Second Research and Scholarship in College Higher Education Conference

Papers, Presentations and Posters
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1 Foreword

Nick Davy, Association of Colleges

English colleges are currently facing exceptional challenges. Area reviews will lead to fewer and larger colleges. The new Technical and Further Education Bill is attempting to set up the foundations for a stronger college-based technical education sector and the apprenticeship levy will significantly increase this form of provision. At the same time, the new Higher Education Bill will create a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), a new higher education (HE) regulatory system and incentives for new entrants.

These changes will have significant implications for college HE in England. Colleges will need to state more clearly to their local communities the distinctiveness of their HE mission and vision. Some might embrace a tertiary technical education service with clear routes to higher level knowledge and skills; others, a mainly access and widening participation offer. In towns and cities without a university, colleges could consider a more expansive HE offer. But in all cases colleges will need to address the issue of ‘HEness’ and scholarship for their HE teaching staff.

Students rightly expect a different learning experience when studying at a higher level: more participative, over time more independent, and also a direct line into how they influence what they experience. They also justifiably expect that their teachers are fully cognisant with the discipline and profession they are teaching.

For technical subjects and programmes it is also critical that colleges work closely with employers, support teachers to be up-to-date in work-based practices, and set work-relevant assessments. To achieve these aims, colleges need to establish a distinct scholarly culture that supports a range of scholarly activity. Ernest Boyer (Boyer, 1990, 16) stated: “we believe the time has come to move beyond the tired old ‘teaching versus research’ debate and give the familiar and honourable term ‘scholarship’ a broader and more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work.”

The attempt to support that broadening of scholarly practice as envisaged in Boyer’s seminal publication is at the core of the work of the Association of Colleges (AoC)/Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Scholarship Project. The aim is to develop, over the lifetime of the project, a framework of measures, self-assessment tools and guidance documents that will both encourage and support scholarship in college HE and improve the learning experience of students.

As I write this, we are now halfway through the project and each Scholarship Development Manager, based within the core 15 colleges taking part in the project, is now testing a range of scholarly-related practices and schemes with two partner colleges. These practices will be introduced, evaluated and assessed by an external expert panel to decide their usefulness and effectiveness for inclusion in the final framework. No measure will be selected without a clear evidence base supporting its adoption.

At the same time the AoC Scholarship Project team are identifying other measures with a substantial national evidence base that can be assessed by the expert panel. This is augmented by Higher Education Academy (HEA), Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and National Union of Students (NUS) schemes that will be similarly tested locally and expertly
evaluated. In addition, an Erasmus + project is also developing an employer engagement self-assessment tool, informed by employers, institutions and students from six countries, which will be included in the final framework. The final draft scholarship framework will then be assessed by an international panel of experts for final verification.

An important aligned aim of the project is to develop local scholarship ‘champions’ and a knowledgeable community of practice that will take forward scholarship in college HE informed by the final framework. The 17 Scholarship Development Managers are already beginning to fulfil this role – writing papers, presenting at conferences and staff development days, and influencing colleagues.

More ambitiously, the project wants to facilitate a national college-wide interest in scholarship and encourage college HE practitioners – both with their students and employers – to capture and publicise their scholarship of discovery, integration, application and teaching in a variety of locations – from the peer-refereed journal to a college scholarship bulletin.

And so welcome to the Second College HE Research and Scholarship Conference publication, subsidised by the project. Like the first publication, which is available from www.aoc.co.uk/thescholarshipproject, this edition demonstrates the wide spread of research and scholarship occurring in the sector this includes small-scale teaching projects with students to innovative approaches, working with employers and potential peer-refereed journal articles.

For the first time, this scholarship, often hidden or published in the ‘grey literature’, is being collated and publicised, indicating that the sector is on the cusp of a significant step change in its scholarship and research.

We hope you enjoy this publication. Please contact the project team if you want to find out more about the project or how you can become an early adoptee of the framework.

Reference

I am very pleased to be able to present here some of the proceedings of the Second Research and Scholarship Conference, which was held in Birmingham on 28 June 2016.

It is clear to me, from my own research and numerous visits to colleges in the last couple of years (both here in the UK and around the world), that colleges which run higher education (HE) courses are determined to develop and showcase distinct approaches to scholarly activity. In some cases these approaches are struggling to find their voice, particularly in the face of prolonged turbulence in the enactment of market-led reforms both in further education and HE. On the ground many practitioners continue to struggle with the demands that are being placed on the space and time needed to engage meaningfully in scholarly activity. However, there are examples where these constraints are being worked with, rather than against. It is clear that practitioners are forging ahead with research and scholarship which is close to their immediate professional practice. Similarly, their institutions are working up scholarly policy documents aimed explicitly at supporting and rewarding the activities which avowedly aim to enhance learning.

I hope this publication will make a positive contribution to the showcasing of the distinctiveness of scholarly activity that is taking place in college HE. Like its predecessor, this publication is split into three sections: first, a series of papers, where the authors have worked up their conference presentations into academic articles; second, extended abstracts, where the authors report on their ongoing projects in the light of conference delegate feedback; and finally, a selection of the posters which were presented on the day of the conference.

Collectively, these proceedings demonstrate both the depth and breadth of the scholarly activity currently taking place, and you will find examples here of all four of the scholarships originally outlined by Ernest Boyer (1990) – sometimes in combination. For example, Fenella Lloyd combines research findings on ‘neuro-diversity’, applying it to teaching and learning settings, while the team of students and tutors from University Centre Peterborough were able to demonstrate how the scholarships of discovery, integration and elements of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) can be successfully mined in combination.

Some of the work here reports not so much on what is being researched, but also the policies and practices that might be needed to both support and reward scholarly activity. This is very welcome, particularly as the AoC/HEFCE Scholarship Project moves towards developing its final scholarship framework. In this context, Samantha Broadhead reports on a successful collaboration between a college and its university partner; Pauline Osborne and Jolanta Peters report on the ways that a college has gone about successfully embedding a culture of research and scholarship; and Patrick Leonard and Deborah Meakin report on steps being taken to record the impact of scholarly activity.

You will also find here reports, discussion and analysis on popular themes in college HE, such as: aspects of digital learning, particularly on the circumstances in which digital spaces and platforms are most likely to enhance student scholarly activity; students as partners in learning initiatives; and ideas to enhance employability and employer engagement. The adventurous reader will find some intriguing work on the role of empathy (Aine Venables)
and the role that walking can play (Jac Catteneo, Amy Cunningham and Shirley Chubb) in the enhancement of learning and student scholarship.

At the end of the publication you will also find a short update on a related European project. Here, AoC is working alongside partners from seven other countries. This project is looking at strengthening the strategic relationship between educational institutions, employers and students.

Many of the authors are early researchers and/or new to the publication process. In that context, I am extremely grateful to all the authors for their original conference presentations, for their positive responses to my editing requests and for working on their final drafts post-proofreading.

Reference

3 Articles

3.1 From RDF to PhD: The impact of the Research Development Fellowship on my practice and the college research community

DR SAMANTHA BROADHEAD, LEEDS COLLEGE OF ART

Introduction

This article reflects on the impact a Research Development Fellowship (RDF) had on an individual’s career and, more widely, on the research culture of a small specialist institution, which is referred to here as ‘the college’. In so doing, the article makes a case for collaborative relationships between colleges and universities as a means of promoting scholarship and research within further and higher education. This argument is made by describing the contexts in which the RDF took place as well as the guiding philosophy of the RDF, which is Joint Practice Development (JPD). The RDF was collaboration between various further education (FE) and work-based learning practitioners, and Sunderland University Centre of Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT). Participants conducted small investigative projects and were mentored by experienced educational researchers affiliated to the university. The article describes a case study that evaluates the RDF project based on the experiences of an Access to Higher Education (HE) course leader and their development into an active researcher and PhD student. The application of the JPD approach to an initial project is analysed, along with the longer-term impact this activity had on the research cultures of the college.

Context

The RDF was delivered by the SUNCETT team and originally supported by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the Institute for Learning (IfL). In recent years, SUNCETT has continued to develop the RDF programme with the Education and Training Foundation (ETF). My first engagement with the RDF was as an Access to HE course leader working in a small specialist art college. I took part in the RDF programme along with other practitioners from across the United Kingdom who were working in FE and work-based learning. The fellowship enabled practitioners to carry out small research projects that could ultimately have an impact on teaching, learning and assessment. The SUNCETT team acted as mentors for the project as well as providing support through workshops, lectures and guest speakers at three residential events throughout the year. At the beginning of the RDF programme, the college had a limited research culture made up of a handful of lecturers who had a personal interest in research. The college had, over the past 160 years, contributed significantly to the development of art education in Britain, having pioneered new ways to teach and to structure qualifications. From the 1950s to the 1970s, there was a reappraisal of art education, largely based on ideas developed at the college, where a Basic Design course was established on the ideas from the Bauhaus (Broadhead, 2008). The Bauhaus was a German art and design school which promoted the experimentation with processes and materials before students specialised within a particular discipline, such as textiles or metalwork. In 1960 the college begun to offer courses that encouraged an open-ended, creative and flexible approach, leading to a new system of art
education nationwide. This shared historical context was one that influenced the way in which staff thought about their own teaching and creative practice.

In recent times, the college has operated on two main campuses. It delivers a range of specialist and general art and design FE courses at one site, which is mostly self-contained and separate from the other, where a range of specialist undergraduate degrees are offered. The majority of staff work solely on one campus, perhaps meeting together a couple of times a year during staff development weeks. This separation of FE and HE staff led to two distinct cultures being developed on each site. However, it also meant that issues arising from internal progression of students, from the Access to HE course to HE, for example, were more difficult to solve collaboratively.

The RDF project that I undertook in 2010 focused on the transition of students from the Access to HE course to HE, initially concentrating on those who continued to study at the college. The Access HE course is aimed at mature students who have not been in conventional education for at least a year and did not have the conventional entry qualifications for HE in art and design (Hudson, 2009: 25; Penketh and Goddard, 2008: 316). Students range from ages 20 to 70 and upwards, and often have a diverse set of experiences and backgrounds (Bush et al., 2012; Broadhead and Garland, 2012). Entry to art and design HE is achieved by accreditation at Level 3 but also by the preparation of a portfolio of work which is used at an interview as part of the application process (Burke and McManus, 2011). As part of the Access to HE course students prepared their portfolio and practiced talking to others about their work. As a course leader and tutor I wanted to use the RDF programme to improve the transition of my students from the course to the next stage in their learning careers.

**Joint practice development**

Calucci-Gray et al. (2013) have argued that research has had an increased impact on educational policy, and that this has been unsatisfactory. This is because the research had been carried out by universities on teachers in schools and colleges rather than with them. This led to research that practitioners did not engage with, and a gulf grew between research findings and the practices in the classroom (or, in this case, the art studio). In order to encourage educational practitioners to become more engaged with scholarship and research, the RDF programme sought to develop participants’ research skills and critical thinking through a respectful and collaborative process.

The approach that was modelled by the RDF programme was called Joint Practice Development (JPD), a concept that critiqued the cascade model of staff development (Gregson et al., 2015). It began with the premise that good practice cannot be easily passed on from one group of practitioners to another for two main reasons. Firstly, cascading good practice could be seen as divisive because it promotes the idea that one group of people has good practice and another does not; thus creating an unequal and perhaps resentful working relationship (Fielding et al., 2005). Secondly, the context in which practice is performed is not always deeply considered; what is good practice in one area may not be suitable in another. It could be argued that all practices need to be constantly modified to fit a new context (James and Biesta, 2007).

JPD offers a framework where professionals from FE and HE can work together to improve their research practices in their particular fields. Rather than passing or cascading research practices to colleagues, a more sustainable process would be to develop relationships and trust between groups of professionals where ideas can be explored together over time.
(Fielding et al., 2005; Gregson et al., 2015). Other factors that need consideration when undertaking a JPD project are teacher and institutional identity in practice transfer and student engagement, and an understanding of the time needed to successfully engage with the process (Fielding et al., 2005). JPD could be seen as a move towards the ideal of democratic-professionalism, which proposes co-operation between teachers and other partners as an alternative way forward to the market model of education (Coffield and Williamson, 2011).

JPD is a process where relationships between bodies of staff are developed. Figure 1 shows how the process works. Firstly, values, aims and objectives are shared, and any differences are openly acknowledged by participants who wish to develop their practices collaboratively. Stoll et al. (2006) have talked about ‘practice creation’, which is a reciprocal exchange between two members of staff (or two groups of staff) where one is the ‘originator’ and the other a ‘receiver’. The two parties ‘create new practices that are inspired by and energised by their dialogic encounters’ (Fielding et al., 2005). Secondly, the two groups of staff observe and discuss each other’s practices. Thirdly, based on the discussions, improvements in practice are decided and implemented whilst considering the particular contexts where they will be performed. Finally, both groups of staff evaluate the success of the changes that have been made. This was the approach employed by SUNCETT and myself (as an Access to HE educator) where we collaborated to develop the research skills needed to investigate Access students’ experiences of transition. The SUNCETT team modelled JPD; I then used a similar approach to work with colleagues within my own institution. In particular, the JPD processes provided the Access team with a means of working with HE staff to improve the transition of Access students within the college.

Figure 1: JPD framework

Initial JPD project in the college
During a staff development presentation addressed to the whole college, a group of Access tutors, including myself, sent out a call to our HE colleagues asking them to take part in cross-sector activities. From this call for partners, three HE staff from three different courses expressed an interest. After meeting and discussing the project it was agreed that working together to develop studio critiques would help students’ transition between the sectors. Studio critiques are a key aspect of art and design pedagogy, and there is a growing area of scholarship developing in this area (Orr, 2010). The shared understanding of subject-based pedagogy was something that the two groups of staff could build upon. A timetable of shadowing was then drawn up. Three Access to HE tutors were selected to shadow and observe HE activities. Two of the research team were part-time and would have usually had less opportunity to network with colleagues in HE. The JPD structure enabled a diverse range of staff from FE and HE to work together whilst developing their own practices. The Access tutors were responsible for arranging a time when they could shadow a HE studio critique session. They made notes after the observed session about what they had seen, and discussed their findings with both HE and FE colleagues.

One of the studio critiques was delivered by the BA (Hons) Art & Design interdisciplinary course in order to promote a sense of ownership of the learning process. The HE course leader and the Access tutors had the opportunity to share their observations about studio critiques and strategies for developing student confidence after the session.

A group of students from the Access to HE course also observed the studio critiques. They had opportunities to talk to HE students about what it was like on the degree course. Access students found this helped them to feel confident that they were ready to go onto HE and to discover if this was right for them. Currently HE students and recent graduates brought their portfolios into the Access studio and discussed their progress, which was also well received by the Access group. The FE and HE teams learned both about each other, and from each other.

The immediate impact of the project was that the two groups of professionals identified common values and understandings of art and design pedagogy. Studio critiques were modified dependant on the context in which they were delivered. Ultimately, mentoring systems and summer schools were set up especially for mature students to become more confident in presenting and talking about their own art and design work.

An insight into other professionals’ positions within an institution brought to light differences and similarities in what was seen as important within the educational process. This exposure to other points of view through observation and discussion influenced teacher identities through the stories and communications professionals told each other. Expressions of cultural values, norms and structures were also passed on through discussion (Rex et al., 2002 and Beijaard et al., 2004). The exchange of ideas with other art and design educators led to a deeper understanding of the issues students face when they progress from FE to HE, with particular reference to the studio critique.

Colleagues from SUNCETT acted as critical friends throughout the project and encouraged the Access team to disseminate their work through poster presentations at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Conference and the LSIS Research Conference in 2012. This was an important means of making the small project more visible to the senior management team within the college, as well as nationally. It had a big impact on the Access team’s sense of professional identity in that they began to see that research could be an important part of their role.
Continuous legacy

The RDF project had a long-term impact on the wider research culture of the college and on my own professional career. From 2012-13 I undertook a research advocate role within the college and set up a research group comprising FE and HE academic staff from across the institution who were interested in researching teaching, learning and assessment, as well as student transitions between FE and HE sectors. By working collaboratively and loosely, and by following the JPD approach, the cluster facilitated regular opportunities for the dissemination of research and supported people in developing their own projects. At the same time, other staff from the college continued to work with SUNCETT on the RDF programme. On an individual level the RDF encouraged me to undertake a PhD on the experiences of mature students in art and design HE, which I successfully completed in 2016.

Figure 2: JPD as a catalyst for emerging research cultures

Figure 2 shows how a number of research clusters grew within the college. As of 2016, there are four research clusters: pedagogy, crossing borders, technology and curatorship. The function of the research cluster is to support staff in their own scholarly interests within a
participatory and collegial framework that is also cost effective. The impact of this work has been threefold: individual professional development; improved student experiences; and the development of communities of practice. The growth of the research clusters coincides with evolved thinking at management level about the role of scholarship and research within the college. This is clearly articulated through the college’s strategic plan, which aims to:

‘Support our staff and help them to develop their research practice; encourage internal collaboration; and, through external networks and meetings, enhance subject-specialist knowledge (especially as it relates to teaching and learning).’

The latest project from the pedagogy research cluster complies with the spirit of the college’s strategic direction. The leader of this project wanted to create a public-facing exhibition that welcomed contributions on any aspect or element of the theme ‘embodied language’, be it audio, visual, tactile, image, moving image, digital, analogue, written, spoken, performative or musical.

This exhibition brought FE and HE practitioners together, along with postgraduate students, in order to explore the use of words and language in the visual arts. The dissemination of this work took place through a public exhibition in one of the college’s galleries, which was appropriate for specialist arts practitioners. Again, this project worked on the common values and interests that art and design educators shared across the sectors.

Conclusions

JPD was effective in bringing two groups of staff together who would not normally have worked collaboratively. This allowed them to develop their practices so that the transition of Access students to art and design HE could be improved. By using the studio critique on the Access course as a means of developing student confidence and critical thinking, the students were better prepared for higher study. Access staff felt invigorated in their teaching practice and this was brought about by learning from their colleagues in HE. The relationship was collaborative rather adversarial so the process encouraged a sense of mutual respect and understanding between groups of staff. JPD encouraged staff to have a sense of agency over improving their practices.

This approach did have one particular drawback, in that it required staff time. The project was funded so Access staff were able to take time out of their teaching timetable to undertake the observations and discussions. Normally this would have been impossible as the teaching workload of FE staff is very demanding. Also, the different ways in which the academic calendar and teaching days are structured meant that identifying opportunities when FE and HE staff could work together was challenging. In addition, not everyone within the FE campus valued the development of research and scholarship, as they did not see it as part of their professional identity. These activities were associated with the ‘otherness’ of HE and ‘not for them’.

There may have been problems with extending the initial project or up-scaling it to include more participants. However, even small-scale projects can have far-reaching impact (Broadhead, 2015). The JPD project, which was supported by the RDF programme, was a catalyst for future development. I continued to work with SUNCETT and became interested in developing my own research interests through a doctoral study into the experiences of art
and design Access to HE students. I was then able to change roles, where I became charged with helping to develop the college's research culture. This has seen the growth of the research clusters and ultimately of research outputs.

