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Sixth Conference of the CLTR

Thursday 10th May 2007 – Ormskirk Campus, Edge Hill University

Learning to learn through real world inquiry in the virtual paradigm

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Learning to learn or meta-learning is an increasingly prominent feature of higher education in the age of super-complexity (Barnett, 2000). Barnett suggests that the universities' role in this age is to develop learners' "capacity to cope, to prosper and to delight in a world in which there are no universals ... it is a task of – and a challenge to – the university to provide those capacities" (Barnett, p. 794, 2005). Fryer (2007) suggests that for learners to thrive in the new condition they need to acquire the skills of learning how to learn, becoming expert learners.

Meta-learning enables learners to have an awareness of their own learning and facilitates them taking control of the learning process (Biggs, 1985). Knowledge that is gained through meta-learning helps individuals to be effective learners, the meta-learning process is as unique to the individual learner as is the learning process (Jackson, 2003). Whilst meta-learning is not yet widely recognised in higher education (Jackson 2004) there is a growing interest in exploiting its benefits (Walker, 2004) especially since the 1997 Dearing Report stated that all higher education courses should include elements which teach learners how to learn. Higher education needs then to explore ways to make the process a reality of practice.

The elevation of the place of learning to learn coincides with a greater prominence of the need to widen participation. This paper explores how learners drawn into higher education from the workplace can embrace ways of learning to learn. It shows, through a case study methodology how a unique learning blend that combines online social learning, work-based learning, inquiry led learning, patchwork assessment (Winter et al., 2003) and high degrees of personalisation, can be used to facilitate meta-learning. The case study unit is the BA (Hons.) Learning Technology Research (BA LTR) course at Anglia Ruskin University. In presenting this case study this paper seeks to exhibit a range of possible ways that may be adopted by others in a dissemination of practice. In addition it sets out to be a prompt for dialogue about how higher education can in practice encourage learners to learn. The case study offers one collection of methods and whilst showing the benefits and possibility of these approaches, it gives honest voice to some of the difficulties.

Each element of the learning blend in the BA Learning Technology Research may be seen to contribute to the learners developing capacity to become empowered learners with a capacity to design, control and reflect upon learning, and critically to re-learn in new contexts. Within this paper each element of the BA LTR learning blend is in turn considered for its contribution to this process. Online social learning is noted for its role in enabling learning to be the object of conversation. Characteristics of the technology including facilitated asynchronous spaces and the building of trust amongst community members and the promotion of community dialogue about the learning process through integration with assessment. The work-based context for learning is shown to offer a

rich and authentic range of scenarios to act as the object of reflection and the context for meta-learning. Unlike in more traditional problem based learning, with the BA LTR, learners are in work, and thus select their own topics or areas of the practice to research and improve. These skills of learning design and choice force learners to critically consider what they need to learn, how they will learn it, and why it is important both to them and their organisation. In planning, learners need to consider the process of learning. The reflection and inquiry based dimension of the blend is shown to lead to the establishment of frameworks for learning which act to equip learners with transferable skills and a confidence to take control of their learning. Through patchwork assessment learners steer away from traditional academic assignment formats towards more accessible, creative, enjoyable meta-learning focused alternatives. Critical to the patchwork approach is the place of the retrospective commentary which is shown to be a vehicle for reflection; reflection on what has been learnt, how it has been learnt and what strategies could be employed to develop learning in future. High degrees of personalisation in the learning blend makes learning the object of the learners focus. Within very broad course parameters, learners make choices about their learning. This process is gradually introduced, such that learn how to take control.

This research paper explores the practices of the BA LTR and the role that these play in enabling work-based geographically disparate online learners to involve fully in learning for super-complexity. Whilst the context of the research is unique, a range of techniques to promote learning to learn may be seen and can potentially be adopted or adapted.

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Student learning on non-traditional modules on traditional courses

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The problem

Straight from school, engineering students tend to have studied subjects which require the production of the “correct answer”. Students arrive with certain expectations and with a certain honed skills set. This system appears to have encouraged students to try to work out what the teacher (or at university, the lecturer) wants. This means that the students are not really being encouraged to become independent learners. They are merely learning to respond to the requirements of the lecturer. They are not developing a deep understanding of how to approach, and above all to define problems. This means that the students that are attracted to this type of course tend to be the ones who have mathematical and scientific skills and interests.

Historically, especially in the first years, university courses take a similar approach. Particularly on science and engineering courses there is a large body of technical and mathematical skills that has to be assimilated. There is really no alternative for students to get to grips with this other than using the traditional methods of reading, understanding, and practicing. Of course, helping the students to learn these fundamentals can be done in numerous ways, but in all of these, the students are being taught to get correct answers (or at least to use approved methods). This approach tends to spill into other subjects where the students are busy looking for the correct answer. They are not aware that when they leave university and start work, they will be doing jobs where they will be expected to provide a solution that fulfils the requirements, not to get the (unique) answer to the problem in order to get high marks in an assessment.

One approach to overcoming this mindset is to use Problem Based Learning, but this can prevent the students from having a profound understanding of the fundamentals of the subject. In order to fulfil both of these requirements, a more integrated approach is needed.

Stretching the students

In parallel with the more traditional modules described above, some more non-traditional modules have been developed in the Mechanical Engineering department at Sheffield University. These use the skills introduced in other modules using more traditional teaching methods, but challenge the students to approach far less well defined problems where the process of arriving at a plausible solution is more important than the exact result.

Two first semester courses “Enterprise and Technology” and “Mechanical Engineering Techniques” have been run for the past three years to attempt to close this gap between students’ preconceptions and the real world.

“Enterprise and Technology” gets the students to use their existing non-technical and developing technical skills to approach an open ended engineering problem in an innovative way. They can approach it in any way that suits them. The final “product” is both the technical solution and the non-technical presentation.

A fundamental element of the assessment is the reflective output in any form students might identify as creative. Students are required to select a specific topic of the module or specific learning and produce a piece that conveys their understanding in a creative way.

Students find this task very challenging as their expectations of an engineering degree are very different. However, the results every year are more than acceptable. Students have produced cartoons, poems, songs, music, paintings, sculptures, creative writing, stories, monologues, etc.

It is fair to say that most students at the end of the task seem really pleased with their outputs, however, there are always around 3-4 students who do not appreciate the value of this. Interestingly is that most students after a year still remember what they did and what the learning was. Including those who did not like the task!

“Mechanical Engineering Techniques” gets the students to apply softer skills to ostensibly technical problems. These are: to write a précis of a technical paper, the energy in recycling and the statistical analysis of an experiment that was previously conducted as part of the technical program of the course. The aim here is to prevent the students from compartmentalising the topics that they are taught and to show them that the skills required to be engineers are not just technical.

All of these exercises are designed to get to grips with the whole range of skills that graduate engineers are required to bring to their jobs. Reading and understanding technical information, clear writing techniques, and dealing with real data are the things that many practising engineers actually spend most of their time doing.

These topics also allow the lecturer to tell the students about what the subject is about. For example, as they are given papers from engineering journals to précis, this provides the opportunity to expose first year students to real research work and to allow them to understand it (of course, care needs to be used when choosing the paper).

What the students get out of it

Student feedback is extremely variable for these modules as many students fail to appreciate that engineers require communication, negotiation, social and environmental awareness and reflection skills in addition to their engineering science training.

However, students who have done these exercises tend to remember them and take away a different skill base from that which they were expecting. These skills are as important as the traditional skills that engineers learn. There is little point in having superb analytical skills if you cannot put them into context, use them in novel ways or communicate them to others.

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The challenge of change: how personal tutors and students are responding to changes in the role of the personal tutor in a new University

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The issue of personal tutoring continues to be a 'hot topic' at many institutions, particularly those facing the twin pressures of high proportions of students from non-traditional backgrounds with specific and different learning support needs and the issue of student retention (Owen, 2002). However, in terms of guiding practice and development in this area, there is a relative dearth of material, which explores the role of the personal tutor in the current climate of widening participation and developing individual competences and professional practice (Gidman, 2001).

