability: will be a key driver of our curriculum development and of the support we offer students and graduates, both in the short term and with regard to their longer term career prospects (p.2)

Developing employability skills should underpin the curriculum and teaching methods of all our undergraduate courses. How can we nurture and develop confident and employable graduates? This paper outlines my experiences with Problem Based Learning (PBL) in teaching Sports students. It explores whether PBL may offer a method and a hope to our students as they prepare to enter an uncertain labour market.

PBL

The history of PBL can be traced back to the approach of Greek Philosophers, Protagoras and Aristotle. More recently, PBL was developed at McMaster Medical School in the early 1960s (Major, Savin-Baden & MacKinnon, 2000), where it was felt that modern concepts of adult learning should be included in medical education (Johnson & Finucane, 2000). It has been adopted by a wide-range of disciplines and subject areas including teacher education (Basile, Olson & Nathenson-Meja, 2003), law (Bailey, 2004), and more recently sport (Duncan & Al-Nakeeb, 2006).

PBL does exactly what it says on the tin: it offers students a problem-based learning situation. The interpretation differs across disciplines but involves giving the students a problem and letting them solve it. Berkel & Schmidt (2000) indicate that it offers "an approach… that stresses the use of real-life problems, and, in the course of discussing them, formulates goals for self-directed learning" (p.252).

Activist and constructivist learning theory underpin PBL. (Biggs 1999; Biggs & Tang 2007). Here I recount my experiences of developing a whole module based on PBL, and share some of the reflections from the students involved, with particular emphasis on key graduate skills. The findings suggest that PBL has the potential to enhance team-working, problem-solving, oral communication and

presentation skills, and critical reflection. My paper contributes to literature on PBL from an applied perspective, where there is a lack of research.

Methodology

Using PBL with Sports students stemmed from previous experiences in teaching a mixed-ability and gender group. As a relatively new lecturer I struggled with how I was portraying information to the students and how well they were engaging with that information. I was also having problems with some disruptive group members. After employing several less-successful tactics such as seminars and discussions, I achieved a high level of engagement after setting the group a PBL task alongside their normal lecture. It was as though I was teaching a different group altogether.

> “Using PBL with Sports students stemmed from my previous experiences in teaching a mixed-ability and gender group”

The practice of starting out with a problem (in my case disruptive and disinterested students) and searching for a solution is a form of Action Research (Zeichner 2008). Action research is designed to improve all aspects of practice, advocate higher levels of equity and compel better practice within a social group. My reflections on my initial experiences with PBL allowed me to further my level of inquiry by following the traditional spiral of action research: plan-act-observe-reflect (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The planning stage involved considering how I was going to implement PBL as a continuous practice in my teaching and how I would maintain levels of engagement with my students. What follows is a narrative of the act-observe-reflect stages.

The module project

The project employed a PBL approach on a second year Sport and Exercise Physiology module with 24 students over 12 teaching weeks. Many of the group had some experience of PBL from previous select sessions, but none on a regular, module-long basis. The main ‘problem’ running through the module centred on an athlete from a chosen sport. The themes

of the module were fitness-testing and application of training programmes to improve performance. Throughout the semester students worked in groups to design a battery of fitness tests specific to their sport, have their athlete perform these tests and analyse the results. Much of the analysis involved group work but the final assessment involved the production of a fitness training plan based on the results of the fitness testing and the knowledge of performance improvement gained throughout the module.

As part of their contribution, students produced a weekly reflective journal with structured questions. 19 students gave informed written consent to use extracts of their journals for the purposes of research outputs.

Results

In their paper entitled 'Developing Employability Skills', Grice & Gladwin (2004) indicate that employers seek key skills when recruiting new graduates. The ability of PBL to enhance these key skills is discussed using selected quotes from students' reflective journals.

Teamwork

Teamwork was emphasised throughout the module, tasks and problems were assigned to small study units of four to five people. In general, students reflected positively on the group tasks:

"I think the dynamics of my group affected the group's ability to complete a task in a positive way. Being in a group with people you don't know so well encourages you to contribute to the task as you don't want to let anyone down by chatting about nothing… Fighting your corner encourages you to know what you're talking about and use relevant information to back up your point, a good practice" (Student journal).

This highlights the importance of team cohesion, a common theme in the reflections with students. Working in a team enabled a higher level of knowledge to be reached:

"By sharing relevant ideas within the groups the tasks were completed thoroughly and showed a vaster range of knowledge that would have been lacking if completed as individuals" (Student journal).

Many students commented on the dynamics of the group; some indicated that positive group dynamics assisted in their ability to complete a task:

"The dynamics of the group are quite well balanced so we were able to delegate jobs to the group successfully without causing arguments or disruption, which helped our [task] to run as smoothly as possible" (Student journal).

As part of their assessment, students gave a power-point presentation. They reflected on the group's performance in the assessment and, where successful, related it back to previous group tasks from the module:

"The group based tasks prior to this presentation allowed our group to familiarize ourselves with one another academically. And therefore allowed us to build a certain rapport before the presentation rather than just being in a team where people know little about each other and their particular methods" (Student journal).

The key advantage of developing this level of team work throughout a module is that students often place more importance on a task or assessment *if the outcome affects other people as well*. The familiarity and comradeship gained from being in module-long small study units (SSUs) appeared to result in a greater engagement with the tasks not only for their own learning, but also for the group as a whole:

"I think our group's dynamics were really good and positively affected not only my personal ability to provide input for discussion but also the group's ability to get on with the tasks and to engage in debates and analysis of the tasks we undertook. We all had some input without a single person taking charge or going unnoticed and not having an input" (Student journal).

With students constantly engaging in group work, not only are we preparing them for the world of work but we are also equipping them with the tools to deal with problems and situations that may arise from difficult group situations:

"The dynamics of the group were affected by a notable absence of one of our members during the practical session. However this meant that the rest of us had to pull through together in order to effectively complete [the task] (Student journal).

"With students constantly engaging in group work, we are equipping them with the tools to deal with problems and situations that may arise from difficult group situations"

Most of the reflections about group work and interaction were positive. This may be because our students often engage in team sports and are relatively experienced in the complexities of group dynamics. The same may not be the case for all students. It is possible that PBL could cause positive effects in certain disciplines and among some personalities, and not in others. For this reason, lecturers should consider the planning of groups before commencing a PBL task, and be open to making changes should problems arise.

Problem solving

Problem solving is the key concept that underpins PBL. During the process, students draw on personal experiences and existing knowledge (Basile et al, 2003). This was reflected in journal entries:

"I believe that I could use my knowledge to provide enough academic understanding to justify my thoughts" (Student journal).

PBL is an inclusive approach, with everyone having the ability to be able to bring something to the task. Biggs and Tang (2007) stress that active learning brings students of all levels and abilities closer together on engagement levels, which should result in a deeper level of learning and achievement.

In some practical tasks, groups experienced difficulties with equipment and procedures. In these situations problem solving was necessary:

"The complications that arose during testing really broadened my knowledge. They meant that we had to be on the ball thinking of suitable solutions constantly" (Student journal).

The nature of PBL supports good academic practice, since students are required to research. Normally this is only necessary during the run up to assessments, but PBL encourages consistent engagement:

"Personally I enjoy researching for the information needed, and that it becomes slightly easier throughout the year as you know what you're looking for more and where to look" (Student journal).

Another student reflected:

"I found the subject really interesting and felt that I was highly engaged with the task. I was highly motivated to do research."(Student journal).

Students identified one of the potential barriers to their enjoyment and engagement as the short time frame given to solve each problem:

"For most of the tasks I...felt that we were not given enough time to go away and find research to back up whatever we were looking at and that they would have been better if we had had more time available to do them in" (Student journal).

However, the importance of time management in task-based work will have given the students some insight into the demands of short deadlines; another important employment skill.

Oral and written communication

At the outset some of the students were more comfortable with communicating orally.

"I personally feel comfortable speaking in front of the class which helped when it came to delivering our task" (Student journal).

For others who found communicating daunting, PBL allowed students to talk in a group environment where the atmosphere is more relaxed:

"I...believe that as it creates a more relaxed atmosphere it is easier to engage conversation with the lecturer" (Student journal).

PBL requires humility on the tutor's part, and the step back from the role of 'expert' to that of 'facilitator'. Not only does this enhance the level of communication but also assists in the quality of the process itself:

"...using debate and discussion within the group it allowed a freedom to converse with each other and the lecturer which made it easier to analyse skills..." (Student journal).

Those who were still struggling to develop their oral communication in the more relaxed, student-focused environment appeared to develop confidence at a later stage in the module:

"The concept of having to present things to others is becoming less daunting to me now that we are having to do more of it which shows that my confidence is growing when it comes to presentation and I think that with more practice I will be able to get over my nerves and present confidently to the class" (Student journal).

Students reported improvements in communication. One group member felt the outcome of their task was particularly poor:

"I feel that there was a lack of communication amongst the group" (Student journal).

The following week, the member described a turn-around:

"Communication amongst the group was a lot better than before. This task was approached with more confidence and therefore completed in a more successful manner" (Student journal).

The reflective journal contributed to students' written communication, as they developed new ways of expressing their views in academic language. Students recognised the value of the journal not only for developing their written prose but also for engaging in active learning.

Analytical and critical thinking

Analysis is a key element of nearly every step of the PBL process, and is key employment skill. Many of the students identified the development of their own analytical skills:

"...[it] allowed us to develop our analytical skills because we were required to assess the importance of each component in relation to the sport" (Student journal).

Students also found the weekly reflective journal enhanced their analytical thinking:

"...having to submit a reflective journal has helped me to look at the lectures in a different way, for example trying to find more whys and hows within subject areas, as well as evaluating techniques that could be used in the future which otherwise may have been overlooked until later dates" (Student journal).

Students felt that the combination of group work and knowledge-gathering to solve problems resulted in a higher level of criticality than could have been achieved in traditional lecture sessions:

"I was able to broaden my knowledge during the session by listening to what other people's thoughts and opinions were on different aspects, and being able to see these thoughts from many different angles" (Student journal).

Often the students were also able to distinguish the value of the tasks:

"These tasks definitely help me to focus on areas which I might have otherwise not felt as confident in exploring, and I enjoy practicing the application of these skills as they will help us all a lot after we graduate" (Student journal).

Students themselves recognised that these skills would make them more employable.

Conclusion

The PBL approach succeeded in engaging the students. Module feedback has been largely positive and assignments were of a good quality; indicating a deeper level of engagement with the topic area than previous year groups. Overall, the project demonstrated gains in student engagement, independent learning and sustained group working.

While the findings suggest that certain key employability skills are more likely to be developed using constructivist pedagogy such as PBL, the paper only begins to develop links between skills for employment and teaching and learning. Questions remain about whether a PBL-only route develops all the complex graduate skills required in the workplace, such as working individually, and taking initiative. Whether these skills transfer to graduate employment remains to be seen and may be the subject of further research.

Whilst the current study reflects positively on both student and teacher interaction with PBL, there are some limitations. Firstly, the completion of the reflective journals was a requirement of the students' assessment case study. This may have resulted in reflections being overly positive as the journals were not anonymous. Future research could build anonymity into the reflective process to allow for a more transparent experiential reflection.

While this cohort felt positively about PBL, this may not be the case for all students, particularly from different subject areas or even different levels. Chappell (2006) recognizes a 'grieving process' in response to PBL, particularly from first year students. He attributes this to students having pre-conceived ideas of university education and rejecting PBL processes as they are not akin to these ideas. Investigating the different responses to PBL both on a cross-year group and cross-subject level would be an interesting future study.

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Risk in Romania: A Study of Child Protection

A qualified social worker for nearly thirty years, Tim Gully is a specialist and expert witness in child protection and dangerous offender management. Tim is currently developing an RIT project comparing approaches to child protection and risk in Romania and the UK. Capture interviewed him.