Staff from different areas of the college are able to support each other in their own research interests; however, managing teaching commitments, resources and research activity continues to be a challenge.

The RDF showed that staff from different sectors could work together towards common goals. This continues today, where staff from FE and HE come together through the research clusters to tackle common projects and issues. However, it must be acknowledged that this is also possible because it is in the college's strategic plan to develop research as a means of improving teaching and learning. A developing research culture needs many factors for its continued success, including individual engagement, resource, infrastructure and a strategic vision.

This case study of a particular RDF project supports the notion that collaborations between universities and colleges can be successful where there is mutual trust and understanding between the two parties. Knowledge transfer and research skill development can provide a catalyst for further ambitious projects and a change in college research cultures. Insights from practitioners with particular experiences of educational processes can also be of benefit to university departments. In addition to this reciprocal relationship, the JPD process identifies those aspects of practice and the underpinning values that all educators share. This commonality can be the basis for creativity and innovation through dialogic exchange.

References


Orr, S. (2010) ’We kind of try to merge our own experience with the objectivity of the criteria’: the role of connoisseurship and tacit practice in undergraduate fine art assessment, Art, Design and Communication in Higher education, 9 (1): 5-19.


3.2 Debating the default: Digital spaces in teaching and learning

SARAH-JANE CROWSON, HEREFORD COLLEGE OF ARTS

Introduction

This article seeks to explore less formal digital teaching spaces and how they might be created and developed to support the pedagogical practice of college-based higher education (HE) educators.

It is important to provide effective support to our students, and enable them to develop the skills they need to flourish in the fluid world of the 21st century (Barnett and Coate, 2010). Students need to be flexible, adaptable and develop confidence in understanding and using digital spaces, both as platforms for social learning (Blaschke, 2012) and as a tool within their vocational practice. As educators we need to support student self-efficacy in a range of pedagogical spaces (Ritchie, 2015). Additionally, external publications, such as the Further Education Learning Technology Action Group report, place the need to understand digital spaces firmly within the context of further education (FE), and therefore college HE.

This article explores digital spaces as a learning environment within the ideas of heutagogy, (Hase and Kenyon, 2001), connectivism (Siemens, 2011) and openness (Neary, as cited in Lea, 2015). Heutagogy is a concept that revolves around ideas of self-determined learning and knowledge-exchange. Traditional tutor-lecturer power structures are replaced by an acknowledgment of the student as central to their own learning experience. Connectivism is a learning theory for the digital age, which looks at knowledge as part of a network; a learning community facilitated through digital technologies. Neary’s discussions on ‘openness’ consider the importance of learning in open, boundless spaces that are dynamic, flexible and adaptive with no fixed focus of power. All three ideas lend themselves to a discussion of the meanings and value of teaching in the digital space.

A central case study, which presents the use of a less formal learning space, is outlined and discussed in this article. With references to initiatives such as ‘Connected Classes’ (Worth, 2016), this article considers ideas of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ digital spaces, and the importance of informed organisational and practitioner choices in relation to the types of knowledge created in digital learning environments.

Background and context

Our language when discussing digital learning spaces can often revolve around ‘the app’, despite warnings to the contrary (Beetham, in Lea, 2015) regarding the shelf life of software and the wider worries of how this shapes our digital knowledge. Boroditsky writes:

‘Linguistic processes are pervasive in most fundamental domains of thought, unconsciously shaping us from the nuts and bolts of cognition and perception to our loftiest abstract notions and major life decisions.’
(Boroditsky, 2009)
It is worth asking how often educators frame the digital learning space as a decontextualised zone with a specific use value, such as ‘discussion space’ or ‘collaborative learning space’, or whether we describe our online digital spaces in terms of their brand identity. Initial evidence from the Scholarship Project’s ‘scholarly spaces’ work suggests that educators frame their consideration of digital spaces in terms of application ‘names’, such as Facebook or Google. It is possible that this reliance on ‘brand identity’ as a key signifier limits our understanding of these spaces to their brand purpose, which is often – though not always – part of a commercial network that does not focus on learning. We stop considering such platforms as learning tools or teaching spaces and instead frame our knowledge within a dominant-hegemonic commercial culture.

Likewise, there exists a plethora of bespoke ‘learning software’ that highlights industry expectations that each platform is specialist and controlled, and therefore unadaptable as to the generic purpose and ‘owned’ by a broader authority (Singer, 2013: New York Times). By contrast, when discussing physical spaces, most educators mentioned a mixture of ‘key rooms’ but also less contextualised areas, such as the office, the corridor and the studio. It could also be argued that most educators feel empowered in the physical space – at least to the extent that they can move the furniture around, open a window and bring in key resources. This is arguably an important part of the learning experience. Heidebrink-Bruno writes:

‘Question the learning environment in which you teach. If the only reason you are in that space is because the university told you so, know that you can do it better. Accepting generic classrooms is the physical equivalent to using default settings — and, as every gamer recognises sooner or later: default settings are never optimal. A classroom must be customised to meet the needs of its population, teacher and students alike.’

(Heidebrink-Bruno, 2014)

However, despite vast leaps in the intuitive nature of human computer interactions, research reveals a disconnect between educators in FE and their use of digital space (City and Guilds, 2014).

Current research undertaken as part of the Scholarship Project considers how useful it might be for educators to decontextualise their understanding of the digital space so that it becomes defined as a tool for learning, and whether this might unlock its potential as a learning environment that can be adapted by the tutor. It is clear from conference proceedings and case studies published through the project that pockets of innovative practice in exploiting the affordances of digital spaces as inspiring learning environments exist sector-wide, but it is also clear that this is equally a vulnerable space for both students and tutors (Beetham, as cited in Lea, 2015).

One way to support this decontextualisation and recontextualisation of the digital platform may be through the use of the metaphor. If we deconstruct learning environments then they simply become spaces to be organised, regardless of domain. They can then be reconstructed to purpose and principle rather than delivered to us by institutions or business.
‘When we teach online, we have to build both the course and the classroom. A good learning management system is a tool that can help with this process; however, we should never let its design decisions — its architecture — dictate our pedagogies. We should also not blindly follow our institution’s choice of learning management system.’  
(Stommel, 2013)

Key visual attributes support us here. college virtual learning environments (VLEs), Moodle or blackboards could be reconfigured as a ‘virtual corridor’ or atrium that represent the institution but which can lead to all kinds of different course areas and rooms. Productivity management apps such as Evernote could become a bookshelf or library. Groups such as Basecamp or Slack become less formal professional spaces that support discourse. Blogging has been likened to shouting into a dark auditorium, only able to see two rows of your audience. Although such individual analogies might appear overly subjective, they provide the ability to conceptualise the digital in terms of purposed space, adaptable according to context and users.

As a starting point for understanding the visual space, explicitly recognising the value of such analogies might be a useful tool, and support our reconfiguring of the digital space in terms of principles. This would leverage one of the great powers of digital, which is that it is relatively flexible in terms of the cost of real estate. This would potentially allow us to be a little more idealistic in our approach to learning than is usually possible in the physical landscapes of college HE.

Neary (in Lea, 2015) suggests six principles to consider when creating [physical] learning spaces. These are: ground, dynamic, power, open, play and anti-war (Neary, in Lea, 2015). Although at first glance some of these principles may seem impossible to provide in the virtual space, I would argue that digital provides opportunities for redefining some of these. In terms of ‘ground’, the ‘floor’ of a virtual space could be re-configured as wallpaper or background; potential visual signifiers of the aspirational space. ‘Dynamic’ is harder, unless one strays into the world of Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality, but the idea of corridors and linking spaces as ‘learning events’ is easier to imagine in the digital domain. Democracy lends itself to digital, if the space is ‘open’ rather than a gated community, and digital spaces lend themselves to ‘play’. In terms of ‘anti-war’, the digital space opens up links to a huge range of visual signifiers and could be a key strength; however, it might also prove problematic.

To tap into these vast potentialities, the educator-architect needs to start somewhere tangible. The case study presented uses digital platforms to open up the virtual world as a less formal, tutor-owned teaching space, which provides another dimension to the VLE and moves learning into domains that empower tutor, student and community.

The case study also provides an example of how individual tutors can ‘debate the default’ by using open source software as a learning environment. This idea is not new; blogging platforms have been used as learning spaces since their inception. However, this example considers how such sites might empower students to feel more connected with the subject material in a less formal learning space, and empower tutors to ‘debate the default’ and take ownership of the digital as they do with the physical learning environment of their classrooms.
Case study: WordPress site

Following an earlier action research project (Crowson and Denison, 2014) that created a physical, ‘less formal’ learning element to traditional lectures, the WordPress site aimed to construct a similar less formal support for students on a Critical Studies course at Hereford College of Arts.

WordPress was chosen following a conversation with students that considered how the ideal learning space might look. This discussion generated ideas such as ‘collaborative’, ‘open’ and ‘friendly’. The majority of students surveyed did not feel that the current college VLE supported such an environment.

When visualised using ‘Wordclouds’, the front page of the college VLE shows only nine key words, the most prominent of which is ‘Files’. Key words are process-driven rather than personal, suggesting that students are introduced to the webspace as a storage space, organised by ‘level’. The physical equivalent perhaps could be a corridor, signposting to various practical physical spaces.

Rationale for the use of a less formal open-source platform also included the fact that, during the 2015/16 academic year, increased financial pressure led to the Critical Studies department losing a member of staff. As a result, a popular new programme (Critical Learning), which taught critical thinking and study skills, had to be dropped.

The Critical Studies team considered ideas of academic space as presented by Neary and Beetham (Lea, 2015), Lave and Wenger’s notion of ‘communities of learning’ and social learning (Bryan, in Lea 2015), combined with ideas of the small private online course (SPOC). This led them to consider the creation of a less formal digital space designed to support flexible pedagogies and offer more collaborative learning opportunities, framed in a student-friendly way, than the college VLE could provide.

The pedagogic rationale for using a less formal digital environment has already been considered, but it is worth mentioning that an increased interest in the use of ‘blended’ learning techniques within HE (Sharpe et al., 2006) and interest in the ‘flipped’ classroom as a way to support student outcomes (Bissa, 2014), supported the project in terms of a theoretical rationale for the design. The particular context was also considered. Suess (2010) suggests that the use of a VLE can be problematic if it doesn’t suit the nature of the course, and this was felt to be the case here, as evidenced by previous feedback from students and staff.

Critical Studies is a research-based curriculum with an emphasis on supporting independent learning, exploring the relationship between theory and practice, and undertaking critical investigation from a range of perspectives. Students on a visual (practice-based) arts course at a specialist institution can find this daunting. Therefore, the team leading the initiative considered:

- ideas surrounding the learning environment as a space that could be adapted to support different types of learning (Temple, 2007 and Kolb, 2005)
- ideas surrounding critical reflection as part of both subject-based learning and learning-to-learn (Illeris, 2007 and Taylor, 2000)
ideas surrounding inherent differences between formal and informal learning, and their relationship with outcomes (Hase and Kenyon, 2001; Eraut, 2004; Wenger, as discussed in Lea, 2015).

An evaluation showed that the creation of such spaces had a small but significant increase in student attainment at the pass/fail borderline. This could be explained in light of discussions around social learning (Lea, 2015).

When the ‘front page’ of the WordPress site was placed on a ‘Wordcloud’ using the same methodology as previously used for the VLE, the visualisation shows far more activity, with 16 ‘key’ words, including ‘collaboration’, ‘find’, ‘Sarah’ (the name of the course tutor) and ‘students’. Certain key words (such as ‘level’) were not present, and the course title was given more prominence. Despite WordPress being a very basic data visualisation tool that could imply many things (for example, that the page is simply more discursive), it does show the front page as ‘more than a signpost’. Using an analogy linked to physical space, the website perhaps acts as an entrance hall rather than a corridor.

In terms of construction, the Level 5 WordPress site (see https://l5criticalthinking.wordpress.com) contained sections differentiated by course area, split into sub-menus of ‘Pre-learning’, ‘Presentation’, ‘Reflection’ and ‘Forum’. The top menu shows pages containing ‘Resources’ and ‘Frequently Asked Questions’. In terms of pedagogic practice, these translate to ‘flipped’ learning resources, collaborative resources, opportunities for students to co-create knowledge with tutors, and a reflective space to encourage synthesis of materials taught.

Similar information and digital pedagogies can be housed on the college VLE, but the use of WordPress serves the dual purpose of attempting to engage students by using a less formal platform that they might be already familiar with, and being more accessible in terms of interface.

When considered in terms of impact on student engagement and summative outcomes, the intervention did not have impact on the stated aims of the research question (which were to engage and improve outcomes for students at the pass/fail borderline). One potential reason for this might be that engagement needs to be established in the physical space before the digital, which can be seen as ‘optional’ by students, unlike face-to-face timetabled sessions.

However, an evaluation based on summative outcomes (measured against Level 4 results in the same subject and mapped against the summative outcomes of the same assignment in the previous academic year) did show some interesting results. It is worth stating at this point that similar information had been delivered to students on previous cohorts through the college VLE, although it is also college practice to produce resources in response to student requests each year. Whilst the course content remained the same, there are further variables to consider for some groups, of which the main two were a change in lead lecturer and the removal of a study programme.

Three course areas were analysed for the study: Artist Blacksmith, Illustration and Textiles, and Creative Design Craft. This represented 60 students in total.

To contextualise impact based on summative assessments, the last three years, when mapped, show a 4% average decrease in summative grades at Level 5 as opposed to Level 4. This can be explained by the more difficult curriculum, which introduces students to theory for the first time. However, for this cohort, 75% of students improved grades from those achieved at Level 4. Although there are many variables in this kind of action research, the
results, coupled with qualitative data from student feedback suggest that the use of a less-formal learning environment might have impacted positively on some students’ learning outcomes.

Likewise, when mapped against the previous year’s cohort (with the obvious codicil that cohorts vary and there are many other variables to consider), data shows a large increase in the amount of students gaining first class honours can be mapped (23% as opposed to 0.05%). This result is balanced by an accompanying ‘drop’ in the amount of students attaining upper-class second degree marks. The percentage of students gaining lower-class second degree marks remains shows an increase, and this is balanced by a drop in students gaining ‘pass’ grades. The percentage of students failing the module remains the same over both years. Overall, this suggests evidence of learning gain at higher-grade boundaries.

Analysis of the data relies also on student feedback. This was gathered through a Survey Monkey online survey, which had a 60% return rate (37 students). Feedback was almost unanimously positive, with all but one student preferring the WordPress site to the college VLE. Several respondents praised the opportunity for ‘flipped’ learning through the site, and the reflective comments and presentations posted by tutors.

‘There is a reason I didn't do a degree 20 years ago – it was (and still is) all about confidence. By having the opportunity to prepare for classes, I feel more relaxed, better equipped and ultimately empowered by the process.’
(Student)

‘I think that the videos loaded for the next lesson help us because we have a basic understanding before, so when we do have Sarah we can ask more questions and have a more in-depth talk.’
(Student)

The table below outlines how well the website helped students prepare for classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Quite well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Very well</th>
<th>Extremely well</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>62.16%</td>
<td>27.03%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of access, at the time of the data analysis (immediately following the first summative assessment deadline in February 2016), the WordPress site had 4,785 views.

It is clear that many students accessed the class during the Christmas break, which suggests that it had a particular effectiveness as a flipped learning space, as well as supporting learning during scheduled teaching weeks.

Final analysis suggests that the less formal space supported the confidence of already engaged students. This would explain the increase in higher grades and is supported by student feedback. The VLE was not as popular as a way of supporting learning, and already engaged students found the WordPress site more intuitive and useful (although it is also clear
from feedback that it could be improved, particularly in terms of navigation). The site grew in response to student needs, becoming a mini-ecosystem.

Likewise, use of a digital space meant that resources could be prepared in response to an individual's request but easily shared with the group. Students could access this information as often as they wanted and whenever was most convenient for their needs. Views of these resources (for example, a video resource put together to support students in understanding an extract from a core course text gained over 200 views on YouTube) suggest that they were useful for students.

Although anecdotal, evidence from tutors delivering course modules suggests that students began to refer to the WordPress site as ‘our’ site – their vocabulary indicating that the site had become part of a shared learning landscape between students and tutors. In student feedback, the site was characterised as ‘friendly and easy to use’.

From the tutors’ perspective, the site also became a useful signposting space for those who had missed sessions and wished to catch-up. Each week the provision of pre-learning, presentation and reflective points provided an overview of the learning experience beyond that offered by PowerPoint presentations posted on the VLE. Likewise, tutor videos and talk-throughs of key moments (such as explaining the brief) were accessed asynchronously before the final deadline.

Using a digital platform afforded the opportunity to capture rich data. More work could be done to examine this data in order to really open up the black box of student use of the site. It would be interesting to analyse data from a completely parallel Moodle site, but in terms of ideologies the two platforms (though both are open source) have distinct differences in how they create knowledge and in how they support an individual to understand and articulate the knowledge that is created. Such an investigation would move beyond the analogies of ‘corridor’ and ‘teaching space’ previously offered by this article as ways in which to understand different types of digital platforms as different types of learning environments.

**Conclusions**

The idea of ‘open’ proffered by Neary in both his work on learning environments (Neary et al., 2010) and in Lea (2015) is relevant here, as WordPress is an ‘open’ rather than a ‘closed’ space where resources posted are viewable by general passers-by. It is worth mentioning in the context of the case study that certain aspects of the site did link to a ‘closed’ site (the college VLE). Teaching resources and reflections could, however, be accessed by non-participants. It is also worth mentioning that one resource posted by a course tutor to support students in reading a key text has accrued over 300 views on YouTube, indicating that opening out resources in this way has an impact beyond the intended context.

In socio-cultural terms, we work both within our own habitus and also within a wider social context (Latour, 1990). Our choice of learning environment (be that co-created with students or imposed by organisations) will affect how we fulfil our ethical duties as educators, and the kind of knowledge we create with students.

Neary discussed ‘moving the learning outside’ and one argument here is whether students should be exposed to the wide range of curated content available on the world wide web, or whether we should espouse safeguarding over a more connected approach (Siemens, 2014). This choice will affect anyone linked to the learning experience.
It could also be argued that ‘open’ is related to ‘play’. Many students will be familiar with game design and thus the relationship between game theory and explorations of complex problems can be explored in a playful but ‘safe’ space. However, in ideas of ‘open’ we, as educators, make an informed choice to locate our learning ‘outside’ in the widest sense, placing it in an environment that will capture data, create profiles, consider responses in terms of the predictive complex algorithm, and which has little respect for privacy. Why, then, even consider teaching in the ‘open’? Projects such as Worth’s ‘Connected Classes’ (Worth, 2016) support students in gaining digital social capital – and in becoming ‘connected’ students who create and manage their professional identities in the digital space and who become more explicitly aware of the benefits of using social digital spaces as learning environments.

Likewise, blogs such as Digital Pedagogy Lab offer freely available advice but also form part of a network of multi-disciplinary collaborative structures that can be read within ideas of communities of practice (Wenger, 2009). These structures also support educators in gaining practical digital skills and enhance their own social learning.