In many institutions, Personal tutoring is recognized as crucial in student support and guidance, and also an important feature of the role of the university in the development of personal and academic skills. Others also recognize the part that effective personal tutors play in a student support process which can assist in student retention (Hartwell and Farbrother, 2006).

According to Owen (2002) a 'curriculum model' of personal tutoring includes support as part of a curriculum of skills development. In some institutions, the curriculum model is being developed further to include personal tutors in the assessment of personal development as part of credit-bearing modules. For example, in one new University of the North West, curriculum developments to a departmental portfolio of courses has included the development of specific personal and academic skills module, introduced in year one across all programmes in 2004. This module has involved personal tutors marking and assessing student portfolios (including personal development planning) and evidence of skill development as well as the more traditional role expectations of pastoral and academic support and guidance (Gidman *et al*, 2000).

After three years of operation, the programmes are undergoing some review, and an evaluation of the personal tutor role and personal development planning / student support, which has prompted this research. The presentation is based on the 'work in progress' with the evaluation, focusing on the views of tutors involved in the processes. Further comparative work is planned with other departments within the Faculty before the submission of recommendations to the Department, and subsequently Faculty, for any amendments to the systems for tutor or student support.

The main methods used is a short questionnaire distributed to all staff involved in the programme (23), and the selection of a small group of tutors (6) for in-depth individual interviews to explore the issues raised by initial responses, particularly in exploring the potential conflicts experienced by staff as they try to balance their pastoral and guidance roles with the demands of making assessment decisions and monitoring progress on a credit-bearing module. The views of tutors with experience of the previous system will be compared to those who have entered Higher Education more

recently. The student evaluations of the module will also be used to obtain the student perspective of the module and tutor role.

This questionnaire included questions on the training and experience of staff to support their role in personal tutoring, which all tutors were expected to fulfill in the department. It also explored the sort of topics being discussed in tutorial meetings and whether the tutors have experienced changes in the nature or content of such meetings. One of the features of this particular system was that students were expected to attend a minimum of four meetings in the year with their tutor. The response to students and staff of the compulsory meetings may be significant if staff and students perceived the purpose of the meeting differently.

Initial findings are limited thus far, as not all responses have been received, but the numbers of year one tutees has ranged from 10 – 16 per staff member, whose experience of personal tutoring in Higher Education has ranged from 3-5 years to over 5 years¹. Lack of engagement by students in compulsory meetings appears to be undermining the potential for such meetings to support students through their initial Higher Education experiences.

The presentation discusses the challenges of the changes to the role of personal tutors in this institution, not untypical of many in this subject area in particular, with growing student numbers and increasing demands on tutors and support systems. Interviews with staff and student feedback illustrate the difficult adjustments being made on both sides. The presentation will highlight the implications for other departments considering similar developments. The particular development needs for staff to help them satisfy changing student and institutional demands will be proposed. This is hoped to stimulate some debate with other delegates with experience of different personal tutoring models and modes of staff support.

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¹ perhaps interestingly, the least experienced members of staff appear to be the most reluctant to complete the questionnaire

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Supporting the first year student experience through peer learning partnerships

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Learning in the practice setting of health care can challenge the novice students' transition to university and nursing. Students often experience significant anxiety when first engaging in the practice setting and may at this point reconsider the appropriateness of their career choice, contributing to rising attrition from nursing programmes. If the student experience is to be enhanced, practice learning must stand alongside university based learning as a legitimate focus for learning and teaching innovation.

Within the UK nursing mentors are qualified nurses working within the clinical setting, who provide ongoing support for pre registration nursing students to enable them to meet their learning need (NMC, 2006). While this is acknowledged as good practice, it is increasingly recognised that the workplace provides a rich learning community where learning occurs not only from within hierarchical relationships but also from a network of collegial relationships among students and significant others. Central to the notion of a learning community, is the concept of peer assisted learning or collaborative learning relationships between fellow students. Peer assisted learning is a recognised learning strategy where students learning is facilitated by other students and has been used to lessen student stress and dissatisfaction, to maximise learning and help students master the process of learning

This paper reports the findings of an action research project undertaken within Edge Hill University to develop, implement and evaluate a peer assisted learning strategy to facilitate learning partnerships between third and first year nursing students, under the supervision of a registered mentor in the practice setting. The innovative initiative was designed to encourage active learning, support the novice students' transition to the clinical setting, maximise opportunities for learning and clinical skill development and facilitate third year students' understanding of mentorship principles in preparation for professional practice

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Out of “chaos” ...: the historical and ideological construct of Dyslexia

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In a literature review discussing adult dyslexia in the UK (Rice, 2004) described the field of dyslexia to be ‘in chaos.’ This paper accepts the core of Michael Rice’s findings, which suggested that dyslexia is an ‘intellectual construct’ and that the field of dyslexia is chaotic and plagued by dissension. This paper seeks to bring some sense of order to this chaos by proposing an alternative, non-scientific model, of dyslexia and explores the historical and cultural origins for the ideological need for the definition of ‘dyslexia’. This paper examines the possibility that the cultural or ideological association between literacy attainment and intelligence originates in Greco-Roman models of status, intellectual superiority, rationality, citizenship and definitions of humanity. The paper adopts a methodology from the historical study of ideology and examines dyslexia as an ideological construct, the product of a belief system rather than an empirical fact. The paper is also heavily influenced by developments within the discipline of history; the emergence of the genres of Disability History (Longmore and Umansky 2001, Kudlick, 2003) and discussions around ‘power and literacy’ in the ancient world (Bowman and Woolf, 1996). The presenter is dyslexic himself and therefore does not claim that dyslexia does not exist only that the nature of its existence needs re-examination.

In philosophical terms, something can exist without being an empirical scientific fact and to assume that everything can be studied empirically is counter productive. Rice (ibid) may well have been correct to describe dyslexia as an ‘intellectual construct’; this however, does not go far enough. As precedents exist from the Greco-Roman world for the ideological construct of the perceived links between literacy and intelligence, it is this ideological construct that arguably has led to the need for the intellectual construct of dyslexia. These precedents have created historically acquired ‘norms’ and social expectations which lead us to assume that someone who is intelligent yet struggles with literacy is an anomaly that requires a separate definition or explanation; dyslexia. As such dyslexia is a subjective and intangible concept, a label of identity, which defies an objective definition. This in essence is no different from historical models of identity for nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality. Many of these groups form minorities of what anthropologists’ would call ‘the other’. Dyslexics should likewise be examined as an ‘othered’ group which by its very nature defies ‘scientific’ definition. Dyslexic models of self-identity therefore could have equal or greater validity than scientific definitions. Science, though useful in examining the traits of dyslexics as individuals, has limited validity in defining dyslexics as a group and indeed has failed to do just that for over a hundred years, as Rice’s literature review has so clearly demonstrated.

Dyslexia is both from previously held prejudices of lack of ability to the more modern labels, a form of identifying and ‘othering’ of a social minority. Tomlinson (1996) has argued: SEN (Special Educational Needs) terminology is a method of domination and

control and it is the professionals that derive the most benefit from the expanding practice of special education. Cognitive and Educational models of dyslexia use terms such as 'learning difficulty', 'specific learning difficulty', 'impairment' and subjective criteria such as 'normal' for literates and 'abnormal' for dyslexics. SEN terminology is part of a wider historical process that is based on a series of questionable ideological assumptions. Levels and definitions of literacy are not historical constants; it may be that literacy has no empirical constant or universal 'norm' to match an abnormality against. SEN terminology also reflects the power dynamic of the social, educational, political and economic dominance of the literate majority over that of the less literate minority. This was not a historical constant, literacy was a high status technology in the ancient world, and it is not until the modern era that it was used to define 'norms.' The misuse of psychological testing of IQ against questionable and subjective norms, such as ethnicity and social class, is well known (Kamin, 1974). Prehistoric and evolutionary 'norms' are of greater intellectual clarity as a scientific control than culturally acquired social expectations. Dyslexia and dyslexics exist, but dyslexic concepts of self-identity are very different from that of 'experts' who often attempt to impose their own definitions onto the dyslexic minority. As such this is a form of 'cultural imperialism', so to speak, and should be viewed as part of an agenda of literate paternalistic social control and the prejudices derived from the definitions of status and power associated with literacy in the antiquity.