How does your RIT bid relate to your main areas of research interest?

Very directly - my background is in child protection. I've come into academia very late, and spent most of my life as a practitioner. The work I'm intending to do in Romania is around child protection, and I teach child protection and child care law here on this course. I've just finished my PhD which is very much about child murder and the media representation of that, and the research is looking at how social workers are working within the current discourse on risk. In Britain, social workers have had a pretty bad press for some time, but most recently with Baby P. In Romania they've recently had a similar case, although the social worker killed the child, but the media reaction has been very similar. Romania has a slightly looser system, and the boundaries aren't quite as clear, as social workers in Romania can foster children, but nevertheless, it *was* the child's social worker!

Why Romania? Do you have a particular interest in it?

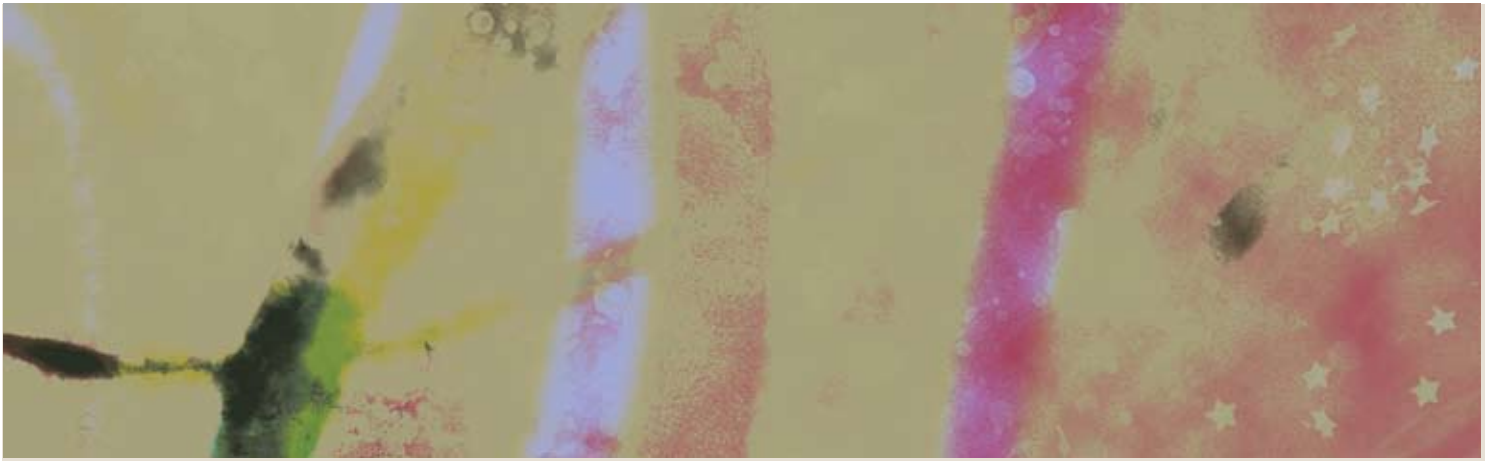
My first link was through the acceptance of a paper for a conference in Romania. My previous links had really been with Denmark, linked through my teaching at the University of Portsmouth. The course was part taught in Portsmouth and part taught in Denmark. I'm interested in the European perspective. This year I've had another paper accepted at a different university in Romania, and out of those two conferences came this area of research, as they have great concerns about risk in 0-3 year olds.

Is your network in Romania with academics or practitioners?

It's with a mixture of academics and practitioners. The academic system in Romania is interesting, in that it's very much older people. At the conference I went to recently, I was probably the youngest speaker by a long way, which is saying something. You can buy academic qualifications out there - a very interesting set-up. It's a country of contrasts, so you have McDonalds, and children wearing High School Musical t-shirts, and then you go round the corner and there's a donkey cart, kids playing in the gutter, and those kinds of contradictions.

What is your sense of the different approaches to assessing children's risk in the UK and Romania?

Firstly, in Romania, it's very new because under the communist regime social work, as we know it, was banned, so they're almost re-inventing social work and they haven't got strung up, as we have, on the risk discourse. They're not scared of risk whereas we in the UK are very risk averse.



What do you mean by risk averse?

Children will always be murdered in our system, whatever we do, but in fact the number never actually goes up. The number has been fairly static since the 1960s. It's been about 110 per year consistently – it's too many, but not many. Most of those will be killed by their mothers (or other members of their family). Only around 10 will be killed by strangers, so we've actually got a very safe environment for children. What my PhD demonstrates is that, going back to Jamie Bulger, Victoria Climbie, Baby P, name any of them, we've got a society in which the prevailing discourse is that there are these monsters hiding out there who are looking to snatch the kids. We've got people who are meant to be protecting them, but can't do so – so we've got these two sides of this coin. Social Services successfully protect thousands of children every year, and occasionally things go wrong. What's happened is that the government have decided the only way to protect these children is by imposing more regulation, more rules, so if you speak to a childcare social worker now, they say that they spend 80% of their time in front of a computer, and 20% of their time with children. That, therefore, is risk discourse in this country: to tick the paper and cover your back. What we've also done in the UK is to spread ourselves too thinly, so instead of concentrating on the small number of children who really need protecting, we're trying to protect too many. The debates have become very broad, for example the smacking debate - should social workers be involved if parents are smacking their kids?

In Romania is there a discourse around risk?

They actually have a far more pragmatic, far more realistic attitude to risk, so they are targeting the really at-risk children. They haven't got hung up on risk and paperwork now, partly because there's not such a big media culture there, and partly the newness of the country, they haven't got the IT equipment, so they can't build the big registers that we're used to, and it's still based on going out there and helping people – that old relationship stuff! It's more pedagogic, trying to get close to people and doing something about it. The church and community remain very powerful, so you have other links, and it feels like there's more of that.

> "Children will always be murdered in our system, but in fact the number never actually goes up. The number has been fairly static since the 1960s."

When we think about Romania, we think of a broken society, because of Ceausescu's policies. How do you see that context informing the development of social work?

From the orphanages point of view, those 6,000 infants in orphanages have now developed into feral adolescents. There does appear to be an acceptance that they are the country's responsibility. As far as the political history is concerned, one of my colleagues out there decided to launch a Masters in Political History, and they hardly had anyone applying. There seems to be this view that that was then, that's gone, we're just going to move on, as we're now part of the EU, a Western state, and we want all that, and we're not going to talk about the past. And yet, clearly, they have major poverty issues, and there are real contrasts: footballers driving Porsches and farmer's driving donkey carts. In a population of around 22 million people, there's a definite small clutch of rich people with most of the population being poor. When you're with the academics, you know the ones that have bought their places as they'll be wearing Gucci earrings, Armani suits, and will be "fixers" of a Mafioso style which of course is very different from here.

What does your RIT project entail?

It's an initial phase, basically to do comparative interviews with 10 in Romania, 10 in Hampshire, looking at risk assessment within the risk discourse. What I'm expecting is that here in the UK social workers are 'up to their eyeballs' in risk assessments, and over there, in Romania, you'll get more "what risk discourse, what are you talking about?". It's about exploring this hunch I have that there's not much risk discourse in Romania. I am expecting that they have a more pragmatic approach which allows them to be more relaxed, whereas we know that over here the rate of burnout, and the rate of resignation is rising. We've just had the Doncaster Report, and hardly any of the child protection staff there are full-time but are agency staff so not part of a system.

What do you mean by the pedagogic relationship?

There are various forms of pedagogy from a social work point of view and the main one is this idea of 'the third' so you get the social worker and the client and they form a 'third being' in which they share. If you go to Denmark, social workers (social pedagogues) have far closer relationships with the clients that we just couldn't do here, for instance they can touch, which is impossible here.

Would you see it as a bit more therapeutic?

In a social point of view, so they might go to a concert together or do some artwork together but it's about having a meeting of personalities, not simply about going to their house and doing an assessment. It may be slightly more risky but it's more rewarding although if you ask people in the UK, they worry about the risk.

How do you foresee using the findings to inform your teaching here?

Well, certainly it will feed in social work teaching, looking at how we manage risk as of course risk is a major part of what we do. There is major pressure on us now to do more child protection teaching and there's a risk that it'll almost take over parts of the syllabus.

Is that a nervousness driven by the media, pressurising statutory bodies to respond?

Both the second Laming report, and Ed Balls have said that we need to do more to highlight child protection. We're now going back to the old days where we're talking about having a split course where you'll either do child social work or adult social work. I can't see any upsides to this. Even if you're in adult mental health, you still see children, and if you do childcare, you still see adults, so you can't draw the lines like that.

How tuned-in to international debates and comparative practice are your students?

We've got some international students, mostly from Africa, and they bring quite different perspectives. We haven't got any from Europe which is a pity. There is a generational thing in that all students seem to be totally disinterested in politics (of any kind), something I struggle with, and find it rather scary that when you ask them who they're going to vote for in the elections, they ask "what elections?" At the last General Election I was at Portsmouth, with classes of 125, of which only 1 was a member of a political party, whereas if I'd asked who was going to buy a pair of shoes that weekend I would have got a very different answer! Going back to the international debate, they have quite a narrow and parochial focus.

Do you have mature students on your course?

Less and less, because it used to be you couldn't be a social worker until you were 22, whereas now you can do it at 18. So we do have a number of mature students, but it's tilting more and more towards the younger ones. This is both good and bad, as you get some who are brilliant but you also get some who aren't really ready (it requires a little life experience), and we have counselled people out, where appropriate.

How important do you think it is for your students to take a critical and a global approach to understanding social work?

Extremely important, as we're in a multi-cultural society and there's lots of fantastic ideas from elsewhere which we can bring into the way we practice, pedagogy being one of them. It broadens people's outlook to understand other points of view and what's going on elsewhere and that life isn't all on Facebook! ■

Big questions, little steps: towards a sustainable future

Simon Boxley; Helen Clarke; Lynda Fletcher; Karen Phethean and Sharon Witt
Faculty of Education

This research was supported by a Learning and Teaching Fellowship (2008) and presented at the 'All Our Futures' conference, University of Plymouth in September 2008.

The University Context

In 2006 the University of Winchester adopted a Sustainable Development Policy. The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy promotes active citizenship and community orientation in relation to environmental awareness on local, regional and global levels. This article reports on a faculty's interventions aimed at exploring how to shape and deliver education for sustainable futures. It describes an iterative cycle of curriculum informing structures and structures informing curriculum to bring about the hope and possibility for a sustainable future.

Faculty Enthusiasm and Ambition

A self- selected group of enthusiasts met in 2007 to discuss how to begin a process which we hoped would move our faculty towards a more solid engagement with ecological literacy. The Faculty of Education Environmental Awareness and Sustainability Working Party was formed, and formulated the first phase of a research project. This L&T fellowship project sought to engender knowledge and understanding about embedding environmental awareness and sustainability within our practice. We hoped this would branch into the sharing of ideas and discussion of the relationship of sustainability to learning and teaching among both staff and students. We envisaged that this would bear fruit in various teaching and learning opportunities across all programmes and within school-based development work.

Conceptualising Education for Sustainable Development

As a first step, we significantly contributed to our Faculty development day in January 2008. As an opening gambit, we suggested, in common with Bonnett (2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2007) that there are problems with the whole notion of 'sustainability' in the light of the environmental crisis. But we also questioned some of Bonnett's conclusions. Our responsibility as sustainable educators extends to attaining some command of both the vocabularies and conceptual apparatuses of 'sustainability'. We were, after all, an environmental awareness and sustainability group, whose aim was both educational and critical. We used the opportunity to address all faculty staff to advance this process.

