

Flexible Futures

Articles from the
Learning and Teaching
Conference 2014



University of Brighton

Flexible Futures

ARTICLES FROM THE LEARNING AND TEACHING CONFERENCE 2014

Eds:

Gina Wisker
Lynda Marshall
Sue Greener
John Canning



University of Brighton

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

Tel: 01273-644767

Email: lm179@brighton.ac.uk

www.brighton.ac.uk/clt/clt-publications/

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Editorial Introduction

This collection of conference papers, from the Centre for Learning and Teaching run University of Brighton Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, focuses on flexible learning, health education, widening participation and retention, academic and student employment and identities.

Two papers consider 'flipped learning'. In 'What is special about flipped learning? Some reflections on a current pedagogic design', **Dr Sue Greener** provides a useful introduction to issues raised in recent literature on the development and application of the 'flipped classroom', offering a critical evaluation of work on pre-class materials online, using classroom time for interactive, constructivist learning, and 'blended learning'. Reflecting and reporting on the implementation of flipped teaching in a level four module in Built Environment and Civil Engineering, **Dr Hannah Wood** explores 'Experiences and reflections of flipping the classroom'. She discusses the process in practice, feedback, and reflection from students and staff involved. **Craig Wakefield** uses work by the eLearning team, updating readers on 'What's new in studentcentral?', the university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which in the latest upgrade (April 2014) offers new features for staff and students.

Developments in clinical education and health learning and teaching are the focus for two papers, the first 'The Quality Ward Round Project: low technology, high fidelity simulation to enhance learning among doctors and medical students' by **Dr Natalie Powell**, **Dr Chris Bruce** and **Dr Andy Kermode** looks at a collaboration of acute hospital NHS Trusts, Brighton and Sussex Medical School and the South West Thames Foundation School, whose collective aim is to improve the standard of ward rounds across Kent, Surrey and Sussex. They explore experience of a low technology, high-fidelity simulation ward round training programme developed as part of work to improve the standard of ward rounds. **Darren Brand**, in his paper 'Mandatory training in the National Health Service' reports on research investigating factors impacting upon attendance at mandatory clinical training sessions, demonstrating that although clinical staff hold mandatory training in high regard, a review of the current delivery format is required, moving from classroom based sessions into the clinical area, facilitated by local experts to ensure that patient safety is a priority, and that staff remain aware of current practice.

In their research on 'The two faces of flexibility: careers and jobs in contemporary academe' **Professor Emerita Sandra Acker**, University of Toronto, **Associate Professor Eve Haque**, York University, Toronto and **Associate Professor Michelle Webber**, Brock University, St Catharines, argue that in an increasingly corporatised academic labour market doctoral graduates have a reduced chance of securing stable, secure

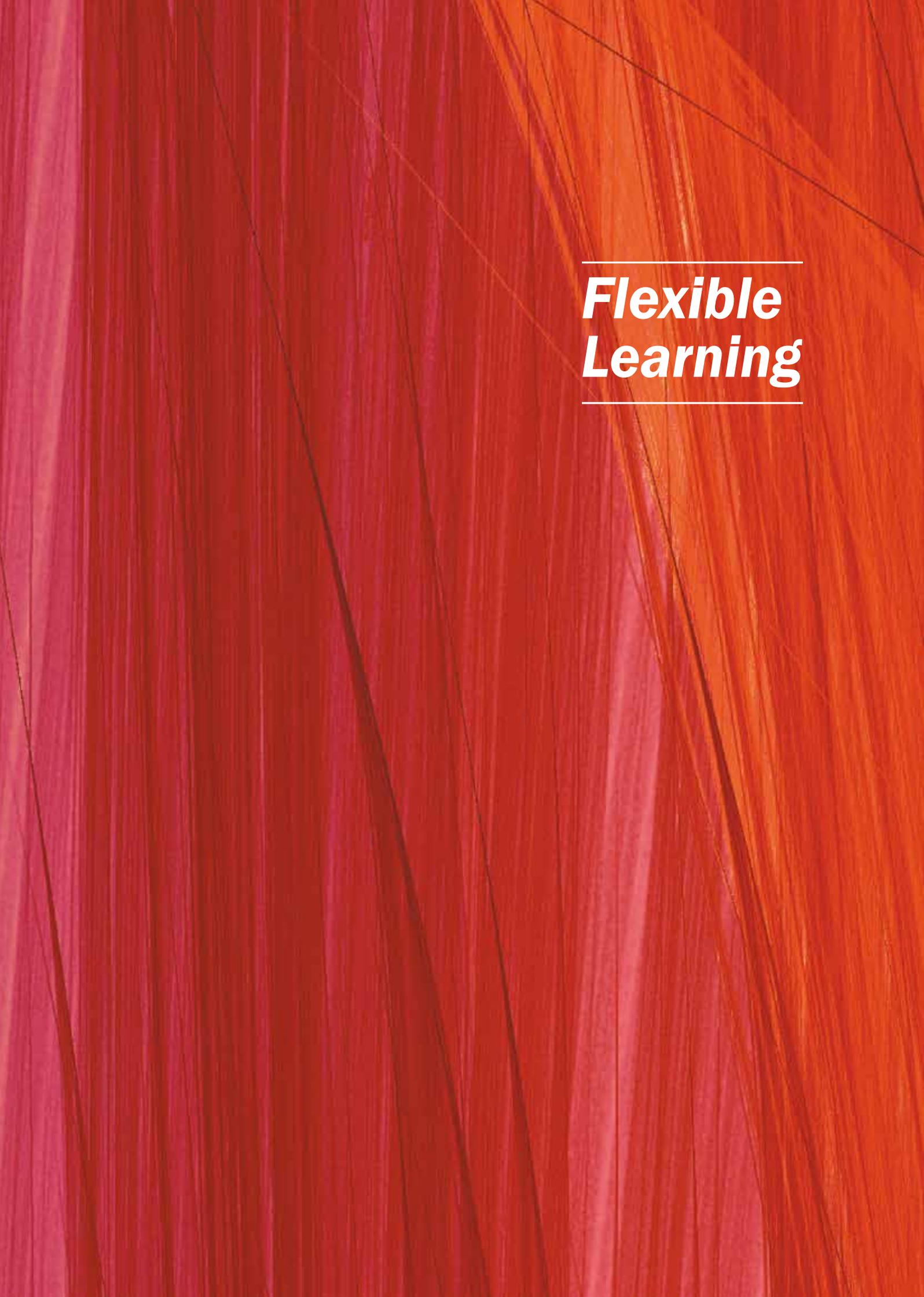
academic careers, finding themselves in a pool of ‘contingent’ (temporary) labour offering ‘flexibility’ to employers but inferior in benefits and rewards to the traditional ‘tenure track’. Participants with a high probability of achieving permanent academic positions talk about loving their work and flexibility, while those in the contingent sector speak sadly about what has gone wrong in efforts to attain an academic career.

A focus on access is introduced by **Emeritus Professor Sue Clegg**, Leeds Metropolitan University, in her keynote at the conference ‘Widening access and participation: has the potential been realised?’ Arguing that while there has been a decisive shift from elite to mass higher education systems in most advanced economies, and higher education is expanding globally, this expansion has, however, not delivered equal access. Women are the majority of undergraduates in some systems but some minority ethnic groups and students from lower socio-economic groups have done less well, have poorer access and are served by less well-endowed institutions. She raises questions about access to high-status ‘powerful knowledge’, posing questions from an English perspective about whether aspirations for more equitable higher education are possible in contemporary higher education systems and asking what widening participation might achieve.

Continuing the focus on access and accessibility, **Stephanie Fleischer** and **Andrew Bassett** share findings from a case-study based longitudinal study of financial circumstances of University of Brighton undergraduates in ‘Using critical incidents to explore students’ financial circumstances: a barrier to learning?’ showing how the financial reality of being in higher education may affect different groups of students, having consequences for academic achievement and learning, and revealing the realities of balancing paid employment and study. In ‘What Works? Students’ experiences and perceptions of belonging, confidence and engagement during the first year at the University of Brighton’ **Jennifer Jones, Dr Rachel Masika, Rachel Bowden, Julie Fowlie, Marilyn Fyvie-Gauld, Dr Elizabeth Guy** and **Professor Gina Wisker** discuss qualitative study findings from the University of Brighton participation in ‘What Works’ (2013-17), an HEA-led programme aiming to enhance student success and retention. They suggest that learning, teaching, assessment and other interventions help to enhance students’ engagement, confidence and sense of belonging to peer learning communities. However, transitional challenges face students. Suggestions for positive change are highlighted to inform discipline related developments in teaching, curricula and interventions.

Considering ‘Beyond the curriculum: how the Overtime project prepares students for life and work in liquid modern times’, **Simon McEnnis** and **Ben Parsons** report on a web-based VLE initiative to help prepare students for life and work in an uncertain world, operated by the students on the BA (Hons) Sport Journalism. The project offers a resistant model to the neo-liberalism and marketisation of UK universities by occupying a position more in tune with the needs and trajectory of a liquid modern society and knowledge economy.

— Professor Gina Wisker
Chair, Conference Organising Committee

The background of the entire page is a close-up, vertical view of a wood grain. The wood is a warm, reddish-brown color, with prominent, slightly wavy vertical lines representing the grain. The lighting is even, highlighting the natural texture and subtle variations in tone of the wood.

Flexible Learning

What is special about flipped learning? Some reflections on a current pedagogic design

DR SUE GREENER

Abstract

This paper discusses a critical evaluation of recent literature on the development and application of the 'flipped classroom': offering pre-class materials online and using classroom time for interactive, constructivist learning, and 'blended learning', the definition of which is diverse but which here is taken to mean any combination of online and face to face learning. The context in which this is explored is undergraduate higher education. Questions in this paper include: What kind of evidence does the literature offer for the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model? What range of versions is currently found in flipped classroom case studies? What learning/educational theories underpin the flipped classroom approach? What does the flipped classroom model offer to university teachers and students which cannot be achieved in other blended formats?



As universities and higher education institutions increasingly adopt blended approaches to the provision of educational material and the stimulation of student-centred learning, there is a tendency to adopt flipped classroom as a ‘best practice’ model, but this needs further evaluation. Some evaluative studies have been undertaken (e.g. Bishop and Verleger 2013), particularly in engineering and medical education where this model has already become very popular. As wider take-up progresses, this review of the literature aims to set out the key benefits and disbenefits of our current understanding of the flipped classroom as evidenced in the literature, and reviews the extent to which blended learning increasingly characterises higher education, distinguishing the impact of rich blended learning models and flipped classroom models. A further area investigated is the conceptual framework which predominates in case studies of flipped classroom and blended learning designs, in an attempt to offer higher education teachers a sound basis for discussion of blended and flipped practice in the classroom. In practice, many conference and journal papers discussing flipped classroom activities (online and face to face), are focused more on the production of videos for online use than on the interactive activities which are meant to build extra value in the classroom (Zhao and Ho 2014). Studies show a clear need for further research in this area to help teachers design effective student-centred learning activities whether on or offline.

Background: the case for flipped learning

Flipped learning has been defined as a ‘pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter’ (Flipped Learning Network 2014 cited in Yarbro et al 2014). This approach to teaching in universities, and increasingly in secondary schools, has gained popularity, particularly since the work of Bergmann and Sams in 2007, which made full use of screen-capturing software to develop out of classroom learning materials. The reason they give for this move was in response to their question: What is the best use of face to face time with students? In other words, this is a good example of technology enhanced learning (TEL) which does not start with the technology, but starts with a teaching issue.

Since teachers at every level and stage of education are likely to come out of their classrooms from time to time feeling that they did not do justice to their subject for learners in that face to face time, the question posed by Bergmann and Sams is clearly helpful. In higher education, particularly at scaffolding levels such as level 4 and 5 in the UK (first and second undergraduate years), it is often the case that teachers are faced with a considerable amount of material, often key definitions and concepts, which must be discussed with students in order to facilitate learning. However, rather than being discussed, the sheer amount of material may drive teachers to resort to putting much course material into slide presentations which may or may not be understood, let alone learned, by students. In large lecture groups, it is especially difficult to check understanding, and too often, a few keen and eager faces

giving good eye contact can persuade the teacher that all have understood, when in reality, few have done so.

We could argue that in the technology, in particular the use of video, flipped learning is simply a current twist on a well established approach to learning and teaching where students are required to prepare something for class, and demonstrate their knowledge and ability to use that knowledge in class. This has been happening for generations, without being called flipped anything. We could further argue that this method of learning has always been more effective than using class time to 'lecture' or deliver information or direct instruction. The notion of the seminar or tutorial class in higher education has always focused on students being active in applying or discussing previously acquired knowledge. So why does flipped learning have an increasing following now?

The answer may lie in the expansion of higher education, as well as the increasing technological options now available. As institutions face higher tuition fees (external 'price') yet lower funding per student (internal 'cost') and increasing competition to recruit students, and as those students have web access to a wealth of free, as well as paid for, learning materials from a range of institutions of learning across the globe, undergraduate class sizes have grown greatly in many disciplines. This poses challenges for staff who try to adapt lecture-style teaching and learning to a much more diverse student body (Cuseo 2007). Lectures can be excellent vehicles for stimulating curiosity, inspiring learners and sharing expertise, particularly where the staff concerned are researching in, and are passionate about, the subject domain. But this makes several assumptions. First, that the teaching staff have the capabilities required for inspiring lecturing – many do, but not all. Second, that the students attending such lectures are in fact there to learn and are willing to do so, an assumption in mass higher education which no longer always holds. Thirdly, that the students do actually attend the lectures and come prepared to listen!

These points may seem unnecessarily cynical, but universities cannot continue to offer the learning and teaching methods that suited earlier generations while our students now may have patently different needs and wants. Tapscott and Williams in their article in *Educause Review* (2010) suggested:

'Video lectures enhance education by allowing students to absorb course content online - whenever is convenient for them - and then get together to tinker, invent new things, or discuss the material. The OCW experience has shown MIT that the real value of what it offers is not the lecture per se but rather the whole package - the content tied to the human learning experience on campus, plus the certification. Colleges and universities cannot survive on lectures alone'.

Today's students have choice, perhaps too much choice, of what and where and how to learn. But as Senior, Reddy and Senior discuss (2014), the student focus is likely to be broadly on capabilities which will help them into and in employment. These authors cite Barnett (2009) on students' 'being and becoming', a focus on resilience, openness and a will to learn which, they suggest is fostered by peer engagement in learning. Willingness and ability to learn are touchstones of the 'New Vocationalism'

discussed by Bourner et al (2011) where they are considered the main ingredients of the graduate recipe offered to prospective employers. Yet passive receipt of delivered information is unlikely to foster either willingness or ability to learn; it is interactive opportunities for peer engagement, and for direct engagement with teachers where concepts prove problematic, that can support enthusiasm for learning; and this couldn't be further from the average higher education lecture experience.