Whichever pathway we choose will depend on students, institutions and other contexts over which we, as educators, have little control. However, an awareness of wider arguments enable us to make an informed decision as to which type of digital space will best support a particular group of students. If we work for an institution that is wary of ‘commercial’ internet spaces then we can present arguments for working outside the VLE to encourage connected learning and curation skills for our students.

Certain types of digital space might act as ‘scaffolds’, much in the way that a combination of college VLE and ‘open’ activities were delivered in the WordPress case study. Commercial software can enable the easy creation of ‘safe spaces’ similar to the VLE, although it is worthwhile educators investigating privacy issues if they subscribe to a free service. Alongside this, pay-for-membership services, such as Box of Broadcasts, may offer a viable curated pathway to support students in gaining digital research and multimodal presentation skills, alongside those offered by unequivocally commercial spaces such as YouTube.

Software branded towards the educational sector offer similar free services, and a social network for educators. However, it is worth considering the argument for social learning here; if we are to indeed prepare our students fully for the 21st century then social digital learning might well be an extremely important skill for them to practice. If ‘social’ and ‘education’ sites are presented by lecturers as discrete spaces, this might limit students’ ability to gain digital social capital and real life experiences of researching using ‘open’ digital spaces.

Regardless of type, if we consider digital learning spaces as differently purposed and created, then these areas will exist within the communities and structures of knowledge exchange that are embodied within the physical learning spaces of the institution. However, the type of knowledge created in such spaces will depend on whether they are used as a tool for knowledge construction or in a more ‘open’ way – for example, as part of a structure of knowledge exchange that constructs as it disseminates.

How we construct and exchange knowledge is determined by the kinds of environment we are presented with (Neary, 2010) as well as the pedagogical frameworks and processes we follow as we communicate (Aarnio and Enqvist, 2002). It is then possible that working wholly within a ‘safe’ corporate space might produce ‘safe, corporate’ knowledge that is both...
confined and ‘un-playful’. We must be aware of the risk that digital spaces might become a modern panopticon; places where the real or imagined prospect of constant surveillance are used to control behaviours. This is at odds to our purpose if we wish to create new ideas and come close to the Frierean notion of education as a force for social change.

This type of digital ‘freedom’ space (Barnett and Coate, 2010) may not be achievable if educators are, in practice, tied to the college VLE or unsure of how best to use and conceptualise the affordances the digital space offers for creative pedagogical practice. If we can manage our vulnerabilities and support students and tutors in conceptualising the digital as a learning space, there is the opportunity for the creation, discussion and dissemination of unboundaried, genuine knowledge construction.

References


3.3 Blended learning in critical/contextual studies modules

TRACEY EASTHAM, BLACKPOOL AND THE FYLDE COLLEGE

Introduction

The School of Creative Arts and Digital Industries (CADI) at Blackpool and the Fylde College (B&FC) has implemented an online blended learning approach to the development of the critical studies curriculum in order to both enhance engagement and address some of the issues that have beset this particular area of study over the years.

The approach taken has encouraged a greater level of collaboration, with students using Moodle as a key element to, in the words of Garrison and Vaughan, ‘reconcile traditional values and practices with evolving expectations and technological possibilities’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008: 3). In connection with a greater integration of technology within learning, teaching and assessment strategies, the blended learning approach has resulted in a preliminary average 10% increase in attendance, as well as more positive module evaluation questionnaire (MEQ) data, in the first year of the critical studies module.

Using the blended learning approach, key teaching strategies were adopted to counteract some fundamental issues that were acting as barriers to full engagement by the students. These issues included the formation of subject specific ‘cliques’; an unwillingness to work collaboratively cross-subject; engaging with the session content selectively (depending on what they perceived as ‘their’ subject); and seeing critical studies (theory) as separate from their studio work (practical elements).

The workshop delivered at the second AoC College HE Research and Scholarship Conference, which was held on 28 June 2016, showcased specific examples of how elements of blended learning aided attendance, retention of information, and general engagement and satisfaction with the course. It also invited specific contexts and examples from delegates in order to share and explore blended learning related opportunities within a broader curriculum area.

Although this particular case study comes from within the arts and humanities subject area (spanning a variety of visual art degree programmes) the benefits I have highlighted would be relevant and accessible to any curriculum area that delivers a critical studies or theoretical module. Considering that all HE degree course content must include provision of ‘higher order thinking skills’, and considering that there is a strong educational push for the development of key graduate skills (including critical thinking, as well as autonomous learning), this research is both pertinent and contemporarily relevant.

‘As higher education and job requirements become competitive, complex, and technical, proponents argue, students will need skills such as critical thinking to successfully navigate the modern world, excel in challenging careers, and process increasingly complex information.’

(Hidden curriculum, 2014)

Encouraging critical thinking and autonomous research skills in our graduates is important within new educational policy; however, in the case of college HE, it is especially pertinent,
particularly because of the recent drive to highlight the contributions of this area within, and alongside, the broader scope of traditional, red brick HE institutions. At the 2016 AoC College HE Research and Scholarship Conference, John Lea urged tutors at HE colleges to ‘go public’ with research activities, while Martin Doel encouraged delegates to think about what makes HE colleges ‘distinct’ and therefore valuable. College HE staff (and the colleges themselves) should value the scholarly and academic output of staff, and also use their work as inspirational examples that encourage the aforementioned (and critical) ‘higher order thinking skills’ in students (Doel, 2016 and Lea, 2016).

Blended learning can therefore contribute towards the ‘students as partners’ initiatives that John Lea is working towards through the Scholarship project, and also to ideas about learning in the 21st century, which sees the student as an active participant or ‘co-creator of teaching approaches, course design and curricula’ (Bovill et al., 2011: 133).

**Contextualising this case study**

Critical Studies is a module that is delivered at B&FC across different creative degrees. In Years 1 and 2, it consists of a 45-minute lecture session followed by a 45-minute seminar session. We have three assignments in Years 1 and 2, each of which is designed to lead up to and prepare the students for their most important final assignment in Year 3, the dissertation. The students dissertation is principally led by independent research, and supported by weekly one-to-one tutorials. We typically have about 60-70 students in each collectivised year group.

In 2012 the critical studies module was delivered in a traditional lecture style, with Moodle used as a repository of information. Each week’s content was hidden until the lecture had taken place, the fear being that students would not attend if they could review it beforehand. There were three main issues with the critical studies module:

1. Attendance was low, compared both to school averages and studio-based attendance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School average attendance across all three years</th>
<th>Critical studies attendance across all three years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic year 2014/15</td>
<td>Academic year 2015/16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.11%</td>
<td>91.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Engagement (and therefore satisfaction) was lower than studio-based modules, based on MEQ results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEQ overall satisfaction for school (academic year 2015/16)</th>
<th>MEQ overall satisfaction for Critical Studies (academic year 2015/16)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>72.13%</td>
<td>9.37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Retention of information was problematic, although there was no way of judging this week on week, unless there was a formal assessment point.
**Blended learning**

Blended learning is a combination of face-to-face and online delivery, but it is also more of a holistic approach and, importantly, a departure from traditional lecture delivery. Garrison and Vaughan assert that: ‘New ways of thinking about course design are required to reconcile traditional values and practices with evolving expectations and technological possibilities’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2007: 3.). In this light, by using elements of blended learning within specific modules, you will move into alignment with industry needs, and the development of digital skills is therefore automatically embedded into the relevant schemes of work.

Blended learning incorporates and allows for the development of a number of separate strategies, including:

- **Flipped learning**, where the students undertake research before the lecture session. This is flipped in that the initial, contextual or descriptive elements of a topic or subject are covered by the students themselves through their own research in advance of the lecture, which allows for more in-depth and analytical debate during the session.

- **Workshop delivery** within the lecture session, where there is the potential to remove the title of ‘lecture’ altogether. The baggage associated with certain academic terms can be a barrier for reticent students to fully engage. However students are also increasingly entering degree level study from workshop-based learning in schools. The delivery of collaborative workshop-based ‘sessions’ is therefore more familiar and accessible than traditional lectures, and the flipped learning delivery means that you are not necessarily missing out content.

- **Group and individual strategies** delivered and monitored through online applications, such as Moodle forums, digital worksheets and reflections on YouTube videos.

- **As well as embedding digital skill development** into the curriculum, this is another way of breaking down the formality and unfamiliarity of the lecture situation, and the potential connotations of critical/contextual studies being old-fashioned and irrelevant.

- **Student-led learning**, student autonomy and peer assessment within sessions and/or online. The strategies listed above hold obvious benefits for students with a broad range of learning styles and academic abilities; however, a certain amount of delivery (or co-delivery) by students has the advantage of easing the workload burden on teaching staff.

- **Interactive strategies**, including hand-outs. This does not require much explanation, but the opportunity for students to have a pre-set space in which to note down key information from the lecture is an invaluable way to assess whether learning has taken place. In terms of the context of this article, the worksheets were used in the seminars following the lecture sessions to evidence to the seminar tutor any areas that needed further exploration or development.

**Theoretical and conceptual underpinning**

It might seem that blended learning is a new thing, but it has been steadily increasing in popularity and practice over the past 10 years, to the extent that most colleges and universities incorporate it at some point.
'The growth, and in some cases the very rapid spread, of blended learning across many institutions from community colleges to research universities arguably springs from the flexibility of the pattern...few critics have come forward to proclaim the heresy of this marriage of delivery systems.'

(Albrecht, 2006: 4)

Blended learning is also used in corporate and business strategy; it is not just an education 'thing'. In the arts and digital industries, for example, creative practice is increasingly blended with online exhibitions, with digital practices running in alignment with physical work, and digital showcasing being the prime strategy of communicating with your audience. This aligns closely with the research of Norman D. Vaughan, who maintains in his article a blended community to inquiry approach: Linking student engagement and course redesign, that designing blended learning is to create a ‘community of inquiry’ (Vaughan, 2008: 61). Through a ‘community of inquiry’ we can view the incorporation of blended learning in education as a more accurate reflection of life outside of education, where education becomes part of a lifelong learning or career development strategy, rather than something that ends when the course does.

Relevance to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education sets out the requirements of what UK HE institutions are expected to do, and defines the quality and academic standards that we consequently work towards.

There are nine indicators of sound practice, all of which are focused on the progression and development of students within the relevant HE setting. Indicators one, two, six and eight are particularly relevant for this blended learning case study.

**Indicator 1**
HE providers articulate and implement a strategic approach to learning and teaching and promote a shared understanding of this approach among their staff, students and other stakeholders.

**Indicator 2**
Learning and teaching activities and associated resources provide every student with an equal and effective opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

**Indicator 6**
HE providers maintain physical, virtual and social learning environments that are safe, accessible and reliable for every student, promoting dignity, courtesy and respect in their use.

**Indicator 8**
HE providers take deliberate steps to assist every student to understand their responsibility to engage with the learning opportunities provided and shape their learning experience.

(QAA, 2012: 23)
The quality code makes clear, through its use of ‘shared understanding’ among staff and students, resources that allow for ‘equal’ and ‘accessible’ learning environments. Furthermore, by encouraging students to ‘shape their learning experience’, the incorporation of blended learning strategies equates to a closer working of the B3 Quality Code in college HE.

**Pedagogic developments**

As discussed, blended learning has increased in popularity and usage over the past 10 years. This progression has been aided by technological developments, including, for instance, the design of new software packages.

The release of the first version of Moodle in August 2002 instigated a range of diverse, innovative and specific learning systems that are now increasingly commonplace in education settings. These systems are supported through the now widespread use of smartphones and the prevalence of tablet computers, as well as the ubiquitous presence of shared online spaces, which make up much of the communication systems used by students today.

Kahoots (a game-based learning platform) and SeeSaw (student driven digital portfolios) have developed the use of shared learning spaces that have in turn been further enabled by blogs and discussion boards, which are easily and cheaply accessible to students, staff and institutions.

The recent Government Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) White Paper indicates the increased commercialisation and competition of further and higher education by non-traditional educational providers. In this light, despite concerns surrounding a loss of ‘authentic presence’ that may come from blended learning, it can be seen as an appropriate and timely response to the new challenges of these potentially more corporate or industry related providers.

**Results**

- A piece of anecdotal evidence from a second year student encapsulates the overall feeling of students: ‘this year’s critical studies is much better than last year’ (Edward Foster, student). It is pertinent that this has come from a graphic design student, as this group have typically been hardest to engage in critical studies processes. In addition, there has been more open discussion and debate about both the content and the role of critical studies, and it is supposed that the more informal learning environment, as well as the additional methods of communication, have allowed for a greater level of sharing and ‘personal reconstruction of experience and social collaboration’ (Garrison and Archer, 2000: 11)

- There has been an increase in attendance across all years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical studies attendance across all three years (academic year 2014/15)</th>
<th>Critical studies attendance across all three years (academic year 2015/16) [the year that blended learning redesign begun]</th>
<th>Critical studies attendance across all three years (academic year 2016/17)</th>
<th>Difference between 2014/15 [traditional lecture delivery] and 2016/17 [blended learning delivery]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60.69%</td>
<td>70.75%</td>
<td>80.16%</td>
<td>19.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There has been an improvement in MEQ data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEQ overall satisfaction for critical studies (academic year 2015/16)</th>
<th>MEQ overall satisfaction for critical studies (academic year 2016/17)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>72.13%</td>
<td>82.39%</td>
<td>10.26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The retention of information is difficult to gauge and record, and because of the nature of traditional lecture delivery, there is no record of this for previous years. However, through the hand-outs, Kahoots quizzes, Moodle quizzes and the Moodle forums, we now have a way to record, measure and analyse students’ retention of information. Furthermore, we now have a valuable tool through which to make curriculum and module content improvements and amendments, both throughout and at the end of the academic year.

**Conclusion**

Blended learning has been an effective solution for specific issues faced by teaching staff and students following the Critical Studies module within a creative-based curriculum environment. In addition to at least partly resolving some of the issues, blended learning has the added benefit of incorporating digital skills into the curriculum, which saves some of the time and pressure of delivery that came with a more traditional lecture delivery style.

Through further research, some of which is highlighted in this article, it is believed that, whilst being effective in education more broadly, blended learning is of particular interest to tutors working in the often problematic area of critical/contextual studies (whatever the curriculum).

Whilst the potential benefits to students are documented (Albrecht, 2006; Garrison and Vaughan, 2008), the potential benefits to staff are somewhat less well known due to concerns about technical hang-ups (or a lack of technical knowledge), a lack of adequate professional development, and more general ‘well-documented resistance of teachers to online learning’ (Jeffrey et al., 2014: 122).

An area of development that could be driven from the advances of blended learning and its associated software and shared learning spaces is the potential for an increased amount and quality (or at least just awareness) of cross-institution collaboration. Blended learning spaces are already in use with students and staff; however, are they being used effectively enough by staff at different colleges?

Returning to John Lea’s message for tutors at HE colleges to ‘go public’ with our research activities, as well as Martin Doel’s encouragement to think about what makes each HE college ‘distinct’, it would be proficient to further expand on and define the ways in which staff at similar (but geographically distant) colleges may use online digital spaces to disseminate, discuss and therefore enhance both scholarly activity and pedagogic capabilities.
References


3.4 Neuro-diverse learning: fostering engagement with critical texts

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Introduction

An initial and small-scale action research project was carried out to identify how the use of a particular strategy could foster engagement with critical texts. The strategy was identified as ‘neuro-diverse friendly’, and was developed as a result of an increased awareness and coincidence of particular contexts and professional preoccupations. This article intends to reflect on those contexts, the rationale and strategy for developing a specific teaching and learning resource, as well as presenting an early review of research activity and results in terms of qualitative data and case study material.

The development of the original action research project and subsequent work occurred within a range of theoretical contexts, which may be beyond the scope of this article to explore. However, it is helpful to identify the key theoretical considerations in the development of the original strategy and following research activities.

Within special education, the development of a social model of disability is very significant, and this was an essential starting point for the early research. The work presented here may be viewed with the understanding that in contemporary practice of working with students with specific learning difficulties, there is an increasing acceptance of adjustments for those difficulties. This has resulted in a wider variety of ways of working both in education and employment, which may benefit all participants. Within the institution where the research originated (Hereford College of Arts) there is an established understanding of the value of these adjustments both for individuals and for the teaching and learning community as a whole, and this was felt to facilitate the early and subsequent research.

Neuro-diversity in context

The use of the term ‘neuro-diversity’ needs to be contextualised in terms of this work. Whilst there is a growing authorship and audience relating to the term ‘neuro-diverse’, the expression is used more to simply identify students for whom neurological functioning is different and possibly more diverse than may be traditionally expected. The term relates primarily, but not exclusively, to students identified as being on the specific learning difficulties or autistic difficulties spectrum. The term ‘neuro-diverse’ helps to infer, without limiting, the huge range of difficulties, experiences and strengths and weaknesses that may be found across a wide range of students, in this specific context within higher education (HE).

Understanding and engaging with research and development conducted by a range of professionals in the field of neuro-science, physiology and specific learning difficulties was both liberating and useful. Work carried out by Stein (2010) in relation to theories about reading and the relationship to magnocellular deficit theory was particularly helpful, as was research conducted by Nicholson, Fawcett and Dean (2001) in relation to the cerebellar deficit hypothesis of dyslexia. Stein’s work explores the way in which differentiation in the size and distribution of magnocells within the crucial visual magnocellular systems in the brain may impact on the cognitive development of reading skills. The study identifies how, through a post-mortem examination, dyslexic individuals show 30% smaller magnocells (Stein, 2010).
This is pertinent because it is this system that enables a reader to effectively direct his or her attention and eye movement to identify letter order and to move successfully across and down a page of text. This research presented an opportunity to consider how practical strategies for dyslexic readers could be developed.

Nicholson, Fawcett and Dean's work (2001) around the widely disseminated cerebellar deficit hypothesis theory of dyslexia is interesting as it explores the role of the cerebellum within the brain, identifying it as central to a range of functions involved in language related skills. The study suggests that it plays a specific role in relation to a wide range of difficulties that may be experienced by students with a dyslexic profile. The focus of this work is the way in which the cerebellum may enable the ‘automaticity’ of skills needed to achieve literacy, and includes a range of cognitive, information processing and motor skills (Nicholson, Fawcett and Dean, 2001). This is useful in that it helps to explain a wider range of difficulties beyond simply reading, thus enabling a better understanding of the variable and individual difficulties that are experienced by students with specific learning difficulties and other forms of neuro-diversity. Understanding how a lack of automaticity may impact on a student's performance in real learning contexts was an important consideration in the development of the practical elements of the final learning resource.

Both of these theories, although influential, need to be examined in light of a wider breadth of research. For instance, Ramus et al. (2003) were unable to attribute a single cause of dyslexia, while Richardson (2001), Pennington (2006), Moll (2012), Utay (2012) and Russell and Pavelka (2013), amongst others, explored the more complex relationship between co-existing difficulties. Booth (2010), cited by Varvara et al. (2010), takes this idea further to explore how a more ‘global’ deficit model may be useful in considering a range of developmental difficulties, including dyslexia and autism, which are among the most common difficulties identified by students entering HE (Varvara et al., 2010).