Clearly there is an appeal in believing that as educators our development will keep pace with

the broader developments in society, social and economic, and with our rapidly growing understanding of the implications of our actions on features of the planet such as the polar icecaps, thermohaline circulation, extreme weather events and so on. But, does this environmental knowledge and 're-skilling' get us any further in considering whether our impact as educators is contributory to a stable state or a sustainable global system?

Many educational theorists, such as Foster (2001) and Scott (2007) have drawn a distinction between two types of educational activity (Vare and Scott, 2007). There is the type of activity which has to do with facilitating or promoting changes in what we do and promoting informed or skilled behaviours and ways of thinking where the need for this is already clearly identified and agreed. This is learning for sustainable development. The second type of activity, though, has to do with building the capacity to think critically about and beyond what 'environmental experts' say and to interrogate ideas about sustainable development, to explore the contradictions inherent in notions of 'sustainable living'. This is learning as sustainable development. We agreed with Vare and Scott that the two types are complementary.

A Faculty's Journey

In learning for sustainable development we sought to develop environmental awareness and ecological literacy at administrative and curricular levels. Education as sustainable development need not be confined to the classroom, nor even to the formal academic programme; this recalled the distinction between Freirean education as politics, and Marcusian politics as education: like education as sustainability and education for sustainability, both are necessary. At both structural and pedagogical levels, the embedding of environmental awareness demands engagement through regular process.

The structural dimension of the process meant that our lobbying led to environmental awareness and sustainability becoming an item on the agenda of BA Primary Programme Committee, PGCE Primary Programme Committee, Foundation Degree Childhood Studies Programme Committee, Education Studies Programme Committee, Faculty Learning

and Teaching Committee and Ethics Committee. We found, however, that formal minutes of Committee meetings were not as useful as we might have hoped in developing an approach to institutional and administrative issues around sustainability, and we relied to a greater extent on our own notes and data collected at these fora to inform the recommendations below.

To further contribute to painting a picture of patterns of current thinking, and to explore the possibility that students might sometimes be ahead of staff insofar as ecological literacy is already inscribed in their habitus, additional views were sought from ITE core subject co-ordinators, in liaison with foundation subject coordinators and at Professional Services departmental meetings; and student views in respect to ITE were gained from opportunistic sampling of BA Primary Year 1 through a cohort representatives meeting, BA Primary Year 2 science and geography subject specialists and BA Primary Year 4 through a Professional Studies module. As a result of these consultations a tracking document was produced to map the inclusion of sustainability issues in Faculty Programmes. Much additional data was acquired by means of a display and suggestion box adjacent to Faculty offices.

We engaged in further discussions with focus groups of students. BA Primary Education students take a series of specialist subject modules. In these we aim to further develop a reflective approach to study (Varga, Koszo, Mayer & Sleurs 2007). Science and geography specialists, who in their future careers may lead primary school curriculum development, grapple with the complexities of subject matter, investigating, for example, possible causes, impacts, and future behaviour related to global climate change, health and living standards, biological diversity, or energy use (Varga et al. 2007; Corney Reid 2007:35).

The students consider complex sustainability issues (Corney and Reid 2007) and explore the place of nature and relationships to it in the curriculum (Bonnett 2006 & 2007).

At the heart of sustainability rests the notion of a relationship with nature which both conditions our attitudes towards the environment and our sense of our own identity. Perhaps educators pay too little attention to our relationships with nature with a resulting 'relative invisibility' of nature in the curriculum (Bonnett 2006). Science and geography remain the strongest areas for initial action (Summers, Childs and Corney 2005), as students on these courses currently explore their personal learning for sustainability journey. This reflective activity reveals the many influences on student personal and professional development, and suggests ways into a fuller exploration of personal orientations in relation to nature and the 'non-human' environment. However, while ecological literacy can be developed solely or even principally within these subject areas, the concept implies 'joined-up' content and an underlying orientation towards holism in education.

Networking

Funding for the first phase of our project enabled two significant opportunities for networking. Firstly, we were able to attend the UK ITE Network for Education Sustainable Development Inaugural Conference, July 2008, where an exciting link was made with a group of NGOs, headed by a UNICEF representative, for potential research liaison on an ITE project funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The project, which the faculty have since joined as primary ITE partner, has influenced our discussion on educational values, through our existing programme themes of identity,

culture, pedagogy, in the 'new' context of education for Roles, Rights and Responsibilities (Hart 2008; Nikel 2005). Secondly it allowed us to attend the 'All Our Futures: Education Waking to Threat, Hope and Possibility Conference', September 2008, facilitating links with the HEI Sustainability Link Group, and enabled us to acquire resources for learning and teaching.

In a paper entitled 'Our Challenges are also our Hopes', we presented initial analyses of several data sets. We used the structure of the National Framework for Sustainable Schools (Department for Education and Schools 2006) as our stimulus for discussion and initial data collection. This sets out eight 'doorways' and associated action-oriented goals to which schools should aspire by 2020. Our findings from Faculty colleagues were considered on several levels. These discussions prompted searching and challenging questions. Among the comments and questions were the following: "Events hosted by the Faculty should only provide vegetarian food"; "how do we reconcile Link Tutor visits to schools [with carbon footprint]?" "how do we take the UN Rights of the Child seriously in all programmes?"

Students' concerns

Novice teachers often have strongly held views about sustainability which reflect their life histories (Corney and Reid 2007). Year 2 BA Primary Education science and geography specialists expressed such concerns in their module evaluation 2007-08, which was collected and analysed using Nominal Group Technique (Delbecq, Van de Ven and Gustafson 1975). In response to the question 'What concerns you most about environmental change?' they articulated the challenges for the future including:

"How unwilling people are to change to make a better future"

"Society's attitude – lack of interest in doing something about it"

"Climate Change such as deforestation and flooding."

They also expressed their hopes in response to the question "What are you going to do about your concerns regarding environmental change?"

"Inspire children to care about their future through outdoor learning"

"Be more responsible and educate!"

"Change my behaviour by being more eco- friendly e.g. recycling, reduce energy use."

The value-belief-norm theory summarized by Stern (2000) and described in Chawla and Flanders Cushing (2007: 439) is relevant. According to this view, people need to value the protection of the environment for its own sake or because they understand its benefits for human society (values that can be categorised as entry-level variables). They also need to know enough about environmental issues to understand consequences for themselves and the people and places that matter to them (taking ownership of issues). Finally, they need to believe that they can have an effect on these issues and that social norms prescribe that they should act (empowerment).

Field visits provide opportunities for students to reflect on sustainable living and environmental concerns. Evaluations demonstrated the value of hands-on, experiential learning. As one student commented:

"From my experience I understand the importance of outdoor learning. When we did an outdoor visit I learnt a lot about sustainable development as I developed first hand experiences and ideas were established and clarified….the outdoor visit today really inspired me to take advantage of the outdoor environment within my teaching either on school experience…[it] showed me the importance that first hand experiences have on a child's learning".

Engagement of children and young people in nature activities together with adults, who show an interest in nature have been suggested to be " key 'entry-level variables' that predispose people to take an interest in nature themselves and later work for its protection". (Chawla and Flanders Cushing, 2007 p. 440).

Recommendations

By October 2008, the Environmental Awareness and Sustainability Working Party was able to formulate a set of recommendations to the Faculty of Education in the form of a discussion paper. We proposed that, in the context of sustainability we should:

1. Consider a re-orientation of our Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes to explore 'Educational Values' through existing themes of identity, culture, pedagogy in the context of Roles, Rights and Responsibilities framework, starting with student induction;

2. Within ITE, embark on a fresh and creative interpretation of the Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (Training and Development Agency 2007) to further emphasise professionalism which reflects a deeper engagement with standards in relation to sustainability and global justice issues;

3. Enrich and enhance our portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate module options to allow those who so wish to study sustainability issues more fully;

4. Include sustainability as a criterion in the module re-approval process.

Developments, Conversations and Future Research

This project has set priorities for future research and application in the Faculty of Education. The project team hopes to undertake further research with the aim of beginning to realise some of our recommendations. A future phase would enable further consultation with Faulty of Education staff and students and consultation across Faculties to share and embed practice, and to explore ways of working in collaboration with University colleagues (in line with the University's aims for Collaborative Enhancement of Teaching and Research Informed Teaching). In addition, we are planning for later related multi-phase research to investigate aspects of practice in partnership Early Years and school settings, and undergraduate and Continued Professional Development provision.

So, can the Faculty of Education at the University of Winchester develop in a way which is sustainable? If the children whom our students teach are still alive in 2060, 2080, 2100 and beyond, theirs will be a very different world. The question of whether it is a fairer, more just and more liveable world despite the now unstoppable climatic change, or whether it is one of irretrievable species-loss, land-degradation, abject poverty and resource-wars, with a descent into ecological meltdown, well, that, in part, depends on us.

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Disabled student views on web accessibility

Tansy Jessop, LTDU, Sharon Edwards, Student Services and Bex Lewis, Faculty of Arts

Tansy Jessop, Sharon Edwards and Matt Renyard secured L&T funding to conduct a small-scale project on disabled students' experience of the web. This paper outlines their findings.

This research project arose in response to developments at the University of Winchester to construct a more user-friendly website. The seeds of the project were sown at a Higher Education Academy seminar on Disability and Inclusion, hosted at the University of Winchester, where among the papers presented was one on first principles in web design and accessibility, and another on narrative approaches to understanding disability.

The presenters wanted to exploit the rich potential of exploring student narratives in tandem with deepening understanding of student perspectives on web accessibility. Inter-departmental collaboration was at the heart of the project, with ITCS, Student Services and the Learning and Teaching Development Unit working together on the bid, and subsequently on the project.

The purpose of the research was to identify specific barriers to accessibility on the university website, from the perspective of individual disabled users with a range of impairments. The project aimed to deepen knowledge of the particular and varied learning experiences of disabled students on the web. Allied to this, it sought to enrich specific knowledge and understanding of how students use assistive technology to access information on the university website. Ultimately, the research aimed to gather information about how to develop a more accessible and user-friendly website in advance of the redesign of the university website.

Context

British universities are extremely rich in new technologies. Disabled students entering university face the prospect of mastering an array of technology, including complex assistive software programmes and more routine functions associated with virtual learning environments. For disabled students, encountering new technology in higher education may be both frustrating and liberating, providing a complex, ambivalent and high-exertion opportunity. For some, technology-rich environments reinforce barriers: "students with functional impairments often find higher education environments very disabling" (Steyaert 2005, 68). For others, there are benefits, including flexible working, social inclusion, and the democratisation of knowledge. Technology has facilitated students in crossing traditional boundaries:

"it has affected where and how they study, helped them collaborate with each other and broken down barriers between students and teachers, social life and study" (Hoare, 2008).

The role of technology in opening and/or closing doors to accessing higher education has been reflected in recent legislation. The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) recognised the social model of disability but was interpreted by many higher education institutions as a slightly 'add-on' compliance stall, mainly about lifts and hearing loops. For universities, the Dearing Report (1997) marked a watershed in opening access, encouraging them to make spaces more accessible, and through the funding council, allocating resources for this purpose. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) increased awareness of good practice in web development for disabled students. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001) required universities to engage with pedagogy and web accessibility.

New guidelines, standards and legislative frameworks have raised the bar for institutions to ensure higher levels of web accessibility. The World Wide Web Consortium (WC3), which develops standards for good practice, has recently underlined the importance of understanding the experience of specific user needs (WC3 2008; 2009) . However, user testing has sometimes been interpreted in a narrow mechanical sense with a focus on compliance (Federici, 2005, 76; Phipps, Witt and McDermott 2001). The wane of a 'tick box approach', epitomised in BOBBY testing, signifies a move towards more meaningful and textured ways of testing the user experience to improve accessibility.