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Model-eliciting activities (MEAs)

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One of the most common themes of education reform movements internationally is the need to elevate the visibility and emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving. This talk briefly discusses some elements that are common to various ways in emphasizing problem-solving, and introduces a somewhat distinctive approach involving models, modeling and model-eliciting activities (MEAs). Originally developed as a research tool to help researchers understand mathematical cognition, MEAs have proven effective in helping learners develop and elaborate important competencies in complex reasoning, transfer, and problem-solving. The talk outlines key defining features of MEAs and how they contrast with approaches such as problem-based learning and case-based reasoning, and encourages a conversation on the direction for modeling research.

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What is reasonable?: assessment and disabled students

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New duties in relation to students with disabilities place a legislative imperative upon universities to go beyond making “reasonable adjustments” and to provide a more inclusive approach to teaching, learning and assessment of disabled students. The obligation to continue to anticipate the requirements of disabled students is now linked to the advent of the Positive Duties set down in the DDA (2005). There is now the expectation of “actively promoting equality of opportunity for disabled people and celebrating diversity” - in other words to be inclusive.

Assessment practices have been usefully conceptualised by Waterfield and West (2006)

Contingent approach: e.g. “special arrangements” such as extra time, amanuensis, separate room etc are put in place. This is a form of assimilation into the existing system

Alternative approach: e.g. a viva voce instead of a written assignment. This offers a repertoire of assessments embedded into course design as present and future possibilities for a minority of disabled students

Inclusive Approach: e.g. a flexible range of assessment modes made available to all and capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways.

- **What is your current method of assessment?**
- **What are the advantages of these procedures?**
- **Are they reasonable adjustments promoting inclusion?**
- **Have you consulted with students in setting the procedures?**

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Enhancing learning through reflection: experimenting with digital storytelling

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The Centre for Active Learning at the University of Gloucestershire encourages the use of active learning based on Kolb (1984) and the Performances of Understanding (Blythe & Assoc, 1998). In this model 'learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb 1984, p38). Developing reflection and contextualizing experience is seen as an important and challenging part of this approach.

Digital stories are media artifacts or "mini-movies" of images and sound, created and edited by individuals, or groups, using cameras, mobile phones, mp3 players, computers, scanners and hard copy images. It is an easily accessible technique that can be quickly learnt. The digital storytelling approach uses narratives and collaboration as learning strategies, and technology to enable a fresh approach to student engagement. In 2006/7 two applications of digital storytelling were piloted with the intention of encouraging reflection with first year students using simple technology, drawing on the work of Kolb, (1984), Schön (1983, 1987), McDrury & Alterio (2002), Moon (2004) and Brown (2005).

Firstly, digital storytelling was introduced to students as part of an innovative, active learning induction process. This induction to higher education was based on discipline field-based activities with time for preparation and reflection. The technique was introduced to encourage students to reflect in groups within their subject area, integrated with the use of appropriate simple technology, in an innovative and fun way. This approach recognises that reflection is not necessarily an individual process and can be improved when others are involved (McDrury & Alterio, 2002).

Secondly, digital storytelling was introduced to students of landscape design to encourage individual reflection on the design process and personal development. Students were asked to demonstrate this reflection through the construction of a story on the development of their design portfolio, as part of their final assessment at the end of their first semester. Such students are thought to acquire complex knowledge and skills of the profession by experiential learning and reflective practice (Dewey 1983; Kolb 1984; Schön 1983; 1987) developed through the use of particular styles of reflection, and is seen to be important for supporting the development of learning, reflective practice (Schön, 1983, 1987), identity and the sense of belonging to a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1988).

Evaluation of the digital story technique in encouraging reflection was undertaken using both the 'Map of Learning' (Moon 1999) and the 'Model of Reflective Learning through Storytelling' (McDrury and Alterio 2002). This revealed that although generally the depth of the group reflections (29 no.) was not high, the individual stories (5 no) were much higher. The 'Map of Learning' (Moon 1999) was relatively easy to use as it

focuses on reflection; in contrast, the 'Model of Reflective Learning through Storytelling' (McDrury and Alterio 2002) was extremely problematic. It raised the point that these digital stories are fixed and non-interactive and thus not true stories in the McDrury and Alterio sense (2002) where reflection can be deepened through questioning and discussion. The feedback from staff and students has been varied and generally supportive and the technique has been viewed as having potential and will continue to be developed in various ways throughout the University.

Digital storytelling will continue as part of the active learning induction with some modifications to ameliorate some of the issues arising from evaluation and encourage deeper reflection. Thus in 2007/8 it is hoped that the tasks set will encourage more purposeful reflection and that students will take ownership of the whole process. It is felt that by using active learning and digital storytelling approaches reflection can be embedded explicitly in learning processes from the beginning of higher education. In future, it is hoped to use a formal setting led by a discipline tutor for the review of stories to help "bring about thoughtful and reasoned change to practice" (McDrury and Alterio 2002, p111) where "tellers and listeners work collaboratively in formal contexts to construct knowledge using processes which promote reflective dialogue" (McDrury and Alterio 2002, p59) thus allowing multiple perspectives to be explored.

The use of digital storytelling techniques in the landscape design field will continue as it is felt to be a useful vehicle technique for articulating tacit learning. This enables both *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* to become explicit (Schön 1983, 1987) within a studio model. In this way, digital stories can be critiqued, in a similar way to design work, within a peer learning forum, as both product and process, enabling 'scaffolding' (Vygotsky 1978) of learning to take place alongside the enrichment of this discipline-based learning community.

Digital reflective stories are compact and easy to store and may prove interesting evidence of the transformation of identity and abilities of individuals, which can be retained as part of an e-portfolio for Personal Development Planning.

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Sixth Conference of the CLTR

Thursday 10th May 2007 – Ormskirk Campus, Edge Hill University

Learning to Learn in a powerful learning environment

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As part of a process of curriculum review and revalidation, a dedicated Life Long Learning (LLL) module was included in each year of a 3 year BSc Midwifery (Hons) programme. This presentation reports on our experience of the first year module 2005-2006.

We aimed to provide the scaffolding for a learning community in which each student can work to develop their own learning potential. This consisted of the following activities:

- Learning through participation in Problem Based Learning and collaborative group working
- Learning through using ICT resources effectively
- Learning through personal development planning supported by an online personal learning system
- Learning through peer supported reading and review

Skill development is fully integrated with curriculum content but the LLL module ensures that process, as well as the content of learning, is rewarded. Assessment is a personal development planning (PDP) portfolio which charts the student's progress throughout the year and acts a springboard for reflection at the commencement of year 2. A portfolio assessment tool has been produced that awards marks predominantly for engagement with learning.

This module is also a tool for us learning about learning and as such it is changing from year to year depending upon student evaluation. We are just realising the full potential of the online personal learning system, to facilitate personal and shared reflections on learning.

Through this module we have helped individual students to adjust to working within a learning community, providing activities to support a social learning process. We have linked these to assessment i.e. PDP portfolio, thus rewarding and giving time for student engagement in learning.