Diversity in flipped learning

This is where the idea of flipping the learning offers a possible solution: by offering explanatory materials prior to class, testing understanding early in class time or also before class (polling for example or simple testing), teachers can spend time in class developing learners' understanding of applications, or going over and more thoroughly explaining concepts which are shown in the tests to be less well understood. A final end of class poll or test can help determine whether immediate understanding has improved, offering further opportunities for reviewing key concepts in advance of summative assessment. This is broadly the approach promoted by Eric Mazur of Harvard, who termed it Peer Instruction (PI) (1997). In a review ten years on from his first uses of PI (2001), Mazur and Crouch discuss improvements to the PI method in which pre-class reading is maximised and incentivised with conceptual questions for students, including a note of what they find most challenging or interesting; this is followed by minimised lecture content interspersed with 'ConceptTests' (*sic*), short focused questions asked after brief presentation of content which students work on individually and offer polled answers in class, then discuss with another student, trying to convince them of the correctness of their answer. This peer instruction is followed by a second poll and a discussion of their responses. Peer Instruction has since been increasingly adopted in the US, for examples see Smith et al (2011), Knight and Wood (2005).

Case studies demonstrate varying versions of flipped learning (also called inverted or reverse learning) beyond PI. Starting from the basic idea that class time experience of listening and taking notes would be swapped with homework time of applying learning to problems, has meant that the drive for flipped learning tends to centre on the teacher being present at the time the learner most needs help – when they are puzzling through how to apply and develop ideas presented to them. In Bloom taxonomy terms, the higher order learning (analysing, evaluating, creating) traditionally seems to take place outside the formal class time, when the resources of the institution are not available. It could be argued that virtual learning environments mediate this issue, being available 24/7 with web access, however, widespread usage of such learning environments as repositories and management systems rather than interactive environments means that help is still not necessarily at hand.

The ubiquity of video

There is a preponderance of case studies which discuss flipped learning as based around video materials (Zhao and Ho 2014). Usually in the studies, such as Lage and Platt (2000), Kaner and Fiedler (2005), Talbert (2012), Gannod (2007), Toto and Nguyen (2009), these are videos pre-recorded by teaching staff, or curated by teaching staff with direct relevance to the curriculum. The growth of video use in re-

cent years has been stimulated by increasing software packages with user-friendly options. While the fully edited and creatively produced video required studio equipment and specialised skills, this remained a limited opportunity, but the increased capabilities of mobile phones and tablets to produce effective video material, and the increasing use of packages such as Jing and Camtasia Relay (both produced by Techsmith), which allow simplified video production and rendering involving no specific technical skill set from the producer, have opened up the world of video recording to mainstream higher education teaching staff. Coupled with the huge and still growing popularity of YouTube.com among learners of every age and ability, the place of the teaching video has become secure, particularly as studies such as that by Zhang et al (2006) find that video lectures are at least as good as face to face lectures at delivering information. However, Freeman-Her Reid and Schiller (2013) point out that good quality video lectures are rated higher by students than home-grown videos created by teaching staff: this is a potential area for investment and more effective tagging and sharing of Open Educational Resources.

It should be pointed out that relatively few studies discuss the ‘flipping’ of complete courses or even complete modules. This is often done for individual sessions, particularly where content has been found to be problematic for students. This is also a reflection of the amount of preparatory work which is needed to design a flipped learning experience. This does not only involve preparation of video lectures in advance, but, almost more importantly, the re-design of classroom activities. The example given above of Mazur’s Peer Instruction demonstrates the detailed preparation of questions to be completed prior to class and in class, and how these are designed to produce in class peer discussion for short periods interspersed with a possible lecture, or sometimes problem-solving activities. Some studies advocate appropriating the pedagogic benefits of Problem Based Learning (PBL) in class activities, finding this to provide two potential beneficial outcomes: first to offer interactive, group-based activity in class, which can be meaningful involvement in learning for students fitting with the notion of flipped learning, and second, to offer a way to operationalise and potentially scale up PBL, with all its attendant benefits of research-based enquiry, authenticity and problem-solving skill development, having offered the scaffolding learning required via the pre-classroom video lectures.

Learning and educational theories in flipped learning

We do not have to look too hard to find evidence of constructivist learning theory in flipped learning models. Constructivist and co-operative learning stem from the well accepted ideas of Piaget and Vygotsky, leading to the notion that the involvement of others can become both catalyst and catharsis in social learning contexts. Kolb’s development of experiential learning and Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, particularly the role-modelling dimension, can both be seen in the face to face activities fostered by flipped classrooms. Bishop and Verleger (2013) cite Johnson and Johnson’s notion of co-operative learning with particular relevance to flipped learning patterns: ‘the integrated use of cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning’ which they call ‘Learning together and alone’. Then there is PBL, which is generally attributed as a theory to Barrows and Hmelo-Silver (Savery 2006) and brings together collaborative learning in groups, with a focus on ill-structured or messy problems with

a feeling of authenticity. Where PBL can be adopted into face to face time, learning is driven largely by the learner, rather than the teacher, who facilitates rather than directs. PBL in higher education can lead to issues of scaffolding, which in a flipped model would be provided by pre-class video lectures or reading assignments, tested at an early stage to ensure basic underpinning concepts are understood, in order to give more autonomy to students in the application of research and group problem-solving skills to the task in hand. The pedagogic framework then for flipped learning has students at the centre of the learning process, constructing their beliefs and meanings of the materials presented, with checking, facilitation and guidance as needed by the teacher.

Challenges of flipped learning

There is no doubt that the affordances of virtual learning environments offer the potential to provide interactive support for formal learning, and out of class opportunities to communicate and collaborate with peers and teachers. There is also little doubt that interactive group-based activities in class go down well with most students. What then are the problems and challenges associated with flipped learning? There is evidence in the literature (e.g. Willey and Gardener 2013) of a continuing reluctance on the part of some students to accept reduced lecture time. These students have an expectation of what they are consuming as higher education customers, and their comments relayed in some papers suggest a common complaint in the form 'I am paying for a campus-based university experience and that does not mean online materials, that means lectures with academic staff.' This could be a transitional phase, where students increasingly become accustomed to blended learning and flipped learning modes at university and come to see them as a right rather than a variation from tradition. This resistance may also relate to levels of student motivation. Students who do not come to lectures prepared to learn but to be entertained and to take part in a ritualised form of educational development, may well be less enamoured of a format which involves pre-reading or watching of videos and coming to sessions prepared to take an active role in learning.

This resistance cannot be lightly dismissed as a passing phase, however, since the repercussions for staff who try to implement flipped learning and find a body of students have not done the pre-class work will have practical difficulties to overcome; in particular dealing with two different groups of students, some of whom may be reluctant to take part in tests, polling and other interactive activities. While one of the potential advantages suggested by advocates of flipped learning is that it can advantage a range of learners with differing learning preferences and abilities, able to follow the video lectures, or indeed pre-reading assignments in their own time and at their own pace, there is, nonetheless, a learning contract here that requires tacit acceptance. The literature seems to show that persistence is required on the part of teaching staff, who need to offer regular encouragement and explanation of the purpose of a flipped learning approach (Strayer 2009, Davies et al 2013, Rowe et al 2013). Furthermore, it does seem useful to include formative testing or quizzes to improve motivation to complete pre-class activities (McLaughlin et al 2013).

Student achievement

Discussions of student achievement with flipped learning models, for example, there are a number of short case studies from US universities in Yarbrow et al (2014), present outcomes which either improve or show no difference from traditional lecture-style teaching. Yarbrow et al raise a question about what particular contexts might suit flipped learning and show clear advantages. From the range of literature reviewed for this paper, suggestions would be contexts where there are difficult concepts to explain, or significant factual or background information is required to set the scene for problem solving or application and development of understanding, and where students of varying ability and learning preferences are involved to enable self-paced learning prior to class.

Concluding remarks

This literature study has aimed to answer the following questions:

- What kind of evidence does the literature offer for the effectiveness of the flipped classroom model?
- What range of versions is currently found in flipped classroom case studies?
- What learning/educational theories underpin the flipped classroom approach?
- What does the flipped classroom model offer to university teachers and students which cannot be achieved in other blended formats?

The fundamental argument must surely be that higher education is not primarily about content. Information and communication technologies have offered a lens to focus attention on the quality and comparability, as well as the currency of that content offered in universities and other higher education institutions. Lower order learning activities which include exposure to information, remembering and seeking understanding are able to transfer beyond the face to face time of students and teachers partly because this information is no longer limited to physical books and papers, but can be found in easily accessible and always available online formats. With increasing numbers of personal devices to access this information (university students are much more likely to own high proportions of mobile devices from laptops and tablets to smartphones (Davies 2014) mobile use grew 115 per cent in 2013 (flurry.com 2014)) access to content is not the issue for higher education. It is evaluation and application of content in order to make it meaningful which is the central task.

So there is a strong argument for offering content online, possibly curated by rather than produced by the teacher, and using face to face time in the classroom in a more interactive way. However, this is not necessarily flipped learning. Blended learning is a much wider category for a range of varied ways of combining online and face to face activities for learning. Blended approaches are less rigid in a requirement for pre-class activity, which may suit some topics better, and a wider range of online tools may be useful both in and out of class, for example, Wikis and blogs, e-portfolios, and opportunities for wider literature search. Opportunities for webinars to replace face to face physical classes can sometimes solve resource or logistical

problems, and these can be adapted to both blended and flipped models. Technology enhanced learning comes in many forms and can be effectively used 'on the fly' in class rather than pre-prepared (for example, developing Prezis from student feedback, polling as gaps appear in student understanding).

The argument about 'content' becoming less important in what the university has to offer should receive rather more attention in discussions of flipped learning. University teachers are well aware of the explosion of resource materials and media relating to their subject discipline, most of which can be accessed online. A flipped approach would seem, in its present forms, to be a return to a more directed, confined presentation to the student of what the teacher believes to be most important. Yet the trend supported by web technology, and constructivist thinking, places teachers in a collaborative learning role alongside students, as all can bring useful and up to date resources into play in an open learning design. If teachers are to spend considerable time setting up front reading assignments or video lectures, we could be back to 'teacher knows best', rather than encouraging students to roam and surf to find possibly useful information, which can be debated and evaluated in class or online through synchronous or asynchronous discussion and case application or problem-solving. Not every subject discipline, and certainly not every level of university education is perhaps suited to wide-ranging student-led foraging for relevant information (as, for example, in PBL which is not pre-designed beyond an initial trigger). However, if flipped learning continues to gather momentum, this will be an issue to address. For employability at the very least, higher education institutions are charged with developing students' capabilities to test and evaluate information, and to be prepared to 'unlearn' or be open to new perspectives. A fully flipped curriculum would seem to close down these opportunities rather than develop them, leading to reservations in answering the question – What is the best use of face to face time with students? - with the term 'flipped learning'.

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Biography

Dr Sue Greener teaches at Brighton Business School. She brought managerial experience and skills from corporate training to the academic task, and is driven by a desire to explore and find innovative ways in which to inspire and share the development of knowledge. In Sue's case, this often means using technologies to add value to learning and always starts with what learners already know, rather than from a defined notion of what must be taught.

At Brighton Business School, Sue teaches and supervises on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and supervises PhD students in the broad field of business and elearning. She co-founded the Business e-Learning research group, part of CIMER research centre in 2004, and has hosted research conferences at the Business School (European Conference on e-Learning 2011 and European Conference on Social Media 2014), as well as setting up the annual Student Social Media Showcase from 2014, which encourages students to submit short videos of their social media research to a permanent website which they can showcase to future employers, and to talk to school-children at the event about their studies.

An external examiner and subject examiner for various higher education institutions, Sue also teaches business online to students across the world. Her early management experience was gained as an administrator and manager at the Medical Research Council in London, MRC Radiobiology Unit in Harwell and the University of Aston in Birmingham. She has been professionally involved in learning and teaching since 1973, as a corporate trainer, training consultant and university teacher, with learning being central to her career and interests be it personal, class-based or online. She is a licensed lay reader in the Church of England, a breeder of pedigree Southdown Sheep and is a council member of the South of England Agricultural Society.

Experiences and reflections of flipping the classroom

DR HANNAH WOOD

Abstract

Flipped teaching is the use of online lectures before the face to face session to allow students to study material in their own time and at their own pace, leaving time for more interactive face to face sessions with academic staff. This article reflects upon the implementation of flipped teaching in a level 4 module in the Division of Built Environment and Civil Engineering, and discusses how the process worked in practice, as well as feedback and reflection from the students and staff involved.

Introduction: flipped teaching

The term flipped teaching is an approach to teaching that critiques the role of traditional methods of didactic pedagogy, rather than relying on the presence of an academic in a lecture hall and students passively listening. The flipped approach becomes an online lesson which is studied before the face to face session, in which the content can be applied and problem solving undertaken with the academic present to provide support and correct misinformation (Jump 2013). It is important to consider that whilst flipped teaching can be a useful method of delivery, especially to large groups, it often requires more effort from both students and instructors, and also to understand that not all students will embrace or necessarily like flipped instruction (Willey and Gardener 2013). There are a number of advantages to the flipped teaching approach, Freeman-Her Reid and Schiller (2013) summarise the advantages as set out by Fulton (2012) as:

- students move at their own pace
- doing 'homework' in class gives teachers better insight into student difficulties and learning styles
- teachers can more easily customise and update the curriculum and provide it to students 24/7
- classroom time can be used more effectively and creatively
- teachers using the method report seeing increased levels of student achievement, interest and engagement

- learning theory supports the new approaches; and
- the use of technology is flexible and appropriate for 21st century learning

In addition Freeman-Herreid and Schiller (2013) identified these further benefits:

- there is more time to spend with students on authentic research
- students get more time working with equipment that is only available in the classroom
- students who miss the class can still watch the lectures
- students are more actively involved in the learning process; and
- they also really like it

The module and rationale for flipping

The module in which the flipped implementation took place was a land surveying module which is compulsory for all first year (level 4) students in the Built Environment and Civil Engineering Division (approx 150 in 2013-14). The delivery of the module consisted of two hour lectures every week and five practical workshops throughout the semester. The face to face sessions followed the traditional concept of a lecture, where the academic would deliver the content and provide the students with further reading and examples to attempt in their own time. This left very little time for more engaging activity such as working through examples and applying knowledge. Whilst attendance and pass rates in the module were not problematic, there was a high demand for additional tutorials, which took place outside of the timetabled sessions for the module, especially in the approach to exams and therefore a change in practice was prompted.

Flipping the classroom in practice

The flipped delivery includes two phases: the online delivery, focusing on delivery of content, followed by a face to face session focusing on applying the knowledge from the online material.

Online delivery

Prior to the start of the semester, the traditional lecture slides were updated and recorded with the lecturer's voice-over using screen capture software (Camtasia Relay). Each lecture was divided into a number of 'bite sized' sections, which were recorded individually to allow students to access the material in smaller, more manageable chunks. Whilst it was anticipated that all sections would be watched in the same sitting, this method provided students with the option of repeating certain areas more easily than scrolling through a whole lecture, and had the added benefit that if a certain section needed to be updated in the future, this could be done without having to record the full lecture again. In general the video clips lasted between five and 15 minutes, with an overall duration of between 45 and 60 minutes. Videos were posted on the virtual learning environment studentcentral and were accessible directly from the platform, with no need to download and no restriction on the type of device used to access them (e.g. tablet, laptop or smartphone).