When explored alongside other theoretical perspectives around wider neuro-diverse learning profiles, and in particular Autistic Spectrum Difficulties (ASD), these ideas enabled a better and more practical understanding of the ways in which neuro-diverse students could present a pattern of strengths which were, in themselves, educationally interesting and almost endlessly varied.

Ozonoff et al. (1991) also identified key issues regarding these students. The authors explored the way in which more complex neuro-diverse profiles are likely to co-exist and – in addition to work carried out by Frith (1998), Moll (2012), Utay (2012), Pennington (2006), Richardson (2001), Russell and Pavelka (2013) and Casanova et al. (2010) – enabled a further exploration of practical ways in which teaching practices could be developed to include a wider range of experiences, strengths and weaknesses. This approach was at odds with the rather more singular approach that is traditionally considered for students with identified specific difficulties.

Ozonoff (1991) and Varvara et al. (2014) placed a particular focus on the executive function deficit model. With regards to ‘high functioning’ individuals, Ozonoff asserted that: ‘the universality of executive function deficits…suggest that it might be a primary deficit of autism’ (Ozonoff et al., 1991: 1099). Executive function is particularly pertinent in cognitive terms when it is understood that this function of the brain has an essential role to play in organising, planning, sustaining attention, inhibiting inappropriate responses, and flexibility in thought and action. The way in which executive function deficits may impact on a student identified with ASD have been described by Temple Grandin: ‘I cannot hold one piece of
information in my mind while I manipulate the next step in the sequence’ (Grandin, 2016). This is particularly relevant in the contemporary context of HE provision, where an increasingly diverse group of students are studying. It is also pertinent in relation to the way in which a ‘primary diagnosis’ of a dominant difficulty may actually draw attention away from other co-existing difficulties. Russell and Pavelka (2013) and Reierson and Todd (2008) have explored the potential incidence of the scope of this ‘single diagnosis’, as has Moll, who asserted that the consequence of this may be: ‘intervention that is not specific to the deficit’ (Moll, 2012). This was a significant consideration in the development of our teaching and learning strategy, and in identifying that wider ‘neuro-diverse friendly’ strategies for teaching and learning were much needed for students whose unique patterns of learning may not be fully understood.

Key research informing the development of both the original strategy and the subsequent action research has previously been carried out by Rumsey and Horwitz (2003, cited by Marshall, 2015) and Shaywitz (2003, cited by Marshall, 2015). The former used positron emission tomography (PET) to trace cerebral blood flow in dyslexic and non-dyslexic students, which identified how it may be possible for there to be more than one neural pathway for the development of reading. Using fMRI, Shaywitz identified that some effective dyslexic readers have a very different pattern of brain activity in comparison to effective non-dyslexic readers (Marshall, 2015).

**Applying neuro-diversity in practice**

In practical terms, this knowledge presented a real challenge in providing effective strategic support. It also enabled reflection around more holistic strategies that would not depend so much on the accuracy and completeness of either a ‘primary diagnosis’ or relatively limited labelling of neuro-diversity.

Responding to an awareness of the problems of ‘primary diagnosis’ and a developing understanding of neuro-diversity led to an exploration of how ‘specialist’ teaching strategies, once widened to include a range of needs, could actually be deployed across an open cohort of students, and how the defined strategy or strategies could reveal new learning abilities. At this point, collaborating with students in the co-authorship of new learning became an exciting possibility. This prospect facilitated discussions with students about what reading meant as an activity, and its purpose. The end result was an exciting and revealing conversation with students around their own experiences and perceptions of reading, and in particular ‘reading-based learning’.

In addition, a practical understanding of both the emotional impact on students of experiencing learning difficulties over a period of their education, and an awareness of the role of emotional processing as a part of the physiological activity of reading, led to a new understanding of the significance of developing positive emotional responses to reading activity. The works of Hill, Berthoz and Frith (2004) and Whitehouse et al. (2009) were helpful in framing an approach to teaching and learning strategies.

Consideration was given to the extraordinary importance of both ‘real’ success and progress in the development of reading skills, and the development of a sense of ownership and autonomy around these reading skills, reading material and the physical activity and outcomes of reading. Particular attention was paid to the development of emotional strength and resilience in tackling complex and previously ‘loaded’ activities. This concept is quite hard to pin down, but may be best understood when viewed within a familiar context where a
student, who has a history of struggling to engage with and ‘succeed’ in traditional reading contexts, may be seen to simply ‘follow the rules’ but continue to fail to understand texts, engage with and question their understanding, and subsequently be unable to use and apply knowledge or understanding to a new context or enquiry. As early as 1979, Beck et al. identified how individuals with ASD often struggle with issues around self-esteem, leading to avoidance and procrastination, and adding to existing problems caused by executive function deficits (Nagler and Shore, 2013). Carroll and Iles (2006) identified how dyslexic individuals reported significantly higher levels of anxiety and self-esteem issues than control groups, and recommended that an assessment of emotional wellbeing should form part of the assessment of need for dyslexic students entering higher education (Carroll and Iles, 2006).

A student may therefore turn this situation around in some way so that they are able to access appropriate texts by using existing neuro-diverse profiles and strengths (rather than an idealised and unattained one), and engage, manipulate and apply new knowledge and understanding to their academic and intellectual contexts. This represents a very novel and empowering sense of liberation from previous ‘failing’ strategies, as well as yielding potentially significant results in real terms – both academically and intellectually. Although at this point anecdotal, it is a tantalising finding in view of established understanding and perspectives around the role of emotional processing and the task of reading.

Development of the strategy and early research activity and results

The result of contextual understandings and professional practice led to the development of a straightforward resource that endeavoured to make reading of critical texts easier in physical, cognitive and emotional terms, as well as foster real engagement with textual material. A key intention of the resource and strategy was to encourage greater autonomy in reading activities from the outset, and to provide a clear, disciplined and time-bound structure for reading activities. The resource included a ‘multi-tasking’ template for students to complete during a reading activity, and incorporated evaluative and meta-cognitive tasks, effective notetaking, referencing and vocabulary activities.

The strategy took account of research around magnocellular deficit theories by enabling readers to focus on short, more easily processed elements of the text, thus avoiding a range of commonly experienced difficulties with tracking print. It also included disciplined ‘boundaries’ for reading content, thus liberating students with anxiety about the time taken to read, and providing a reassuringly ‘disciplined’ and clear set of rules for students with organisational or semantic language difficulties and known or unknown executive function deficits.

Other aspects of the strategy included the use of more kinaesthetic materials and approaches, such as the scheduled use of coloured highlighters, tactile white-tack or torn paper, and vocalisation of text-related questions. This was in response to an understanding of the potential processing abilities of more right-hemispheric brain activity – traditionally associated with creative, holistic, visual and spatial skills. The use of vocalisation and questioning during reading was a key element in the engagement process; questions were simple but required individual and ‘open’ responses to the text, thus encouraging a variety of interactions with cognitive, meta-cognitive and emotional processing.

In further activities, blue and yellow coloured paper was used for key aspects of notation during reading. This activity was devised in direct response to Stein’s research, which indicated that blue and yellow were the most useful remediating colours for people who have
difficulties with print-related contrast, attention and tracking (Stein, 2010). A key element of the strategy was the open and uncritical engagement of readers with the texts, through both self-questioning and evaluation throughout the reading activity. This was explicit and unavoidable and, satisfyingly, yielded surprising and impressive results, with some students finding this a way to improve their confidence and self-esteem with reading in two specific ways:

- First, by ensuring that students took an honest, accepting and contextualised view of their understanding of the texts presented. Anecdotally, the results of this part of the strategy were either that students felt liberated from reading text that was impenetrable or were further motivated to try again, with the understanding that this was a clearly boundaried activity.
- Second, by ensuring that students engaged with the text at a fundamental level and could use their understanding and new knowledge of the text in a specific context.

Notes and reflections on the text were briefly recorded within quite disciplined guidelines, resulting in direct, usable notes, including recording unknown vocabulary and ideas around the text and further questions. Feedback has been extraordinarily positive with students commenting:

‘When I am now reading anything I use the template. I am taking the important information and it is easier to refer back to that when I am writing.’

‘It’s improved my confidence – it’s gone up because I know that I can get what I need from reading.’

‘I am reading more texts because of that nice thing of taking information that you think can be relevant and using it.’

‘The questions I have to ask help to trigger something else I can look at.’

‘I use the strategy for all sorts of things now – talks and other things.’

‘I usually have difficulties with concentration, losing track and forgetting. [The strategy] is a good way of making progress through an article.’

‘It saves a lot of time.’

‘I can feel more confident discussing my research and ideas.’

**Conclusion**

This early action research project identified a small group of students with a range of learning experiences and potential strategies for engaging with reading. In simplistic terms, these students could be termed as ‘neuro-diverse’. A co-existing ‘control’ group was also identified, which could be identified as ‘not having any known neuro-diverse profiles’. Both groups were offered instruction in using the strategy in one session, and this was subsequently followed up with an opportunity to ask questions, clarify or receive further support.
Both groups completed a simple rubric around their existing reading experience before and after using the strategy. Quantitative data was sought through discussion and interview with the students following the project’s completion.

Whilst the quantitative data suggested that students found the strategy useful, in reality the number of participants was effectively too small, and this would suggest that the research could not yield sufficient data to provide any conclusive results. However, the qualitative data was fascinating – with a number of key themes becoming apparent. Each participant was extremely keen to discuss their experience of using the strategy and to take a further part in the research, and so brief case studies were developed. Each participant was also able to identify three ways in which the strategy had been beneficial, with individuals suggesting that it gave them greater autonomy in their research reading. A number of participants adopted the approach as their ‘primary strategy’ for reading critical texts. A single participant in the group was able to use the strategy for the development of meta-cognitive interpretation and analysis of critical texts in their course of study. Each participant reported an improved sense of confidence in tackling reading and research tasks, and greater self-esteem in relation to this activity.

It is intended that the resource be developed with a larger and more diverse cohort, which will yield a greater amount of useful qualitative data. This will enable the development of both an understanding of effective and useful teaching and learning strategies, and further research opportunities.

**References**


3.5 Students as teachers in research

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Introduction

Collaborative learning and student research lie at the core of scholarship at University Centre Peterborough (UCP). The following article tracks the journey of UCP’s Research Ambassadors, from dialogical learning to conference presentation, demonstrating how the use of social media can facilitate collaboration. The article goes on to consider the notion of traversing the ‘zone of proximal development’ as part of small-scale research projects, where students are encouraged to create new knowledge together, think as scholars and become researchers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Following a successful AoC Scholarship Project bid in April 2015, UCP chose to assign two of their Student Ambassador posts to research and scholarship activity, thus creating the new role of Research Ambassador. Academic Director at UCP, Liz Knight, gave the following reasons for employing these posts: ‘Students are central to the development and enhancement of higher education (HE) provision at UCP; research and knowledge are increasingly important in today’s society and it is often the student voice that brings about change’.

Transitioning from the first year – a research experiment

The scheme’s successful pilot in 2015/16 had a significant impact on student culture and made a major contribution to ‘establishing a scholarly ethos’ at UCP (Simmons and Lea, 2013). Much of the student work generated can be viewed on the AoC Scholarship Project website under the case study ‘Embedding Scholarship’ (Mars, 2016).

Such a step-change was key to ‘transforming the student experience into an immersive and scholarly journey’ (Mars, 2016: 4). More significantly, it was a move towards the Research Ambassadors developing ‘their own context-specific pedagogy in an action framework to support the advancement of the Scholarship initiative’ (Mars, 2016: 4). The Research Ambassadors were invited to the 2016 AoC HE Research Conference, giving them an opportunity to explore change through a qualitative small-scale research project, which had the following research question: How could the Research Ambassadors pull together to design the pathway for next year’s participants with the least intervention?

‘An obvious way for college HE lecturers to develop their scholarly profiles would be to engage in forms of action (or evaluation) research, particularly by working with their own students, seeing them as collaborators in solving professional and pedagogical problems, rather than as respondents or people to be researched. This style of research also has some considerable scope for developing the 33 research skills of students.’

(Lea, 2015: 32)

UCP was keen to develop its own scholarly profile. A context-specific research project with a definite time limit presented the opportunity to encourage its Research Ambassador to explore more collaborative modes of learning. With the AoC HE Research Conference
in June 2016, it seemed fitting that the Research Ambassadors work together to deliver a presentation. This was the event they had to ‘scaffold’ towards (Bruner, 1983).

**A solution to a dialogical dilemma: Vygotsky and Bruner**

Vygotsky explains his concept of the ‘zone of proximal development’ as ‘the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving...in collaboration with more able peers’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 89). Collaboration and collaborative learning were necessary for change. UCP’s first Research Ambassadors were already ‘more able’ in this sense, as they had been in post for a year and could accurately be defined as the ‘experts’ in this case. To share this expertise, and to develop their learning alongside the second year Research Ambassadors, required some form of dialogical platform.

Bruner (1983) viewed dialogue not only as a mechanism for developing learning and supporting new forms of thinking but also as a cultural tool. The role of the more able peer would be to manipulate objects on behalf of the student, formulate approaches to problem solving, remember steps in a task and provide emotional support (Bruner, 1983). In the case of the Research Ambassadors it was conceivable that objects outside of the dialogical circle could be spoken of and referred to. This meant the use of a dialogical platform could still be deemed appropriate if the objects were potentially accessible via a shared language. The objects of scholarship here were: CVs, conferences and presentations, which could be referenced and shared using links to digitally stored data. The next step was to identify a dialogical platform that all the Research Ambassadors could access and use at distance.

**WhatsApp as qualitative research**

The dialogical platform suggested was the digital application WhatsApp, which was collectively agreed upon from a list of social media already used. It was evident that one of the original Research Ambassadors had nominated himself as the lead ‘teacher’, which gave the WhatsApp conversation immediate momentum. As the main researcher and ‘moderator’ (Myers, 2000) of the group conversation, the Scholarship Development Manager only interjected in the conversation two to three times.

The specific pedagogy alluded to in the UCP case study could be developed by introducing the idea of the ‘pedagogical cycle’ (Sadker and Zittleman, 2006) to students immersed in this dialogical process. The Scholarship Development Manager was interested in how this initial pedagogical construct could phase into a collaborative learning circle. Moreover, a focus was placed on how the WhatsApp conversation and the formal and experiential knowledge shared by the participants could be synthesised to shape the course of a more scholarly pathway for the new Research Ambassadors. In short, this would be a realisation of the scholarship of innovation, as outlined in the current scholarship policy for UCP:

‘Scholarship at UCP is a scholarship of synthesis between employers, students and economic / technological growth which works efficiently within a scholarship of innovation and collaboration. This scholarly approach supports Peterborough’s SMART city and circular economy objectives.’

(Knight and Mars, 2015)
The Research Ambassadors’ final presentation on their journey to reconfigure the Research Ambassador role was delivered by three of the team at the 2016 AoC HE Research Conference (Mazalkov et al., 2016).

Research Ambassadors as researchers

The WhatsApp to Presentation project seemed to capture much of what the Higher Education Academy (HEA) identified as good practice in their 2015 publication, *Students as Researchers* (HEA, 2015). Although this document was written specifically for supporting students to research in their disciplines, much of its content is applicable to the cross-disciplinary learning and discourse that became the lifeblood of the Research Ambassadors’ project. Briefly, the following students as researchers themes were recurrent: higher level thinking skills; critical judgement; organising and synthesising ideas; research-based activity; student-initiated participation; overcoming barriers to participation; research skills development; and research dissemination (Walkington, 2015). This was an indication that the Research Ambassadors, whether conscious of it or not, were beginning to act as researchers, and were on their way to authentic co-researching.

Applying the ‘boundary mechanisms’ model to the analysis of the WhatsApp conversation

Once the students had chosen a digital platform for dialogue, they introduced another dimension into their learning environment. In their journey as co-researchers they had introduced notions of ‘boundary mechanisms’, ‘boundary objects’ and ‘boundary crossing’ into their research inquiry (Gachago et al., 2015). Boundaries can be cultures, locations, time, professional levels, etc.; in other words social cultural differences that could lead to discontinuity in action or interaction. Boundary objects are those artefacts associated with the crossing process, which is the transition from one territory to another (Gachago et al., 2015). Boundary mechanisms of learning can be classed as identification, coordination, reflection and transformation. Integration of knowledge is encouraged as boundaries are crossed, offering a good chance for scholarship and innovations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boundary mechanisms of learning</th>
<th>Common learning processes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identification</strong></td>
<td><strong>Othering</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Different sites are questioned and</td>
<td>Comparison of one practice with another to identify differences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>accordingly redesigned. The emphasis</td>
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<td>remains on a new awareness of practices</td>
<td><strong>Legitimate coexistence</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>and redevelopment of existing identities.</td>
<td>Working in different groups and/or sites and considering</td>
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<td></td>
<td>interference and expectations of a number of relationships in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>different groups.</td>
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</table>
### Coordination
The focus remains on overcoming a boundary for continuity to take place, by means of unforced movement between sites.

### Communicative connection
Using boundary objects to be shared by various role players. It could be interpreted differently by different role players.

### Efforts of translation
Boundary objects could be used to translate aspects in different sites and to address the multiplicity of different sense makings.

### Enhancing boundary permeability
Role players are unaware of the different practices due to effortless exchanges and lack of considered choice and effort.

### Routinisation
Practices take place routinely with little or no disagreement.

### Reflection
A developed set of viewpoints contributing to the development of a new identity that could potentially inform future endeavours.

### Perspective making
Clearly indicating knowledge and understanding of a certain topic.

### Perspective taking
Reflecting on one’s own knowledge and considering others’ perspectives.

### Transformation
This contributes to the development of new practices, which often result in the emergence of ‘in-between’ practices that are often called boundary practices.

### Confrontation
A specific challenge or problem forces different sites to consider their current practices and relationships.

### Recognising a shared problem space
Often a shared problem is identified as a result of the confrontation.

### Hybridisation
A new cultural form is developed as a result of the shared problem space. Aspects of different spaces are combined to create a hybrid that is completely new.

### Crystallisation
Something that has been created during hybridisation is embedded in practice. Continuous joint work at the boundary. Contradiction in terms of moving towards a new site through hybridisation, but equally preserving the integrity of the original site.
Boyer’s model of scholarship (1990)

Three of Boyer’s four models of scholarship were noticeable throughout the project. The scholarship of teaching and learning was evidenced both in the way the Scholarship Development Manager facilitated the project and the way in which the group adopted new modes of learning. A scholarship of discovery was evident in the way the Research Ambassadors delved into their own discipline knowledge and research experience, as well as questioning their assumptions about truth and what they knew. A scholarship of integration was most evident. Each ambassador came from a different academic background, and there are references to this difference throughout the WhatsApp conversation, as well as many attempts to process different perspectives of the same phenomenon together. This was observed most typically at the juncture of a boundary crossing, when diverse knowledge was integrated and new knowledge formed.