Web accessibility needs to go beyond compliance: "creating an ethos of inclusion, not a definitive checklist of steps that need to be taken to become somehow 'compliant'" (Dunn, 2007). TechDis, the UK education advisory service on accessibility and inclusion, advocates an Accessibility Passport - with a focus upon "the abilities of the learner, the disposition of the lecturer, the policies of the institution, as well as the time, place and medium of delivery" (JISC TechDis 2006, 1). Recent trends point in the direction of more complex, holistic, and user-centred approaches to re-defining the meaning of web accessibility.

One of the key implications of these legislative and standards frameworks is that there are no automatic, easy, one-size-fits-all solutions for web accessibility, notwithstanding strong and appropriate calls for universal design. The complexity of user needs implies that web developers, academics, managers, student support services and university IT staff, listen to the voices of individual disabled students, if they are to distil evidence-based principles for user-friendly websites. This paper draws on the idea of listening to student voices.

Methodology

The research methodology was qualitative, based on six case studies of students. The researchers used semi-structured interviews and observation as the key elements of methodology. They observed students using their PCs, applying assistive technology, and comparing commonly used websites including the university website. In four of six cases, the two lead researchers visited students in their places of accommodation.

The sample of respondents was a theoretical sample (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985), by which we mean linked to a concept rather than being representative. We intentionally sampled a range of disabled students with different impairments, to provide a rich picture of varying experiences of computer and web use. Student Services helped to source students by e-mailing twenty students with a request to participate in the research. Six students responded to the invitation. Within the six, the sample provided a good range of different needs and experiences.

The researchers developed a schedule of interview questions, based on the literature, experience and a previous iteration of user testing (Edwards, 2005; Jessop and Williams, 2006, unpublished). All the interviews were conversational in tone, allowing for deeper exploration of particular issues. Interviews lasted for about one hour, although some took longer. The applied part of each interview made use of each student's own PC or laptop in the conditions in which they normally used it. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with the permission of participants.

Both researchers found the observational dimension richer in cases where students were interviewed at home, as it supplied additional contextual clues about student habits of using technology, for example about connectivity speeds, space for working, and lighting.

The research conformed to normal ethical protocols of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage. We paid students a nominal fee for their time, emphasising that this was a fee for time not an inducement to give 'teacher-pleasing' answers to our questions. The data gathering phase of the research took place from March to April 2009. During May to July 2009, the researchers drew in an additional team member to undertake an extensive literature review in the area of web accessibility to enhance the data analysis phase.

The research team analysed the data by reading transcripts and listening to recordings, alongside close consideration of the literature. They identified themes, engaged in dialogue and *"critical friendship"* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) about these themes, and coded data according to agreed themes. In conducting the data analysis, the researchers interpreted each case as a whole, compared data across cases, fragmented data thematically, and reconfigured the data in a sense-making exercise, the outcome of which is this paper.

Participants

There were six participants interviewed for the research project, all students at the University of Winchester, with varying disabilities or learning differences. Each had received a range of assistive equipment and software, and a laptop or PC of their own to undertake their course work in an environment and at times of their choice, funded through the Disabled Students Allowance.

Name	Disability	Age
Lewis	Partially sighted	22
Charlie	Cerebral Palsy	22
Helen	Brain Injury	21
Colin	Muscular Dystrophy	18
Declan	Dyslexia	43
Esther	Mental Health	30

Attitudes to technology

Students demonstrated different degrees of passion, frustration and engagement with technology. Recent literature describes three different categories of technology-user - being entirely at home with it (digital natives), making the transition (digital immigrants), and being 'on another planet' (digital aliens) (Cruey 2008; Lozinski 2008). Age is a strong predictor, with anyone below 24 years old automatically defined as a digital native because of their exposure to technology. If age is the main criterion, four out of six respondents were digital natives, whilst two were digital immigrants. However, disability shed a different light on these categories.

Disabled students demonstrated a more complex and subtle relationship with technology. Helen, aged 21, behaved more like a digital immigrant than a native, as she painstakingly learnt and re-learnt computer operations following a brain injury. Declan, aged 43, displayed a facility with computers, assistive software, and customised settings, which belied his recent transition from typewriter to PC. Five of the six students were intensely engaged in technology and the virtual world, characterised by one as "a life saver" (Charlie). Disabled students' experiences hinted at a fourth category, signifying a deeper, more active and personalised engagement, which we term here the 'digital agent'.

Digital agents described how technology had opened up new avenues for learning and socialising. Developments in equipment, software and the internet have created learning and social opportunities, and given students greater flexibility and independence. As one partially-sighted student reflected:

"I don't know what we did without them to be honest with you, especially with a disability. The technology has just grown in a scary amount in the last 10 to 15 years. When I was in Year 5 (at school) that's when we first started using computers and we never looked back. And the new stuff that's coming out at the moment is just ridiculously clever…. They just make life easier" (Lewis).

An older student with dyslexia commented on his steep learning curve:

"When I first came to this country, I wasn't IT literate at all and I picked it up really quickly, but everything is self taught. I really enjoy working with software and PCs and I pick it up really quickly" (Declan).

He went on to describe how he had customised the screen colour to help him read texts: He preferred reading on screen because "you can change the size of the fonts". The assistive software Read and Write, which converts text to speech, enabled him to read more texts than he would otherwise have done.

For a student with cerebral palsy, the main educational virtues of technology were in rendering his handwriting legible, and allowing him to work at home, limiting the tiring and time-consuming activity of walking onto campus. For example, being able to "check ahead to see whether a book was in the library" using the library pages, saved him precious time:

I'd say from the educational side of things, it's just made everything a lot easier because I know people have had difficulty reading my handwriting, whereas the emphasis on word processing just renders that irrelevant which is quite good.... It's just a lot easier to have everything at the click of a button rather than having to say, go onto campus or traipse the shops" (Charlie).

Charlie demonstrated the collapsing boundaries around social networking and learning, describing how his research and learning were taking place through virtual communities:

"It's just the fact that with the social networking things, say if I'm working with friends for a project and if we can't all meet up we can just connect and discuss it there. And it's also an invaluable social tool as well" (Charlie).

In Colin's case, access to technology and the virtual world extended his possibilities, creating an environment in which learning, entertainment, shopping, identity and socialising converged. Spending an average of five hours a day on his computer, mainly on the internet, he shopped, ordered prescriptions, watched BBC iplayer, contacted friends on Facebook, and was in the process of constructing his own website:

"I can do a lot more with a computer and the internet than I would do otherwise" (Colin).

Both Esther and Declan described the rewards of writing on computers, and the facility with which they could edit, move, and cut and paste. For Declan, PCs had replaced erasing fluid, while Esther had binned her notebook and pen:

"Oh, I can't live without them. I love computers. I wouldn't say I'm high tech, but I really enjoy using them and find them quite easy to use. Definitely very helpful for writing for me. I don't really like writing by hand any more" (Esther).

Students tempered these positive stories of technology with tales of frustration. Helen described ambivalence and powerlessness in her engagement with computers, with negative feelings arising when she was confounded by the machine:

"It's quicker and more efficient maybe. I don't know, because at the same time my laptop has been the bane of my life as well. It's been because of things going wrong with my laptop, because of not knowing how to do something" (Helen).

Similarly, Declan expressed a love/hate relationship with technology, which demonstrated both his frustration and passionate engagement with the medium:

D: It kind of frustrates me because I want to throw the computer out of the window sometimes. I really do.
I: So we're getting a bit more texture to the question about how you like computers…
D: It's just like it's a machine and if you can't fix it you have to send it away. It's just frustrating. I do like the technology, but I also hate it as well.

Colin summed up the sense of reciprocity in his relationship with computers, by attributing the quality of 'niceness' to functioning machines, with just a hint of malice for malfunctioning ones:

"As long as they don't crash I'm fine. If they're nice to me, I'm nice to them" (Colin).

Perceptions of the University web pages

Students' interactions with the University web pages were central to our research, which worked from the first principle that websites should be accessible and user-friendly for all, and that accessibility is not a marginal, 'extra', add-on attempt to comply, *post facto*, with disability legislation. The central argument of universal design is that accessible web pages are significantly more navigable and user-friendly for everyone: "access for all has become access to excellence for all" (Smith and Hurst, 2002).

There were certain features on the university pages that students all used, such as e-mail and the learning network (except where course pages were linked but external). Other features were invisible or irrelevant to students, for example the student chat facility, or the top navigation bar which contains information mainly relevant to staff. Students disregarded the student chat facility because Facebook is the main site of social networking. Four out of six students generally ignored the portal messaging, partly because of scrolling down and across, and lack of perceived relevance to them. Most glanced at the highlighted messages which appear first and are prominent.

Interviews revealed a 'second' or hidden layer of the university web pages which some students were either unable to access or completely oblivious about. This subterranean layer of the university website was invisible to students because of the seeming lack of intuitive and clear signposting. This was most evident in the process of accessing journals. Three out of six students were unable to, or had not accessed journals electronically. While 'invisible' and unused pages may simply be part of the background clutter or 'noise' for students, and may include the student chat facility, the standard portal messages, they also include vital learning resources like journals. Several students mentioned multiple log-ins as irritating and therefore a barrier to going to a second or third layer. This reflects the tension between security and accessibility which is a more general issue, but is particularly pressing for disabled students whose assistive software compounds the slowness of access.

More generally, students voiced some contradictory needs and perceptions about accessibility and user-friendliness. At the sharp end of these differences were calls for simplicity and black and white text by a partially sighted student, in contrast to a dyslexic student who preferred colour backgrounds or a student with mental health issues who found pictures, animations and links helpful. In general, most of the sample preferred simple and clear layouts, while not falling on the side of the text-only route, widely regarded as a poor substitute for the real thing, "like making someone pay for a full-priced ticket to the cinema, then sitting them in a side-room with a portable TV to watch the film" (Phipps, Harrison, Sloan and Willder, 2004 p.3).

For the partially sighted student in our study, clarity, simplicity, black and white text and big boxes to click on were vital, while peripheral text was misleading.

I: If you were in charge of designing web pages for people with visual impairments, what would they look like?

R: It would have to be just really obvious big squares, it would literally be 'Email', click, the next box over would be 'Portal', the next one over there would be whatever. …I know it sounds a bit

> boring but just for accessing stuff, it's ideal. I think Google has got it right because it just says 'Google', there's a box, click in it and then you just search for what you want.

Contrastingly, a dyslexic student described colourful backgrounds as helpful:

"I like blue – it's one of my favourite screen colours. I find it relaxing. It reminds me of the sea and water… on a white screen my eyes are really tense, on a blue one they're more relaxed and I can read a lot easier" (Declan).

Some contradictory needs may be resolved by assistive software and personalised settings, while others may be more difficult to engineer.

Concluding thoughts

Our findings suggest that a new web design should incorporate a simpler, less cluttered layout, and obvious click-of-the-button options for students to customise and personalise the pages. The technical wizardry which assistive software allows at the interface with Microsoft Word, such as setting font styles, sizes and backgrounds, seems to be what is required in the more complex design of web sites. This would enable the partially-sighted student to enjoy a simple layout with clear, obvious links to frequently used pages and no hidden information. It would allow a dyslexic student to personalise the background colour and font style of the web page. At the same time, a balance needs to be struck between simplicity and clarity, and the complexity of information which the university web site needs to convey to different audiences.

The study probed students' attitudes towards and facility with technology, and demonstrated how computer-savvy they are, and how each student has generally found ways of operating which suited them, within the constraints of some less good features. In general, disabled students have stronger incentives to make technology and assistive software work for them to dismantle barriers to accessing knowledge, information and inclusion. Given this context, these students demonstrated huge investment of time and effort in becoming 'digital agents', those who have command and insight, not only over regular PCs but also over more complex software, scanners and extra features which enable deeper engagement with the university website and virtual features.