Much of the material involved mathematical problems and so examples of these problems were demonstrated in the lecture videos. Students were provided with the specialist worksheets on which the calculations were to be recorded, and advised in the videos to work through the problem as they watched the video. Unlike live lectures, this allowed the individual students to work at their own pace and rewind and recap as necessary. At key points within each problem, students were advised to pause the video and complete the rest of the section before moving on to the next process, allowing them to ensure that they understood and were able to carry out the work and check their answers in their own time. At the start and end of each video the students were also provided with the learning outcomes for the video set, allowing them to reflect on whether they had achieved these or not, and prompting them to repeat certain sections or make a note of questions they may have to aid their understanding. A discussion board for each video set was set up alongside the videos to allow students to post questions which could be answered by the lecturer or other students, however this was not widely utilised.

Face to face sessions

The format of the face to face sessions changed from a two hour session (before flipping) focusing on content delivery, to a one hour tutorial in which students could work on problems with the help of the lecturer. It was made clear to students that the face to face sessions would not be a repeat of the lecture videos, and that in order to participate in the tutorials they must watch the videos prior to attending. Each tutorial began with a recap of the learning outcomes to highlight to the students again what they should have gained from the videos, followed by a series of multiple choice questions to test understanding, and a further more in depth exercise to apply the knowledge. The multiple choice questions were asked using 'Poll Everywhere' live audience participation software, allowing students to use their mobile devices (such as smart phones and tablets) to anonymously answer the questions and see how they were performing against the rest of the class. The questions were designed to ensure that students had understood the main concepts of the videos and to highlight areas they may need to go back to. This part of the tutorial usually lasted for around ten minutes with the rest of the time dedicated to attempting exercises designed to ensure students could apply the knowledge and concepts from the videos, for example, attempting full calculations with the assistance of the lecturer if required.

Student engagement

Throughout the module, engagement was monitored in a number of ways, the number of views for each set of videos was recorded week on week as well as information on when and at what time videos were being accessed. Attendance of the tutorial was also monitored each week. Once the module was complete, a comparison of marks and attendance from the previous year's cohort (taught in the traditional format) was made to identify any changes.

Seven video sets were published, two of which covered two weeks of tutorials, there were also introductory and revision tutorials, in total covering 13 weeks of contact time. Figure 1 shows the total number of times each set of videos was accessed throughout the module. With the number of students registered on the modules at

around 150, it is clear from the figure that each student accessed the videos several times (with an average of approximately 2,850 views per video). It is interesting to note that the video which received the lowest number of views, video set 5, was the only set that did not cover any calculations.

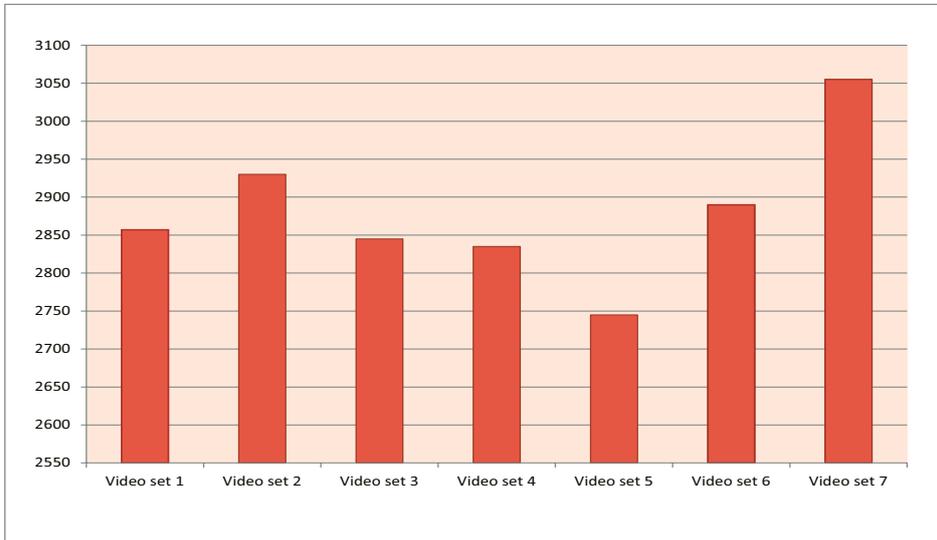


Figure 1: Total number of views per video set

Figure 2 provides a snapshot of when the videos were accessed; again, it is interesting to see that although most of the engagement was on a Tuesday, the day before the tutorial session, there was a steady level of engagement throughout the week, suggesting that students were engaging with the material at the time that best suited them, as well as accessing the material again, possibly after the face to face session.

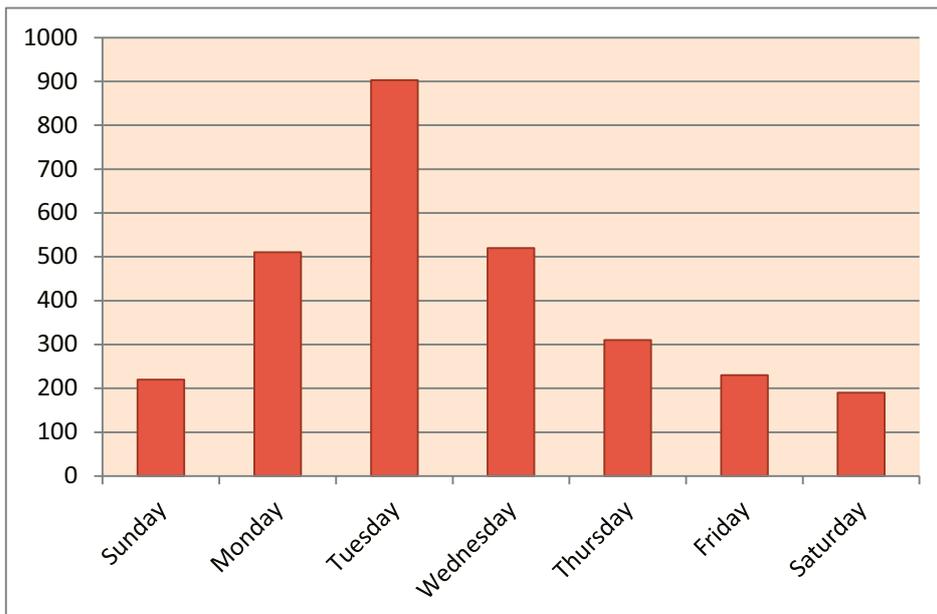


Figure 2: Views by day of the week

Figure 3 shows when one set of videos (in this case set 3) were being accessed. In the first three weeks there was little or no engagement as expected (the material wasn't to be covered yet), however, in weeks four to seven there is a high level of engagement with this video set. Although this is to be expected in week four as this is when the tutorial for this set of videos took place, it is encouraging to see that the videos were still being accessed alongside the following week's material. Another important aspect shown by figure 1, is the use of the videos for both preparation of coursework submitted throughout weeks 11 and 12, and for revision for the exam which took place in week 14, where the access to the video set was at its peak.

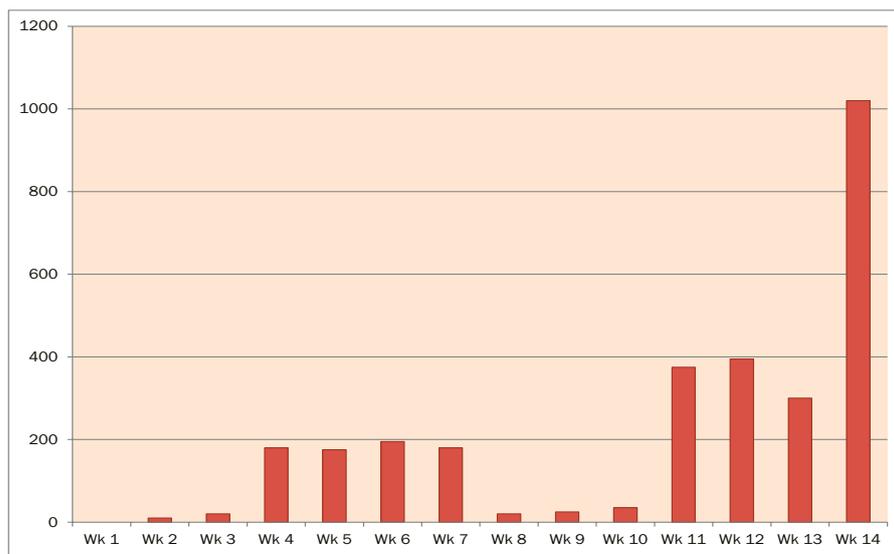


Figure 3: Views by week

A concern with the flipped model before its implementation was that attendance of the tutorial session would be significantly reduced. Attendance before and after flipping the module can be seen in figure 4. In the previous year where the traditional approach had been used, attendance fell slightly throughout the module, a similar trend was seen after the flipped implementation with a more significant difference between

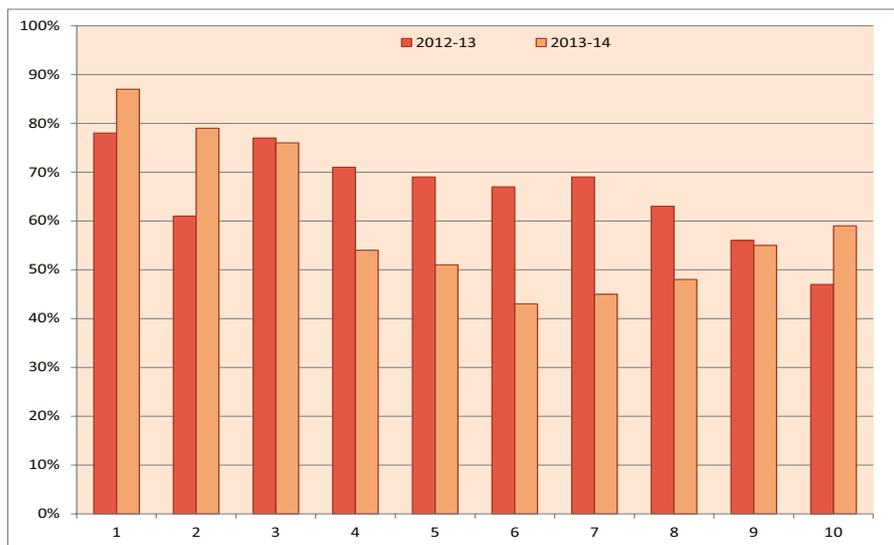


Figure 4: Attendance before and after flipped implementation

weeks four and seven, however, towards the end of the module attendance was in line with or exceeding that of the previous year.

As well as a comparison of attendance, achievement was also compared before and after the flipped implementation to establish the impact that the change of delivery may have had. Figure 5 provides an overview of the marks from before and after the flipped implementation, as with attendance, there was not a significant impact, however, the percentage of students achieving either a first or upper second grade did increase with the new delivery and those achieving a third or lower second were reduced. Students failing the module did not change considerably.

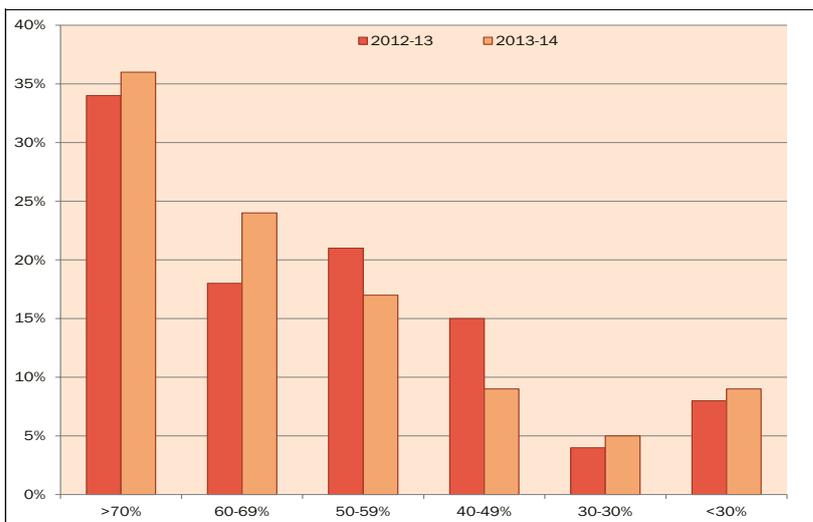


Figure 5: Comparison of marks before and after flipped implementation

Student feedback

As well as analysing the engagement and achievement as described above, feedback was sought directly from the students involved by means of an online questionnaire. The questionnaire took place five weeks into the module, to ensure that students had enough time to engage and reflect upon the change in delivery and to allow changes to be made if required. The response rate was fairly low at 15 per cent, however a balance of opinions was provided.

Overall the feedback concerning the ease of access to the videos was positive, with 95 per cent reporting finding the videos either easily or very easily. 76 per cent of students found the video content to be either useful or very useful with no responses indicating that the content was not at all useful. This indicates that engagement with the online material was generally a positive experience for the students. When focusing upon the face to face sessions, it became apparent that the multiple choice questions received a mixed response, with more than half the respondents giving either a neutral or negative response to their usefulness. The more in depth exercises however, received a more positive reception, with over 65 per cent reporting that they were either useful or very useful. When asked if they would like to see the flipped mode of delivery used in other modules, 56 per cent indicated that they would like to see it in other modules, 33 per cent felt that it should be confined to some modules and 11 per cent did not want to see the delivery extended to other modules (figure 6: over).

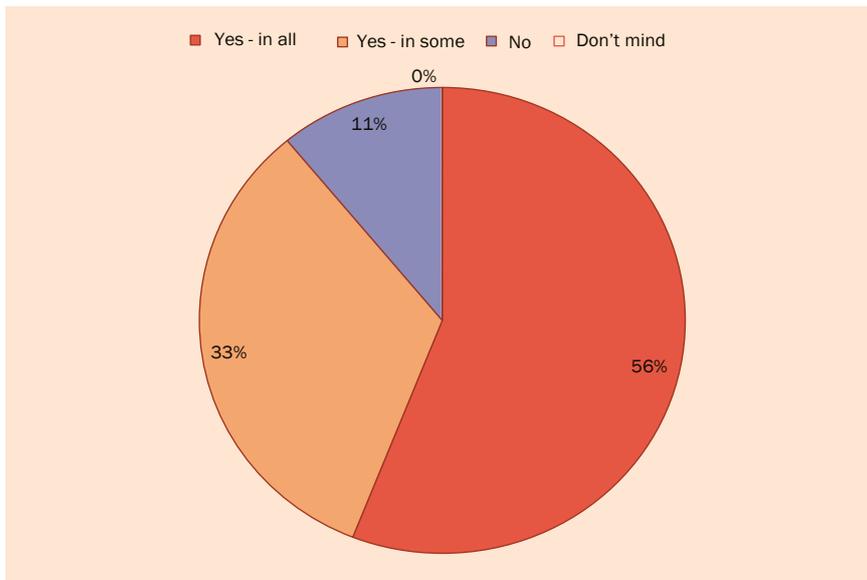


Figure 6: Responses to 'Would you like to see the flipped model in other modules?'