Our experience in 2005-2006 suggests that this module has helped build a learning community. We have enjoyed reduced student attrition and improved group cohesiveness, with positive end of year evaluation.

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Developing reflective skills in first year education studies using journals as teaching and assessment tools: evidence from literature and experience of a first year educator

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Introduction

The literature I reviewed indicates that the use of reflective journals in teaching is an innovation which encourages experiential learning and reflection among students and hence a tool that enhances reflexivity in professional practice. In this review I have examined the literature related to how journals enhance reflexivity at education level and how reflective practice enhance adaptation to the current complex practice that require unique ways of being responsive. My anticipated outcomes of the review were to find out the extent to which there is evidence that; if in first year professional education courses students demonstrate reflection in their journals such reflexivity is carried on to professional practice.

There is evidence that journals are now being used to develop reflective skills in professional education (Atkins & Murphy, 1993; Jensen & Joy, 2005; Plack & Greenberg, 2005; Tryssenar, 1994) and medical education (Grant, Kinnersley, Metcalf, Pill, & Houston, 2006). Various reasons have notably been given to justify this trend. Apart from the fact that these have settings where curriculum can be easily integrated to practice contexts (Grant, Kinnersley, Metcalf, Pill, & Houston, 2006; Wong, Kember, Chung, & Yan, 1995) there is evidence suggesting that the reflection in professional education tasks mirrors the health professional practice demands. Hence the claim that reflective writing in professional education courses do foster reflective practice (Burrows, 1995).

Summary of a few findings

In the light of the need for reflective approaches in teaching professionals scholars have asserted that; the move towards the education of the reflective practitioner should be accompanied by a closer look at teaching tools (Shepherd & Jansen, 1990). The basic tenet is that curriculum influences student outcomes and hence if we are to advocate for the need to educate reflective practitioners we need to look at using teaching tools like reflective journals. For example, the findings of a study of a study by (Wong et al., 1995) carried among nursing out in Hong Kong revealed that journals can be used as a tool for recording reflection and evidence of the presence or absence of reflective practice. This study does not suggest or have a follow up of whether reflection noted at professional education institutions can also persist in practice settings. However the findings of a research by Tryssenar (1994) about the use of journals in an occupational therapy course indicated that the use of journals in academic settings has the potential to be an effective strategy to promote reflection in professional practice.

Areas needing further research and recommendations

In practice contexts there is a tendency for managers to rely on one domain of methods in appraising reflective practice. For example, performance appraisal for reflective processes tend to involve observation and interviews where evidence is based on what can be seen or verbalized. The possibility of using these methods in conjunction with reflective diaries, journals or portfolios have not been articulated although these have been proven to be effective evidences of records of reflective practice (Shon, 1991). The rationale in advocating for such a scenario is that in assessing reflection we check the practitioner's ability to make explicit the knowledge that is implicit in their actions. I am therefore suggesting further research on whether the written journals can provide a good medium for doing this.

Conclusion

From the above review of literature it can be seen that the use of journals in reflective teaching enables the learners to explore their own patterns of thoughts thereby empowering the learners to live more resourcefully and autonomous in the practice context. However there are dilemmas that need further research in the area of learning and practice praxis if developing reflective skills in first year education and eventually in students' professional lives is to be accomplished.

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Developing a thinking skills approach in ITE: researching the epistemological beliefs and the metacognitive understanding of beginning history teachers

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Introduction

In trying to understand how beginning history teachers become effective history teachers we are working with a series of complimentary models. One important model of effectiveness links to the idea of the teacher as reflective practitioner. The other element lies in an understanding of the professional craft knowledge of the subject teacher. Shulman identified three elements of subject knowledge

1. Subject matter knowledge is the 'amount and organisation of the knowledge per se in the mind of the teacher' (Shulman 1986, p. 9).
 2. Pedagogical content knowledge covers: the ways of representing the subject which makes it comprehensible to others(it) includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult (Shulman 1986, p.9) Shulman and Grossman (1988) further analysed this in terms of substantive knowledge (the key facts, concepts, principles and explanatory frameworks in a discipline).
 3. Curricular knowledge consists of a highly specialized, but possible limited, knowledge which links to the nature of the curriculum. In history terms this would be the Key stage 3 National Curriculum and associated programmes of study and the requirements of public examination syllabi at GCSE and beyond.
- Peter John (1991) refined this understanding to provide a more subject specific definition for school history and for history teachers. He identified a readily understandable body of information – Subject Knowledge which might be described as the sum total of accumulated knowledge and understanding. This might be reduced to dates, events, personalities eras etc but it is undoubtedly the series of historical constructs which a history teacher brings to the subject in school. Beyond this understandable 'Subject Knowledge' is the 'Knowledge of Teaching History', the professional craft knowledge of the history teacher.

Beginning history teachers therefore have a difficult task both in trying to understand the complex nature of professional craft knowledge and acquiring that professional craft knowledge. It might be reasonable to suggest that the stages by which this craft knowledge is acquired is dependant first upon experience and is therefore both developmental and cumulative. The second element in the formula lies in the ability of the beginning teacher to reflect on their own practice and the practice of others. In some respects the professional craft knowledge appears to be exclusive, even mysterious; this might be explained by the distinctions and definitions of different kinds of historical knowledge. Both Shulman and John (working from Shulman's ideas) imply that knowledge is both simple and complex. John's definition of 'Subject Knowledge' might be summarized, albeit crudely, as facts which are accumulated over the years whilst pedagogic content knowledge is more complex and more exclusive, the domain

of experienced history teachers. In this construction of knowledge the understanding of history graduates beginning a history teacher education course is less significant, it is only one element of the baggage of historical understanding which has been accumulated over the period of his or her undergraduate studies. John's work is now some fifteen years old does not really take into account the shift which has taken place in teaching and learning in higher education. Subject specific benchmark statements have identified a series of knowledge constructs and conceptual frameworks variously described as graduate skills and qualities of mind or degree learning outcomes. (For the QAA Benchmark statements for history see: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/history.asp>). These benchmark statements demonstrate a far more complex understanding of the nature of the discipline and of the subject knowledge than is accounted for in John's view of the 'knowledge of historical events, personalities topics and concepts' which does nothing more than 'inform the teachers view of history'.

In this respect researching the epistemological understanding of history graduates is important and makes an understanding of the links between subject 'graduateness' and professional craft knowledge more relevant. However benchmark statements are no guarantee that history graduates are able to demonstrate high quality thinking or the attributes associated with advanced thinkers, they might be described as un-knowing or unaware learners. When working with history graduates it is clear that they are able to operate as sophisticated thinkers when working in a historical context. They demonstrate a deep knowledge and understanding across a range of subject areas and they can work with historical sources in a conceptually complex way. This understanding of historical methodology is second nature and workshop tasks are undertaken in an effective manner. When these same graduates are asked to reflect on their thinking, to consider how problems were thought through they found this more problematic and reinforces this idea that beginning teachers can demonstrate contradictory qualities – in the narrow field of their graduate expertise they are capable of constructing their own knowledge and understanding. As newcomers to teaching they are operating at a very different level. The key to developing the critical thinking of beginning teachers lies therefore in persuading them to apply the type of critical awareness that they possess in historical understanding in different contexts. The links between metacognition and knowledge construction might therefore be key to this process.

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Thursday 10th May 2007 – Ormskirk Campus, Edge Hill University

Staff and student perceptions of a postgraduate induction programme

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This academic year saw the introduction of a new induction programme for students enrolling on the MA in Education at Edge Hill University. As part of the evaluation of this initiative, research is being undertaken into staff and student perceptions, initially by means of student questionnaires and staff interviews.

There are three intakes onto the MA in every academic year (September, January, and April), but data will only have been gathered and analysed relating to the first cohort of students by the time of the conference.

This presentation will describe the induction programme, and report on the research data collected.