Building a complex analysis of the WhatsApp conversation in stages

A multi-faceted approach to analysing the WhatsApp conversation was necessary to optimise the value of the project to scholarship and student learning at UCP. The following sections demonstrate a series of analyses based on this insight, starting with the application of the pedagogical cycle, then the boundary mechanism model, and finally an example of conversation segments or ‘brackets’, which integrate all models, theory and policy elements mentioned previously in this article: proximal development, students as researchers, boundaries, and Boyer’s model of scholarship. To ensure anonymity, the Research Ambassadors from 2015/16 are coded as A1 and A2; those from 2016/17 are coded as B1 and B2. The Scholarship Development Manager is coded as C1.

Analysis of the WhatsApp conversation about applying the pedagogical cycle model (Scholarship Level 1)

According to Sadker and Zittleman, the pedagogical cycle goes through four stages: Structure (S), Question (Q), Respond (Rd) and React (Rc) (Sadker and Zittleman, 2006).

‘C1: C1 here... just so you know I am observing but will not be participating... in 10 days we will have some good material for presentation.’ (S)

‘A2: B1 and B2, have you thought about what you want to do as part of the SRA?’ (Q)

‘B1: I don’t know enough about it to say for definite. Can you and A1 say what were the best 5 skills you learnt from the position.......’ (Rd)

‘A1: I will get those to you by 9.30 tonight.’ (Rc)

Analysis of the WhatsApp conversation about applying the boundary mechanisms model (Scholarship Level 2)

Applying the boundary mechanisms model to the WhatsApp conversation enabled us to track the cycle from identification and coordination to reflection and transformation. The WhatsApp conversation naturally segmented itself into two parts or topics. The first focused on the role and practices of the Research Ambassador; the second on the AoC HE Research
Conference presentation (Myers, 2000). Of further interest is how boundary transformations can be identified as the transition to collaborative learning. Part 1 is analysed below.

**Part 1**

‘A2: B1 and B2, have you thought about what you want to do as part of SRA? C1 mentioned you guys might want to do something specific?’

{Identification}

‘B2: I don’t know enough about it yet to say for definite. Can you and A1 say what were the five best skills you learnt/used/developed from the position and that might give us an idea of how we can go forward.’

{Co-ordination}

‘B2: Wicked, also could you just give a summary of the sort of things we will be doing?’

{Co-ordination}

‘B2: Sorry if I’m being stupid but what was last year’s lecture about?’

{Identification}

‘A2: Also, B2 and B1 what courses are you doing? So that me and A1 can better tailor the RA programme for you.’

{Identification}

‘B2: … Basically, I think I am more interested in the actual research process, so things like skills and processes and guidance needed to actually conduct research. Also, because I am doing English literature, research in this field doesn’t relate so much to industry it is definitely more related to academia. Am I on the right lines or am I way off the mark? And does that all make sense?’

{Reflection}

‘B1: … I feel that the term research is a slight a misnomer, a feeling echoed by other students including existing ambassadors. One idea I have considered is regular forums promoting critical thinking.’

{Reflection}

‘B2: That sounds good, also what do you think of promoting sessions where students can explain their ideas to students outside of their field? I know that explaining my ideas to someone who knows nothing about my field is really helpful because you have to start from the bottom up.’

{Transformation}

‘A2: I think explaining your research clearly to someone not familiar with the field is a good reflective exercise. Perhaps for the group sessions, you can focus on the skills needed to
advertise effectively the sessions to the students and get them interested.’

{Transformation}

‘B2: Good thinking, perhaps some flyers and an email.’

{Transformation}

‘B1: B2, should we see if this can be incorporated into induction - either in person or write something for tutors and have a freshers or societies week presence?’

{Transformation}

**Complex analysis 1 (Scholarship Level 3)**

In the following segment, the zone of proximal development can be identified as the change in what B1 and B2 did not know about the role of the Research Ambassador, as well as the list of research activities, to knowing about them through dialogical engagement with their more expert peers. The dominant boundary object for the RAs in this case is the mobile device running the WhatsApp software.

‘B2: I don’t know enough about it yet to say for definite. Can you and A1 say what were the five best skills you learnt/used/developed from the position and that might give us an idea of how we can go forward.’

{Identification, co-ordination}
{Boundary crossing – knowledge from experience as RA}

‘A1: I will get those to you by 930 tonight’

{Boundary crossing – time, place}

‘B2: Wicked, also could you just give a summary of the sort of things we will be doing?’

{Identification, co-ordination}

‘A2: One if the things we had to do was to reflect on what we learned and experiences from attending [sic] last year’s lecture’

{Pedagogical cycle – react}

{HEA students as researchers – high level thinking skills, critical judgement}

‘A1: You will get an idea from the things we have done, I’ll make sure to offer some more information in the summary’

{Scholarship of discovery}

‘B2: Sorry if I’m being stupid but what was last year’s lecture about?’

{Identification}

‘B2: Thanks :)’
‘A2: Soz suppost [sic] to say conference, anf [sic] it was on how other colleges are promiting simular [sic] things to what we r doing’

{Boundary crossing – concept}

‘B2: Okay, cool.’

{Boundary crossing – time, place}

‘A1: Hello all, my computer keeps restarting and isn't very happy! I haven't been about to do much this morning and yesterday so sorry first the delay, I will try to get it working again and email you over the document today’

{Boundary crossing – time}

{Boundary objects – A1’s home computer; the mobile device running WhatsApp}

‘A2: Ok, here are my 5 skills learnt and 5 pieces of evidence:
  - reflective writing
  - presenting on a technology related topic
  - taking minutes at RSEC meetings
  - creating a flyer for UCP
  - participating and contributing at formal meeting
    -- AoC Conference Report
    -- presentation on The Impact of Technology on the Accounting Profession
    -- Think Piece
    -- Research Lunch flyer
    -- minutes taken at the RSEC meetings’

{Scholarship of integration}
{HEA students as researchers – research skills}

‘A2: I can send you the documents of what I did, if thats [sic] fine with C1.’

‘C1: Share everything’

‘A2: Ok’

{Scholarship of integration}
{Scholarship of teaching and learning}

‘A2: Also, B2 and B1 what courses are you doing? So that me and A1 can better tailor the RA programme for you.’

‘A2: (I have sent the files if you want to look through them)’

‘B2: I am doing English literature.’

{Scholarship of discovery}
{Scholarship of teaching and learning}
{Boundary crossing – time, social cultural}
‘B1: Hi sorry, I’ve been out the house all day and only just had tea! I will catch up with this all in the morning’

{HEA students as researchers – overcoming barriers to participation}

‘A2: What is the time limit for us to speak C1? Thanks’

‘A2: OK we have 20min between the three of us, so about 6min each’

‘A2: Have you guys looked through the documents I sent yet?’

{Co-ordination}

‘A2: Hey everyone. After giving it some thought I think me and A1 can each talk about for 5/6 min of what we learnt and what we did as SRAs, basically the 5 skills and the 5 evidence.’

{Reflection, transformation}
{HEA students as researchers – organising and synthesising ideas}

**Implications for the Research Ambassador scheme**

By the day of the AoC HE Research Conference presentation, the Research Ambassadors and their role had undergone a complete transformation. This was apparent in how the role was reconfigured, the student experience, the intense research undertaken, and the new ways of handling knowledge demonstrated. One wrote:

> ‘Was I the researcher or the research subject? I knew I was both from the start, but I undoubtedly felt as though I was more of a researcher than the person being researched... Upon reflection, my research is being researched; my development is being studied and evaluated to help promote the effects of this learning style so that others will benefit from what we have all learnt as Research Ambassadors.’
> *(A1, Research Ambassador, 2015/16)*

The insight of A1 is of particular importance when considering UCP’s original model for scholarship and how it relates to employers and growth in Peterborough. Frequently, Peterborough employers cite the gap in skills for graduates as social skills, the ability to self-organise, to be independent and to get up and find out about work themselves. The project addressed these employer concerns and both A1 and A2 have communicated the value of working together in terms of finding work. Both are now employed.

**Conclusion**

Complex analysis of the WhatsApp conversation, alongside the scholarly journey of UCP Research Ambassadors towards conference presentation, is invaluable for our understanding of scholarship. The project brought up so many scholarly elements that this article may not have space to attend to the most pressing issue for student research discourse: identifying new knowledge formed through the dialogical process.
Fundamentally, success can be marked by the affective nature of embedding Research Ambassadors into the scholarly life of UCP students. Observable indicators include cultural behaviours, scholarly practices, knowledge sharing, improving opportunities for discourse on research, encouraging digital dialogical platforms to be employed, and support for widening participation and inclusion. Thus, for research and discourse purposes, ‘investigating the possibility of new kinds of identities and new kinds of actions’ (Myers, 2000: 203).

The complexity of analysis at all levels of scholarship suggests that a typology of research and scholarship needs to be developed and integrated into UCP’s Scholarship Policy. Social media is not the saviour of scholarship but intelligent use of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Viber, alongside more traditional forms of media, can enhance the process. Ultimately, context-specific pedagogy for scholarship requires further student-led research in using social media for scholarship discourse and enhancing student collaboration at UCP.

References


3.6 A journey in developing a research and scholarship culture in college-based higher education

PAULINE OSBORNE AND JOLANTA PETERS, BRIDGWATER AND TAUNTON COLLEGE

Introduction

This article explains one college’s approach to developing a culture of research and scholarly activity (RASA), and its transformative journey in providing support for staff, including the challenges, pitfalls and successes encountered. A literature review explores RASA within college higher education (HE) and the barriers faced, with reference to the differing nature of RASA in higher education institutions (HEIs). This article stems from a presentation given by the authors at the Association of Colleges (AoC) HE Research Conference in June 2016 (AoC, 2016). It is anticipated that the article will act as a stimulus for discussion in other further education (FE) colleges in their journey towards staff RASA enhancement.

Traditionally, FE colleges offer vocational courses. However, in the last two decades there has been a significant shift towards a diverse provision of vocational higher education (HE), including the offer of postgraduate courses. These are provided through franchised university partnerships, non-franchised academic co-operation agreements, awarding bodies or colleges’ own awarding powers. Such diverse provision poses questions about whether colleges face any challenges with regards to RASA development, and whether there are mechanisms that colleges can put in place in order to support their staff. The UK government urges colleges to expand their HE offer and demonstrate staff engagement in RASA, which currently means that ‘the foot has grown, and it needs a better-fitting shoe to accommodate this change’ (Feather, 2016: 1).

Literature review

Over the years, college-based education has gained numerous terms that define its diverse, fast-paced and changing environment. These include: hybrid sector (Turner et al., 2009), heterogeneous sector (Eaton, 2015, cited in Lea, 2015), Cinderella sector with its McDonaldisation approach (cited in Hayes, 2007), or IADHD (Institutional Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) sector (Anderson, Wahlberry and Barton, 2003). Despite this, colleges that deliver HE have an obligation to comply with the Quality Code for Higher Education to keep up-to-date with the developments in their disciplines, evidence their engagement in RASA and demonstrate the distinct nature of ‘HEness’ (Lea and Simmons, 2012).

The college described in this paper has, in line with the Higher Education Academy, adopted Boyer’s definition of scholarship: the scholarship; of discovery, teaching, integration and application (Boyer, 1990). These four types of scholarship represent the process of undertaking research, synthesising the acquired information and applying theory into practice via teaching. There are academics who argue whether certain aspects of Boyer’s scholarship model should only be applied to the university system, such as the scholarship of discovery (Young, 2002; Schofield and Burton, 2015). However, could these separate scholarship demarcations be blurred or ‘permutated’ in the context of the ‘research-teaching nexus’? (Lea, 2015: 61)

Lea (2015) also refers to the terms ‘research-led teaching’ and ‘research-informed teaching’. In college-based RASA, ‘research-informed teaching’ is arguably the most common. A lecturer can collate primary data on an innovative teaching method, engage in the scholarship of
its application, integrate this new knowledge, and ultimately teach using the method. That said, Boyer’s (1990) four dimensions of academic practice can lead even a college-based practitioner to become a well-rounded scholar (Lea, 2015), who engages not only with one dimension of Boyer’s (1990) academic scholarship, but all four.

According to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2015), scholarly activity in the college-based environment may not necessarily demonstrate original or primary research, or the ‘scholarship of discovery’ (Boyer, 1990) that leads to dissemination via peer-reviewed journals or authored books. Lecturers delivering HE in FE act as interpreters of the subject matter through their application of RASA to teaching, as well as being the modifiers of the curriculum rather than originators. It effectively focuses on the college HE staff’s ability to be involved in more applied research, informing their practice through industrial updating and work shadowing. In addition it helps with keeping up-to-date with the discipline through secondary research, engaging in CPD, staff development, and working with the degree-awarding bodies in enhancing the current curricula or developing new ones, which lead to a positive impact on students (QAA, 2015). Simmons and Lea (2013) summarise college-based scholarly activity as adding value to the students’ learning opportunities, the overall quality of teaching and learning, the raising of academic standards, and an innovative curriculum that meets employer needs and the currency of staff subject knowledge. Indeed, college HE lecturers’ strength is their ability to teach a broad range of subjects to a variety of students at a number of levels and to diversify their teaching approach.

King and Widdowson (2009: 19) suggest that an appropriate definition of scholarly activity for a FE college lies in a:

‘middle path between the research-led approach of a traditional HEI and a more appropriate definition for a vocationally focussed FEC [further education college]. This is likely to reflect the FE sector’s focus on teaching and learning, whilst drawing heavily on the professional body expectations facing industry-active tutors.’

This argument seems highly appropriate and is in line with Feather (2012: 246) who argues that ‘to understand scholarship, we must not settle for the status quo – that is, what is handed to us – but persevere in our quest for new knowledge and true understanding’. He goes on to state that ‘scholarship is dynamic, and therefore needs to adapt to new environments and factors affecting it’ (Elliott 1996a, 1996b, cited in Feather, 2012: 246).

Despite this broad approach to defining college HE scholarly activity, a range of barriers are highlighted within the literature that restrict college-based staff from engaging in RASA. The questions we aim to answer refer to the exploration of these barriers and whether, through understanding them, approaches can be implemented to support college-based RASA, based on the example of a college that delivers HE in FE.

Some of the barriers identified in the literature refer to workload-related issues, teaching commitments and the pastoral work associated with the FE and HE divide within the same institution. In addition, there is the need to switch between two levels of education, which leaves staff with little time to engage in RASA (Young, 2002; Burkill et al., 2008; Medcalf, 2014; Feather, 2016). Balancing time and subsequent other commitments, an issue raised by Young as early as 2002, still resonate in the most recent literature (Feather, 2016). Some reflective research papers refer to teaching hours being 720 (Child, 2009); others refer to a minimum
of 830 hours (Harwood and Harwood, 2004; Young, 2009). It is unclear how these hours were calculated and whether they include cover provision for absent colleagues. However, 828 hours is certainly a norm in more than one college known to the authors.

Literature also refers to the levels of anxiety felt by college HE staff due to their mixed understanding of identity – whether they are FE or HE and having to make adjustments in their thinking when switching between levels, sometimes in the space of five minutes (Harwood and Harwood, 2004; Young, 2009). Conflicting quality assurance systems and the time invested in understanding and complying with them also point to the lack of sufficient time for engaging in RASA (Scott, 2010). College HE staff report isolation in terms of internal and external contacts with other practitioners in their disciplines, as compared with their HEI counterparts, leading them to levels of anxiety associated with this isolation (Young, 2009; Medcalf, 2014; Feather, 2016).

To exacerbate the issue, Young (2009) and Lea and Simmons (2012) state that often within HE in FE there is a lack of support at an institutional level, a lack of recognition for teaching HE and a lack of commitment from college management in providing support with regards to RASA. Although the majority of the literature points to the negative aspects encountered by college staff in terms of their engagement in RASA, Medcalf (2014: 18) summarises that college HE practitioners are ‘conscious that they are subscribing to the value that research and scholarly activity have a key part to play in their professional development and professional responsibilities and subject updating’.

Despite the challenges highlighted in the literature, this article explores a south-west college’s journey in establishing holistic mechanisms to support staff engagement with RASA in college HE.

**The establishment of the Research, Scholarship and Ethics (RSE) Committee**

The college set up a Research, Scholarship and Ethics (RSE) Committee in 2011 as a starting point for the focused development of RASA. In addition to supporting a number of staff to undertake Masters qualifications, a key activity of the committee has been to launch and run an annual bidding round for funds to support small-scale research or scholarship activities.

In order to provide the necessary institutional support, certain foundations and a framework had to be established by the committee in order to instigate an understanding of RASA amongst the college staff. Clear definitions were established to help understand key terms, such as research, scholarly activity, gate-keeping, research participants, research ethics and research information sheet. The adoption of institutionally-accepted terms helped minimise the ambiguity for college researchers and provided convergence across the institution.

The college’s approach to RASA is in line with the argument put forward by Feather, who states that ‘the field of scholarship should not be forced upon a person, as this is likely to disillusion and demotivate that person’ (Brew, 2010, cited in Feather, 2012: 252). ‘Individuals need to be allowed to select their preferred field of study, to be given the time and resources to explore that field, and to interact with other like-minded people’ (Feather, 2012: 252). Staff at this college are free to choose their field of scholarship and research method, and activity is not limited to action research. Jameson and Hillier (2003, cited in Feather, 2012: 247-248) argue that action research is the best research method in the HE in FE context. It is true that this form of research does fit well. Summers and Cutting (2016) provide examples of
action research in the form of a co-operative inquiry carried out at the college in relation to education for sustainable development. However, as Feather (2012) argues, it would be wrong to conclude that research in FE colleges is limited to action research. The chapter written by Osborne in Summers and Cutting (2016) provides an example of a research project that involved wider research methodologies carried out at the college.

**Staff Research and Scholarship Awards/Award Holder scheme**

Each year the RSE Committee launches a bidding round for Staff Research and Scholarship Awards. This scheme enables staff to ‘buy themselves out’ of some of their contractual teaching or other work obligations, or to carry out RASA in their own time and be paid for it. It was expected that staff would opt to replace other work activities with research but that has not proved to be the case. The reasons staff have given for carrying out their project in their own time includes a commitment to the students, concern about finding a replacement member of staff with the right skillset, and concern that their colleagues might be asked to cover their teaching, therefore adding to their workload. Moving forward, further consideration needs to be given to establish if these concerns are real or perceived, to tackle barriers to enable staff to feel they have the choice of researching instead of some teaching, as well as providing the option to be paid to undertake the activity in their own time as envisaged by the committee. Although some staff have used a proportion of the six days of scholarly activity provision that is available for academics to take each year, the vast majority of projects have been carried out in their own time, funded by the college. Feather (2012: 247) comments that staff delivering HE in FE are not given time to conduct research because management ‘do not see research as a priority’. However much of a priority managers wish to make RASA in FE colleges, they are limited by financial constraints and the challenges of bringing about cultural change. This dilemma, and how to fund any replacement of teaching hours with research (if indeed this is even desirable or realistic), is at the heart of the debate about the development of an appropriate RASA culture for college HE.

The Award Holder scheme provides an infrastructure and the necessary resources to support staff with such activities. The scheme is based on experience gained from the former Plymouth University Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (HELP CETL) (Turner et al., 2009).