Whilst responses were generally favourable towards using the the flipped style in other modules, it was with an understanding that it is perhaps more suited to some modules than others (for example, those with high mathematical content). Quotes such as the following:

'The video allows us to have a more one to one learning approach, with the major benefit of being able to pause the video to take notes, and then resume, whereas in a class, if we were taking lots of notes, we can easily miss out on things you say'

'I can watch the videos in my own time and rewind as I need to. There's less chance of me getting lost/losing interest like I could do live'; and

'It gives the advantage of having the lecture over and over again for better understanding',

show that much of the benefit of the flipped model is the ability to work at a pace which suits the students, and to be able to recap on material to gain a better understanding. However, some students did not feel this way stating that:

'This module feels like distance learning. I am paying to be taught not teach myself online. I prefer to be engaged by an actual teacher'.

On balance another comment highlighted both the benefits and perceived weakness of the model:

'... the advantage of having a live lecture means you are able to ask questions at that time ... however, video lectures allow you to go through the lecture at your own time, write detailed notes for future revision and go over material you didn't understand either at the time or in the future',

highlighting the concern that questions which occur when engaging with the material cannot be answered immediately as in a live lecture.

Discussion and conclusion

Overall, the experience of flipping the delivery of this module was a positive one for both the students and the lecturer, whilst the preparation of videos required significant time, once the module was running (and in subsequent years) there was noticeable payback for this. The rationale for flipping developed from the large proportion of students requiring additional tutorial support, whilst not formally recorded, it was noted that there appeared to be a considerable reduction in the amount of extra tutorial time requested by students, especially around assessment. The introduction of the tutorial instead of the lecture, allowed the lecturer's time to be spent more effectively, providing the students with much more meaningful and useful contact time than in the past.

In general, the experiences from this module concur with those of others who have implemented the flipped model elsewhere. Bishop and Verleger (2013) describe the experiences of a number of studies into the flipped classroom, reporting that despite differences in the studies, student perceptions were fairly consistent, these can be summarised as follows: opinions tended to be positive, but there were invariably a few students who strongly dislike the change; students did tend to watch the videos when assigned, and even when they weren't; students tended to be better prepared after watching videos rather than given text books to read (especially important as Sappington et al show that college/university students generally don't complete reading assignments (2002)); students preferred live in-person lectures to video lectures, but also like interactive class time more than in-person lectures.

On reflection, a number of benefits and challenges were highlighted through implementing flipped teaching in this module, which have been summarised in figure 7.

Benefits 	Challenges 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lectures can be watched as many times as required ▪ Students can work at their own speed - less chance of getting lost or bored ▪ Significant reduction in the need for extra tutorials ▪ More meaningful and useful contact time ▪ Revision was easier for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students' perceptions: some felt short changed (not able to ask questions/ 'not paying to teach myself') ▪ Tutorials in large lecture theatres can be difficult to manage ▪ Require significant input before the module starts to prepare lectures

Figure 7: Benefits and challenges

Overall, the perceived benefits outweigh the challenges and the flipped model will be used in the future in this module, with the possibility of using it for particular aspects of other modules. Whilst the experience was a positive one, there are aspects that

will be changed in the future, for example, it was clear from student feedback that they did not find the use of the multiple choice questions to be as useful as the in depth exercises, and therefore more emphasis will be placed on using the tutorial sessions for this type of exercise. Another outcome of reflecting upon the experience was that perhaps some students did not understand the rationale or process of flipped teaching, and felt they were being left to teach themselves. In order to provide students with a better understanding and to feel more comfortable with this kind of approach, time will be dedicated in the introduction to the module to properly explain this to the students, so that they have a greater understanding of the benefits this type of delivery can offer them.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the input of Marion Curdy, the Learning Technologist at Moulsecoomb campus, for her guidance on the use of flipped teaching, help with re-recording lectures and collecting feedback from students.

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Biography

Dr Hannah Wood is a Senior Lecturer in the Built Environment and Civil Engineering Division of the School of Environment and Technology, University of Brighton. In addition to subject specific research, Hannah has an interest in researching learning and teaching within the Built Environment and Civil Engineering discipline and is especially interested in the use of technology in support of learning and teaching.

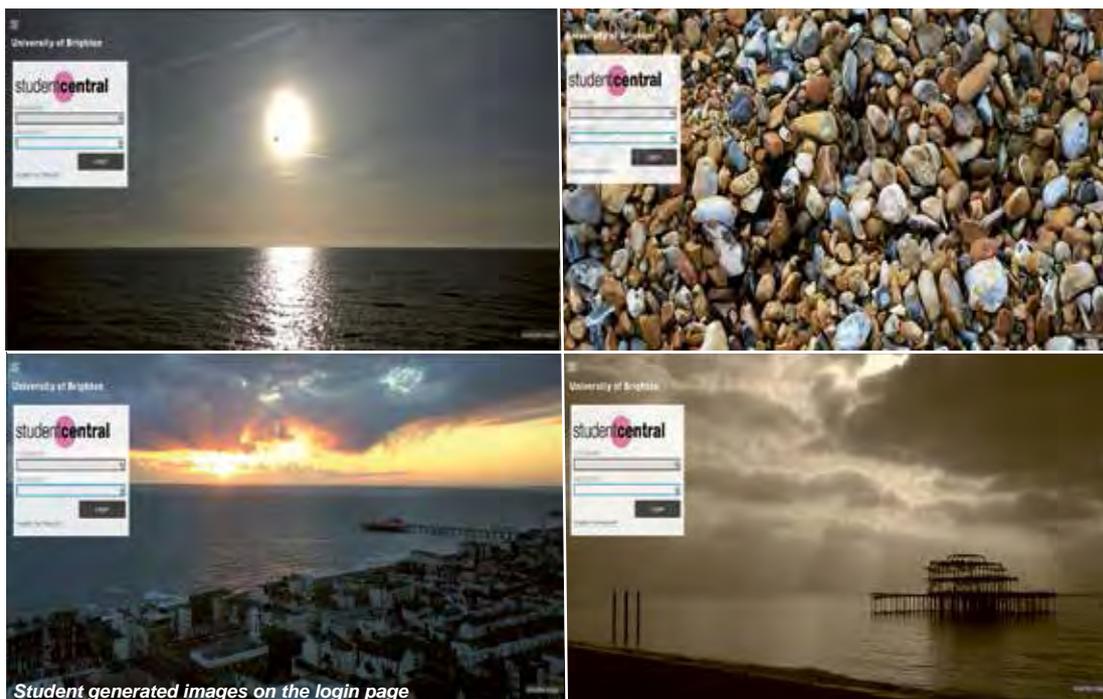
What's new in studentcentral?

CRAIG WAKEFIELD

Abstract

Studentcentral is the university's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). April 2014 saw a significant step forward for the University of Brighton, moving the platform from a self-hosted to a managed hosted solution, ensuring greater reliability and timely upgrades. The studentcentral site was then upgraded in June 2014 to the latest available version, resulting in the university being at the fore of VLE offerings in the UK.

Studentcentral is the institutional name for the learning system, a product from US company Blackboard. It is a web-based server software platform that offers open architecture for customisation of course materials and course management (Greasley, Bennett and Greasley 2004). Blackboard products are used by around 49 per cent of UK higher education institutions (UCISA 2014) and the latest upgrade offered a range of new features for staff and students, which will be explored in this paper. The findings here are based on work by the eLearning team, their blog for detailed explanations and 'how to' guides is available at: <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/elearning>.



Introduction

'A Virtual Learning Environment is a collection of integrated tools enabling the management of online learning, providing a delivery mechanism, student tracking, assessment and access to resources' (JISC 2004). Typically a VLE incorporates a range of tools to assist and augment student learning, supporting teaching both within and outside the classroom. More recently, the concept of 'blended learning' has become popular amongst education establishments, promoting the mix of face to face learning and online learning. One way that this can be achieved is by educators utilising their institutions VLE. In 2001, only seven per cent of higher education institutions had a VLE (UCISA 2001), but throughout the last 13 years this has risen steadily to 2014, when it was reported that 100 per cent of UK higher education institutions have a VLE (UCISA 2014).

However, engaging staff and students to use a VLE is a critical factor, and constant development to meet the engagement challenge is vital to ensure adoption as a key part of teaching and learning. A key issue with early VLEs was their complexity, and uptake was limited to the early adopters and 'techie' teachers (Henshaw 2014). Barriers to staff engagement with VLEs can include time/workload, pedagogic uncertainty, lack of support and lack of recognition (Linguard 2007). This paper will discuss how, in a specific institution, the VLE is transforming to meet these challenges that face both staff and students in higher education.

As VLEs have become more mainstream, utilisation as part of teaching no longer seems optional, often there is a minimum expectation for teachers to upload content and engage with a VLE. More recently, institutions have endorsed 'minimum requirements' for content areas on VLEs (Reed 2014), including the University of Brighton (Centre for Teaching and Learning 2014). This enforced usage of VLEs is part of the institutional strategy that first established the need for VLEs. Over the past 20 years higher education institutions have faced increased scrutiny due to increasing tuition fees and competition from more diverse routes of further study. As Brown (1998) discusses, with a trend towards increasing numbers and diversity of students, coupled with declining resources and erratic student attendance, HEIs have driven the implementation of VLEs as a solution to many woes. Indeed previous research has shown that even when VLEs were in their infancy, they were still recognised as part of institutional strategy (UCISA 2001) and this continues today. The main institutional drivers for the provision of a VLE include:

- enhancing the quality of teaching and learning
- improving access to learning for students off campus
- widening participation/inclusiveness
- student expectations
- improving access for part-time students using technology to deliver elearning.

(UCISA 2003, cited in Stiles 2007)

However, for widespread adoption, there must be pedagogic reasoning behind any initiative (Lewis and Goodison 2004). Many academic teaching staff have felt that these institutional drivers are not backed with pedagogic reasoning, which has led to slow adoption within institutions. Whilst it is clear that VLEs have become a central part of universities academic offering in the past decade, there is still much to do to fully engage teachers (and ultimately learners) in the utilisation of a VLE, with most using the minimum of affordances (Rientes et al 2014). In relation to critical issues around staff and student engagement, this paper will discuss the pedagogic reasoning behind the latest VLE developments at the University of Brighton.

Navigation

It is well known that an effective learning environment that motivates learners is one that is easy to navigate (Stefanov et al 1998). Students at some institutions have previously criticised Blackboard's navigation for being difficult and not user-friendly (University of Manchester 2013, University of York 2012). In a recent evaluation of their Blackboard VLE, Brunel University (2014) challenged students to nominate 'best practice' modules utilising Blackboard. The most commonly cited reason for nominating a module was 'clear navigation', demonstrating the importance placed on this by students.

With the new update for June 2014, attempts have been made to address these navigation and usability concerns. As well as improvements to the aesthetics of studentcentral, the update sees a major new introduction: the 'Global Navigation menu', which users access by clicking their name after logging in. Essentially this aims to provide access to commonly used areas with just a few clicks, which can provide a simpler route to key content. The menu also alerts users to notifications from within modules and courses, such as any announcements or grades being released.

This system of 'notifications' is not new, as most social media websites allow users to be notified of updated content since their last login. The popularity of sites such as Facebook, Google and Twitter has resulted in educational designers paralleling the shape of learning environments to match the simplicity offered by social media. An example of this parallel between current social media applications and virtual learning environments is seen with the Global Navigation Menu, where a simple menu is located under the user's name and/or avatar similar to the layout used by most social media and search engines..

There are also links to tools, including: a global calendar, alerts, announcements, My grades (for students) and the Retention Centre (for staff). A user can see these new tools down the left-hand side of the menu, and the numbers marked in red tell the user if there's something new or that needs attention.

This improved navigation design should enable learners to engage better with the VLE, and to be notified more effectively of key information about their course. One essential part of any educational course is feedback, whether from summative or formative assessment. As Electronic Submission and Assessment (EMA) becomes more prevalent in higher education, the need to make feedback easily accessible within a VLE is essential. Indeed, Gibbs and Simpson (2003) state the importance of

timely feedback as a condition of 'learning from assessment'. The National Student Survey (NSS 2014) reports that in English higher education establishments, only 69 per cent of full-time learners agree that feedback on assessment is prompt at their institution (HEFCE 2014). Whilst this could be due to a multitude of factors, the ability for learners to receive notifications of course information (including grades) will assist them in accessing content immediately. As timing of feedback is so crucial for subsequent learning (Goodman and Wood 2004), this development should allow learners to engage in feedback within a critical window of opportunity. Increasing the visibility of assessment feedback with notifications may also help improve subsequent NSS scores relating to timing of feedback.

In a further attempt to engage students with studentcentral, the 'login' page has been customised to display a rolling slideshow of student-generated images (p 27). The aim of this is to encourage students to submit photos related to their university life – an attempt to make the VLE 'theirs' rather than a corporate site owned by the university. The incentive is very real, the login page was accessed 255,098 times in October 2014, and should provide a great platform for students to showcase their academic work and university experiences.

Redesigned collaborative tools

Conole (2007) describes how internet learning technologies have shifted from being primarily content based (storing and retrieving learning materials), to a social platform, where users can utilise tools such as wikis and blogs to communicate and collaborate with peers in support of their learning. This shift in technology gave rise to the concept of an improved internet – the term 'Web 2.0' is used to describe these interactive developments. Web 2.0 tools allow individuals to read information whilst networking with their friends at the same time; moreover, they can share knowledge with each other (Uzunboylu, Bicen and Cavus 2011). Students also feel they would benefit from being able to use these tools, citing them as the most desirable feature of VLEs in a 2011 study by the National Union of Students.

Whilst studentcentral has included these interactive tools in the past, it could be argued that they were basic and not user-friendly, leading to limited use amongst staff and students. There is also the challenge presented by external online communication tools, such as Facebook. Encouraging students to use VLE based communication tools can be difficult when they are frequently using social media channels to communicate. To support the shift to an interactive environment, studentcentral now offers a redesigned interface for blogs, wikis and a discussion board. With a more intuitive design, it is hoped that learners and teachers will be encouraged to utilise these tools to support learning. The interface also resembles most other social network platforms, which should make users feel comfortable in using the tools as the interface feels familiar. The use of avatars also allows for a friendlier, humanised discussion and the interface resembles most other online discussion tools.

As socialising online is more and more prevalent in society, so is having a web profile or 'avatar'. This is typically used across a range of online platforms, from social media to online gaming, and is used to represent the users 'digital self'. Brunskill

(2013) discusses how online discussion can disinhibit users, and that by representing oneself with a familiar avatar, users are able to stamp their distinct 'e-personality' within a system. Users can now upload an avatar within studentcentral, and this should further encourage users to engage with these interactive tools. For those who have added a profile picture to their account, this is displayed in each post/wiki entry, similar to other social networks. Ultimately this should humanise the online discussion and engage users.