The induction programme was designed to help the students understand what characterises MA (level 7) work (and also to help them return to study).

In view of the structure of the MA the induction programme is presented online, via WebCT. The MA is modular, and its flexibility allows students to take many of the modules at a number of different stages. This leads to the possibility for a module to have on it some students for whom it is their first module and others for whom it is their second, third, fourth or fifth module. Added to this is the fact that students can attend on different days and on different sites, many miles apart (ranging from Shrewsbury to Chorley at present). Hence the decision to present the induction programme online.

The induction programme consists of six activities, three of which are designed to familiarise the students with the structure of the programme, the learning resources available, and the conventions of Harvard referencing. The other three are designed to start students on their journey into academic reading and writing: an activity designed to help students to think about their philosophical position, another to reflect on their practice, and a third to engage critically with the literature. These last three activities should be but the first step in an ongoing developmental process.

The normal process of evaluation produced a mixed response from students, although it is fair to say that the activities were in general appreciated.

The students considered the tasks to be on the whole 'useful', with a great deal of variation between students, from 'incredibly' or 'extremely' useful to 'not at all useful'. More interesting have been the kinds of comments made by the students.

It is of course necessary to obtain the student perspective, and the data gathered from students has not been uninformative. However, it is difficult to see how students at this

stage could evaluate whether the programme has been successful in its aim to help them understand what characterises Masters level work, as to make this judgement would require them to have that understanding in the first place.

Neither is it easy for tutors to make this judgement, although there have also been some positive comments made by tutors, with the general feeling is that it is has been a step in the right direction.

In order to evaluate in any real sense whether the induction programme is succeeding in its aim to help students understand what characterises Masters level work, it is first of all necessary to analyse what is meant by '*working at Masters level work*' (and indeed what is meant by the term '*induction*').

For this reason it was decided that the staff interviews should focus primarily on how tutors construed Masters level study, and the presentation will report on these differing perceptions. Participants will be invited to join in a discussion to compare and contrast their views of the characteristics of study at MA level.

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Being there: student perceptions of learning in practice

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There is no dispute that practice based learning is key to the application of theory to practice (Burns and Paterson 2004). There is recognition of the importance of contextualised, situated learning which is real and meaningful and operates within a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, Hislop et al 1996). Nursing is a practice based profession and currently 50% of the UK pre-registration programme takes place in the clinical setting. However learning needs to be supported and exposure alone to the clinical milieu is not sufficient. The linkage of theory to practice is complex and students cannot be left to do this unsupported. Without effective support, knowledge will remain hidden and remote (Hislop et al 1996). Although learning in practice is the focus of renewed professional debate and the current proliferation of theory/practice interface roles is an indicator of the resurgence of interest in learning in the practice environment. There are still forces impacting directly on the student learning experience, these include the increased volume of students, the dynamic nature of health care delivery, increased staff turnover and the considerable difficulties faced by ward based mentors to fulfill their challenging role. These driving forces can influence the capacity of clinical nurses to support student learning effectively (Brennan and Hutt 2001). Another powerful issue is the long debated nature of the clinical role of the nurse lecturer (Duffy 2004). This role is subject to wide variation in interpretation and in some instances has evolved into one of liaison, visitor and supporter, rather than one of 'hands on' care delivery as originally envisaged.

Data emerging from a small scale qualitative stakeholder evaluation of the perceptions of 3rd year pre registration student nurses and link teachers, into an innovative theory / practice interface role, also provided insights into student perceptions of their learning in the practice environment. Ritchie et al (2003:252) describes these insights as "little lizards" emerging from the rocks. Bowling (2002) asserts that qualitative approaches are key to providing deeper understandings of new and complex phenomenon. The study aimed to gauge the perceptions, multiple truths and realities of two key stakeholders, providing an insight into insiders' experience of a change within a specific context (Leedy and Ormrod 2001). Ethical approval and ongoing consent from the participants were gained. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted and participants were all aware that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Two separate focus groups were held, drawing on group dynamics and discussion to explore the topic in depth (Bowling 2002). The resulting rich data was analysed using Ritchie and Spencer's (2003) analytical hierarchy. An explicit audit trail was produced which facilitated the trustworthiness of the study (Barbour 2000). The limitations of the study are the sample size, that the data is from one site and that the findings are not generalisable because of the specific context.

Emerging themes provided an insight into the enabling characteristics of effective facilitators, perceived helping and hindering forces and student experiences of learning in practice. Students were aware of the conflict caused by the dual role held by ward-

based mentors. They were empathetic and tolerant appreciating how busy their mentors were. However they were also acutely aware of their own learning needs and needed to know that there was *someone else* behind them. Although their preference was for highly visible support, the invisible support offered by the knowledge that they were not alone engendered feelings of security and confidence. Students perceived that the Practice Facilitator (the theory / practice interface role under consideration) had a direct impact on their learning in the clinical area, particularly, although not exclusively, in relation to clinical skills acquisition. The key factors discussed were the supernumerary status of the Practice Facilitators, ease of access, familiarity and their perceived standing as an expert practitioner who could make sense of the *how* and the *why* of nursing. Their excellent level of interpersonal skills made the students feel at ease and able to express their felt needs. Contextualised, situated meaningful learning in the real world of work was highly valued. Their strong preference was for individual, timely, targeted support in the clinical area with the specific equipment they would be using. They did not value generalist approaches as highly and found simulated practice in clinical skills laboratories to be *detached* and at times, to be a stressor. *The time to learn*, question and practice in a genuinely supportive environment was key to the application of theory to practice. They wanted to be able to *go back* and *start thinking*, to reframe and release the knowledge buried in practice (Benner 1984).

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‘If I only had time’: supporting part-time undergraduates with skills development in a busy curriculum

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Undergraduates frequently face difficulty making the transition to university level study. For part-time students, transitioning from Foundation Degrees, this can be further compounded by entry straight into level 6 academic study. As part of the widening participation agenda, in 2006, the Faculty of Education at Edge Hill University started running an innovative, two-year BA Honours with QTS degree programme. This is the first top-up degree with QTS in the country which trains secondary school specialists. These trainees face the challenge of commencing undergraduate study at level 6.

This joint project is a work in progress, undertaken by an academic in Initial Teacher Training (the course leader) and the Skills Development Co-ordinator for Learning Services at Edge Hill University. Initial enquiry was informed by the academic tutor's experience of delivering the first assignment (a research module) during the first year of the course. She identified where improvements could be made by embedding 'study skills' into this busy curriculum for mature part-time undergraduates and collaborated with the Skills Development Co-ordinator, in order to design and deliver skills input. The skills sessions were delivered during the first two weeks of the research module, using an approach grounded in social constructivism.

The aim of the project is to raise self-confidence and group cohesion, to support the developmental process of writing the first assignment, to provide the additional skills and knowledge for the trainees' final project and to equip them with the skills to engage in life-long learning. The project's underpinning ethos is our belief that skills development should not be offered as a separate, generic entity but should be contextualised to the students' curriculum and relevant to their assignments. We base this on our own experiences of working with students and we draw on current research into the first-year experience of academic writing and study skills.

The Skills Development Team has previously designed and delivered 'study skills' and 'academic writing' sessions for groups of students (on request from academic staff). Experience of providing this outside of curriculum context and without full collaboration from academic staff has proved problematic and unrewarding for the team. Student feedback from these sessions illustrates that sessions are more meaningful when subject tutors are involved in the design and delivery of them and where they are fully relevant to course structure, content and assessment. Cottrell (2001:6) reinforces this, suggesting that 'skills development needs to be subject specific [which] necessarily requires the involvement and support of subject specialists'. Furthermore, Mitchell and Evison (in Ganobscik-Williams, 2006: 72) cite research from Queen Mary University, which concludes that, 'teaching writing should not be a remedial or add-on activity [but

should be] part of the responsibility of disciplinary academics and should occur within the discipline's curriculum'.