A decision was taken from the outset to encourage and welcome applications from academic and non-academic staff alike, from those focusing on work-based learning and FE just as much as from those involved with HE. Although the starting point was a desire to strengthen the HE culture within the college, it was decided that students, staff and the institution itself would gain by having a broad cross-college approach not limited to HE academic staff. Therefore, anyone interested in engaging in some aspect of RASA can be supported. This approach also enables the college to ‘mitigate the often-isolated nature of HE in FE’ (King et al., 2014: 63)

The application form asks six strategic questions: who, why, what, how, when and for how many hours. Staff applying for an award provide an agreement letter from their line manager that demonstrates their full support of the individual undertaking RASA.

In the early stages of the scheme, a significant pitfall was the time taken to provide feedback and obtain responses from applicants in relation to their bid applications. This has been refined to a system whereby the applications are received a week ahead of the committee meeting so they can be scrutinised and questions identified. Applicants present their project
ideas to the committee panel and respond to potential questions. If necessary, the applicants may be required to amend their application in response to the feedback received and resubmit it to the panel who then confirm the outcome of their application.

A member of the committee is allocated to each project to act as a mentor. The mentor gathers feedback on the progression of the project for reporting back to each termly meeting of the committee so that progress can be tracked or any necessary intervention identified.

According to Eaton (cited in Lea, 2015: 191), RASA within a college-based environment may take a number of forms that differ from their research-intense university counterparts, or ‘originators of research’. Upon reflection it is evident that there is a trend in applications relating to industrial updating, engagement with local and regional employers, widening participation, research-informed teaching, action and applied research. Such a trend within colleges is ‘recognised as a valuable addition to the wider HE sector’ (Eaton, 2015, cited in Lea, 2015: 192). Successful projects have aimed at improving practices in the service areas as well as leading to improved teaching and learning, innovative HE curriculum design, blended learning and digital literacy, the use of technology in teacher mentorship and coaching; exploring and applying innovative teaching methods, and developing international curriculum links.

One of the main barriers in setting up the Award Holder scheme was the fact that staff were not used to being given an opportunity to engage in a funded RASA project and many were unsure what projects they might undertake. The committee therefore initiated ideas for potential projects. Some of these ideas have been taken up successfully. Medcalf (2014) provides evidence that staff in FE colleges consider themselves to be novice or early career researchers. He also cites Universities UK (2010: 20, cited in Medcalf, 2014: 16) who advise the development of a ‘strong mentoring culture’ to support early career researchers. Although not true for all staff, many do fit within this category, and this prompts the question about the next steps that the committee can take, for example by establishing more formal mentoring or coaching activities. In addition to using internal expertise, greater links with the expertise that lies within the college’s validating universities is worthy of further exploration.

The RSE Committee acts not only as a driving force and a support mechanism for RASA, but also performs a gate-keeping role, in particular with regards to the research project’s ethical considerations. Ethics committees are ‘bridging the gap between conduct and compliance’ (Israel and Hay, 2006: 131); however, there is a lack of evidence of such committees being established in CBHE environments, as more focus in literature is given to HEIs’ ethics committees (Mcareavey and Muir, 2011; Remenyi, Swan and Van Den Assem, 2011). The committee requires researchers to expose their research and scholarship intentions for ethical scrutiny. The college’s committee has therefore established a research ethics policy, ethical clearance form, research participant’s information sheet and a consent form.

The complexities of research ethics at this college are simplified through the use of the research ethics scrutiny diagram, otherwise referred to as ‘research ethics traffic lights’, which provides a visual diagram with scenarios showing when research projects may require ethical scrutiny by the RSE Committee. There are cases when such scenarios may show an ‘amber light’, in which case the final decision about the ethical clearance requirements are made by the committee.
**RASA dissemination and outputs**

The annual staff research and scholarly activities publication acts as a stepping stone in building confidence when writing up a research or scholarship project, which can ultimately lead to peer-reviewed external publications. The document is published in printed format, accessible via the college libraries, and via the electronic repository on the virtual learning environment (VLE). The RSE Committee provides final report writing guidelines to facilitate completion of the project report. In 2009, Turner et al. highlighted the limited recognition for college-based staff who engage in RASA. The college has implemented a number of mechanisms that raise the RASA-active staff profiles via the college's annual Research and Scholarship Symposium, which provides ample opportunities for staff to disseminate their project outcomes, network with colleagues from across the college and build their confidence to share their project findings with wider audiences.

**Electronic repository – Staff Research Guide**

Turner et al. (2009: 260) highlight the lack of clarity concerning funding and available support for RASA-active college practitioners. The Staff Research Guide on the VLE at the college acts as an interactive electronic repository composed of the definitions, policies, procedures, protocols and guidance materials in relation to RASA. It provides guidance on different types of research and methodologies, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of specific methods. It also contains ethical scrutiny policies and dissemination routes, together with the external funding toolkit. A separate section within the repository is dedicated to those who are seeking external funding, highlighting the routes that staff can take beyond the college's own scheme. Similarly, an additional section is designed for those who are new to RASA or are newly-qualified teachers.

Conducting literature reviews and carrying out secondary research inevitably involves the library research repositories and the support of library staff to provide researchers with effective quality information retrieval. The Staff Research Guide links researchers to subject-specific database portals directly through this repository, and provides a central resource discovery point to available research materials. Staff who teach on certain partner university-validated courses also have access to the partner university resources via the same central repository, which offers ease of access and uninterrupted service 24/7.

The main pitfall encountered in the early stages of running the RASA Award Holder scheme was keeping close control of the allocation of the funds. To counter this issue, RASA-specific budget claims forms were produced. Funds can only be released once specific signatures have been obtained and costs counted against the project budget, with money being claimed monthly and not after the end of the accounting year.

Progress is still to be made in handling how to carry funds over from one year to the next. Currently this is limiting projects to a duration of seven months (January to July). If projects are allowed to run over from one academic year to the next it has a knock-on effect of having already spent part of an unknown budget prior to the launch of the next year’s bidding round, which can then limit what is available for allocation in that year.

One key to the success of RSE activities has been the support of the senior management team in providing funding of up to £20,000 per year, not all of which has always been used. Indeed, £5,000 has enabled a number of successful projects to run. Clearly funds are limited and this results in small-scale research projects. Stanton (2009, cited in Medcalf, 2014) claims that government policy has focused research funding in mostly older universities that have
a successful track record. Medcalf (2014: 12) argues that ‘this has the potential to starve the ‘HE in FE’ sector of potential opportunities for research, and the resultant staff development which comes herewith’. The aim at this college is to encourage and facilitate staff to more formally engage in RASA. Despite the fact that much research funding is likely to remain beyond the grasp of college HE, it is a further aim of the RSE Committee to enable staff to gain a track record of project completion, so that they are more likely to be successful in bidding for external research funds in the future. Success in gaining external project funding would make a significant difference to college HE culture. The impact of larger research funds is demonstrated by the fact that the longest running and largest research projects carried out in recent years at the college were funded through the Plymouth University HELP CETL scheme, which had a large budget. It is these more major projects that have in time led to publication in Summers and Cutting (2016).

A further key to the college’s RASA success is the involvement of the Research and Library Services Manager who provides significant support as a member of the Committee and is well placed to support staff in their applications and ongoing research activities.

**Conclusion**

Developing a research and scholarship culture within college HE is a long and challenging journey. There are varying arguments in literature with regards to what could or should constitute RASA within college HE. Barriers identified in the literature range from lack of time to lack of institutional support. Although there are barriers to overcome, progress can be made, as seen through this college’s journey. The establishment of a RSE Committee with funds to award on an annual basis for small-scale research and scholarship projects has had a significant impact in developing the culture within this institution. The funding of Masters qualifications has also had an impact, as has the annual Research Symposium and the annual research and scholarship showcase publication. These activities set an expectation of such work being carried out across the college, thereby influencing the RASA culture for FE and HE academic and non-academic staff alike, all of whom are able to contribute to improving the student experience through such involvement. The award infrastructure, ethics protocols, online guidance and repositories support staff with engagement in research and scholarship.

An appropriate RASA culture for college HE needs to be established within each FE college in line with their individual strategic aims, offer and partners’ expectations. The nature of this culture and the definition of research and scholarship to which they are working or aspiring to is a question for debate within colleges and across the sector. Funding opportunities to support research and scholarship activities in college HE would considerably help in this cultural shift. This is important in order to ensure that what is offered is fit for purpose and is delivered by those who have credibility. In this college, as in many others, the journey will continue in the development of an appropriate research and scholarship culture for college HE.

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Abstracts

4.1 Walk Write Create

JAC CATTANEO, NORTHBROOK COLLEGE, AMY CUNNINGHAM, UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON
AND SHIRLEY CHUBB, UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

Introduction

‘Walk Write Create’ is an ongoing research project involving staff and students from Northbrook College and the Universities of Brighton and Chichester. Funded by a University of Brighton Centre for Learning and Teaching Scholarship, it explores how purposeful wandering as a reflective and productive process can enable students to develop confidence in their professional, creative and academic writing skills. The project has established a community of research-led learning between higher education institutions (HEIs) and college-based higher education undergraduates, postgraduates, alumni and academic staff, as a model of collaboration that may be adopted by other practice-based disciplines. The difficulty visual/kinetic students experience with verbal expression has been well documented (Borg, 2012). Francis (2009: 29) argues:

‘Art and Design students are being encouraged to find their own processes in their practical work and differences are celebrated. However in their writing, this idea of process gets lost and they are not introduced to possible ways of working, or are encouraged to think that the final logical structure of a written piece, read left to right, front to back, reflects the way it is evolved.’

By demonstrating to students how they might transfer the integrity of their practice into written forms, it is hoped that they may see writing as a complementary creative process. One of the initial drivers for the project is widening participation. The researchers are looking for new ways to support students from a broad demographic, for example first generation entrants, mature students and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students. The project encourages students to broaden their horizons by working collaboratively and sharing their learning with peers across a range of levels and institutions. It also allows staff to share good practice, stimulating a collaborative dialogue across institutions.

Methodology

The project’s methodology can be categorised as performative research:

‘When research findings are presented as performative utterances, there is a double articulation with practice that brings into being what, for want of a better word, it names. The research process inaugurates movement and transformation. It is performative. It is not qualitative research: it is itself a new paradigm of research with its own distinctive protocols, principles and validation procedures.’
(Haseman, 2007, cited in Bold, 2008)
The project draws on Giroux's (2005 and 2011) critical pedagogy, ‘providing the conditions for students to speak differently’, Wenger’s (1998 and 2000) ‘communities of practice’, and psychogeography (Pinder, 2005), whereby students respond to their environment through intersections of writing, drawing and making. Studio-based workshops, gallery visits and walking field trips have enabled participants to produce a series of written pieces, accompanied by drawings, maps, sound recordings and photographs. This primary material is used to inform the students’ research and artists’ statements, contextual essays and equivalent professional products on the Fine Art programmes at the Universities of Brighton and Chichester, as well as the Creative Industries Department at Northbrook College.

Walking is an important area of practice in fine art, the performing arts and literature (including notions of psychogeography). It has recently come to the forefront of discussions, explorations and analysis, as illustrated by exhibitions such as ‘Walk On From Richard Long to Janet Cardiff - 40 years of Art Walking’ (2013-14) and Hancox (2012) Contemporary Walking Practices and the Situationist International: The Politics of Perambulating the Boundaries Between Art and Life, as well as numerous symposia and networks. The relevance of this field of enquiry to practice-based research is broad, and ranges from ecology and sustainability to understanding the artistic process and wellbeing. This project is intended to enhance the existing provision of a creative approach to reflective writing (a developmental element of the MA Fine Art programme at the University of Chichester, the Fine Art Academic Programme at the University of Brighton and Fine Art courses at Northbrook College). The research uses this rich and growing subject area to develop a model for learning and teaching where ‘learning through doing’ focuses on the specific activity of walking to explore new ways of linking the written form with other practical and creative forms.

‘Walk Write Create’ builds on the pedagogic research undertaken by Amy Cunningham and Jane Fox in the ‘exploding the workbook’ project (2011-12) and a collaborative creative writing project between colleagues and students from Northbrook College and the University for the Creative Arts (Cattaneo, Gramstadt and Tappenden, 2013). It is also informed by ideas investigated in ‘Significant Walks’, a Wellcome Trust collaborative research project led by Dr Shirley Chubb, Reader in Interdisciplinary Art and MA Fine Art Coordinator, University of Chichester, with Ann Moore, Professor of Physiotherapy and Head of the Centre for Health Research, School of Health Sciences, University of Brighton (see http://significantwalks.com). The strategies proposed in the project could also transfer to courses that are practice-based, where learning through doing means making sense of practical outcomes in retrospect of their achievement.

The research incorporates the University of Brighton’s and University of Chichester’s learning and teaching strategies by facilitating critical engagement and continual dialogue between staff and students, with students seen as collaborative partners in the development of new knowledge and understanding. It addresses how students and staff understand and work with ‘threshold concepts’ (Meyer and Land, 2003) around the articulation of ideas and concepts that emerge through creative arts practice. The project seeks to develop a model where students and artists will be supported to find strategies that allow them to talk from practice and begin to articulate haptic knowledge in order to ‘give voice’ to the often complicated and poetic processes and ideas that reside within artworks. This is essential for the development of, and contribution to, an understanding of research in both an art-based context and a practice-based field and curriculum.

As well as allowing collaborative working and the exchange of ideas, the project has demonstrated possible routes of progression for BA students. Several of the first Northbrook
undergraduate participants have now taken up MA places at the participating HEIs. In the future, an online archive and artists’ book-making workshop are planned, with dissemination through virtual and place-based exhibitions.

**Bibliography**


4.2 Collaborative research as professional development

PHILLIP MILLER, NEW COLLEGE DURHAM

Introduction

The North East College Regional Scholarship Network (NECRSN) was formed in March 2014, bringing together New College Durham, Sunderland College and Newcastle College with the aim of collaborating in the development and enhancement of college higher education (HE) research and scholarly activity. The basis of this collaborative network approach lies in the capacity for a discipline, rather than an institutional, focus. Recent studies have noted that practitioners who work in college HE often face barriers in existing subject communities (Simmons and Lea, 2013) and therefore bringing together practitioners within a college-based HE setting might go some way towards tackling these issues.

The research background

A sports subgroup worked on a piece of research aimed at exploring possible relationships between perceived cohesion, attendance and key performance indicators (retention, achievement and success) using 107 Level 4 foundation degree and HNC students as participants. Whilst the findings of the research may be of use to practitioners, and the process may benefit early stage HE students by allowing them to engage in research in a participative manner (Webb, 2010), one of the principal gains was in bringing together academics at various stages of their professional and academic careers. Conducting such collaborative research allows teaching staff to actively engage with multiple areas of Boyer’s (1990) model of scholarship in a supportive and accessible manner, promoting what Glazer, Abbott and Harris (2004) suggested to be a deeper understanding of themselves, both professionally and personally.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2013) states that scholarship and research lie at the heart of higher education. It suggests that at Levels 4 and 5 there is a need for staff to have an understanding of scholarly developments in their discipline, and that at Level 6 teaching will be informed, if not led, by the research/scholarship of staff. QAA (2013) recognises that this does not necessarily mean conducting original research, but it does mean more than simply undertaking professional development. A University and College Union (UCU) survey suggested that, whilst there is some evidence of this type of scholarly activity within colleges, individuals are often ‘scholarly’ in their own time due to maintaining class contact hours in excess of 800 hours per year (UCU, 2013). Within most colleges, continuing professional development is viewed much more as information dissemination and updating rather than an opportunity to engage in a professional and scholarly community of practice, or acting as a learning professional (Lucas and Unwin, 2009; Lingfield, 2012; Rand, 2015). There is a range of literature to support the claim that existing models of staff development are ineffective. Savoe-Zajc and Deschamps-Bednarz (2007) have stated that one-day workshops provided by experts do not yield any significant changes at classroom level. Zeichner (2003) stated that staff neither like these programmes nor use them to improve practice, and that this sort of training model is unconnected to teachers’ daily work and is disrespectful of their knowledge.

Methodology

Off the back of experiences within a formalised model of collaborative research and the aforementioned doubts as to the usefulness of traditional models of continuing professional
development, an alternative model has been devised and approved for trial during the current academic year. The trial involves a small cohort of staff from the involved colleges, which are opting out of the institutional CPD days that occur across the year, and instead undertaking collaborative research on agreed departmental and/or institutional issues. This programme is designed to allow staff to become architects of change by building upon their current conceptions (Parke and Coble, 1997), and will hopefully prove to be an effective professional development tool that promotes inquiry, reflection and problem solving that results in action or change (Jaipal and Figg, 2011).

In terms of individual personal development, Boyer (1990) recognised that knowledge is acquired through research, synthesis, practice and teaching, and there is a wide range of literature to support that engaging in this kind of research activity is an effective method for professional development. Levin and Rock (2003) stated that research is an effective professional development tool that promotes inquiry, reflection and problem solving, while Locke and Reilly (2009) identified similar benefits for professionalism based on the deployment of reflection, knowledge generation and collaboration. Zeichner (2003) effectively summarises the evidence by stating that teacher research promotes the kind of teacher learning that is valuable and transformative, qualities that are not often linked to many professional development models.

The outcomes of this programme could have significant benefits for the college, with the expectation that the activity should revolve around enhancing pedagogical effectiveness and supporting students to succeed (Simmons and Lea, 2013).

References


QAA (2013) Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff: Expectations for Foundation Degree-awarding powers and for taught degree-awarding powers, Gloucester: QAA.


contributions to professional development, Educational Action Research, 15:4, 577-596.


4.3 Engaging students as partners in learning in study skill and employability development

KELLY PARMAR AND JOANNE PARKER, DERBY COLLEGE

In the competitive world of work beyond higher education (HE), increases in social and political pressure have resulted in the need to ensure students are equipped with the relevant skills to secure employment. This research explores strategies to engage students as partners in learning, specifically in relation to study skills and employability development, and the practicalities by which this can be established through classroom and independent study.

The conceptual model focuses on suggestions to develop partnership further, with attention drawn to the 'challenge' element, which emphasises 'new ways of working and learning' (Healey et al., 2014: 15).

Context

At Derby College, HE provision comprises approximately 600 students. The variety of courses attracts a wide range of students in terms of skillset, age, culture, background and qualifications. A higher education study support coach supports student academic skill development, and an audit system is used (Figure 1) to capture skill data to assist tutors (Tariq et al., 2004). Adapting components from this proforma and tailoring the audit to suit the needs of the students at Derby College, we designed a new audit. This was undertaken in response to suggestions from students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The previous audit was taken from the University of Derby.