Other improvements include interface design that makes it much easier to tell where and when new content is posted (for example, a new post on a discussion board) and improvements to the content editor, which enable users to easily add multimedia content to their blog/wiki/discussion post, opening up more possibilities in their use.

Improvements to online tests

David Hanson, Chief Executive of the Independent Association of Prep Schools stated recently that 'All public examinations, including GCSEs and A-levels, will be taken online within the next decade' (Garner 2013). The improvements in quality, stability and availability of online tests means more teachers are able to embrace the shift from traditional examinations. Sarrayrih and Ilyas (2013) discuss how online course examinations are not only useful to evaluate the student's knowledge, but come with great benefits in efficiency compared to traditional 'pen and paper' examinations. There are also huge benefits for students, those who normally experience high levels of anxiety prior to examinations report reduced test anxiety when sitting an online examination (Stowell and Bennett 2010). For those with specific learning difficulties, screen readers and other accessibility software can very simply be deployed to ensure online tests are available to all.

In a survey conducted by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL 2012), findings reported that 40 per cent of education staff have received medical advice about work-related stress, with the most common reason cited as 'workload' (84 per cent). With some online examinations offering automatic grading, this represents a real benefit to teachers as well as pedagogic and administrative benefits.

In studentcentral there have been a number of improvements to online tests, mostly to the interface that teaching staff see. To keep the interface clean and uncluttered, options become available according to the position of the mouse on the page. You can now copy and paste from Microsoft Word directly into any of the text boxes. Only the text is pasted, formatting applied in Microsoft Word is not retained, therefore the pasted text is not distorted by unwanted html code.

Where appropriate, the system now allows negative marking. This ensures more robust multiple choice tests, and discourages students from 'guessing' answers.

There is also the 'Item Analysis', tool which gives teaching staff a range of analytics once students have attempted an online test. The tool also 'rates' questions based on how successful students were at answering the question, and assists exam creators in ensuring that they have delivered a fair assessment of learners' ability. This

information can be used to improve questions for future test administrations or to adjust credit on current attempts.

Due to the recent shift to managed hosting, studentcentral now offers a much more stable, reliable service, with very limited unexpected downtime. This should ensure greater confidence in creating high stakes online examinations using the platform.

The Retention Centre

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA 2013), 6.7 per cent of undergraduates did not complete their first year of study in 2012-13, and in total around 26,000 students dropped out of university study (Paton 2014). Within higher education there is now a significantly greater focus on student retention and achievement, and to reach this goal, educators need tools to help them identify students who are at risk academically, and to adjust instructional strategies to better meet these students' needs (Safer and Fleischman 2005). Monitoring students can be difficult, as there is a multitude of ways to assess a student's engagement and progress with a course/module. However, studentcentral now has a new, customisable tool to track student progress: the Retention Centre, where tutors can quickly see which students are 'at risk' with their studies using customised rules.

The new 'Retention Centre' in studentcentral replaces the old 'early warning system', and provides tutors with a simple overview of their students' academic health. Essentially, it brings together data about students registered on a module and displays this in a clear and meaningful way. The main areas of focus are grades, missed deadlines, studentcentral activity and studentcentral access. If a student is below the expected threshold in any of these areas, it will be highlighted and a tutor can investigate further. Tutors can contact the most at risk students immediately and flag those they wish to monitor closely. As tutors observe their progress, they can also keep track of any correspondence and make notes within the Retention Centre. The Retention Centre is fully customisable: teaching staff can decide what indicators will be used and decide the thresholds for these. This should prove a useful tool in empowering staff to improve retention within their courses and modules.

Conclusions

With a modern, more intuitive VLE, both staff and student users at the University of Brighton can look forward to a more positive experience in using studentcentral. As learners now expect blended learning to be part of their study, the pressure for a VLE to deliver is more critical than ever. Higher education faces difficult times with student retention and satisfaction, but by improving core functionality and mirroring popular interfaces, students should feel more at ease when using studentcentral, improving overall engagement with online materials. With improved stability and functionality in instructor related tools, it is hoped that this will raise staff confidence and engagement with the VLE.

Future research should focus on measuring these outcomes, assessing the success of the initiatives and understanding future development that needs to be undertaken to truly engage both staff and students in online learning. With an ever-evolving edu-

ational climate and the emergence of Open Education Resources (OER), the need to fully understand the requirements of a VLE for institutions, staff and students is vital.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to the eLearning team at the University of Brighton. For more information and guidance on using any of the tools mentioned in this paper, please go to: <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/elearning>.

For the blog post from which this article was based, please navigate to: <http://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/elearning/2014/06/09/whats-new-in-studentcentral/>.

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Biography

Craig Wakefield is part of the eLearning team at the University of Brighton, and the Learning Technologies Adviser for the Hastings Campus. The team support staff with a range of technologies and pedagogical issues including studentcentral, electronic marking of assessments, e-portfolios and utilising mobile devices for teaching and learning. A former lecturer, Craig has used studentcentral for a number of years and has experienced its development from both a teaching and technical perspective.

The Quality Ward Round Project: low technology, high fidelity simulation to enhance learning among doctors and medical students

DR NATALIE POWELL, DR CHRIS BRUCE AND DR ANDY KERMODE

Abstract

The Quality Ward Round Project (QWRP) is a collaboration of acute hospital NHS Trusts, Brighton and Sussex Medical School and the South West Thames Foundation School, whose collective aim is to improve the standard of ward rounds across the Kent Surrey and Sussex region. In this article we present the background to the work of the QWRP from Surrey and Sussex healthcare NHS Trust where a low technology, high fidelity simulation ward round training programme was developed as part of quality improvement work to improve the standard of ward rounds.



Introduction

In the busy world of hospital medicine, ward rounds are the principle point of contact between clinician and patient. They are paramount in providing safe and effective healthcare and are likely to significantly influence the patient's experience (Herring, Desai and Caldwell 2011; Cohn 2013). It might be assumed that the doctors that lead and participate in these rounds are specifically trained to do so. However, to our knowledge, training on ward rounds is not currently part of standard medical undergraduate curricula, nor is it a specific competency within the foundation curriculum for the first year following qualification. It is not surprising, therefore, that The Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Nursing publication (2013) 'Ward rounds in medicine: principles for best practice', highlights significant variation of ward rounds in practice, and recommends the need for clearer structure and education for those that take part in rounds.

A doctor's ability to perform ward rounds is largely gained through experiential learning over cumulative attendance on ward rounds as part of clinical placements during medical school. In the latter years of the course, students are encouraged to 'shadow' and take on some of the roles of the junior doctor. Much of the learning, therefore, is reliant on the ability of the individual role model that is being observed, which can be variable. The ward round offers significant opportunity for bedside teaching and learning (Claridge 2011), which has previously been the cornerstone of teaching in medicine (Abdool and Bradley 2013). Over time, the focus of ward rounds has changed and this may have eroded the educational potential of rounds. From a clinician's viewpoint, the primary aim of the ward round is to structure patient care and ensure that the patient has a clear diagnosis and management plan. The Royal College guidance highlights that for maximum effectiveness rounds must be well organised and structured. Ward rounds are important for reviewing patient safety issues such as adherence to blood clot prevention and the checking of prescriptions and allergies. It is easy to see how a disorganised or badly led round could lead to errors and negative clinical outcome.

There has been increasing interest recently in the use of medical safety checklists to help ensure that vital parts of a process, such as ward rounds are followed. Stemming from work in the aviation industry, checklists have been used successfully in many areas of medicine. The WHO Surgical Safety Checklist, for example, helps to ensure that essential components of a pre-operative review are completed before the patient goes to theatre. Its introduction has led to significant reductions in mortality (Weiser et al 2010). Checklists have also been designed for use on medical ward rounds. Some are considerative in nature and encourage participants to pause and reflect to ensure that all components of care have been addressed. Others are more evaluative and act as an aide memoire to crosscheck that the essential components have occurred. Anecdotal reports suggest that such checklists can help to reduce errors of omission (Hales et al 2008) but widespread adoption of such checklists has not been seen.

We, at Sussex and Surrey Healthcare NHS Trust (SASH) were keen to introduce such a checklist but felt that mandating its use would not be enough, and that to change

the culture would require education. We therefore embarked on further quality improvement work to see if we could teach ward round skills using simulation and encourage junior doctors to use the SASH ward safety checklist.

Simulation is widely used in many clinical areas such as anaesthetics and surgery. Simulation is frequently used to train doctors and medical students to react to the abnormal and changing physiology of a simulated patient who is often a mannequin. In our training we were keen to explore whether using the principles of such a teaching style using a simulated environment, clinical scenarios, peer observation and role play could be used to develop ward round skills and etiquette. In our training we would use a 'real' simulated patient and not require the use of physiological simulators.

Methods

We designed a three hour simulated ward round session that features three clinical encounters using actors playing the part of the patient. The training is low technology and does not require the use of monitoring equipment, but utilises the simulation laboratory so that those not taking part in the scenario can observe the scenario without being a distraction to those running it. Learners assumed different roles in the encounter; a leader, a scribe and others to check paperwork, drug chart prescriptions and patient results.

Scenarios were developed to explore leadership, delegation, communication, team working and time management rather than clinical diagnostics or examination. Scenarios were themed to cover key patient safety issues. Students were briefed to conduct a ward review in the normal timeframe expected during a ward round. False documentation was provided such as medical notes, drug prescription charts, observation readings and test results. For the first scenario little guidance was offered and the ward checklist was not used. In the second scenario the team were briefed on the use of the checklist and in the third scenario the team were encouraged to utilise the expertise of other allied health professionals (for example pharmacists). The complexity of the cases also increased from scenario one to three.

Prior to the training, the students were surveyed about any previous experience of ward round training. Their confidence was assessed in leading and documenting rounds (on five point Likert scales). Similar surveys were issued following the training.

Results

Results of the initial development training are currently in press. 102 learners overall undertook the training session in 2012-13 (72 medical students in their final year and 30 foundation year one doctors). 52 students and all 30 doctors completed the pre-training surveys. Of these, few had any prior training (9 per cent medical students, 27 per cent of doctors).

Following the session, 68 of the 72 students and all 30 doctors completed post training surveys. 100 per cent felt that the session was useful and 93 per cent rated it as excellent. As the sample was not paired, statistical analysis using the Wilcoxon Mann Whitney test was used to compare confidence levels before and after training.

This demonstrated statically significant improvements in both leading and documenting a ward round when the data was combined for both sets of learners. Analysis of the cohorts of student and doctors individually also demonstrated statistically significant improvements in confidence in leading ward rounds (Powell, Bruce and Redfern in press). All learners felt that the use of the ward round safety checklist helped to improve confidence, and 90 per cent of students felt that the training should be part of their undergraduate training.

Discussion

The results of the project suggest that students and new doctors lack confidence in leading and documenting ward rounds and few have had any formal training. The simulation training was well received and survey findings suggest that the training improved confidence in all learners.

Simulation was chosen as the preferred method for teaching ward round skills as multiple studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of simulation in the teaching of basic science and clinical knowledge, procedural skills, teamwork, and communication as well as assessment at the undergraduate and graduate medical education levels (Okuda et al 2009). Simulation ward round training draws upon two major learning theories, namely experiential learning and action learning as described respectively by Kolb and Kolb (2005) and Revans (1998). The simulated environment allows learners to practice in a safe environment where mistakes can be made without negative outcome for either patient or learner.

Improved confidence was seen in all learners irrespective of whether they led the round and despite increasing the complexity of encounters during the session. This demonstrates the efficacy of observational learning through role modelling as described by Bandura (1991), and highlights that low technology simulation with peer observation is a suitable method to teach ward round skills in a group environment.

The post session debrief also allows significant opportunity to reinforce the lessons learned during the scenario. Such feedback can reinforce good practice and modify poor performance (Hargreaves et al 1997). As part of the debrief, learners are encouraged to reflect on their experience and focus on aspects that went well as well as those that could be improved. This is done within the peer environment so that all benefit from the learning. The facilitators draw on the themes to ensure key learning objectives have been met, for example, patient safety issues that arose during the encounter.

We feel an isolated session of training is unlikely to be sufficient to assume competence in the learner of the complexities of ward rounds. Such skills are developed and adapted over a physician's career. Ward round training is likely to benefit qualified doctors of all levels. With the statutory requirement for all doctors to revalidate their fitness to practice through the General Medical Council, the ability to demonstrate skills in this vital area of medicine may become a requirement in the future.

One of the wider benefits of the ward round training has been in the re-establishment of the multi-disciplinary in terms of role and value in the ward round process.

The addition of a nurse or pharmacist to the ward round process can provide vital additional information, and ensure continuity of care in terms of patient management and potentially improve patient safety.

Conclusions

As a result of the initial pilot at Surrey and Sussex, a collaboration was formed with Brighton and Sussex Medical School, the University of Brighton and the South West Thames Foundation School; the Quality Ward Round Project (QWRP). The Health Education Kent Surrey and Sussex technology enhanced learning programme has a five-year strategy to ensure that the use of technology enhanced learning (TEL) is appropriate and responsive to the changing health and social care environment. Simulation with a low or high technology focus falls within the remit of this strategy and our collaboration was supported by a grant from HEKSS to develop our ward round work. Its aim is to help deliver training centred around compassion and patient safety.

As a result of our collaboration we have now delivered training to all newly qualified doctors at a second hospital site, Western Sussex Foundation Hospital's NHS Trust. The training continues to develop and an additional resource pack is available for other Trusts keen to replicate the training.

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Biographies

Dr Natalie Powell is a Consultant Physician at Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and an Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer at Brighton and Sussex Medical School. Her interest in ward rounds stems from her work as Associate Chief of Patient Safety at her trust. She is also a member of the Sussex Simulation Hub.

Dr Chris Bruce is a Speciality Registrar in the Kent Surrey and Sussex Deanery and an Honorary Teaching Fellow at Brighton and Sussex Medical School. He has been instrumental in the design and delivery of the teaching sessions both at Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and during the QWRP sessions in 2014.

Dr Andy Kermode is a Foundation year two doctor who was one of the first students to undertake the training in 2013. He then joined the team to help deliver the QWRP at Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and helps to add the perspective of a working junior doctor to the training and feedback sessions.

Mandatory training in the National Health Service

DARREN BRAND

Abstract

Aim: To identify the factors that impact upon attendance at clinical mandatory training sessions.

Method: A quantitative approach was used, utilising a questionnaire sent to 400 randomly selected participants. A total of 122 responses were received, providing a mix of data that was statistically analysed, and open ended responses that were reviewed utilising a mini thematic analysis.

Findings: The study demonstrated that clinical staff hold mandatory training in high regard, and are fully aware of the value and need for such training. However, it was clear that a review of the current delivery format is required.

Conclusion: To ensure that patient safety is a priority, and that staff remain aware of current practice, the delivery of mandatory training needs to move away from classroom based sessions, and into the clinical area. Delivery should be facilitated by local experts in order that content can be tailored to the local area, rather than generic delivery. A review of staffing establishments would also facilitate the release of staff to attend educational sessions. From an educational perspective, we need to be aware that healthcare staff cannot easily obtain leave to attend classroom based education, and consideration must be given to alternative attendance method.