During this workshop, we will share our challenges, initial enquires and initial evaluation of the ongoing project. We invite feedback from colleagues and we will encourage them to reflect upon their own approach to skills development, their own concept of 'embedding' skills and the implications for future learners, and for academic and support staff in higher education.

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An exploration of student and staff perceptions of disruptive classroom behaviours in HE

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Within the United Kingdom there has been a recent increase in media attention on the deterioration of classroom behaviour in compulsory secondary school education (DFES 2005; Ofsted 2005). Similarly, media reports suggest that students and teachers nationally are experiencing high levels of disruptive classroom behaviours (Cutner and Brook 1997; Cornwell 1998; Clements 2004; Meike 2006). Whilst there is a national focus on student conduct in general throughout the HEI sector, highlighted by the launch of the National student conduct survey (2007), there does not appear to be any published empirical work on 'disruptive' classroom behaviour in British higher education. This is surprising, given the apparent magnitude of anecdotal opinion that 'behavioural standards' are deteriorating.

The effects of disruptive behaviours have been described as restricting the learning and teaching capability of institutions (Amada 1993, Sorcinelli 1994), affecting the academic and intellectual development of students (Hirschy and Braxton 2004), impinging on teaching performance and student learning (Braxton and Bayer 2004) and resulting in poor course evaluation and poor student performance (Boice 1996). Amada (1993) and Caboni et al (2004) reason that if we understand which classroom behaviours students perceive as inappropriate, we can devise institutional policies that are more effective. In addition Sorcinelli (1994), Young (2003) and Nilson and Jackson (2004) suggest that if students are active participants in the formation of a code of conduct, they are more likely to approve of it and conform to such a code.

This study surveyed three hundred and fifty first year undergraduate nursing students and fifty seven teaching staff at a University in the North West. Results of the survey confirmed that both students and lecturers considered that 'disruptive' classroom behaviour was having an adverse effect on the learning and teaching environment. Perhaps unsurprisingly, perceptions of what constituted 'disruptive' student behaviour were variable, with chatting in class, lateness, leaving the classroom to go to the toilet and preparing to leave early being the most frequently cited examples. Both student and staff data indicated inconsistency in the approaches that staff used in response to behaviour that was widely deemed to be disruptive. Several lecturers indicated that the development and implementation of a classroom specific code of conduct would provide welcome guidance and support in dealing with such behaviour.

It is intended that the survey be replicated across subjects and HE institutions to provide an evidence base from which to develop a code of conduct that addresses concerns related to student classroom behaviour and contribute to the continuing professional development of staff.

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Learning to be an e-learner

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“Learning to learn” (L2L) skills are not the preserve of the 18 year old attending University for the first time. We will argue that within a lifelong learning perspective, all students need to review their skills of learning on a regular basis. This is particularly the case when older students “return to study” after a number of years in the workforce, and also when they become an ‘e-learner’ for the first time.

Our experience, over a period of 8 years, of supporting returning students in the process of becoming effective e-learners has led us to reflect on a wide range of L2L skills, which we would argue are as relevant for the 18 year olds attending university for the first time, as they are for our older and professionally experienced students.

In recent years a number of books have appeared outlining the learning skills necessary to master becoming an e-learner. (e.g. Clarke 2004). But when we investigate those “e-skills”, we often find that they are simply the basic L2L skills mediated through the medium of technology. Of course there are some additional “technical” skills which students need assistance with – but these are technological skills not L2L skills.

We will examine a couple of examples to illustrate this point:

- The use of electronic books (e-books). The introduction of electronic books led to a debate about assisting students to develop new skills to use the electronic books effectively. However as this debate developed, it soon became apparent that it linked in with a larger debate – “how to use any text (print or electronic) effectively”.
- Coping with the large amount of online material which is available at the click of a mouse. Once students had access to digital information they appeared to lose their capacity for questioning the provenance of particular information, and tended to take everything appearing online as factually correct. Some specific online programmes such as the Internet Detective were introduced to try to help students become more selective and critical in their use of web-based material. But again the debate expanded into the broader one of supporting students in their appraisal of the provenance and value of all available information, whether in print or digital.

In practice these are simply “reading” skills and “selection” skills – equally relevant for the face-to-face teaching situation.

Working at the interface with technology, we have found that there is a need to stand back from the technology and question all L2L skills, and to consider how they might best be facilitated. There is a danger that the use of technology might mystify what are basic L2L skills. Perhaps the technology is adding an extra layer which has to be

unpicked, but at the same time it might be also adding affordances which allow the L2L skills to become more overt, and thus be more effectively addressed by both tutors and learners.

Of course, it is often argued that 18 year olds, in particular, are so technically competent that they don't need additional support to become e-learners. We would argue that this assertion is a fallacy. Yes – many people of all ages (and especially 18 year-olds) now use a range of technologies for social and communication activities; but they have rarely used the technological facilities in an educational setting. There is a difference between using an online chat room for social interaction; and using the asynchronous features of a VLE for reflection and discussion.

Summary – there are basic L2L skills involved in becoming an e-learner for both 18 year olds and older students returning to study. These are mediated through the technology; and both groups need help to come to terms with, and utilise effectively the technologies to support their studies. A strategic approach to induction will be discussed.

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Sixth Conference of the CLTR

Thursday 10th May 2007 – Ormskirk Campus, Edge Hill University

Getting it right from the start: active learning in a higher education setting

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“Students who are more confident in their own learning ability learn faster and learn better.” This is the claim made by Guy Claxton in the introduction to his book *Building Learning Power: helping young people become better learners* (2002, p3). The claim was borne out through the experience of the presenter/author as a teacher in two primary schools which followed Claxton’s “four Rs of resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity” (2002, p13). With the right support and knowledge framework, young students became independent, active learners and more rounded individuals, armed with skills preparing them for their future learning and life in the ‘real world’.

These positive experiences of active learning led the presenter/author to become a researcher at the Centre for Active Learning (CeAL, a HEFCE funded CETL) at the University of Gloucestershire. It was a salutary discovery to realise that much of the good work happening in primary schools becomes lost within a secondary curriculum largely driven by GCSE and A level success, meaning that many students arrive at university used to spoon-feeding and regurgitation rather than independent active learning. The first year experience, particularly induction and early introduction to active learning, became a focus of attention and thus of this paper.

The induction process varies enormously between HE institutions – it is increasingly being viewed as an important feature within the agenda of widening participation, allowing students who may not have previously come to university to engage with a new way of life and learning. D’Andrea and Gosling (2005), Lynch *et al* (2006) and Yorke and Longden (2004) are amongst the many who acknowledge the importance of induction in providing familiarisation with university procedures and premises, early opportunities for socialisation, an introduction to academic expectations and ways of teaching and learning.

Over the last three years, the Department of Natural and Social Sciences working with CeAL at the University of Gloucestershire have been developing an induction model based around active learning principles not dissimilar to those espoused by Claxton. This provides the earliest possible introduction to becoming an independent learner in HE, which is then carried on through the first term by an innovative compulsory PDP and learning skills module (Swansborough *et al*, 2007).

The induction model as described here has been arrived at following observations and feedback from both staff and students on the induction process over the last three years. It is based around a central field-based activity, allowing time for preparation for the activity and familiarisation with active learning, and then reflection on the

experience through the media of digital stories¹. Opportunities to socialise are interwoven throughout both academic and social events during the week, as are opportunities to fulfill necessary administrative tasks. Another important part of the model is to provide students with pre-induction information through a mail shot and dedicated web pages in order to clarify procedures and expectations before arrival.

In September 2007, the model will be adopted across other departments within the University with the intention of expansion across the whole University in future years.

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¹ The presenter/author's CeAL colleague Jo Lonsdale is presenting a paper at this conference on the use of reflective digital stories in active learning.