In listening to student voices, this study demonstrates the complexity of user needs, the range of intersecting variables (for example, age, experience, impairments, equipment and the website itself), and the agency of students in exploring possibilities. The paper begins to show how complex an arena this is. However, it also suggests some clear ways forward for better web design, including simplicity, clarity, clear and intuitive navigation, and opportunities to customise and personalise pages. As web design and content become more democratically owned, the onus on the university is to ensure that it is not only the information technology staff who know the rules of the accessibility game, but also content developers, academics, library and professional services staff and fellow students. Only then will the theme of accessibility and user-friendliness be more seamlessly integrated across the University of Winchester web pages.

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Write4children

Andy Melrose and Vanessa Harbour, Faculty of Arts

Andy Melrose and Vanessa Harbour were recently awarded RIT funding to establish an ejournal on writing for children. This is their story.

What do you do when you spot a gap? You take the initiative and fill it. That is precisely what Prof Andrew Melrose and one of his research students, Vanessa Harbour, did when they realised there were no academic journals that combined research on writing for children with research on children's literature. Their aim with this ground breaking scholastic venture was to produce an e-journal providing a forum for debate and discussion that acts as an accessible resource for academics, writers, practitioners, librarians and students alike.

With the support of the University and funded by a RIT bid they set up the e-journal Write4Children: The International Journal for the Practice and Theories of Writing for Children and Children's Literature – the first journal of its type in the world and following on in the footsteps of the MA Writing for Children, which was also the first of its kind back in the mid 90s. This ensures that the University of Winchester remains at the cutting edge of research into writing for children. Their success at securing a RIT bid allowed both Melrose and Harbour the time to set up the e-journal as well as ensuring it had a professional look.

An e-journal may not automatically bring to mind concepts of research informed teaching but Melrose and Harbour challenge this by suggesting that that a journal is a prime source for RIT. It enhances the learning and teaching experiences of both students and academics by producing and supporting critical reflections and narratives on current practice which in turn informs current teaching and learning strategies with a strengthened pedagogy in the field of writing for children and children's literature. Their aim has been to locate at its centre the needs of students; researchers; practitioners (writers) and academics working within the field, anticipating that the intellectual exploration of writing for children and children's literature will strengthen the provision of an educational environment in which students, academics and indeed the wider writing for children audience can feel challenged and supported. The editors saw the e-journal as providing an international forum for better academic and pedagogic research whilst promoting best practice and academic research in advancing debates including on controversial issues in writing for children and children's literature such as: race, gender, sexuality, drug culture, sex education etc. It is an exceptional resource with cross-links and hyper-links to other material and debating forums which aims to explore the diversity of writing for children and children's literature. Melrose and Harbour believed that the published research, informed by a notion of 'international learning and research communities' will expand the international focus of writing for children and children's literature just at a time when the world becomes smaller through e-learning and e-reading.

A call for papers has been issued through organisations such as the International Research Society of Children's Literature, of which Harbour is a member, and the first edition of this peer reviewed biennial publication will come on-line in November 2009 through the website www.write4children.org - a site which is already active. It is hoped that future links will be forged with the University of Winchester Press enabling a hard copy collection of essays and articles to be published. Using both of their contacts and conference visits Melrose and Harbour have established a formidable international editorial board of leading members of both the creative writing and children's literature establishment with the likes of Jeri Kroll, Kim Reynolds and David Rudd.

Even though they were determined to develop its international connections Melrose and Harbour stayed close to home for the design and illustrations. The website design was undertaken in-house by Chloe Battle of the University's marketing department and was funded by the RIT bid whilst the water colour illustrations were supplied by another University of Winchester research student, Karenanne Knight, ensuring an eye catching, user-friendly e-journal.

The call for papers has been a huge success and the first edition, so far, includes papers amongst others from the former Children's Laureate Michael Rosen and renowned academic Peter Hunt, who said of the journal: 'Write4Children fills a gap in the academic

market with some style. Creative writing courses are flourishing, children's literature courses are flourishing, and creative writing for children courses are growing rapidly. Write4children provides an up-to-the-minute, highly responsive, on-line resource for all these fields, combining the best academic standards and the most knowledgeable professional input, with maximum accessibility to suit the needs of its very broad audience.' While children's author Tony Bradman, of Dilly the Dinosaur fame, who has also recently agreed to be a member of the editorial board said: 'It's great to see a journal like Write4children getting off the ground. As a children's author I don't think there can ever be too much discussion about children's books – and I'm sure Write4Children will make some terrific contributions in all areas of debate, highlighting how even though the e-journal has an academic basis it is likely to be a resource used by many practitioners.

It is anticipated that the e-journal will enhance the development of a research-informed and informing environment that stimulates the knowledge of writing for children and children's literature to all levels of students' learning in higher education across the world. In particular, Melrose and Harbour hope it will embed research-informed teaching and research in the realm of writing for children and children's literature by allowing the curriculum to be kept up to date and active, whilst encouraging professional and pedagogic development .The journal links with National Strategic Priorities for learning and teaching in Higher Education such as creating a learning environment informed by research that can provide students with 'an understanding of knowledge creation (the research process and research methods) and its application (in economic, social, health and global contexts). It also stimulates key skills of critical analysis, respect for evidence and informed decision-making.' (teaching informed and enriched by research). Consequently, the e-journal offers a platform for debate on both critical and creative practice-led research in all aspects of children's literature and at all levels.

Students are often more engaged if they see their lecturer is research active and if they can see that there are potential opportunities for them to be involved as well. The Faculty of Arts at the University of Winchester are currently taking part in a pilot scheme for second or third year undergraduate students to have an opportunity to experience 'live' research and work alongside an academic - Winchester Research Apprenticeship Programme. The editors participated in this scheme by taking on a student to help develop a wiki that is linked to the e-journal web site. The wiki it is hoped will offer another forum for debate and information that is current and 'live'. Consequently in July a second year creative writing student has been given the opportunity of working with the editors for four weeks in the research, development and design of this wiki. So not only does the e-journal allow students to have access to cutting edge research through an international resource, the editors actively encourage them to participate in research based activities as well as contributing papers.

Both Melrose and Harbour hope that the e-journal continues to grow at its current rate and opens the world of research into writing for children and children's literature to all and they realise the importance of the relationship between the two subject areas. When asked where they were going next with the project, the reply came, 'First off, a session at the National Association for Writers in Education (NAWE) Conference in the Autumn, then a book, a conference maybe....watch this space...' ■

Journalism

Capture interviewed Chris Horrie about the new Journalism degree.

What was the background to the development of the Journalism Degree?

The programme first ran in the academic year 2007/8 so was already established when I arrived. Media Studies wanted to broaden out its existing courses and already had some journalism-appropriate modules. There was a feeling that these could be pulled together into a separate course. Paul Manning was in overall charge of it along with Richard Wright, an ex-BBC journalist. I'm now the Course Director for the BA Journalism and the new MA Journalism which was validated in May.

What students do you hope to attract?

The degree is particularly appropriate for older people who have life-experience as they need to be able to cope with both undergraduate level work and vocational training at the same time. The MA is highly suitable for those with subject backgrounds in the modern greats including economics, politics, philosophy, history, and science. The 'greats' provide knowledge about the world and an understanding about what's happening in it.

How would you describe the pedagogic approach of the degree? How do you mix theory and practice?

I don't like this split between 'theory' and 'practice'. Initially the degree wasn't working well as there was a rigid division. It is now much improved although inevitably we've had to compromise in some areas. I work on a theory of three levels. There's a level of basic practical skill, which traditionally wouldn't have been dealt with at a university. Then there's a second level, which is broadly knowledge, not particularly analytical and not particularly abstract. At the same time it's not skilful in terms of technique, but for journalists it's particularly important that they know a lot of things, for example the structure of local/national government. Journalists have to be very good at being able to find things out very quickly so it helps that you have very good knowledge of sources but there's no need to theorise about those kind of sources. Finally, you have the third abstract level where you can theorise and reflect and make connections. The thing is to try and keep all those things going on all the time, not separate them out into different areas because that never works. But it's rather hard to achieve that. It is changing but it's really hard to find people who can mix both theory and practice.

How does your background as a journalist contribute to the degree?

It sounds arrogant but because I've been working involved in colleges and journalism for 15 years, I can do it. I mix theory and practice. There's a problem in the UK where journalism is designated as a creative activity such as photography or poetry. It's a business, and it's factual – the key defining thing is that it deals with fact. Creative Journalism is like Creative Accountancy: making things up, which doesn't work. A science or history graduate can write a factual book review of Shakespeare: date, characters, and film data – it's reportage, not a creative activity.

What are your areas of specialism? How does that work with other members of the team?

I have two big areas of specialisation: media law and tabloidisation. My last staff job in journalism was at BBC News Online as a news reporter and feature writer. I was Director of Studies in Journalism at the London Printing College (LCP) and then Postgraduate Director at University of Westminster. At Westminster we had a lot of international students, from China, India, United States, Eastern Europe, Italy, France, Tanzania, and Nepal and we're expecting to attract the same here. The University of Winchester is small and much less well known in those places, but we're growing.

What are the main degree outcomes for your graduates?

BA journalism graduates go into print, broadcast and electronic media as reporters, producers and researchers. Others enter public relations, marketing and the information services. The programme provides a firm basis for postgraduate study or further training. Andy Stegel (Meridian TV and an Associate Lecturer on the course) says he'd love to have done it and sees it as a great space in which to experiment and make mistakes - out of the public eye. MA graduates can get a range of outcomes. After the first semester they will be certified Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC) journalists. After semester two students will have had considerable further study of journalism. They will have done a work attachment and had a lot of experience of working with minimal supervision in a realistic newsroom simulation (Winchester News Online). Many students will leave at this point with a Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism (BJTC). Others will continue through the summer to complete the more purely academic Masters level qualification.

What is the most exciting part of your degree?

Doing live news - that's good, and that's a lot of fun! We're doing live news (http://www.winol.co.uk/). All decent journalism courses in the United States are based around live-production known as the Columbia School of Journalism method. Colleges own the local radio and TV stations and in Missouri the university bought the equivalent of the Southern Echo in 1901 as an asset. They own it, and it's run properly with professional editors and managers. All the students then work on it and that's how they learn. I am the first person in Britain to bring the Columbia School Method to Britain, first at LCP years ago, when we did it in print. We brought out a newspaper called the Back Hill Reporter (the campus was named Back Hill), not your typical voluntary student paper but a professional paper, scheduled, with advertising. People had particular jobs on the paper and were assessed in relation to these jobs. It was very successful and people who've graduated off that have done very well in journalism. I used the same method at Westminster but I was able to update it using the web because it's easier and cheaper. When you're printing a newspaper it's expensive and complicated and the same if you have to have a license to broadcast radio or television. Here at the University of Winchester we've been able to make the website, webcast live video TV and do it 24 hours a day with about an hour of content on a loop with options of three TV channels.

What kind of content is being streamed on that news channel?

We would like to see output from all courses starting with the Faculty of Arts on video, as with subjects such as dance and theatre they must be producing hundreds of hours. We could programme it with a schedule. I'd love to create a broadcast unit in Winchester Cathedral

and a bit like Parliament have ReligionVision as that kind of content gets massive traffic especially from the States so it would give us big link-juice. My optimum position is that I'd organise the whole course around live production, and that would include news bulletins on a channel produced by the university including output from all its activities – from big conferences to committee meetings as this encourages openness. Currently the content is all focused around Journalism but we're actively looking for more material. We loop whatever features the students are able to make, linked from the http://journalism.winchester.ac.uk pages on which we have about 200 pages of content.

Can you describe the student experience within this live production context?