Background

The presentation delivered at the Learning and Teaching Conference summarised the findings of an MSc dissertation research study into factors that impacted upon attendance at mandatory training sessions within the National Health Service (NHS). The findings of the survey highlighted that although the way in which patient safety training for healthcare staff is delivered needs urgent review, there are also implications for staff accessing modules and study within higher education institutions. These will be made clear within the recommendations section of this article.

The inquiry report into the findings of the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust had recently been published (Francis 2013), followed by the resultant response document from the Department of Health (DH 2013). Unsurprisingly, the recommendations had a heavy focus on the importance of a trained and skilled workforce.

The author replicated a small scale study undertaken by a medical devices manufacturer after the study lead, who was responsible for the delivery of mandatory training, noticed that attendance in the classroom was becoming increasingly poor. In many cases, the sessions were only half full.

The majority of healthcare staff, and this study concentrated on nurses and support workers, are aware of the various mandatory training requirements that are required each year to ensure that consistently safe practice is delivered to patients. This includes infection control, basic life support and manual handling updates.

Mandatory training in healthcare exists in various forms, with the term 'mandatory' defined as being obligatory or compulsory. This term alone can lead to unsatisfactory perceptions of the training, as staff relate the term to didactic teaching. As a consequence of these perceptions, individual autonomy can diminish, a view supported by leading educationalists including Dewey (1915), Rogers (1983) and Freire (1972). Strong views and opinions are frequently voiced within the healthcare profession around the volume of mandatory training that has to be covered. Through data collection, this study set out to establish the difficulties experienced in clinical practice that impacted on attendance at such training sessions.

The study intended to gather and review data from staff, in order to make recommendations to promote and encourage attendance at future training, in order to ensure that safe patient care was delivered consistently in all areas of the hospital.

The initial review of the literature demonstrated that education and training are intrinsically linked to a competent workforce, delivering safe patient care. Without suitable investment in education and training, patient safety is potentially placed at risk. That said, it was evident that literature specific to mandatory training attendance is limited in quantity. The majority of material sourced is grey literature, made up predominantly of policy documents and Department of Health guidance. As a result, the literature review addressed the main issues around attendance at mandatory training, such as motivation and patient safety.

Maben et al (2012) researched the relationship between the care delivered by staff (as perceived by staff), and the influence of staff wellbeing, motivation and affect. Kang et al (2012) has suggested that by ensuring the ultimate wellbeing of workers, and in particular having a supportive work environment, the subsequent care delivered will be of a higher quality. The motivation of staff is clearly key, and this links closely with attendance at mandatory training sessions (Moore 2002). Although somewhat dated now, Moore (2002) speaks of the importance of empowering staff, the value of lifelong learning and of support staff in a theatre environment competing for opportunities to attend education and training events.

When commencing this piece of work, one of the key concerns noted was the number of mandatory training session cancellations directly related to staffing pressures, and the need for staff to remain in wards and clinical areas. This concern is substantiated by Dean (2011), as she has noted that nurses are failing to meet the basic standards required by the NMC to register annually, due to poor staffing numbers within their work areas.

The literature explored made it very apparent that the link between education, training and patient safety is clear: the latter does not exist without the former (NMC 2008a; HCPC 2012; Pearson 2013; Timmins and McCabe 2005; Dean 2011; Milligan 2006; McHale 2012 and Castledine 2009).

Research design

From the outset of the study, the main aim was to understand the motivational factors of nursing staff to attend mandatory training, and to establish if there were any perceived barriers preventing attendance.

A questionnaire was produced to capture a mix of qualitative and quantitative perceptive data from respondents around why they had attended, or failed to attend a mandatory training session within the previous six months. Questionnaires are recognised as being one of the most common forms of research (Dyson and Norrie, 2010) due to the fact that they are flexible and adaptive to the needs of the researcher. A well utilised questionnaire also has potential for influencing clinical practice (Coates 2004) and assists in eliminating interviewer bias (Davis, Couper and Janz 2010). This flexibility was of particular importance, as the research question has a strong focus around the perceptions of staff towards mandatory training, and needed to facilitate the authentic expression of views and opinions to be fed back as part of the policy review. Surveys also enable large amounts of data to be collected concurrently, and to effectively compare variables at the analysis stage (Polit and Beck 2004).

In essence, it was important that the survey tool gained the opinions and views of staff around mandatory training attendance, and their perceptions of what may improve attendance at such sessions.

The clinical target population totalled 2,000 individuals. It was intended to gain a 10 per cent representational view of this section of the workforce, so a total of 200 completed and returned questionnaires was the aim. Based on an aspirational 50 per cent response rate, 400 initial questionnaires were issued by the Learning and Development administrative team utilising a convenience (opportunity) sample approach. The inclusion criteria for the study was as follows:

- i Respondents must be a nurse, healthcare assistant, midwife, operating department Practitioner or allied health professional.
- ii They must have either attended, or failed to turn up at a booked mandatory training session within the previous six months.
- iii Staff must be employed to work within the acute sector of the organisation (as community mandatory training was different).

- iv Packs to be issued to all staff, irrespective of grade or banding.

Follow up packs were re-issued two weeks later to ensure that as many completed responses were received as possible.

Findings

Out of a total of 400 questionnaires issued, 122 were returned, equating to a 30.5 per cent response rate. It is noted that this reduces the confidence interval, and will have a negative impact on statistical significance. Of all the respondees, 99 (81 per cent) were female, and 22 (19 per cent) male staff, which is in line with pre-existing knowledge that the nursing workforce is predominantly female. However, the proportion of female to male nurses on the NMC register are not in proportion to this study, as 90 per cent are female and 10 per cent male (NMC 2008b).

Figure 1 below indicates the spread of ages of respondents, demonstrating that the majority are aged between 26 and 39 years (n=51, 42 per cent), closely followed by those aged between 40 and 55 years (n=38, 31 per cent). These staff are likely to be looking at promotion or career progression, and as a result, will be keen to maintain their level of qualification and competency. For those holding management or supervisory roles, compliance with trust policies is likely to be better, with positive role modelling demonstrated (Curry et al 2011).

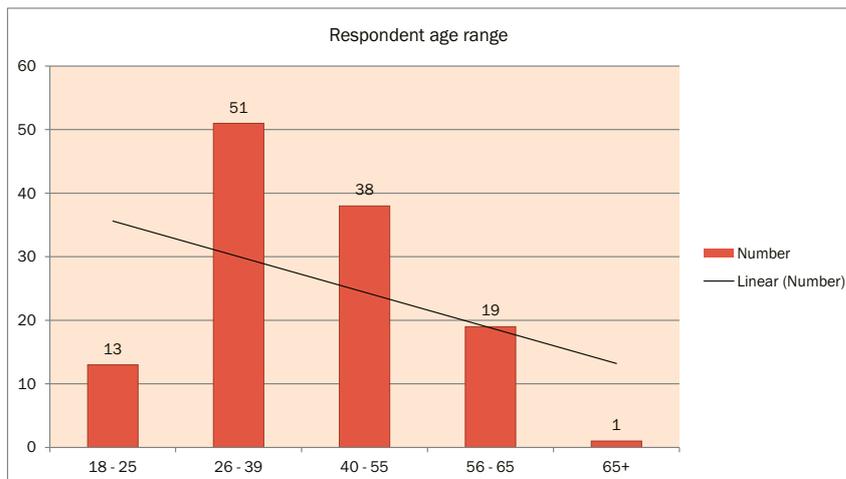


Figure 1 (Source: questionnaire)

Respondents were asked to indicate their professional role, and the term 'other' was used to classify all roles outside that of a registered nurse or healthcare assistant. The majority of respondents (n=72, 59 per cent) were registered nurses, with healthcare assistants (n=28, 23 per cent) and other staff (n=22, 18 per cent). Of the respondents, the majority held a diploma level qualification (n=50, 41 per cent), closely followed by a first degree (n=41, 34 per cent). Only two staff surveyed held a masters level degree (1.6 per cent), with no respondents qualified to doctoral level.

Although the study saw a relatively equal distribution of respondents in terms of years of experience in role, figure 2 (over), demonstrates that the largest group is made up of staff with the most experience: in excess of 20 years (n=34, 28 per cent).



Figure 2 (Source: questionnaire)

Of the 122 responses received back, 66 per cent (n=81) were full time workers, with 34 per cent (n=41) working on a part time basis.

In order to gain an understanding of the utilisation of medical devices by staff, respondents were asked to indicate if they used medical devices, such as infusion pumps, thermometers or vital sign monitors within their role. The majority (n=100, 82 per cent) stated that their role did involve such use, with only n=22 (18 per cent) stating that they did not use such equipment.

When asked if they had attended mandatory training in the last year, the data shows that the majority (n=98, 80 per cent) had attended, whereas only 24 (20 per cent) had failed to do so.

If a negative answer was given, respondents were asked to provide detail of why this was the case. The key themes identified related to bookings being cancelled by senior staff due to ward pressures (n=7), and the opinion that medical device training was not relevant to their role (n=7). Sickness on the day of training sessions was also a factor for five respondents. A number of comments were made relating to the rigidity of the day and timing of the sessions (n=15).

Respondents were then asked to comment around their own feelings towards the value of attending mandatory training. A review of the main themes was undertaken in order to group the responses given. Respondents were not limited to one response, and therefore the percentage given for these questions reflects the response against the overall number of comments provided. The largest response (n=47, 25 per cent) was that such training is essential to remain up to date and hold current knowledge for safe practice. A number of responses relating to improved patient safety were given. The one negative area (n=13, 7 per cent) was that staff felt that the sessions were not updated frequently enough. 24 respondents (13 per cent) gave a matching one word answer: 'essential'.

When questioned about potential barriers affecting attendance, respondents feedback that the greatest issue (n=43, 25 per cent) was low staffing levels on the wards. 22

participants (13 per cent) felt that there were no barriers and 15 (12 per cent) gave no comment, which can only be assumed to mean that no barriers were identified.

When questioned about factors that could improve attendance, no comment was given by the majority (n=40, 33 per cent). There was a relationship with previous questions, in that 21 (14 per cent) respondents commented that increased staffing would improve attendance. Staff also commented on changing the set day of training (n=16, 10 per cent), the option of local delivery, such as in ward meetings (n=14, 9 per cent) and variation in delivery methods, such as elearning, pod casts and written material (n=17, 11 per cent). It is noted that these statistics are not high, however, they were comments made by staff from across the organisation and not specific to one area. Staff were then asked to state whether they felt supported by line managers to attend mandatory training. The greater majority (n=110) stated that they did feel supported, with only 11 responding that they felt unsupported. When asked if their areas undertook any form of prioritisation for mandatory training, 75 stated that there was, and 47 responding that no such focus was given.

It is of note that there is a relationship between the two sets of data discussed above, as the majority of respondents (n=110, 90 per cent) felt supported to attend training by their line manager, and the majority of areas in which respondents are employed indicated that some form of prioritisation took place (n=75, 61 per cent).

In areas where staff did not feel supported, numbers were too small (n=11) to identify specific themes. Comments included a feeling of priority being given to registered nurses over healthcare assistants (n=2) and a lack of understanding of an individual's role by a line manager.

Areas in which prioritisation occurred tended to be based around a specific individual with responsibility for booking and managing all aspects of education and training (n=15, 16 per cent). A system that appears to be effective and commonplace is referred to as a 'traffic light system', whereby RAG (red, amber and green) ratings assist in the prioritisation process (n=10, 10 per cent). Similar comments related to a paper based system, and the departmental manager identifying gaps in training. Figure 3 below demonstrates the responses given to a question asking staff to identify factors that facilitate attendance at mandatory training sessions.

Factors facilitating attendance at Mandatory Training	
Response	Number of responses
Matron support	91
Increasing staffing levels	70
Time owing in lieu	51
Temporary cover for staff	51
Attend on day off	40

Figure 3 (Source: questionnaire)

Discussion

It was abundantly clear through reading the responses that mandatory training for healthcare staff is held in high regard, with a firm awareness of the need for sessions in order to maintain patient safety and ensure that all staff demonstrate consistently high skill, competency and knowledge levels. One factor that many areas reported, was the difficulty in releasing staff to attend such sessions, since when patient acuity levels are high, attendance is often cancelled by managers. The Royal College of Nursing (2010a) report this as an increasing concern, particularly since the funding cutbacks required through the £ 20.00 billion of NHS savings required by 2015 (RCN 2012). Nationally, a third of nurses have been unable to access mandatory training in recent years, as discussed in the RCN report (2010b).

Although not a common theme amongst respondents, a number of inferences were made around new staff to the trust who had recently undertaken mandatory training with their previous NHS employer, and were subsequently asked to re-attend session in order to comply with local policy (Mythen and Gidman 2011). Holmström (2011) advocates the use of training passports to alleviate this issue, which is currently being explored by the Local Education and Training board.

Concluding Remarks

The intention of this study was to gain an understanding of any perceived barriers or factors that may hinder staff working in an NHS trust from attending mandatory update training. The data collected demonstrated that as a trust, the staff surveyed are fully conscious of the value and worth of mandatory training, and are fully conversant with the need and principles behind it, but do struggle to attend due to both staffing and clinical pressures facing them on a daily basis. In some areas, a system exists whereby prioritisation for training attendance is given, but this is not commonplace.

The responses to the questionnaire highlight the place that mandatory training has had, and will require to hold in ensuring that clinical staff are able to access training to ensure that their knowledge and skills remain current, and as such, they consistently deliver safe practice and high standards of care to all patients.

In conclusion, within the rapidly changing NHS, patient safety remains a constant concern and is only delivered through a robust and well trained workforce. The literature and this study overall demonstrate that the requirement for regular training is unquestionable, however, the current access format is without doubt problematic. Several recommendations can be made from this study to improve staff attendance at mandatory training events, which are summarised below:

- Analysis of ward staffing levels, with particular focus around capacity to provide cover for staff to attend mandatory training sessions.
- Consideration of the set delivery day on which mandatory training sessions are delivered, thus ensuring that staff who work set days are able to attend/maintain compliance with the trust policy.
- To review the mandatory training delivery strategies, with a view to utilising

online media and summative assessment to confirm learning has occurred.

- To further investigate the use of elearning for the range of mandatory training in order to improve the accessibility for staff in all areas of the trust.
- To review the existing mandatory training portfolio, with a view to cutting down the frequency of training and reviewing the classification 'mandatory'.
- To consider localised training specific to the area in which it is being delivered by introducing a 'train the trainer' contextualised, role modelling system.
- A back-fill team facility, employed to cover staff to attend mandatory training, potentially via the Temporary Workforce Service.
- A full scale review of the existing mandatory training policy.

The study also identified the potential for such training to move away from classroom sessions that are booked into a rigid programme, and into the clinical area. This could be achieved through the utilisation of both educators and local 'champions' who hold existing link roles in areas such as infection control, falls and moving and handling. These individuals could facilitate local training at times that are convenient to the needs of both the individual and the clinical area.