**Figure 1: Audit 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Year of Entry</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Has the following tendencies:</th>
<th>Learning difficulties or disabilities (clear below)</th>
<th>Skills identified above reason for work on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reference:**

Methodology
The challenges we faced were two-fold:

Plan for study skill development at Derby College to tackle the challenges:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September-October</td>
<td>Audit (student assessment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Audit (teacher assessment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Audit (HE study support coach assessment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April-July</td>
<td>Audit (re-completed by student)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>End-of-year study skill HE report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: HE Study Support Plan

Year-on-year plan for study skill development at Derby College:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1: 2015/16</th>
<th>Year 2: 2016/17</th>
<th>Year 3: 2017/18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appoint full-time HE study support coach</td>
<td>Two full-time HE study support coaches (plus assistance with numeracy)</td>
<td>Continue to develop the role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce colour-coded audit to be filled in by all HE students at induction and the end of the academic year</td>
<td>New audit form designed (Figure 1)</td>
<td>Further proactive use of the audit; make available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookable workshops on specific study skills and one-to-one support</td>
<td>Continued support via workshops and one-to-ones with more tailoring</td>
<td>Further tailoring with engagement from tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pilot of WordPress with Children and Young People’s Services year-two cohort</td>
<td>Analysis of results from WordPress. If successful, extend to other HE programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff study skill development</td>
<td>Maintain staff development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Year-on-year plan
The data showed a conflict between embedding study and employability skills versus bolt-on style workshops (Rich, 2015). The practical realities of the bolt-on approach include a mixture of circumstantial factors, for example the nature of courses, work-life balance and time restraints, which hinder student engagement. Additionally, the requirement to embed may invite resistance from tutors (Allan and Clarke, 2007) due to additional workload. Collaboration with students to alleviate the obligation on tutors to develop study skills will strengthen communication and responsibility for the student's own learning. The flexibility around booking in one-to-one tutorials and workshops directly through tutors develops a further sense of community.

A pilot of independent student portfolios (Riebe and Jackson, 2014) is underway with one of the second year foundation degree cohorts, via the virtual learning environment (VLE). This will articulate and advance skills, displaying examples of current practice on work placement and during HE study (inclusive of any extra-curricular activity). The example profile (Figure 4) shows the flexibility in headings, content and imagery. This profile can also act as an online CV.

![WordPress profile](image)

Figure 4: WordPress profile
Student account: Joanne Parker

Commencing the foundation degree was daunting; meeting new people and being unsure if I was able to achieve the results expected from the higher education programme, especially once phrases like ‘academic writing’ came into the equation. Furthermore, being a mature student and having been out of education for a while made me anxious. With the enjoyment of gaining new skills and knowledge the year soon passed and I am now in my second year. I feel more confident with my new skills, but mindful that I have plenty more to learn.

Resources such as the college library and Derby University helped me to gather information along with study skill support. Making appointments with Kelly [Higher Education Study Support Coach] after completing my first draft helped double check anything I was unsure of and highlighted areas for improvement. This gave me greater confidence in my own findings. Kelly would always have optional extended ideas for me to look over that would further improve my work. I try to take on board all new ideas and embrace new skills. With commitment last year, I found my results improved each time.

My next step is to complete Levels 4 and 5. I am ready for this challenge and I am equally excited to start using WordPress. Using WordPress reflectively will help me to document anything I may have either found challenging or good practice to share with others. Additionally, it will be a valuable tool for upcoming job applications. Keeping my profile updated will enhance my employability skills and convey all the appropriate achievements I have and the valuable knowledge that I have gained. I am aware that it will take time to build my profile; however, I believe the outcomes of dedicating this time will be rewarded in the final product.

Joanne’s account highlights the hurdles students face, and how proactively seeking guidance and having more autonomy for individual learning needs can prove successful.

Conclusions

This small-scale research project provides a starting point for engaging and working with students collaboratively to enhance quality, rapport, teaching and learning. The successes and drawbacks of the WordPress pilot are, however, yet to be seen in their entirety. I am optimistic that the results will have the following effects:

- increase student confidence
- aid skill development during and after HE study
- become a life-long tool for forthcoming projects
- remove the pressure from tutors and increase the responsibility on students.
Mindful of this, I am also aware of the potential barriers:

- time, both for the students and tutors
- Technical challenges students may face.

An end of year report will be published in July, which will provide further analysis and recommendations for the next academic year.

References


4.4 Working with international students as partners
MIKE SAUNDERS, YORK COLLEGE, AND ROY FISHER, UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD

Introduction
This presentation considered some of the key issues surrounding the pedagogy of working with international students embedded within vocational classes, including the Access to HE Diploma. It was based on work undertaken by Mike Saunders (Head of Studies, Lifelong Learning and HE, York College) and Roy Fisher (Professor of Education, University of Huddersfield).

A section of the work presented will be included as part of a chapter in a book published by Springer International. The work will also contribute to a research project being carried out at York College, which aims to investigate how the principles identified from research in other countries apply in the UK further education (FE) sector. The presentation focussed on the principles needed to develop pedagogy that meets the needs of both international and local students.

The presentation
The first section of the presentation considered the six areas that are discussed in the book chapter. These areas had been identified by Mike Saunders as being of particular importance when working with international students at York College. The six areas are: integrating international students into classes with local students; ensuring that all staff are involved in the development of the English skills of international students, developing their understanding of the language of assessment and of the academic rigour required in the UK, making use of their experience in the classroom and in their assessment, and ensuring clarity of communication. There was a brief explanation of each, and of the actions taken at York College, to make sure that these were in place (Fisher and Saunders, 2016).

The presentation also considered aspects of the literature around the pedagogy of international provision. It is clear that there has been little examination of the curriculum and pedagogy of international students in the UK, however, there is a large body of work based on Australian provision, which has been carried out by Dr Ly Tran at Deakin University. The concept of the ‘Ubuntu’ approach to teaching and learning, and its place in the international classroom, was presented. This approach, which is humanist in nature, has been shown to be particularly effective where international students are being taught alongside native speakers. This led to an explanation of Lillis’s Heuristic of Meaning Making was explained. This ‘rule of thumb’ attempts to show how the meaning of a conversation is affected not only by the situation in which it takes place but also by the culture of the participants.

The presenter then applied the theory of position and the work of Vygotsky on the Meaning Making, with the aim of developing a discussion about a possible model of the international classroom. Position theory and Vygotsky’s ideas about More Knowledgeable Others’ fit together well with Lillis’s heuristic and allowed the author to postulate a model of the transnational classroom. The discussion around this model was extensive and provided useful feedback on the concepts presented. These outcomes will be included in the paper being prepared for publication, which outlines the research carried out at York College. The final points were agreed by those in attendance as being relevant and in line with the theory presented.
Reference
4.5 Empathy for learning

AINE VENABLES, HEREFORD COLLEGE OF ARTS

Introduction

This research set out to collect information on how a shared definition of empathy can be developed as part of a visual arts curriculum, and how far considering ideas of empathy supports students’ creative and professional practice.

‘The ability to understand what someone else is feeling’ is a textbook definition of empathy. Ideas put forward by Krznaric (2014) suggest that understanding empathy can help us to grasp complex problems and give us the capacity to collaborate with others to solve them. These are powerful skills for undergraduate students to develop.

Having looked at research into empathy and creativity, it became clear that there was not a significant amount of information in this field. This led me to investigate further.

Methodology

This research sat within a Level 5 Illustration Professional Practice module, with the students taking the role of co-researchers. The project saw the group working for the Hay Festival to produce two deliverables:

1. Large-scale illustrated Shakespeare quotes to celebrate Shakespeare 400.
2. A series of children’s workshops (ticketed events) inspired by Roald Dahl.

The students worked closely with Hay Festival, and considered the importance of empathy when developing this relationship. They also considered the relevance of empathy in their research and the production and planning of the workshops.

We set up a closed Facebook group to create a platform for students, staff and the Hay Festival team to communicate. The college’s Marketing Department was also invited to participate for promotional purposes. This digital space provided tangible evidence of student collaboration and engagement for module assessment (see www.facebook.com/groups/1027168680703226/).

Digital platforms provide new ways to build and evidence knowledge, ‘engaging students as partners in learning and teaching demands new ways of working together and new ways in which staff and students relate to one another’ (Bovill, 2016).

This project was modelled on practitioner-led action research with students as co-producers of knowledge (Healey, Bovill and Jenkins, 2015, as cited in Lea, 2015), but also drew on ideas of practice as a means of knowledge production. ‘As a rule artistic research is not hypothesis-led but discovery-led (Rubidge, 2005), whereby the artist takes on a search on the basis of intuition, guesses and hunches and possibly stumbles across some unexpected issues or surprising questions on the way’ (Borgdorff, 2011). With this in mind we set out to create a shared definition of empathy and analyse how this could improve output in four key areas:

- Empathy in creative practice - the selection of materials, techniques and processes to respond to and support subject matter or message.
Empathy in contextual research - culture enables us to empathise with and understand the lives of others. It was particularly important for students to consider the quote they were illustrating using empathy to understand and interpret the narrative, much as an actor would.

Empathy in professional development - the Hay Festival gave students a range of audiences, clients and end-users:

• The Festival directors, with whom they liaised to produce large-scale illustrations. Through listening, researching and synthesising information they produced outcomes their client actually needed, not what the students thought they needed.

• Students were responsible for the planning, preparation and delivery of children's workshops in consultation with the Festival programmers. They developed strategies to work with different abilities and confidence levels, and negotiated tasks to develop individual student strengths at all stages of planning and delivery.

• During the Festival, a small group of students volunteered to deliver extra letterpress workshops onsite, where they unexpectedly worked with world-class illustrators, such as Chris Riddell and Alan Kitching. They also contributed to BBC Radio 3's The Verb, which was broadcasting from Hay. These types of experiences support Borgdorff's theory that discovery comes through risk taking.

Empathy in a wider social context - this aspect of the research quickly became too large a topic to capture. Whilst we explored current thinking around the importance of empathy in today's society, we chose to focus on the creative, cultural and professional aspects of empathy.

Research findings

Research findings were evidenced by qualitative data, including student journal entries, student feedback and videos of critical discussion. Quantitative evidence was gathered using a rubric, questionnaire and summative assessment results. Word clouds, generated from information gathered through questionnaires completed by students at the beginning and end of the module, demonstrated a greater understanding of the importance of empathy across all professions, and also evidenced a less subjective, more analytical student awareness of empathy.
Students also rated themselves on their understanding of empathy across four research areas at the beginning and end of the module. Results showed a marked increase in understanding across all areas.

![Understanding of empathy](chart)

The students’ definition and grasp of empathy, and its relevance as a creative, professional and pro-social tool, was evidenced both through quantitative and qualitative data, such as reflective evaluations, group discussions and empathy blogs.

The module also enabled students to examine their own practice using reflective blogs, two of which can be read here:

Sarah’s empathy blog: https://ill4empathyblog.wordpress.com
Andrew’s empathy blog: http://www.andrewcharlesarts.com/empathyblog/

I presented this research to Level 6 Illustrators as part of their module feedback, and they were fascinated to see how the data indicated that learning had taken place. They commented on how module feedback in creative subjects was often subjective and so were pleased to see their progress as quantitative data. Analysis of the grades achieved, in comparison to the previous year, suggested that considering empathy creatively and professionally helped them to move up a grade boundary – with a particularly pronounced movement from a third to a 2:2.
Our next step is to consider the relationship between empathy and learning. It became apparent through the research that empathy is learning and that this might be a more appropriate title for future studies. Other areas for development include:

- Developing a cross-curricular empathy module to facilitate a deeper understanding of the functions of empathy in creative practice.
- Promoting the co-creation of knowledge with students as teachers through workshop delivery, collaborative activity and cross-curricular engagement.
- Working with clients such as the Hay Festival to embed professional practice, developing modules across the college to engage and credit students working to live briefs, and increasing employability skills. Continue to work with Hay Festival in the creation and delivery of modules in the current revalidation process at the college.
- Developing internships and work experience, as well as partnership learning communities, to embed empathy as an intrinsic component of creative practice and professional agility.
- Exploring whether there is a correlation between the areas of the brain that light up when experiencing empathy and during periods of creative flow.
References


5 Posters

5.1 The effective learning bridge - pedagogy and then some
Adrian Bamber and Candice Downie, Blackpool and The Fylde College

5.2 Embedding employability into the higher vocational curriculum
Dr. Tanya Carey, Dr. Ann Cotterill and Tom Evershed, Warwickshire College Group

5.3 Symposiums: A Novel Approach to Developing Students’ Employability Skills and Self-Awareness
Dr. Tanya Carey, University of Warwick, Dr. Ann Cotterill, Warwickshire College Group and Tom Evershed, Warwickshire College Group

5.4 Using an International Perspective in Vocational Curriculum Development
Dr. Ann Cotterill, Warwickshire College Group, Gavin Drew, Melbourne Polytechnic and Diane Whitehouse, Warwickshire College Group

5.5 Degree design in partnership with an employer
Alex Day, Peter Symonds College

5.6 The recording and impact measurement of scholarly activity
Patrick Leonard and Dr. Deborah Meakin, Hull College Group

5.7 The impact of research funding on college-based HE lecturers
Cathy Schofield, Truro & Penwith College

5.8 Educators working with employers to create technical educators
Boota Singh, Warwickshire College Group and Kyley Speakman, Birmingham Metropolitan College
The efficacy of applied higher education: Do degree apprenticeships lead to tangible employer benefits? The purpose of this study is to investigate the new degree apprenticeship programme and the academic application of this to determine whether degree apprenticeships lead to tangible and measurable employer benefits.

Objectives

1. To carry out a longitudinal case study on Aerospace Engineering degree programmes, focusing on students and their line managers that work for a large North West Aerospace employer.

2. To examine the co-creation of applied degree programmes in partnership with employer groups.

3. To study student development and employee effectiveness from an employer perspective.

Stakeholders

1. BAE Systems Aerospace Engineering
2. Rolls Royce Project Management
3. Lancaster University
4. Department for Business Innovation and Skills

Wider benefits


Timeline - Plan

Initial concept and implementation - Project Management foundation degree and BSc Honours degree students complete with industry partners.

First cohort of foundation degree students complete

Nuclear Engineering degree apprenticeship co-created and initiated 2015

Queens Anniversary Prize for HE and FE achieved

Employer responsive degree apprenticeship co-created and initiated 2017-19

Degree apprenticeships developed and further implemented through wider engagement with industry, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.
5.2 Embedding employability into the higher vocational curriculum

Dr. Tanya Carey, Dr. Ann Cotterill and Tom Evershed, Warwickshire College Group

**T-Shaped Framework**

David Guest (1991) wrote about T-Shaped employees who, in broad terms, have a depth of technical competencies and a breadth of transferable capabilities and qualities. Further to work by Gazelle Global (2012), Warwickshire College developed a T-Shaped Framework for students that develops four core employability behaviours: self-efficacy, social skills, technical competence and enterprise. These core behaviours, written at a platinum level in the style of HE learning outcomes, include: personal qualities for success in the workplace of the future; capacities to find, make and manage networks and collaborations; & aptitude for driving successful enterprises.

**Programme outcomes**

Every HE course at Warwickshire College has a number of programme learning outcomes that relate to the T-Shaped Framework. These learning outcomes are mapped against modules across the programme to show where they are explicitly developed. A further level of embedding is undertaken through detail in the internally verified module guides as to how and where employability skills are addressed. Staff lesson observations include the consideration of whether T-Shaped skills are embedded within directed activities, and course teams also reflect upon the development of T-Shaped skills in their Annual Course Reports.

**ASSET module**

The ASSET module is mandatory in every HE course at Warwickshire College (except Pearson HNs). ASSET stands for Academic Study Skills, Employability and T-Shaped, and T-Shaped employability skills are central to the module. ASSET takes a dynamic approach to developing students’ academic and employability skills, integrating these with the subject of study to ensure that the delivery feels relevant to students. A flipped learning approach is significant and aims to develop in students, from the outset of their studies, the behaviour of self-directed, independent study. The module also connects to a Personal Development Plan through the tutorial system.

**Student symposia**

Overarching the development of students’ employability skills are the development of their self-awareness and their confidence. With this in mind, every higher education student at Warwickshire College is expected to attend a Student Symposium near the beginning of their course. These Student Symposia link with the ASSET module so that students can network and practise employability skills and thinking in a fun, safe and inspirational environment. They are challenged to work outside their comfort zones, to stretch themselves and to reflect on their T-Shaped employability skills. By the end of the day, students’ views on their own skills have generally changed.

Employability is widely accepted as an important aspect of higher education and this is equally valid in higher vocational education. Influences on Warwickshire College developing a cohesive approach to embedding employability into its HE include: the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), which has promoted seven key employability skills for many years (CBI, 2009); the work of the Gazelle Group of Colleges (2012) whose Enterprising Futures, further to David Guest (1991) and others, promotes the development of T-Shaped capabilities; and the approach of Babson College, USA, which is internationally renowned for its enterprise and entrepreneurship education. Using each of these influences, the College designed a holistic strategy to embed employability into the vocational HE curriculum. This strategy has four pillars, shown above, that together provide a unique higher education experience.

Course teams have engaged well with the strategy, including through wide ranging consultations on the ASSET module and Student Symposia, and they are directly involved in the implementation of each of the four pillars.

Students find that the ASSET module works effectively for them and, in the most recent Warwickshire College Group module surveys, 93% of respondents agreed with the statement, “Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the module.” With regard to the Student Symposia, 81% of respondents felt that the day was useful and 70% said that they could think of highly valuable things they would do differently as a result. Figure 1 shows the skills that students felt they had most developed through the Student Symposia.

External academics’ views of the ASSET module (from approval events, for example) have tended to be split. Some praise the module and others feel that it is too large. A review during 2015/16 has reduced indicative content and assessment in line with these concerns. Employers, both through approval events and when employed by the college as Industry Advisors, make regular comment on the value of the ASSET module for boosting student employability.

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CBI (2009) Future Fit: Preparing graduates for the world of work
Gazelle Global (2012) Enterprising Futures: The changing landscape and new possibilities for further education

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![T-Shaped Framework](Image)

![Programme outcomes](Image)

![ASSET module](Image)

![Student symposia](Image)

![T-Shaped employees](Image)
5.3 Symposiums: A Novel Approach to Developing Students’ Employability Skills and Self-Awareness

Dr. Tanya Carey, University of Warwick, Dr. Ann Cotterill, Warwickshire College Group and Tom Evershed, Warwickshire College Group

Introduction
In an increasingly competitive employment market, employers are looking beyond vocational knowledge and academic achievement when considering applicants for a job. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) emphasises that, in addition to seven key employability skills, is the need for a positive attitude, which it describes as a readiness to take part, openness to new activities and ideas, and a desire to achieve results. There is demand for individuals who have “an ability to demonstrate an innovative approach, creativity, collaboration and risk taking.”

To address the employability skills need Warwickshire College Group devised innovative HE Student Symposiums to encourage HE students to review a wide range of employability skills and start their journey of self-assessment of their own employability skill sets.

Symposiums: A Novel Approach to Developing Students’ Employability Skills and Self-Awareness
Tanya Carey,* Ann Cotterill and Tom Evershed
Warwickshire College Group, *University of Warwick

Skills Assessment and Reflection
Students were asked to rate their abilities across a range of employability skills at the start and again at the end of the symposium. Overall, scores increased by 1 point (in a five-point rating) from the start to the end of the day. To put the ratings in context, students were also asked at the end of the day which skills they felt they had developed most during the day. Student responses varied from 2014 to 2015 but the top two skills were Team Work and Communication with Creativity, Leadership and Adaptability also scoring highly (Figure 1).