The student experience on both the MA and the BA is that they typically spend three days a week, week-in, week-out, running this live output. The most important thing is that it is live and it is in public. That has a dramatic impact on the learning and teaching, as no longer are they producing stuff just for their lecturer to look at - it's now out in the public. This provides the daylight of disinfectant. They're more likely to be spotted if they cheat or plagiarise and not just by mechanistic methods such as Google Alerts. We can rely on the most powerful aspect of student nature: malice! One of the students is going to spot something dodgy and tell on them. My experience in the tabloid industry demonstrates the law of Schadenfreude. People are always much happier to 'do people in' than anything else. They also get the powerful incentive of ego so if their work is good and admired, they get glamour and fame from it – and they like that – even small amounts of it, even if people look at their blogs and think it looks great. It also helps in assessing them because we might say something is rubbish and they might not believe it. However if nobody looks at their

"We can rely on the most powerful aspect of student nature: malice! One of the students is going to spot something dodgy and tell on them"

blog or they get lots of complaints, then there you are. The converse is that if they work hard and it's good, they get all this objective evidence that it's good within the terms that we've set them. We track the traffic to the site so we know which segments have been read, how long people have spent on each segment, and then there are elements of reader appreciation including commenting or "rate this story" which we can use for teaching.

How does this feedback work in practice?

We work with feedback on two levels. We ask the students which did they think was the best story and why, and then we look at the traffic to that site. Traffic isn't everything, as there's also interaction but it's a good indicator. The criterion is different from a class presentation as you're opening it to public interpretation and this is good as it's highly realistic. So everything is built around live production and people have specified roles: editor, features editor, or reporter and they all take it in turns to do these jobs.

Are there other forms of production on the course?

We also have a live community newspaper on WINOL and a magazine: The Vault. The Vault is my jewel in the crown which we should win all sorts of awards for as it's ahead of what's happening in the industry – an online video interactive consumer magazine. It's built in Flash embedded in HTML. We're planning

another journal, rather like Capture, but it's dependent upon getting enough good quality student content. The current state of the media is that it's all moving towards convergence, focused around the internet. As a small institution, with a newly formed course Winchester is in a good position to take this forward as the course was able to start from a blank slate whereas established journalism courses are having to work out ways to integrate their radio courses with their print courses and their online courses.

What part does blogging have to play on the course?

Every student on the degree blogs, and these are crucial. The student blogs are linked out from the core pages so they retain total liability whilst we have limited liability because we do link to them. We will read the blogs during term-time at least once a week, sometimes more. On at least three modules in the first year next year, the submission requirement is to write a blog and they'll use the same blog for different modules using categories to assign entries to different modules. So they'll be writing on this almost every day. Now, when I did this at Westminster with the postgraduates it was fantastically successful on all kinds of different levels. Firstly, the students know the level they need to be at. The worst thing in the student experience is the paranoia, the feeling that they are a lot dumber than everybody else.

Blogging, to some extent, solves that as they can see what others are doing. It's very good for retention, particularly for first years, as they feel part of a club. They have a friendship group straight away and it helps those shyer people who might not speak up in a seminar. The old idea of about 4-5 years ago, that people are very worried about having personal information about themselves online has proved false, as the young people are used to living their lives online - it's the older ones who are worried.

The students tend not to realise how hard it is to get anybody to read a blog, and the need to produce content that people want to read! If it works out right you can get a group dynamic going, where they're helping each other, pushing forward. It's also very good for inclusivity, for older people, and people with childcare who can complete their blog entry after the kids have gone to bed rather than making a presentation at a 3pm lecture. Blogging is very convenient for lecturers especially those handling a heavy workload as blogs can be checked regularly, providing ongoing feedback rather than a big box of marking to be completed at the end of a semester. The students syndicate the comments anyway so if you place a comment on one saying "that's really good", they will instantly, maybe covertly (maybe on Facebook), say "Horrie said this blog is good to look at", and they'll all do it. It's like the classic idea of the learning community and also has the added benefit that it sends linkjuice back to the core pages for the subject, a number of genuine blogs pointing back to us as the originating institution.

Does the blogging help them to build true communities on campus?

The students tend to form communities with students studying the same subjects, but at different institutions, as they have common interests. This is very challenging for an institution which loves the idea that this is a Winchester student who happens to be doing journalism, whereas the students don't see it like that: they see themselves as journalism students who happen to be at Winchester. At Westminster, they were linking their blogs to other students on

journalism courses, and they'd find that they were studying the same kind of things, essay questions, same kind of project work, so they can talk to each other, which is good practice for the real world. We're providing all this free educational content by telling them to set up a blog. It's a bit like the Chinese proverb: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime".

How do you see the industry developing, and how will this affect the career paths open to your students when they graduate?

A: It's a very exciting time to be involved with the media as a couple of years ago newspapers didn't appear to be going anywhere, television was getting a bit stale, but the internet has been like a breath of fresh air in the industry. It'd be great to be young again, exploring the possibilities, breaking the rules, and defining the rules for a new kind of journalism. The industry has changed completely. It's now all about convergence around the internet and at Winchester we've had a chance to get this right, from the start. ■

Masters in Business Administration

Capture interviewed Dr Pru Marriott, who leads the MBA programme for the Faculty of Business, Law and Sport

Can you tell us about the Winchester MBA?

It has been running for one year. It's a typical MBA. It's not dissimilar to most MBAs in terms of its content. The way it is delivered is slightly different, because we have a very small cohort, with seven full time and two part-time students. It was only established last year so hopefully we will attract more students. What is interesting is that all our students, bar one, are from overseas. We have two from America, one from Canada, one from Kazhakstan, one from Ireland, one from India, one from the Netherlands.

What are the entry requirements for the MBA?

You have to have an undergraduate degree, at least a 2:2, plus at least two years' middle management experience. Some come with significantly more than that.

What is the impact of having such an international cohort?

It has huge advantages because we have this diverse range of backgrounds. They all come with different views on leadership, dealing with change - it makes the experience very rewarding for the students and for the member of staff, because they get this whole range. You can't simulate that experience. Because most of them live in Halls or at West Downs, they are quite close as a cohort, and they interact very well. What they are keen to develop, is to keep contact after they leave, and even to develop a Winchester Business School alumni association. They have been very close knit, which is unusual, because on MBA programmes, the bigger the programme, the less they talk to each other.

How would you describe the pedagogical distinctiveness of your MBA?

We do quite a lot of group work and we have a good programme of guest lectures. We believe strongly that you can learn as much from your peers as from your tutor, and we create opportunities for the students to experience 'real-life' business situations. We bring in people from business to talk to the students about aspects of business and management. If they are learning a module in an academic context, it's nice to apply that to someone who is using it in business. We also have an e-network which MBA students have access to, which is where people from the business community come and give seminars on a Tuesday evening. We do this in collaboration with the Winchester School of Arts, so they will organise speakers as well. Examples of this include a former student who set up his own photography and IT business and he came to describe how you go about setting up your own business and marketing it, and we also had the person who set up Hippo bags describing the way they market themselves and use customer data more effectively. The event is also a social event, so there is space for students to network and meet with potential employers.

How are students assessed?

We've designed the MBA with a wide range of assessment. Some modules have the traditional combination of essay and exams, others use mini-tests and case studies to capture more real life and applied business practices. Business consulting is quite a novel module, developed by Mike Davies. Here, we link students to businesses in the region in a consultancy role. We match the students to businesses who have problems they are seeking to address ranging from IT problems to marketing problems, and students work as consultants to the business, researching and providing solutions, as part of their unpaid work experience. This looks very good on their CVs, and it is tremendous experience for the students. The student feedback was very positive about this. They really liked the real life aspects and also that they could see how business operates in the UK.

We want to incorporate Wimba software more in our teaching, assessment and research supervision. With it, we could link up with somebody anywhere in the world and we could share in lectures, provided they have a webcam - the software would enable us to do this. It will also enable us to give feedback verbally, real time or recorded as documentary evidence. We could also have dissertation supervision at a distance through Wimba, in addition to e-mail. It allows a measure of face-to-face – you can see the whites of their eyes, and supervise students face-to-face. I think it will allow us to internationalise the curriculum and give a verbal dimension to feedback.

How have you marketed the course?

This cohort has mainly been recruited through our University of Winchester website, although we did get one student from India through international

recruitment who came in at an entry point in February. You can come in either at the start of semester one or semester two. Hopefully we can recruit more, and continue to attract an international cohort. Ideally we would like to have about 20 students.

What are the challenges of running an MBA in an economic downturn?

The theory suggests that in an economic downturn you are likely to have more students rather than less, because if they are made redundant, the chances are that people might study to improve their qualifications and opportunity of re-entering the job market some way down the line. But it is early days for us. We recruited a small cohort back in September but it was not related to economic conditions. It is too soon to tell about our applications because on the MBA it tends to be fairly last minute.

Do you have any flexible delivery of the MBA?

A major development which I have been driving is the weekend delivered MBA at Chute House in Basingstoke. Each module is delivered for two weekends, five weeks apart, which for a seven module course means 14 modules over 18 months. It's fairly intensive – the students get 36 hours contact time, the same as everyone else [on the full time programme] over the two weekends. But it is delivered slightly differently, as it is a much more intensive - an interactive approach to doing an MBA is necessary. They submit their first assessed task on the Monday before their second weekend, and it is marked by the Friday. We have seven students on the weekend MBA, but we are expecting it to grow because it is a very fast way of doing an MBA. It's pretty unique to complete the coursework requirements in 18 months. For a part-time MBA this is incredibly short – it can take up to six years. The feedback so far (after two modules) has been extremely positive.

Who is your market for the weekend MBA?

It's mainly people who can't get release from their jobs to undertake full-time study, but are able to negotiate some release for 14 Friday afternoons. We are also trying to target people in Basingstoke. There is huge potential there as it is a business centre. We were featured in the Basingstoke Gazette recently and we have had ten enquiries as a result of that article.

Presumably students need to complete a dissertation to fulfil the full requirements of the MBA?

Yes, their 15,000 word independent study is done at a distance with supervisors keeping in touch with their students. This applies to both full time and part time students. Supervisors are organised once the students have submitted their proposal, and the students have discussed the timetable with their supervisor before they leave the taught element. Part of the Research Methods module is linked to their dissertation, so they have done a proposal and a literature review as part of the assessment for this, and received feedback on it. They don't have to start from scratch and they have had some feedback to help craft the dissertation topic.

What are your hopes for the future of the MBA?

I would welcome another international cohort. It has been a very good experience both for the tutors and the students. Locally, we have been approached by the National Health Service Workforce Planning team to accredit a module against our MBA. They don't

want a public sector qualification, (a Masters in Public Administration) because they see themselves very much as a business. For our existing students, we have given the students free membership of the Chartered Manager Institute. All the students on the MBA will have student membership. They have a number of resources students can access, and there is network for them to engage with. Having completed the MBA they will be eligible for full membership, if they choose, and they can take an additional exam to become Chartered Managers. ■

Childhood, Youth and Community Studies

Capture interviewed Paula Allen, who leads the CYCS programme in the Faculty of Education.

What is the background to the development of the CYCS Degree?

There were two different drivers; one was the commitment of government to have a graduate workforce working with children and young people. At the same time there were lots of government policies coming into place, for example Every Child Matters, multi-agency working, and the Common Core for the Children's Workforce which sets out basic skills needed for work with children, including communication, safeguarding and promoting welfare, supporting transitions (http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/common-core). All of these inform the way we should be working with children and young people to enhance their outcomes. The government has also been working on the Integrated Qualifications Framework, which should allow people to move between different jobs in the children's and young people's workforce more easily. More courses, it is anticipated, will have common modules that are relevant to all those working with children and young people, looking at the whole age range from 0-19. They'll also need specialist modules, which would be more relevant to certain professions.

Running alongside this was the recognition that there is a group of students who are really interested in knowing more about children and young people, who probably want to work with them in the future, but haven't always been convinced that they want to work in a particular profession (so, for example, they haven't always wanted to be teachers). At the time of writing this degree there seemed to be very few programmes which were generic, which enabled students to do that. Students can really learn about children, young people, their families and their communities, without studying them from any one particular discipline.