From a higher education perspective, accessing study away from the workplace is more difficult than in previous years. As such, the Learning and Teaching Conference presentation highlighted the need for us to think about how elearning and blended learning needs to be considered when developing modules in order to facilitate attendance and participation by such individuals.

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Biography

Darren Brand is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Health Sciences at the University of Brighton. The research presented at the Learning and Teaching Conference was carried out whilst he was an educator in clinical practice as part of an MSc in Health and Education. A registered nurse by profession, Darren has held roles within the NHS covering operating theatre practice, education and management in clinical governance.

The two faces of flexibility: careers and jobs in contemporary academe

PROFESSOR EMERITA SANDRA ACKER, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR EVE HAQUE, YORK UNIVERSITY, TORONTO AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR MICHELLE WEBBER, BROCK UNIVERSITY, ST CATHARINES

Abstract

In Canada, as in other nations, the academic labour market has become fragmented, while universities have been increasingly corporatised. What this situation means in practice for doctoral graduates is that their chances of securing a stable and secure academic career have declined. Graduates may find themselves in a pool of 'contingent' (temporary) labour which offers 'flexibility' to employers and to a certain extent to employees, but is inferior in benefits and rewards to the traditional 'tenure track'. The permanent sector persists alongside the contingent one. Data from two qualitative studies allow a contrast between new tenure-track academics and recent graduates doing contingent work. Participants with a high probability of achieving permanent academic positions talk about loving their work and the advantages of its flexibility, while those in the contingent sector speak sadly about what has gone wrong in their efforts to attain an academic career.

Introduction

Drawing on two recent qualitative studies, this article reveals the varied experiences of relatively new doctoral graduates working in Canadian universities, depending on whether they have entered the secure sector where a permanent job is a realistic possibility, or are mired in the contingent academic labour market which does not offer equivalent satisfactions and life-chances. We begin by discussing the changes in academe that have produced such a differentiation of opportunities, followed by details of our research, an analysis of relevant results and some comments on the implications for academic futures.

Background

Writers across the globe now talk about the impact of neo-liberalism on academic work, bringing unprecedented degrees of surveillance, managerialism and corporatisation to university campuses. For universities striving to operate on business prin-

ciples, providing tenure or 'jobs for life' may seem incompatible with efficient management techniques. Prospects for new PhDs to become academics are very good in some countries, dire in others (Cyranoski et al 2011); overall the trend is toward declining opportunities for secure academic careers (Neumann and Tan 2011).

Putting aside, for the moment, phases of doctoral or post-doctoral study, as well as institutional and disciplinary variations, the classic Canadian¹ full-time academic career contains three ascending levels: assistant, associate and full professorship. Ideally, a doctoral graduate is hired as an assistant professor on what is known as the 'tenure-track', a status that gives access to a permanent position ('tenure') to those who qualify, i.e. are successful in a review of their research, teaching and institutional service after a probationary period of about five years (Acker et al 2012). While the prospect and experience of the assessment process creates high anxiety, there is some reassurance in the fact that most people who go through such a review in Canada are successful². A promotion to the position of associate professor usually accompanies or shortly follows attaining tenure. A further promotion to full professor is possible at a later point in the career, but an academic is not obliged to aim for that level, unlike achieving tenure, which is necessary in order to retain one's position.

This ideal-type description has been increasingly unsettled and fragmented in recent years as many positions on the 'tenure-track' have been replaced by a variety of differently defined and/or time-limited alternatives (Jones 2013). Numbers of administrators in areas like educational development and research support have increased. A so-called teaching stream has appeared that may in some cases lead to tenure but which has fewer if any research responsibilities.

Most notable is the rise in numbers of temporary or 'contingent' appointments. Contingent faculty hold full- or part-time positions, ranging from 'sessional' or 'stipend' appointments teaching one or two courses to longer full-time contracts. There is no guarantee of permanence or job security, and conditions and benefits are inferior to those of regular faculty (Field et al 2014; Jones 2013). Many doctoral graduates in the humanities and social sciences hope to become academics (Gemme and Gingras 2012), yet they increasingly find themselves holding a job or multiple jobs in the temporary sector of academe³. Canada is not alone in this uneasy situation, as numbers of contingent academic workers are rising rapidly in Australia (Lane and Hare 2014), the United States (Kezar 2013), the United Kingdom (*Guardian* 2014) and elsewhere.

1 This description also applies broadly to the United States, although it is generally believed that in the USA fewer new academics are successful in securing tenure, especially in prestigious research-intensive institutions. Canadian universities are not as highly differentiated as their American counterparts.

2 While there are no national statistics on this point, administrators and union personnel we spoke to in our previous research estimated that over 90 per cent of those who actually got to the point of being reviewed were successful, sometimes after an appeal. However, it was also indicated that individuals out of the mainstream white, male category may have a more difficult time with the process (see Acker et al 2012).

3 In contrast to the UK, at least in the social sciences, there are relatively few contract research positions available. Applicants for funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) are encouraged to hire masters and doctoral students rather than contract researchers to work on projects.

What remains of keen concern, yet under-researched, is the space between doctoral study and secure academic work, as researchers have usually concentrated on one or the other category (McAlpine et al 2013). In the Canadian province of Ontario, Field et al (2014) found only a few universities where published data on 'non-full-time faculty' were available. From studying available data, websites and collective agreements between unions and universities, they concluded that conditions for contingent academics are better than those reported in the United States, while remaining inferior to those of regular faculty. The lack of documentation of the contingent or contingent-to-permanent career probably lies in its unfamiliarity (as even now, many full-time academics are not aware of how rapidly the academic labour market has changed), general difficulties conducting long-enough longitudinal studies, scarcity of publicly available data (Jones 2014), and the nature of the phenomenon itself, i.e. 'contingency' as defined by instability and frequent job changes.

In summary, there is a crisis, not always recognised, around academic employment in many places, including Canada. There are not enough secure jobs in academe for new doctoral graduates, who may find themselves in a pool of temporary labour, the existence of which saves the universities money but may have deleterious consequences in the long run. For methodological and other reasons, there is not much research available that helps us document the situation and its impacts. Many questions remain unanswered.

Our research cannot, of course, answer all such questions. However, we can draw on two recent qualitative studies to illustrate the different perspectives of new academics on and off the tenure-track. A vivid picture of what it is like to dwell in the contingent sector of academe contrasts greatly with the satisfaction expressed by the early-career academics headed for permanence. Below, we briefly describe the two studies before presenting interview extracts that document the difference.

The studies

The first study, 'The New Scholarly Subject', concerns academics' responses to recent changes in university work, particularly around accountability. Semi-structured, qualitative interviews took place between 2011 and 2014 with 24 full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members, 13 women and 11 men, in the fields of education, geography, political science and sociology in ten universities in Ontario, Canada. As we were interested in comparing perspectives across career points, we selected seven assistant professors, eight associate professors and nine full professors. Twenty of the participants are white and four from racialised minorities.

The second study, 'Early Careers of Former Doctoral Students', builds upon earlier research from 2001-02 (Acker and Haque 2010, 2015a), in which semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 31 doctoral students enrolled in a Canadian sociology of education program. Although located within an education faculty, the department was oriented towards sociology and the study of in/equality rather than education per se. Reflecting the university's multi-cultural, urban location, the students identified their ancestries as Black (African or Caribbean roots), White/European, Indigenous, East Asian, Latina/o, Middle Eastern or South Asian. In 2010-11 we had

the opportunity to re-interview 11 women and two men from the original study, ten of whom had received their doctorates, taking anywhere from four to 15 years to arrive at completion⁴. Of the interviewees, two are tenured, three are tenure-track, six are or have recently been working in universities on a contingent basis as their main employment, one has been working outside academe but recently added contingent academic work in the evenings, and one is entirely out of academe⁵. All of those who are tenured or tenure-track have done at least some contingent teaching.

Academic life on the tenure-track

Surveys indicate that Canadian academics 'have higher levels of job satisfaction than their peers in other countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom or Australia' (Jones 2013: 78), likely because they have avoided national research-assessment type exercises, enjoy good salaries and belong to strong unions. When asked about satisfactions and dissatisfactions, most of the participants in the New Scholarly Subject study stressed the former (although they could be very critical of features of academic life). Strikingly, the assistant professors were the most enthusiastic. While they had yet to cross the magic line to a permanent position, they were excited about being in the academy. Almost all used two words in their responses: 'love' and 'flexibility'. These people love their work:

'I love teaching . . . I have to enter into my little bubble but it gives me such a high . . . I just love it' (Ellie)

'I love the research. I love the research' (Kyle)

They are delighted by the way in which they can set their own schedules, achieving 'flexibility':

'Just doing the work I want to do, also the flexibility, enjoying the work and the diversity of it' (Poppy)

'I can't believe this . . . I get paid to sit around and think about stuff and write. I think it's a gift' (Tricia)

'It's great the flexibility that you have in your day to day life and your work schedule and being able to stay home in your jammies and write, and your ten-second commute from your bed to your desk by way of your coffee machine' (Zoe)

Participants elaborated on how this flexibility contrasted with the limits of other jobs, especially school-teaching, and its beneficial consequences for family life:

'I love the flexibility of what I do - I know I teach on certain days, but if I want to have the opportunity to go on a school trip with my son, who's in grade five, I can do that . . . There's a preciousness to that that's really - I don't know if all aca-

4 Although the sample was one of convenience, as we did not have funding to travel or to transcribe additional interviews, by charting destinations of the whole group from public sources and word of mouth, we satisfied ourselves that the 13 resembled the larger group.

5 We use present tense here because these descriptions are based on our most recent information, as some individuals changed positions after the interviews. See Acker and Haque (2015b) for more detail.

demics fully grasp the magnitude of it, but having lived that other life [previous career], I go ‘wow, this is pretty special, this is pretty special’ (Ryan)

While downsides were also indicated, for example the difficulty of placing boundaries on one’s work time, they were outweighed by the satisfactions, and statements about negative features were often qualified, for example:

‘You know, work comes home with you all the time, grading comes home with you all the time, that’s the downside of being an academic. It never leaves you . . . I put in anywhere from 50 to 80 hours a week, if not more, sometimes 100 and you get paid the same, there’s no overtime . . . *But that’s the good part about academia, your ability to do it*’ [our italics] (Katie)

If we add in the state of the current academic labour market – several people commented on the difficult situation for contingent faculty – we might surmise that early career faculty on the tenure-track see themselves (as some say) as privileged and lucky. They have no wish to jeopardise this ‘gift’ (Tricia) of a career by any real resistance to the performative expectations that it brings (Archer 2008), even if the consequence is a certain amount of anxiety and overwork, as Katie’s statement suggests. Or as Kyle responded when asked how he felt about accountability: ‘I don’t think I feel anything but [that] this is part of the job’.

Academic life off the tenure track

Euphoric statements from the tenure-track assistant professors contrast markedly with the sadness of those in the early career study caught in the contingent sector of academe. Asked by the interviewer ‘So, is academic life what you thought it to be?’ Craig⁶ answered:

‘The sessional world⁷ is a bitter, resentful, strained world, compared to what I see on the other side of the fence for the full-time faculty. I get paid a fraction of what they get paid for, I do more work as far as the teaching load goes, and [I receive] no money for research and no money [for] going to conferences, covering expenses, updating equipment. None of that stuff . . . I had a sense of what the sessional world was, but I didn’t realise how administration makes it happen. Like I’m not invited to department meetings, there’s no conversation with full-time faculty. I’m not even on the same department floor as the rest of the department because of the way that this department has been configured’.

Charlotte also emphasised the divide between full-time and sessional faculty: ‘the thing is, people who are full-time, I don’t think a lot of them care’.

‘Usually the only reason why someone [talks to] me is to say how long are you using that photocopier? . . . That’s typically the way I’m addressed . . . It was really nice having a full-time professor the other day ask me how I’m doing. And I said it’s really great I’m teaching in the day. Days are a lot nicer . . . Instead of

6 Our practice in this study was to use pseudonyms with the first letter matched to job type: A for those who were tenured, B tenure-track, C contingent and D out of academe.

7 Participants generally used the terminology ‘sessional’ to describe what we are naming as contingent work.

saying oh yes, and then quickly walking off, he said, yeah, you know what, night time courses, I find difficult too’.

Often as well qualified as those who obtained secure positions, these participants struggled to understand what had happened to them. Elsewhere, we have described the way in which both external forces - the academic labour market and the doctoral program - and their personal lives and choices were seen as impacting upon their trajectories (Acker and Haque 2015b). In looking back, some focused on what they should have done differently; for example, having discovered that it was almost impossible to be hired without teaching experience, several participants wished they had found sessional teaching work before completing their degrees. Others mentioned competing family responsibilities. Denise, who had not found academic employment and had embarked on a different career path, commented ‘I was at an age where I was older and I wanted to have a child. If I had gone that route [moving for an academic job] I don’t think I’d have [my child]’.

Some of the interviewees, such as Craig, had not (yet) completed the doctorate, even after many years, making it more likely they would be left in what another non-completer, Carla, called ‘sessional purgatory’. Yet neither completion nor a good doctoral record guaranteed secure academic employment. Cecile had been an outstanding student but ‘I’ve never gotten anything permanent . . . What can I tell you. It’s been a bit of a mystery to me’. Restricted mobility was the only reason she could think of that hampered her prospects: ‘because my family was here, I couldn’t pick up and go anywhere’. But geographical mobility had not helped Charlotte, another doctoral graduate who had a series of temporary positions: ‘I had to leave the country, not once, but twice, for extended periods of time to pay off my [student] debt. And it wasn’t enough one time, I had to go back and I had to do it again because of lack of opportunities here’.

Participants had come to believe that academic politics influenced hiring. Charlotte referred to ageism: ‘the truth is you would like someone young, without a lot of experience, who you can control . . . I’ve been in places where they say here’s the salary range, how low will you go’. Two of the graduates described situations where they were not hired for a particular position despite being better qualified than the person who was chosen. Some who had held multi-year contracts or otherwise got to know colleagues, were disappointed when no one helped them move into a permanent job: ‘No one . . . has gone to bat for me in terms of saying ‘this isn’t right . . . So, yeah . . . It’s sad, very sad’ (Cecile).

Of the five participants in the early career study who are now tenured or tenure-track, only one, Alice, came close to going straight into a tenure-track academic position, after a few sessional teaching experiences. The three on the tenure-track but not yet tenured all spent years in sessional and contract positions, Ben after receiving the doctorate, Bonnie before, and Bella both before and after. Bella explained that she is now ‘fairly competitive’ because ‘I came out of my PhD with ten years of teaching experience in different settings’.

Discussion and conclusion

Looking at the contrasts between the junior academics in the New Scholarly Subject study and the doctoral graduates in the Early Careers research, we can speculate about what might account for different 'flexible futures'. There are indications that the assistant professors might have had more access to cultural capital. All but one were born in Canada (although two had lived for a time in other countries as children); the individual born outside Canada moved there as a young child. Only one was a person of colour. Most had solid middle-class backgrounds and two had a parent who was in university management. Three had worked as assistant professors in American universities (one also doing her PhD there), before coming back to Canada to take up their current positions, while a fourth was hired directly after completion of an American doctorate. Three others taught on contract for one or more years in the departments where they were subsequently hired onto the tenure-track.