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Thursday 10th May 2007 – Ormskirk Campus, Edge Hill University

The educational experience of pre-registration learning disabilities nursing branch student nurses

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Joann Kiernan, Senior Lecturer (Learning Disabilities), Edge Hill University

This presentation considers the educational experience of pre-registration learning disabilities branch student nurses across the UK and Ireland. Semi-structured questionnaires were returned from students at a UK Learning Disabilities student nurse conference in 2006, the collated data was analysed and revealed several key themes. Preliminary indicators suggest that students:

- a) enter the programme with previous learning disabilities experience
- b) believe they experience the educational components of their programme differently from students on other branches
- c) continue to believe they have chosen the right branch although
- d) a large majority of others do not understand their career choice and
- e) they experience both positive and negative attitudes from educational staff, practitioners and other branch students however
- f) whether positive or negative these attitudes from others have made them more determined and positive about their career choice and finally,
- g) have predominately enjoyed their programme no matter what their experiences may have been(whether negative or positive)

Our conclusions so far indicate that student nurses would benefit from further collaboration between education and practice in order to support their specific needs in a more constructive manner and that a greater understanding of the role of the learning disabilities nurse included within the curriculum in the first year would not only benefit all branches of nursing but would specifically enhance the learning disabilities branch student nurse's profile/self esteem. We are about to commence a longitudinal study with one cohort of learning disabilities branch student nurses at our University, since we have embedded specific support processes for this Branch of students, the data we collect from questionnaires distributed to these students at certain points in their 3 year programme will provide us with evidence as to the efficacy of this support structures and also as to whether students perceptions change as they progress through the programme.

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Using programme approval and review as a tool for systematic enhancement of teaching and learning

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Context

The Quality Assurance Agency Code of Practice describes programme design as a “creative and often innovative activity” and proposes that the “processes used by institutions to approve, monitor and review academic programmes should foster creativity, and encourage a culture of continuous *enhancement* of provision” (QAA, 2006: 9)². Similarly, the revised guidance on Institutional Audit promotes the development of an approach which includes “the way that the institution makes practical use of the outcomes of internal review to support enhancement of the learning opportunities available to students” (QAA, 2006: 9)³. However, even where institutional mechanisms exist to identify and commend good practice in the context of a specific programme or discipline, the potential to spread this more widely is not always realised and the QAA Code offers little guidance as to how *systematic* enhancement – the routine dissemination and sharing of good practice within an institution or, more widely, the sector – might be achieved.

Aims

It is the authors’ contention that programme approval, periodic review and the annual monitoring of programmes all have a significant role to play in enhancing academic standards and learning opportunities within higher education institutions. For the purposes of the current research we have chosen to focus only on programme approval and periodic review and in particular, how institutions use their validation and audit processes to promote the sharing of knowledge and experience in curriculum design and delivery. The results of this research will be presented under the following headings:

1. Guidance to course teams and panel members;
2. Reporting and disseminating outcomes;
3. Edge Hill University case study;
4. Conclusion and recommendations.

² Quality Assurance Agency (2006) ‘Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education’, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section7/default.asp#precepts>
[accessed 11 April 2007]

³ Quality Assurance Agency (2006) ‘Handbook for Institutional Audit: England and Northern Ireland’ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/handbook2006/Handbook2006.pdf>
[accessed 11 April 2007]

The purpose of (1) will be to establish whether course teams across the sector are routinely required to evidence good practice in their submissions for validation and review, and panel members explicitly required to look for it. Section (2) will detail the various mechanisms used by institutions to report from validation and review and how the good practice identified through these processes is shared. Section (3) will be presented in the form of a case study based on validation and review reports from Edge Hill University and will demonstrate how good practice is currently identified and reported within that institution. The final section (4) will evaluate the findings of this research and consider whether full value is being derived from validation and review in respect of their potential contribution to systematic enhancement, with some practical suggestions for improvement.

Methodology

In preparing this presentation the authors have undertaken the following research:

- Survey of Institutional Audit reports between 2002-4 (QAA, 2006)⁴ and web-based research of the validation and review arrangements of 15 randomly-selected Higher Education Institutions;
- Questionnaire-based survey of 42 HEIs (mixture of pre/post-1992 and new universities);
- Desk-based research of validation and review reports of Edge Hill University over a sample period of 2 years.

Outputs

The preliminary findings of this research will be presented to delegates at the CLTR Conference at Edge Hill University on 10th May 2007 and also circulated to all contributors to the questionnaire-based survey for additional comment. A full paper containing both the original findings of the research and further evaluation based on input from delegates and contributors will be prepared for publication later in the year.

⁴ Quality Assurance Agency (2006) QAA 100 01/06 *'Outcomes from Institutional Audit: Validation and approval of new provision, and its periodic review'*
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/institutionalAudit/outcomes/default.asp> [accessed 11 April 2007]

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Learning to Learn: the experience of undergraduate students with features of Dyslexia and ADHD

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Dyslexia and ADHD have very similar histories. Initially there was a reluctance to believe that such a problem exists, and then there was acceptance in children, and finally in the adult population. ADHD recognition however is some years behind Dyslexia, so that although the problem is recognised in childhood, it is only in recent years that research and therapy has considered the adult. (Barron, K. E, S. W. Evans, et al. , 2006, Corbett, B. S, D, 1999, DuPaul, G. J, E. A. Schaughency, et al, 2001, Mortimore, T. and W. R. Crozier, 2006, Salend, S. J, H. Elhoweris, et al. 2003). Previous research (Whiteley, Smith, Lever, Wakelin, Dudiak, Dewart.2005) demonstrated that the incidence of unreported dyslexia and ADHD was relatively high in a large sample of 1200 undergraduate psychology students. 12.1% of the sample scored high on dyslexia and 14.5% of students scored highly on the inattentive scale with 6.9% scoring highly on the hyperactive/impulsive scale. And yet, only 4% of the whole sample reported being diagnosed with a learning difficulty of any kind, with just 2.5% of the sample reporting their difficulty as being dyslexia and none of the participants mentioning difficulties of an attentional nature. Thus both dyslexia and ADHD sufferers have a strikingly high level of non reporting of their difficulties.

Interestingly, students with dyslexia did not perform any differently from other students across the range of academic assessments. However, the outcome was rather poor for students with ADHD. Their marks were on average lower than other students, and they were more likely not to progress at University.

The current cross institutional study is being carried out to explore in more detail the experience of these neurodiverse students at first and second year undergraduate level. The goal is to determine why students don't seek help and the outcomes from the support that students have encountered. A richer analysis of assessments that the students find particularly difficult, and the strategies that students are employing to mitigate their difficulties is also planned.

As before, the CAARS (Connors, Erhardt & Sparrow, 1999) and the BDA Dyslexia check list (Vinegrad, 1994) were employed to identify the target groups. 16% of students had high dyslexia scores, and 22% and 12% scored highly on the ADHD A (inattentive), and B (hyperactive) scores respectively. Nearly 10% of the sample displayed co-morbidity in both dyslexia and ADHD... The level of non reporting is also high with 4 (less than 3%) reporting a learning difficulty, with dyslexia accounting for three students, and a hearing impairment for the other. No students stated that they had difficulties relating to ADHD.

Comparisons have been made with the performance data available so far. Scoring high on dyslexia did not relate to performance in a negative way at the overall level (see also Whiteley H, Smith et al 2005). However, high scores on the CAARS did correlate with poorer performance. Although correlations with total scores for year 1 were not significant it was found that both ADHD A scores. (-0.221*) and ADHD C scores (-0.243) were linked with poorer performance for the second year total.

A closer examination of the individual assessment components showed that dyslexia did not correlate with performance however, there were several significant negative correlations for the CAARS with performance. Whether the assessment was by essay, practical, multiple choice questionnaire or examination was not a determining factor since poor performance was associated with high CAARS scores which was apparent for each, but not all, assessment modes.