How easy will it be for graduates to move into vocational areas?

This will depend on their future career choice. If students know already that they wish to be a children's nurse or social worker it would be advisable to study this straight away. At present, we have a cohort of students that are undecided, so it's a degree that gives them deeper knowledge and critical understanding, and three years to think about potential professions and areas of employment. We really encourage voluntary work throughout the course, and that again, enables students during the three year period to really reflect on the age group that they particularly enjoy working with, and the type of setting and organisation that they want to work within. We are anticipating that students will progress to post graduate study particularly in teaching, early years, youth work and possibly social work. Some students may progress straight into employment and take relevant work related training in for example playwork, community work, connexions, youth justice and within the 3rd sector. They will be graduates, so if they go for a

job outside the sector, the degree, equips them with generic theory and skills for employment as these are embedded all the way through.

How long has the degree been running?

We've just completed the first year, with 48 students from single, combined or second subject programmes. We are anticipating approximately 80 students next year.

How common is the CYCS type degree across the sector?

We were slightly ahead of the game, but I know similar programmes are being set up elsewhere. It will be interesting in this time of capped numbers whether universities that haven't actually started to run a similar programme will develop one or not.

Who are you hoping to attract in the degree?

Basically, we're looking for students who are really interested in developing their understanding about children and young people, their families, peers and communities and the effects they may have on their development and wellbeing. So, we're not seeking to attract students who are particularly interested in health or education alone, but where the child is considered holistically, and all the things which might affect their development, learning, well-being and health. We're also hoping to attract students who want to engage in research, enquiry and critical reflection, and how this can be applied when working with children, young people, families and communities. It's not a pure academic degree, we are seeking students who can not only engage with theory but who can clearly apply this to situations in the future where they will be working with children and young people.

What disciplines do you cover in the course?

The programme is particularly informed by psychology, sociology, education, health and social care. There are strong themes around informal education, well-being, multi-agency working and how the child, their family and communities all inter-relate.

How would you describe the pedagogic approach of the degree?

Research and enquiry is something that we try to engage the students with right from the beginning, and that then leads to critical awareness and critical evaluation. We try also to encourage the students to be independent - to have an enquiring mind, critiquing government policies and research and reflecting on their meaning. This runs through everything we do, asking students to engage with research, evaluate it, then see how it can be applied to different situations. Practically all modules have two assessments. One is an academic assignment, very much underpinned by theory, policy and research, but then there's usually a practical application, so it's not just enabling students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the theory, but how that can then be used and applied to practice.

What are the main degree outcomes for your graduates?

To produce an informed and competent graduate who's capable of understanding the issues around health, learning, development and wellbeing of children from early years to adolescence, understanding the social context of the child and the young person, including the family. We want our students to be able to critique government policies that set part of that context and

understand the issues around multi-agency working. Multi-agency working is a very important focus in this degree; when students move into a variety of different professional jobs, they've already been used to working together, sharing their ideas and different perspectives. The students will not only have learnt about why multi-agency working is important, but will have been immersed in it all the way through.

What is the most exciting part of your degree?

For students, the ability to study the full age range of childhood and to consider this from a variety of perspectives rather than from one discipline. Students are able choose from a variety of optional modules which allow them to specialise in a particular age group or potential career pathway or maintain flexibility throughout their degree programme. The opportunity to be involved with voluntary work for which they can be awarded University credits is another exciting aspect of the programme.

For staff, recruitment and retention has been very exciting. We have recruited very well and students haven't changed to their second subjects at the end of the first year which, if the degree hadn't come up to their expectations, would have been likely. We've had some really positive feedback from current students, and also from parents at open days who express a desire to do the course! We get positive responses from other professionals, who ask if they can come in and contribute a session to the programme, as they see it as an exciting development and would like to be involved. We've also received positive feedback from the children and young people's workforce locally, when we've been at meetings and discussed what we are doing.

Are there any surprises in the programme?

We can see the advantages of the University's level 4, second subject model. There are quite a few programmes that potentially fit very well with this degree, most notably Education Studies and Psychology, but also programmes such as Events Management, Sports Studies and Theology and Religious Studies. However we have been surprised by the reactions of some students at Open Day who have said "but this is really all we want to do". An additional pleasant surprise has been how popular we have been as a second subject for other programme.

What are the main challenges for your programme?

The challenge for anyone doing this kind of degree is keeping abreast of the changes that are happening in the children's and young people's workforces. We need to ensure that these students have the best employment opportunities available, and so we need to constantly keep aware of the changes to ensure that our programme reflects these so that they are well-placed for going into employment of further professional training afterwards. Whilst not ignoring the theoretical aspects of the degree, we need to be pragmatic and ensure our students have good prospects in the marketplace.

What career paths would be open to your graduates?

Some will continue to postgraduate study in their chosen profession. The degree has been marketed

about the value of e-learning. That was a big thing for me, particularly teaching for many, many years. I've come to this quite late in my career. It's revolutionised the way I think about the possibilities and the benefits of these approaches. Professionally, it opens up a new area, setting aside the pedagogical advantages, in that there are opportunities to convert that L&T material into scholarly work. We've already started doing that. We've produced one paper and we will produce more in the future, individually or collaboratively. Actually, the other interesting aspect of this has been the discovery that it is much easier for me to work collaboratively on L&T research than to write a paper on early modern drama, for example. It will enhance my CV and I've enjoyed doing it. It's been a refreshing change.

Social Work Degree

Capture interviewed Professor Sandra Drower about the new Social Work Degree.

Tell us about the background to the Social Work degree at Winchester.

In 2004, the external examiner for the Social Care programme suggested that existing staff start thinking about the possibility of developing a social work degree here. Some years previously Winchester had offered a Diploma in Social Work, and with the national development of the BSc (Hons) Social Work it seemed a good time to pursue this, the new degree, at Winchester. Two key General Social Care Council (GSCC) requirements for the development of a social work training programme are to make sure that all local stakeholders are on board and that there will be enough placements for students. Hampshire County Council (HCC) backed the initiative, and then it was a matter of getting someone to lead the process. In 2006 I took up the position of Programme Leader and Professor of Social Work here.

What stakeholders did you involve in developing the degree?

Important initial links were with the GSCC finding out what the basic parameters for the whole degree were, and with Hampshire County Council (HCC) identifying local needs, what local providers were already doing and what could be Winchester's niche area. We have involved service users in developing the programme from the outset. Although this tends to be unique in programme development it is another requirement of the GSCC. But how we involved service users was left to us. We established a Social Work Advisory Group (SocWAG) which has members from HCC, service users, and academic staff. Everything has gone through them from developing the philosophy of the programme to the practicalities of programme delivery – it's a very democratic process making sure that all the stakeholders really are part of the process. We took the National Occupational Standards as a minimum standard and then as a group put our own stamp on the programme which is all about creating adaptable, flexible, creative, resilient practitioners. As a society we're moving through a period of considerable transition with stresses from the economic crunch, globalisation, diversity, and technology. We've got to create a workforce which is not as mechanistic and dependent as it seems to have become in the face of government directives. We have to be respectful of the fact that certain procedures need to be followed but also bear in mind that these procedures can be wrong, not work and need to change.

Would you say that the degree takes a critical stance?

Yes, right from the introduction to social work there is a module about what social work is, and what it is not. An initial question is, "is social work about controlling or is it about caring, and can care be controlling?" We encourage the students to think about what they're really doing. We are also very strong on social work's value base – social justice, equity, democracy. We are very conscious of how we are working in the classroom, with service users,

with other staff and whether our behaviour actually evidences our values. 'Modelling' these for students is important in preparing them for work with service user groups and is central to the philosophy of the programme.

What students do you hope to attract onto the degree?

This first year has been absolutely wonderful because there has been a complete cross- section of students. However, there is always one problem - we never get enough men. This year we started with 34 students and only two were men. I've found there's a very constructive dynamic in the classroom. We've got a lovely mix of older and younger who are able to challenge each other's viewpoints. Some are straight out of college, some mid-20s, done working/ travelling but not quite settled down, and some older and looking for a second career. We've got about seven students from different ethnic groups and countries, mainly Africa, which is also interesting in terms of their particular life experiences and what they bring to the classroom context. For next year the numbers seem healthy and it looks like an interesting spread again.

What feedback have you had from the first cohort?

One of the things I was very thrilled about was that the current students want to meet the next cohort. In Week 0 when we meet the new students we're planning to bring in some students from this past year, some service users, and some HCC practitioners. We want to say 'this is the team you will be working with for the next three years'. A programme can look really great on paper, but you can never predict how it will work in practice. The feedback has been great. It makes sense and I can see where we need to shift things around.

Who teaches on the social work programme?

We have a small and tight knit team. At present there are three full-time posts, myself, Tim Gully, a senior lecturer, who has fabulous experience in child protection and child advocacy, and a practice-learning co-ordinator, Liz Ellis, a very experienced practitioner. We will add another new staff member to start in September, and a fifth at the end of the second year - as we move into the programme's third year.

Is there a particular learning and teaching philosophy which underpins the degree?

We place strong emphasis on ongoing dialogue – among members of the team and between the team and students. As a team, we won't wait for a formal staff meeting, but we constantly monitor and share with each other how students are doing. This is part of the practice of social work - you're constantly aware of what is happening in and with those around you – so teaching social work is not a matter of going into a classroom and performing a task. It's an ongoing dialogical process. We have regular structured team meetings where we'll look across modules, see which areas students are finding tough and look for ways in which modules can support each other. As a team each semester we look at the results of the whole group of students in order to see how far we're in alignment or out of kilter with each other in terms of our assessing. It also gives us a feel of which students are struggling and with what and gives us a sense of how they are coping with different kinds of assessment. It's very tight team-working but it is central to making a social work programme work.

Do you find being a single honours degree quite helpful?

For a professional degree it's terribly important! A lot of people from the outside will look at that and think that it's very 'exclusive', but it actually produces an ethos in terms of the values and principles of the profession which you can really work with. The moment that you have students on the programme who are not identified with the core business and not as committed - coming in and out just to get a module - you have an entirely different dynamic.

With combined honours I'm fully aware that there is richness in bringing different frames of reference together, and different ways of working. What I'm very against is where students make up their own programme of study and approach this like choosing smarties: "One of this, one of that". A programme of study must be coherent. There should be a rationale underlying the choice and students need thoughtful guidance on this. How do their subject choices fit together? Academics need to guide students. It's not an administrative task, putting together different degree combinations that work.

Students need to be able to clearly articulate and give a rationale for why they want to take a particular combination of modules, otherwise you may have a student in your class who is not really committed because they are not really clear as to why they are there. It places a particular demand on the lecturer to hold the class together and to bridge the gap between modules from different subjects. Students often can't make this leap for themselves, for example that between Social Care Studies and Education Studies. As a professional degree it is important that the Social Work programme has a strong sense of its professional identity – the aim is to nurture this identity in students – this is unlikely to happen when there are differing levels of commitment and understanding in the classroom.

What social work skills do you hope your graduates will have achieved by the end of the degree?

I want them to be confident. I want them to have a very balanced and unselfconscious view of what they can do and what they can't do, and to know where they can find help when they can't do things. It's OK to need to find out and to need help. I'd like them to be creative and they must have insight and self-awareness. A challenge for the social worker is to be able to set boundaries. They need a clear sense of where their responsibilities begin and end in relation to their work. They must be creative, independent and interdependent workers, able to use their initiative, but also know when to get others involved.

How are you teaching your students to deal with the paperwork?