Summary
In two years, 526 1st year students have participated in the novel HE Student Symposiums, representing approximately 60% of all (FT and PT) new HE starts. From their own reflections, students have developed skills and identified areas for further development. WCG aims to further increase the proportion of new students participating each year and to introduce ‘returner’ symposiums from 2016/17.

Employability Skills
Warwickshire College Group identified a set of employability skills to focus on in the Student Symposiums.

- Adaptability
- Resilience
- Problem solving
- Creativity
- Team Work
- Initiative
- Leadership
- Reflectiveness
- Creativity
- Reliability
- Communication
- Empathy
- Risk Taking
- Focus and Drive

The skills chosen are deliberately generic enabling activities to be undertaken by students in randomised groups with peers who may be from very different subjects.

Symposium Structure
At the start of each symposium comprised students undertook an individual skills assessment followed by a simple task serving as both an ‘ice-breaker’ and to foster a sense of creativity.

Students were then moved successively into different groups of 5-8; group members were identified by number, colour or shape on their name badge. Within groups, students designed and delivered a ‘rocket pitch’ on a given topic and also undertook a more complex task of replicating a structure made from children’s building blocks (Stickle Bricks). Finally students reflected on the day and their own skill sets.

Each task was introduced by demonstrating the key skills that students would probably need to use. Students were encouraged to observe the skills demonstrated by peers so they could determine whether they felt their own skills were well developed or needed improving.

References
1 From http://www.cbi.org.uk/business-issues/education-and-skills/in-focus/employability/
2 Working towards your future Making the most of your time in higher education, CBI and NUS (2011)
3 Future fit Preparing graduates for the world of work, CBI (2009)
5.4 Using an International Perspective in Vocational Curriculum Development

Dr. Ann Cotterill, Warwickshire College Group, Gavin Drew, Melbourne Polytechnic and Diane Whitehouse, Warwickshire College Group

The Agri-Tech Agenda

Within the UK, and particularly within Worcestershire, agri-tech is an important educational priority; it is one of the three strategic priorities of the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership in their economic plan to create jobs and increase regional productivity.1 Put simply, agri-tech is the application of technology within agriculture and allied sectors such as horticulture.

As a large vocational college with experience in Agriculture, Horticulture and Engineering, Warwickshire College Group is well placed to move this agenda forward. To support ideas for curriculum development the College took advantage of reviewing the experience of a similar large college in Australia which has a head start in delivering agri-tech education.

Bachelor of Agriculture and Technology

Melbourne Polytechnic’s unique degree (validated by La Trobe University) incorporates five specialist pathways:

- Agriculture
- Agribusiness
- Agronomy
- Aquaculture
- Viticulture and Winemaking

Each contains core modules in Agricultural Systems and Technology; Living Systems; Rural Business Management; Food Production in a Changing World; Ecological Systems; and Future Farming Technologies.

BSc Horticulture Production Technology

The new WCG degree (validated by University of Worcester) includes related curriculum: Horticultural Sciences; Principles of Amenity and Production Horticulture; Horticulture Machinery; Horticulture Engineering Technology; and Field Production. Staff at WCG were able to reflect on the similarity of the curriculum from Melbourne Polytechnic to help design the Horticulture Production Technology modules.

Employer Engagement

For the Melbourne Polytechnic degree, employers were consulted at the design stage to ensure the degree met the diverse needs of the wider agricultural industry.

At Pershore College, the specialist nature of the degree allowed designers to engage with specialist growers and producers.

Both degrees require sufficient content that can be applied or contextualised to specific industry applications. For example, the technology used by tomato growers differs from that utilised by strawberry producers but skills can be developed that can enable understanding to be applied to either, or different, application(s).

Resources

Melbourne Polytechnic is a large multi-site tertiary and further education college located across six main centres in the Melbourne suburbs in Victoria, Australia. The Polytechnic recently developed a Bachelor of Agriculture and Technology with five dedicated pathways including Agribusiness, Agricultural Studies and Agronomy.

Warwickshire College Group is a large general FE college with six centres across two counties. Pershore College, located in Worcestershire, is a national centre of excellence for horticulture and has a long track record of delivering high quality horticulture HE.

Further Collaboration

Having established a partnership, further collaboration is planned including:

- formal exchange programme for students to complete year 2 of their degree at the partner institution;
- sharing of practice including modules across shared subjects such as equine or animal science, in addition to agriculture/horticulture;
- guest lecturing via video, webinar, etc;
- staff exchanges - these may be harder to facilitate due to the cost but will be explored;
- student exchanges - Melbourne Polytechnic staff are keen to look for early opportunities.

References

1. World Class Worcestershire Our Strategic Economic Plan, Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (2014)
## 5.5 Degree design in partnership with an employer

**Alex Day, Peter Symonds College**

### Background

A serendipitous meeting between the Associate Director of Training at Be Wiser Insurance Ltd and the Director of Adult & Higher Education at Peter Symonds College in January 2015 led to the development of the first degree in insurance in the UK. This poster is a reflection on the process and highlights key considerations that may be of use to others planning to develop programmes with employers, especially when the employer has professional subject specific knowledge which the institution does not.

**Conversation January 2015**

*“Our company is very committed to training at Level 3 but what I would really like to do is develop a degree in Insurance”*

*“Very interesting, we can help. As a College we have written a range of degrees which all sit in a framework. This makes them quicker to design and more cost effective”*

### Things to consider

**Why are we doing it?**

- Insurance is a rapidly evolving and changing industry.
- Existing qualifications very knowledge-based and traditional.
- Desire to create the insurance professional of the future.
- It fits with our strategic objectives.

**Cultural fit**

We considered whether our College and the employer had a close enough cultural match so that development work could be undertaken swiftly and efficiently. In this case the answer was “yes”. If it had been “no” then we would have needed to create a detailed agreed action plan as early as possible!

### What did each party bring to the table?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>College</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sector specific subject expertise and knowledge of what employers want.</td>
<td>• Expertise in design and validation of degrees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of current qualifications and the pros/cons of these.</td>
<td>• Ability to respond to employer need quickly and cost effectively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Staff dedicated to working with the College to design a degree.</td>
<td>• A university partner to validate the degree.</td>
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### Formally creating the partnership

We discussed with the employer and university how best to set up a formal agreement. We then used the existing memorandum of agreement we had with our university partner as a template to create an agreement between the College and Employer which included specifics such as:

- Ownership of intellectual property rights of specific modules, the handbook etc.
- Financial details, i.e. who was paying for what and the fee per student.

Although agreed in tandem with development work, we ensured this was signed off by both parties prior to validation.

### Getting started

**Working with the employer to develop a shared vision for the insurance professional of the future.**

Our aim was to create a programme which would develop and enhance capacity for analytical, critical, and creative thinking, and thereby create the insurance professional who can anticipate and plan for change leading to a prosperous future for their organisation.

### Designing the degree programme

Initial research was carried out that reviewed the college’s framework for degree programmes and identified what could be utilised and/or needed to be adapted. The apprenticeship standards that exist for Level 4 Insurance Professionals were reviewed and we ensured that year one of the programme could be mapped to this (to future proof the degree in the advent of degree apprenticeships).

Working jointly, the college and employer identified main themes for modules by keeping the vision at the forefront, looking at existing qualifications and facilitating discussions with other employees/employers, from which a consensus emerged.

Modules were assigned to college or employer members depending on expertise and drafted. These were then reviewed in joint team meetings.

A validation document was compiled and taken through the necessary internal stages for preparation for validation. A validation event was held in April 2016.

### Validation

As the subject is not currently taught at degree level it was important to have both an academic expert from the financial services subject area and an industry expert from the insurance sector.

The validation team consisted of employees and college staff working on the development and went smoothly. We particularly welcomed the recommendation from the validation team that we set up an industry-specific advisory board for the degree programme to ensure the content kept pace with a continuously changing market place.

### Post-validation

Recruitment of students for September 2016: both employer and college have attended events jointly, which has helped strengthen the partnership and develop relationships with a wider number of staff across the two organisations.

Development of staff to teach on programme. Appropriately qualified trainers from Be Wiser, who have been delivering Level 3 and 4, are being inducted by the college and a mix of college and Be Wiser staff will be teaching on the programme. The mix of industry trainers and college staff is already reaping benefits in terms of developing innovative and creative approaches to delivery.

Use of other Be Wiser employees: we are currently exploring how we might involve existing Be Wiser staff in the programme as mentors, critical friends, guest speakers, and potentially marking assessments and presentations etc.

### Future

We plan to:

- open the degree programme up to other local insurance companies who are already expressing an interest.
- develop a blended learning approach so that we are not constrained by geographical location.
- convert to degree apprenticeship once Level 6 apprenticeship standards are available.
The recording and impact measurement of scholarly activity
Patrick Leonard and Dr Deborah Meakin

Collecting staff scholarship data
Within many colleges delivering college based higher education (CBHE) the identification and recording of staff scholarly activity is at an early stage. As noted in the 2014 Mixed Economy Group (MEG) survey, "the recording and impact measurement of scholarly activity is mixed and emerged as the least developed element of this survey. In this respect, little appears to have changed since the earlier 2010 survey" (King, Davies and Widdowson, 2014).

At Hull College Group (HCG) we have developed a method of collecting data on staff activity in relation to their delivery of Higher Education (HE) through an online questionnaire. This asks staff about their scholarly activity, professional practice and industrial updating as well as pedagogical developments. The information is collated centrally and reported to give an overview (see Figure 1).

Reporting on the data
Each year reporting is taken to the Research and Scholarship Committee where it is shared with our HE community, including senior managers. This also feeds back to the Research and Scholarship Strategy for monitoring of the aims and objectives. This process led to the production of the infographic, Figure 1 which provides a rich picture of the scholarship being undertaken at HCG. This information also feeds into the annual review process, which takes place for each member of staff.

Impact measurement
Support for staff to gain higher level qualifications has been available as a long term strategic approach to the development of our provision. An analysis of support information over a three-year period was undertaken. A chart of this analysis is shown in Figure 2. Prior to the analysis 93 staff were recorded as having applied for financial support over five years.

This analysis was undertaken in 2013 and includes both academic and support staff, both of who contribute to our HE provision. As a result of this support for development 58 staff have been awarded 'recognised teacher status', enabling them to deliver HE provision to our students. A direct study of staff perceptions of staff activity has not yet been carried out, but is planned in the future. The data here suggests that a motivator for staff to undertake scholarship and CPD is support for the activities reported in Figure 2.

Further study
Hull College Group (HCG) is lead college on the Association of Colleges (AoC) Scholarship Project. Working with its two partner colleges, Bradford College and Blackpool and Fylde College, will carry out research into how we can record scholarly activity in a comparable way and potentially rate it for the impact it has on the student experience. This study will run for one year and will include the ideas and perceptions of staff, students and employers to identify what scholarship is and how we can use a common understanding of it within our partner organisations and across the Scholarship Project.

References:
The impact of research funding on college-based HE lecturers
Cathy Schofield, Truro & Penwith College

Background
Contractual and cultural differences between UK universities and colleges, both providers of higher education (HE), means that lecturers employed in colleges are not required to be research-active, and tend to be employed on teaching-only contracts. Their colleagues in universities are often required to be active in both roles, with their research activity being highly scrutinised due to funding linked to the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Although not required to be research-active, HE lecturers in colleges often claim that they wish that such opportunities were available to them, however they are prohibited by their higher levels of contact time with students (Turner, McKenzie, and Stone, 2009).

Although staff may be eager to become research-active, resistance is met through management systems and time is not made available for such activities to be undertaken. This study was interested in whether external financing of buy-out time, allowing college staff to undertake research, would lead to changes in institutional perceptions of research activity.

Methodology
In 2005 an opportunity was made available to HE lecturers working with colleges to apply for funding from the Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning programme (CETL) whose remit was to:

‘Reward excellent teaching practice and to invest in that practice further in order to increase and deepen its impact across a wider teaching and learning community.’

As part of an evaluation of this programme in one university, questionnaires were completed by 51 award holders, 18 males and 33 females, on receipt of their award and again on completion of their final report.

The questionnaire was made up of a series of open questions regarding the award holders’ perceptions of the experiences of the research process and others’ reactions to their research activity.

Data was thematically analysed comparing the pre and post responses.

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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrecognised</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognised</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pre-award managerial perception
Although many respondents noted that research was perceived by management as a positive activity, this was not met by any practical support.

Support
Prior to the award, respondents felt that their desire to undertake research was unsupported: ‘Staff are not supported in research and scholarly activities, nor is it encouraged.’

Only very occasionally were references made by staff to having received support for research activity through institutional systems and research groups.

Recommendations
- Formalise the activity by adding research as an optional role within HE lecturers’ contracts.
- Commission research to review and evaluate issues of institutional importance.
- Management support and recognition for staff securing external funding.
- Organisation of dissemination opportunities so all may benefit from any findings.

Enhancement of individual and institutional reputation and the sector as a whole.

Post-award managerial perception
Having completed the research, managers could see how others within the institution may benefit, including students, staff and the institution as a whole.

Recognition
Support seems to have increased over the period of the projects, but was not necessarily met with equal recognition. This was experienced at a personal level with line managers not acknowledging the achievements of staff, and a lack of internal dissemination opportunities, except where it enhanced the institution’s reputation.

References
5.8 Educators working with employers to create technical educators

Boota Singh, Warwickshire College Group and Kyley Speakman, Birmingham Metropolitan College

**Introduction**

Oral Health education is a key component of the UK wider health strategy, Royal College of Surgeons of England published a report that highlighted ongoing concerns to Oral health in England amongst children in particular. The World Health Organization has held concerns for some years in regards to poor health education. There has been extensive research into poor oral health and the need to use education as a strategic tool to combat the risks. However, there has been a lack of research into the design of Oral Health Promotion courses. Existing programmes are all considered as CPD for oral health professionals. There is no defined curriculum or directly regulated provision for Oral Health Education courses, which is in contrast to the professional practice sector where all qualifications are subject to review as they are licence to practice qualifications. The role of an Oral Health Education course is often as a specialist advice giver or instructor rather than an educator as the role suggests.

**Need to develop pedagogical approach**

The college incorporated its teacher training knowledge into developing of Level 4 Oral Health Promotion course beyond its CPD professional practice roots. The close relationship between the lecturers and employers created an organic working group where employers informed the design and delivery content of the course to make it more sector relevant. The key component to this was college lecturers adding in a pedagogical model from teacher training which developed a health educator opposed to an instructor. The model (Figure 1) describes the idea of patients understanding information or using prior knowledge then being satisfied which leads to adherence. This is a linear flow of information from teacher to student. In contrast, Figure 2 shows a traditional model used by teachers where a more cyclical approach to learning and communication is utilised.

**The course consultation process**

The approach to developing a course that incorporated teacher training techniques was first identified through the network of employer and students feedback, which suggested that dental professionals should be able to have the following attributes:

- Reflect on their practice in communicating with patients
- Understand how patients think about the oral health
- Develop a patient routines and patterns
- Support patients to recognise the importance of maintaining oral health autonomously

These attributes are found throughout teacher student dynamic theories by teaching practitioners such as Geoff Palty, Mike Greenson and many others. The design principles of the programme align with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

**Quality assurance process**

The course was validated by an internal panel which acted as a critical friend with input from employers, students and academics. The principals are teacher training skills in delivery with pedagogical techniques and theory. The subject knowledge compliance was dental and teaching specific. Pearson’s rarely used custom provision route was adopted to accredit the programme, which allowed a trailblazer approach to authenticate practice.

**Reading list**


6  The BEEHiVES Erasmus + Project and its relationship with the Scholarship Project

Nick Davy, Association of Colleges

Background
The Association of Colleges (AoC) is involved in many projects both domestically and internationally, and deliberately joined the Erasmus + BEEHiVES Project to explore whether any outputs could be used by the Scholarship Project. A specific focus was placed on whether any measures would be generated that could be included in the project’s scholarship framework.

This aim became even more imperative as an early internal project survey of ‘employer engagement’ indicated that there was a significant spread of practice in the participating colleges, and no accepted method of self-assessing future performance. Although the BEEHiVES Project was not set up to address this problem directly, early focus group work with employers, providers and students, as well as the development of the project’s key questionnaire, indicated that such a measure would prove to be an extremely useful output.

What is the BEEHiVES Project?
The BEEHiVES Project is designed to address cooperation and collaboration barriers in the strategic partnership triangle – Higher Vocational Education and Training (HVET)/Professional Higher Education (PHE) institutions, employers/labour markets, and students – to contribute to the development of skills relevant to labour market needs. It also set out to equip students with knowledge and skills relevant to their long-term employability, entrepreneurship and personal development.

The project includes partners from the Czech Republic, Germany (coordinator), England, Denmark, Flanders Belgium, Malta and the Basque country, and has the support of EURASHE, the European-wide representative body for Universities of Applied Science.

To date, the project has produced six externally verified HVET/PHE country reports, including descriptions of relevant qualifications and summaries of focus group work with providers, students and employers.

An early outcome has been the development of a tentative typology for collaborative working through analysing and harmonising the six country reports:

- **Surveying techniques** such as graduate tracer studies, market-research surveys, skills-gap identification, mainly deployed by educational institutions to understand the requirements of the other stakeholders within the knowledge triangle.
- **Consultative techniques** either in the form of employer or student participation in governing boards of institutions, through institutional participation in bodies of chambers of commerce or regional development boards, or through independent consultative bodies such as national skills councils.
- **Knowledge transfer techniques** such as assessment topics set by employers, jointly set topics for internships and placements, involvement of alumni in outreach activities and rotating staff between industry and educational institutions.
- **Fully joint projects** such as course and curriculum development, definition of occupational standards, jointly taught courses by industry and academia, and combined research and development initiatives.

Possible success factors for successful strategic partnership working have also been identified, and include:

- establishing regional forums for collaboration, so as to contextualise the collaboration within a wider societal context
- providing space within a collaboration to triangulate the requirements and expectations of each stakeholder, and for them to balance these amongst themselves
- ensuring that any fora for collaboration meet regularly, and have specific objectives and targets
- ensuring specific persons and/or associations are assigned the role to manage and strengthen collaboration, rather than allowing it to develop purely organically, supporting both top-down and bottom-up collaboration methodologies simultaneously
- integrating criteria in the quality of collaboration into the overall quality management systems of businesses, student organisations and educational institutions
- providing individualised pathways for collaboration, both for individual students as well as for specific businesses, including SMEs.

These will be tested through a further questionnaire of several hundred employers, students and providers across the six countries during the next stage of the project.

**Outputs**

As a result of these early findings, the project is now aiming to develop and publish the following three main outputs:

- A thematic toolbox of findings from the questionnaires that will be of interest to academics, members of strategic partnerships and policymakers.
- The identification of proven success factors, including best practice case studies, which partners can use to develop their own approaches to collaborative working.
- A benchmarking tool, including a self-assessment checklist, where partners can measure their progress towards successful partnership working.

It is the latter output that the Scholarship Project central team believe will be the most useful for the final scholarship framework. If developed as envisaged, it will be a very useful instrument for the whole college sector, in the context of government support for a stronger technical education system in England.