The initial conclusion is that although scoring high on ADHD questionnaires is related to poor performance, it is not related to one form of assessment.. Students were categorised by whether they showed predominately dyslexic issues (8%), ADHD issues (18%) or were co-morbid (10%). Surprisingly, it was found that marks for pure dyslexics were higher than average, pure ADHD was worse than average, but students who were co-morbid performed worst.

It could be that each assessment involves a large range of skills, some of which the student has difficulties with and others they can compensate for. Currently qualitative research from questionnaire, focus groups and semi-structured interviews will perhaps encourage students to tell the story of their experience in relation to difficulties and strategies. For instance the three students who had a designation as dyslexic were all co-morbid with ADHD and each reports very different experiences of the university's excellent student services centre:

P.31: Receiving help including technical help, equipment, special software and special tutoring. Has difficulties concentrating in lectures, difficulty structuring assignments and exam answers, and not enough time in exams. Find it hard to motivate themselves, and *"at the start of an assignment don't know where to begin"*.

P.157: Difficulty concentrating when other people are talking, with distractions, and poor memory. Tried to get help but: *"tried, doesn't work. No-one helps, everyone tells you to go ask someone else – I have poor communication skills so its hard for me to explain the problem"*. Strategy use: *"read alone – nothing else works"*.

P.169: Has not sought help at university (but gets extra time in exams), but did have dyslexia lessons at secondary school. Has difficulty *"misreading questions"* but has not sought help because *"there's nothing you can do for misreading"*. Also has difficulties if it's noisy, lots of people or feels un-relaxed. Strategy: work in library.

Students who have unreported difficulties seem to have also been unreported at primary and secondary school. 25% of students reported difficulties with learning at university but this was much more apparent with the neurodiverse students (35%), and the most common reason was difficulties with concentration/attention of whom 48% scored high on the CAARS A (inattentive) scale, and 24% scored highly for dyslexia.

The challenge is to break down the following barriers:

"Didn't think that anyone could make my memory better or help me concentrate more"

"I did not think that anyone would take it seriously or even be able to help with it"

"Sometimes approaching teachers seems intimidating and daunting"

"Don't have very good strategies, I get annoyed with myself a lot of the time. I try to break down words slowly"⁵

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Numeracy and nurse prescribing

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Background

Poor numeracy amongst nursing staff is well recognised and reported (Wright 2006). Evidence indicates that poor numeracy skills exist amongst both student (Jukes and Gilchrist 2005, Hall 2006) and qualified nurses (Hutton 1998) and that the numeracy skills of nurses are worse than those of doctors and pharmacists (Oldridge *et al* 2004). Errors of calculation made by nursing staff in administering medications continue to be a regular, yet avoidable, occurrence. These calculation errors often result in medication errors and can lead to adverse patient events, prolonged hospital admission and even death (DH 2000). Indeed the wrong dose, strength or frequency of medication accounted for 28.7% of all medication incident reports between January 2005 and June 2006 (NPSA 2007).

The implementation and expansion of non-medical prescribing has occurred in demand to a changing National Health Service, patient demands and the expansion of non-medical clinical roles. It has resulted in patient benefits through improved and timely access to appropriate medications following assessment and management by appropriately qualified and competent non-medical prescribers.

To date there is no reported evidence of poor calculations skills amongst qualified non-medical prescribers leading to a prescribing error. However, in view of the evidence of poor numeracy skills amongst nurses, the risk of a calculation error by a nurse prescriber leading to an adverse patient event is very real.

Assessing Numeracy Skills

Edge Hill University (EHU) identified the importance of numeracy skills for non-medical prescribers when it first delivered the 'Nurse Prescribing' Programme (V300) in 2003. Since first delivering the programme EHU has assessed the numeracy skills of students as part of the final assessment and required a 100% pass mark. This resulted in a relatively low number of students passing the final assessment at the first attempt when compared to programmes delivered by neighbouring HEIs that did not assess numeracy.

In 2006 the Nursing and Midwifery Council published new standards for the preparation of Nurse and Midwifery Prescribers (NMC 2006). Within this document the importance of good calculation skills in preventing medication errors and ensuring patient safety was recognised. The standards require that a numeracy assessment within the context of prescribing is part of the final assessment and that students attain a 100% pass mark.

As the new NMC standards have been adopted by HEIs across the North-West of England this has had a significant impact on the overall pass rate (personal communications Paul Warburton – Members of the North West Non-Physician Prescribing Education Group). The process of identifying and selection of candidates with appropriate numeracy skills prior to entry to non-medical prescribing programmes has been highlighted.

The North West Strategic Health Authority has commissioned EHU to develop and deliver an online numeracy assessment tool. This tool will assess the numeracy of all applicants to non-medical prescribing programmes across the region and has been developed in collaboration with other HEIs and Trusts. This assessment will form part of the application process and allow applicants with appropriate numeracy skills to be selected.

The tool provides an assessment of numeracy using questions that reflect clinical practice. It addresses essential numeracy skills such as multiplication, division, volume and rates of infusion, dosage in relation to weight and the numbers of tablets required.

This paper presents the evidence of poor numeracy amongst nurses. It will also show how the collaborative development and implementation of an on-line numeracy assessment across the North West will lead to a reduction in failure rates on prescribing programmes and lead to a reduction in the risk of errors by nurse prescribers due to poor numeracy.

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Emotional intelligence in higher education

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This session presents ongoing work across three institutions in the area of emotional intelligence (EI) and considers its impact on students and staff within Higher Education (HE). As a consequence of widening participation initiatives, HE institutions have an increasingly diverse student population. Alongside increasing student numbers and diversity, there has also been an increase in student attrition. The transition from high school to university is a challenging and stressful experience for most individuals regardless of their background, and the decision to stay or leave HE prematurely is likely to be influenced by a whole range of factors.

Recent theories of intelligence incorporate aspects of emotional and social competence (emotional intelligence, EI), which are seen as essential for attainment and for effective performance in life generally (e.g. Gardner, 1993). The research suggests that young people who are emotionally intelligent cope more effectively with the challenges of life, have greater self confidence, and are better able to establish quality friendships (see for example, Qualter, Whiteley & Gardner, 2007; Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson & Pope, 2007). This raises the possibility that students who are relatively high in emotional intelligence are likely to cope better with the transition to university. This notion is supported by recent research. For example, successful transition (persistence rather than drop-out) is associated with the degree to which a student perceives themselves to be academically and socially integrated into university life (Tinto, 1993; 1998); personal levels of inter- and intrapersonal skills (Schutte et al., 1998) and the quality and extent of social support networks (Christie, Munro & Fisher, 2004).

Study 1 explores whether students with high EI cope better with the transition to university and whether the introduction of an intervention programme to support the development of EI competencies can increase EI and so ease the potential negative effects of transition and impact on retention. This study is conducted with students on a Foundation Year programme and with students taking part in a summer school prior to beginning University in September.

Study 2 examines a similar intervention programme and investigates again, but with a new larger sample of first year undergraduates, whether this intervention can increase EI. This study also asks whether an EI intervention can be successfully integrated within the 'personal development planning (PDP)' process for undergraduate students.

Study 3 looks at EI development from the view of academic staff within HE. This study presents evidence from a small scale development project with senior staff at one of the participating universities and asks whether, given the evidence suggesting the

benefits of support for the development of EI competencies in students, we also need to think about the introduction of similar support for staff.

All three studies have produced promising initial results suggesting that both staff and students can benefit from activities to facilitate the development of specific EI skills and that students with average to high levels of EI are more likely, than their relatively low EI peers, to stay on at University through their first year. The work of the team is now being extended and refined to provide a clearer picture of the role of EI in HE and the best way to facilitate its development.

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