We've all been very upfront about the issue. What is happening with social work in the UK in not the same as in other countries. One aspect – function - of social work has taken prominence – statutory social work. I link this back to the fact that social work in this country seems to have become 'owned' by the State. It is actually a profession in its own right. But many people outside the profession, including bureaucrats, think they know what it is and define the social work role accordingly. An important debate within social work at the moment is that as social workers we should be defining our own role, and there's a strong wish to take back control. We need to start that process with graduates, making them aware that they have to define their role. In the UK, statutory social work

seems to have become the only social work but it's just one aspect among many others, including advocacy, community and group work, working in schools, doing preventative work – like in other countries. It may be that the recession will help us to define our role better. Cutbacks can challenge us to be more creative.

What has been the most exciting aspect of launching the new degree?

It actually worked! There have been some tricky moments, but it has worked. Writing the programme was a lonely enterprise. There's a lot of having to feel your way. But it's great to get affirmation, as we have through the response of the students and from the external examiner this week.

What have been the surprises in running the programme?

The lovely students we have. I've been teaching social work for a long time and I'm very conscious that each group and year of study is different, and I'm conscious of how students respond within staff-student dynamics. I had wondered about the institution being a new-ish university, finding its path, and how that would impact on the programme and the students. But the students themselves have adjusted very well indeed and have been open to all the experiences offered by the programme.

What are the main challenges that lie ahead?

We need to recognise that each year will be unique, and we need to allow for this coming year to become its own group, whilst at the same time I want us to continue to develop that open, engaged ethos we have established. We've been able to do it with one year of study, and it's going to be a challenge to try and maintain that across two. The second years will be going into placements for the first time next year, which will throw up another set of untested challenges out in the community. We hope we've prepared them enough. The feedback from their 5-day shadowing placement was very positive. The third year placements will be tougher still and will bring more challenges. Once we've completed the first three year cycle we'll be able to review the whole programme and get a sense of how it is working across the years.

How do you envisage the social work programme being affected by the economic downturn, if at all?

There is a special Social Work Taskforce sitting at the moment as a result of cases such as Baby P. They will be presenting their final report in October. They have been tasked to look at a range of issues relating to the profession. The level of crisis within the profession and the toughness and importance of its work are beginning to be recognised. High staff turnover, the workload, the nature of the work, the lack of adequate and appropriate supervision, how social work is managed, and the poor work conditions, are some of the issues being considered.

The reality is that social work is very tough work, and it's often the most junior people who are put on the front line – not entirely appropriate. The crisis within the profession has resulted in some very exciting initiatives. For example, exploring the possibility of getting senior professionals back on the front line and keeping them there through identifying new career pathways, finding ways to provide strong mentorship and appropriate clinical supervision. Already social work students receive a good bursary to assist them with their studies. At present a pilot project is being run in a number of local authorities to explore how the

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transition from university to full-time practice may be eased for newly qualified social workers. In the pilot the first year of practice is made a more structured year, with particular kinds of experiences, including capping the case load, ensuring regular and appropriate supervision, and providing a programme of staff training. It seems that a model of mentoring similar to the NQT is being explored – much more appropriate than going straight from university, being given a caseload and basically being left to get on with it.

Social workers get a pretty bad press and have become a bit of a political football. How do you make sense of this?

Social workers have taken the media rap for on a number of occasions – but if you bash people too much they will leave. And this is what has happened in social work – people burnout and leave. But it's a fascinating profession! It brings together a lot of the tensions in society. It often operates almost as the conscience of society as it deals with all the things that society doesn't want to see, and often requires working with people who push conventional boundaries. We live in a culture that wants instant results and has lost faith in the fact that life is a struggle and can be very uncomfortable. Social work is about being there in that struggle.

A central political tension comes in recognising the dichotomy between a culture of targets and the nature of social work. It's like two different frames of reference and languages. A business model doesn't really work when you're trying to engage 'hard to reach' families. You can't set targets about closing cases when dealing with such human situations, or balance budgets by delaying court procedures. It can be dangerous.

Clearly some very uncomfortable things have happened within statutory work, but when these things blow up we need to look more closely at what has actually been going on in particular work contexts. It is complicated. For example, one problem in Haringey was the high proportion of agency staff. This results in a lack of continuity for service users. This is clearly bad practice when you are working with people who are already badly damaged and extremely vulnerable. I believe that the State is now really starting to recognise that social work has real value and needs constructive support. These are exciting times for the profession! ■

Pedal power - volunteering as active learning

Richard Cheetham, Faculty of Business, Law and Sport

Learning and Teaching promotes volunteering as a key element in the student experience and an important driver of graduate employability. In this opinion piece, Richard Cheetham, Lecturer in Sports Development, reflects on the benefits of a volunteering project involving cycling and disabled children.

Confucius said "What I hear I forget. What I see I remember. What I do I understand". This is one of the reasons why the volunteer experience is continually promoted by lecturers, and attracts potential employers. Volunteering is an invaluable learning opportunity. Graduates attest to the fact that volunteering benefits them personally and professionally, and helps them to overcome the hurdle of not having enough experience in relation to unsuccessful employment applications.

Having recently completed another year of community sports projects with second year sport development students, the value added and experiential learning nature of the module has been praised by those involved. One could almost see Confucius nodding with approval when their feedback was received. As part of the Cyclists Touring Club and East Hampshire District Council 'Cycling for All' initiative, five students led inclusive cycling activities for those with physical and mental impairments each week at Alice Holt Forest near Farnham. They volunteered for one of the most demanding challenges, and whilst they were supervised and supported, they had no prior experience. Here were some of their observations;

"I felt that I was actually contributing and learning at the same time".

"Volunteering with this group is one of the most rewarding things I have done. I know the challenges these people face because I was there helping them each week. I can understand the barriers they have to overcome just to take part in sport."

"We just learnt by doing it really… getting our hands dirty, not being afraid to get stuck in. We all felt really supported because we volunteered for something tough, not really glamorous".

The process of volunteering is often mutually beneficial to the volunteer and the organisation (Deane & Adams, 2003). Organisations recruit intrinsically motivated volunteers who are willing to undertake work for them. The opportunity to become involved in a project or a 'one-off' event may only happen with the contribution from those willing to give their time for free. The Manchester Commonwealth Games used 10,500 volunteers for two weeks, contributing to a successful and well-run event. In their studies on the motivation of volunteers, Downard, Lumsdon and Ralston (2005) and UK Sport (2003) both

> “Students who get involved in volunteering tend to be those who realise that things will not happen unless they make them”

highlighted that they gained skills otherwise not available to them. As well as the social aspects of meeting like-minded others, there was a real sense of personal and career development. For those who are keen to enhance their prospects of getting employment, careers advisers are the first to suggest that volunteering looks good on the CV. A potential employer is likely to be enthused by someone with volunteering experience and impressed by the character shown by anyone willing to take two weeks of their time (in many cases using annual leave) to work voluntarily. The students in our sports development project confirmed that they had gained skills and confidence, learning by doing, and reported high levels of satisfaction in being engaged in worthwhile activity.

However, it is often difficult for lecturers to sell the idea of volunteering to busy students. There are undoubted pressures on time with those who work full-time or have families. This and additional commitments have created a “time squeeze” (Cuskelly, Hoye and Auld, 2008 pp.12) affecting the decision to volunteer and commit to any form of involvement. Students are no different. The demands of studying, part-time work and the obvious social opportunities restrict their time too. There are always barriers but it is a question of encouraging the concept of volunteering and the derived benefits. From a sports perspective, there are 151,000 registered voluntary sports clubs in the UK (UK Sport, 2003) and over 5,000 sports graduates annually. The question is what will set those new graduates apart at interviews.

Students who get involved in volunteering tend to be those who realise that things will not happen unless they make them, and want to underpin theory and academic knowledge with active learning and practical experience. With a three year commitment to a University degree the student not only has the opportunity to be part of the community on campus but also the community within Winchester. This could allow them to develop relationships and make contacts that may help their careers at a later date. Imagine the personal and vocational development by being attached to a team or club for this time. We need to encourage and make students aware of volunteering opportunities that arise. Confucius is not the only one with wise words!

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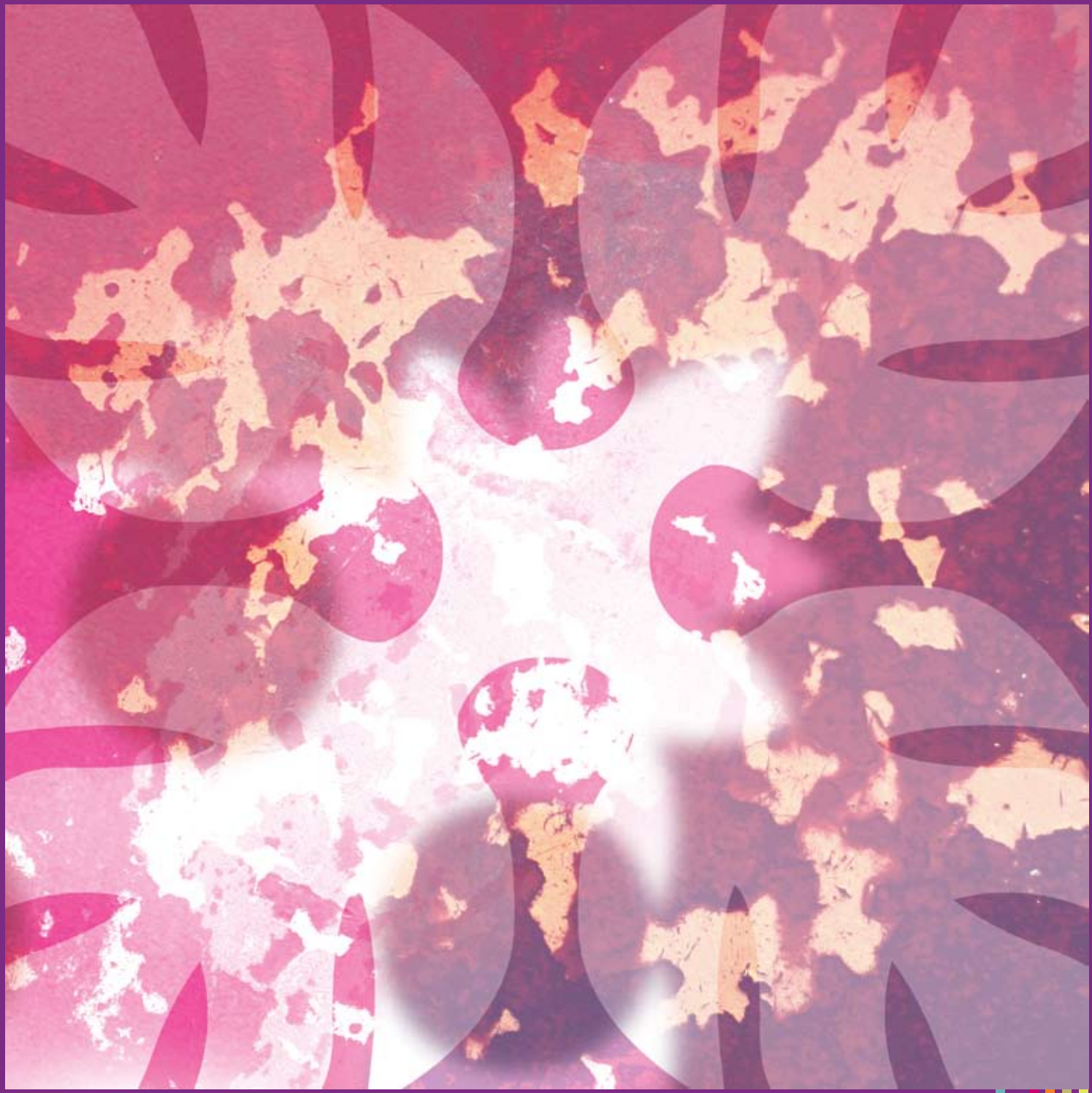

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The University of Winchester
Winchester
Hampshire
SO22 4NR
01962 841515
www.winchester.ac.uk

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