While we do not have the same systematic background data on the participants in the doctoral follow-up research,⁸ they were more ethnically diverse and more likely to come from immigrant backgrounds. However, those with white Canadian ancestry had no obvious advantage in the academic labour market. One difference between groups is particularly interesting: of those in the Early Careers study who had been geographically mobile in their search for jobs, none had actually gone to the United States. Working or studying in the US seems to carry a particular cachet within Canada that may be influencing hiring practices.

The making of an academic is a lengthy process. On average, individuals in the social sciences in Canada spend four years in undergraduate study, two in attaining a master's degree, and six more on the doctorate. To be competitive, they must also establish an impressive publication record and demonstrate experience in university teaching. Consequently, they are likely to be in their early thirties or beyond by the time they enter the tenure track, if they do. Women may be up against a ticking biological clock and both men and women may be dealing with family responsibilities. Araújo (2005) discusses 'the PhD as a phase in time', referring to a practice in Portugal in which employed academics are given a *dispensa*, a period of time away from their teaching to achieve a doctorate. While the provision of this research leave appears enlightened, the lecturers describe it as 'painful and anguishing' (Ibid: 192). It is a 'waiting time that is characterized by doubts, uncertainties, ambiguities and hesitations' (Ibid: 196). Their lives are on hold and they can only experience the present by projecting it into the future. Similarly, McAlpine et al (2014) see the identities of doctoral students and early career academics in Canada and the UK as situated in a past-present-future trajectory. In the United States, Nerad and associates (2009; Morrison et al 2011) estimated that it took six years before almost three-quarters of social science doctoral graduates seeking academic positions were tenured or tenure-track. Our research suggests that waiting time may now be even longer.

Many commentators on the difficult academic labour market in the social sciences and humanities, locate the problem in the inadequacy of doctoral education, arguing

⁸ Moreover, we do not know anything about the fellow doctoral students of the assistant professors.

that there is insufficient training in the soft skills that impress non-academic employers (team-building, leadership, etc) and that (post)graduate education needs to be reconceptualised so that it is not necessarily aimed towards academic careers. While we agree that there is a strong argument for improving graduate education (Acker and Haque 2010), those arguments should not obscure the role of insufficient and inadequate employment opportunities, a situation intensified by the conversion of universities into quasi business-like operations, alongside decreased state support.

Within that scenario, we find useful Bourdieu's identification of types of 'capital' that act as resources in a 'field', the academic field in this instance (Bourdieu 1986, 1988; Mendoza et al 2012). In a context of many competing meritorious candidates, securing a tenure track position is aided by an ability to deploy economic, social and cultural capital (middle class origins, contacts and networks in the United States, and comfort with the academic life) in a way that institutionalises yet disguises inequality. Bourdieu (2000: 25) writes:

'One of the least noticed effects of academic procedures of training and selection, functioning as rites of institution, is that they set up a magic boundary between the elect and the excluded while contriving to repress the differences of condition that are the condition of the difference that they produce and consecrate'.

Both the pool of 'flexible' labour and the 'flexible' junior academics willing to do whatever it takes to retain careers that they love, are symptoms of a new and often disturbing academic order.

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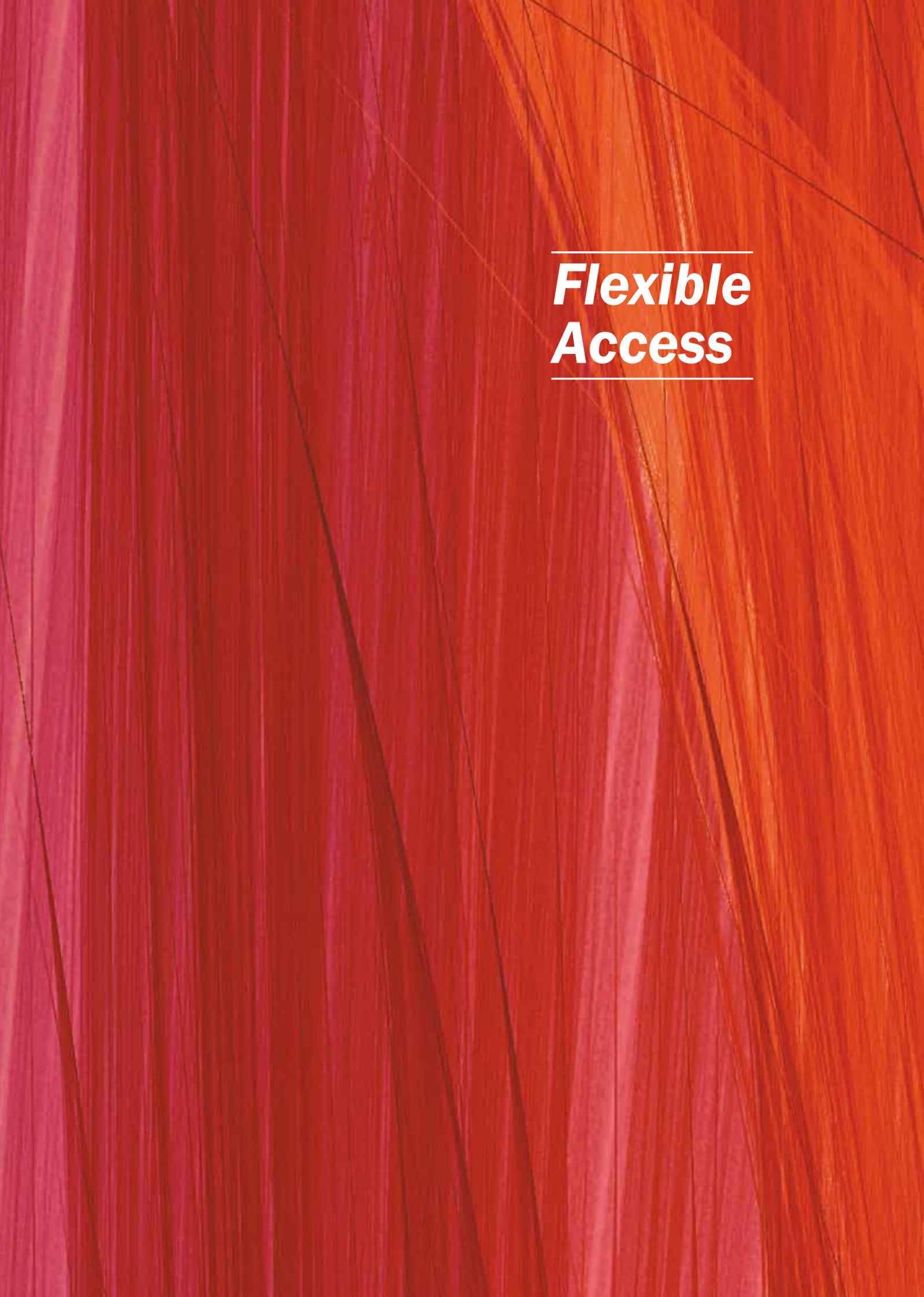
Biographies

Sandra Acker is Professor Emerita in the Department of Social Justice Education, University of Toronto, Canada. She has worked in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada as a sociologist of education, with interests in gender and education, teachers' work, and higher education. Her recent research has focused on changes in academic work, university tenure practices, women academics in leadership positions, and doctoral student experiences. She is the author of *Gendered Education* (1994) and *The Realities of Teachers' Work* (1999) and co-editor (with Anne Wagner and Kimine Mayuzumi) of *Whose University Is It, Anyway? Power and Privilege on Gendered Terrain* (2008), as well as numerous chapters and journal articles.

Eve Haque is Associate Professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her research and teaching interests include multiculturalism, white settler nationalism and language policy, with a focus on the regulation and representation of racialised im/migrants in white settler societies. She has also investigated the experiences of doctoral students and doctoral graduates. She has published in the journals *Social Identities*, *Higher Education Research and Development*, and *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, among others. She is the author of *Multiculturalism Within a Bilingual Framework: Language, Race and Belonging in Canada* (University of Toronto Press 2012).

Michelle Webber is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Brock University, St Catharines, Canada, where she is also affiliated with the Centre for Labour Studies and the Jobs and Justice Research Unit. She has published on feminist pedagogies and knowledges, the regulation of academic practice, university faculty associations and the work of teaching assistants and contingent faculty members. She has co-edited (with Kate Bezanson) *Rethinking Society in the 21st Century: Critical Readings in Sociology* (2012) (3rd ed) Canadian Scholars' Press and co-authored (with Bruce Ravelli) *Exploring Sociology: Canadian Perspectives* (2015) (3rd ed) Pearson Canada.

Contact Information for lead author: Professor Emerita Sandra Acker, Department of Social Justice and Education, University of Toronto, 252 Bloor St West, Toronto, ON, M5S 1V6; email: sandra.acker@utoronto.ca.

The background of the entire page is a close-up, vertical view of a wood grain. The wood has a rich, reddish-brown hue with prominent, wavy vertical lines and some diagonal streaks, creating a textured and organic appearance. The lighting is even, highlighting the natural patterns of the wood.

***Flexible
Access***

Widening access and participation: has the potential been realised?

EMERITUS PROFESSOR SUE CLEGG, LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

The third quarter of the late twentieth-century saw a decisive shift from elite to mass higher education systems in most advanced economies, and higher education is expanding globally. This expansion, however, has not delivered equal access. While some groups have fared well, women now make up a majority of undergraduates in some systems, some minority ethnic groups have done less well, and students from lower socio-economic groups still have poorer access and tend to be served by less well-endowed institutions. At governmental level the policy rationale for widening access is that higher education is a route to social mobility while the overall justification for expansion is conceived in neo-liberal terms as serving the competitive needs of the 'knowledge economy'. There is, however, evidence that there is a break in the linkage between education, graduate employment, and social mobility, particularly among groups who are the targets of widening access policies. Perhaps more insidiously, under the guise of employability, curricula are undergoing changes designed to enhance the skills students are assumed to require in order to achieve this goal. The Australian writer Lisa Wheelahan is one of a number of authors internationally who have highlighted the importance of social and epistemic access to high-status 'powerful knowledge': 'Powerful knowledge is powerful because of the access it provides to the natural and social worlds and to society's conversation about what it should be like' (Wheelahan 2010: 10). Other writers have raised questions about whose knowledge and from where. The lecture¹ will draw on experiences from the English context to pose questions about whether aspirations for more equitable higher education are possible in contemporary higher education systems and ask what widening participation might achieve.

There has been a truly remarkable shift in higher education from elite to mass systems. The United States was the first to achieve mass participation with 40 per cent age participation rates as early as the 1960s. This was followed by expansion in Western Europe and Japan in 1980s, and then by growth in developed countries in East Asia and Latin America. Both India and China have rapidly expanding higher

¹ I have retained the syntax of the spoken text to preserve the feel of the original and its context. A later version of this talk was developed as an SRHE Annual Conference Keynote 'System diversity, inequality, curriculum and (possibly) hope' and can be found at: www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2014/speakers.asp.

education sectors and huge aspirations into the future. Globally, tertiary education has grown from 19 per cent participation in 2000 to 26 per cent in 2007, but this masks huge disparities. Gross enrolment rates, which is the figure UNESCO uses for comparisons, show that low income countries had seven per cent enrolments compared to 67 per cent for high income countries, with Sub Saharan Africa at six per cent, the US at 70 per cent. According to a 2009 UNESCO Report:

'The 'logic' of massification is inevitable and includes greater social mobility for a growing segment of the population, new patterns of funding of higher education, increasingly diversified higher education systems in most countries, and an overall lowering of academic standards' (Altbach et al 2009: 3).

Now the key question of the 'logic' of massification is for whom? New patterns of funding mean in practice, a shifting of costs from the state to students and their families, while increasing diversification involves more private provision and for-profit international providers, and the overall lowering of academic standards stands as an argument that, as we shall see, is often a code for defending the elite parts of the system. What is not in doubt is that the most privileged socio-economic groups have retained their relative advantage. There have been some radical shifts, in the UK for example, women now outnumber men at undergraduate level, but this is not the case across all systems, in parts of Africa women's participation is low and when combined with data on class is infinitesimally small. In India lower caste groups, Muslims, and rural populations all lag behind. So the picture is complicated and class, race, and gender intersect in complicated ways. One of the problems with our statistics is that we can often only look at one dimension at once. Nonetheless, globally we can say that high income countries are doing better, and that the socio-economically privileged participate disproportionately in higher education. The issue of fairer access, widening participation, redress, and increasing social equality (the terms vary) is, therefore, an issue for all higher education systems and has been taken up by governments using different language, but based on a recognition that 'mass' does not equate with 'fair'.

In England, fair access to elite universities is as far from ever from being achieved. The University of Cambridge enrolled only 25 'poor students' in 2010-11 and 2012-13, where poor students are defined as having been in receipt of free schools meals, and the University of Oxford managed just 15 in both years. Students from our public schools continue to dominate access to elite universities (Boliver 2013). Government logic which concentrates on access is often at variance with those from inside higher education and beyond, whose interests are in social equality and in addressing the root causes of these inequalities. So in this talk, I am going to address some of these issues and in particular look at the official justifications offered for expanding higher education, and question whether these hold up to scrutiny. I also want to ask whether the potential of widening participation has been realised, and look more closely at what participation might mean and what sorts of knowledge students are gaining access to. So the talk is divided into three parts, the first looks at neo-liberal justifications and the knowledge economy, the second looks at the structure of higher education and implications for social justice. The third part asks about access to

what? and whether and how newer groups of students challenge existing knowledge practices.

Neo-liberal justifications and the knowledge economy

The two main official justifications for expanding higher education and widening access can be summarised as follows. Firstly, higher education is necessary to supply the needs of the 'knowledge economy' in a globally competitive world. This supply-side economic logic is premised on the view that better educated workers are the key to national prosperity and to the innovations that allow countries to successfully compete. The second argument is that higher education is the key to individual success and social mobility. Let's look at these in turn.

The phrase the 'knowledge economy' is ubiquitous but it masks a much more complex reality. As Philip Brown, Hugh Launder and David Ashton (2011) have been documenting in their research, the competitive logic of accumulation breaks jobs down and routinises them. This is happening to knowledge jobs in much the same way as we previously saw in relation to manual work. The profitability of knowledge companies depends on asserting property rights and managing the knowledge inside workers heads, in other words transforming tacit personal knowledge into explicit codified knowledge, a process Brown and his co-authors describe as 'digital Taylorism'. There are numerous examples, in banking where algorithms now replace the lending decisions of what used to be autonomous branch managers, but also in high tech industries. In one software firm, that Brown and his colleagues researched, an increasingly small number of people did the development work but profitability depended on what they call 'routine analytics' done by graduates in Bulgaria and India, where graduates can be hired at a third of the cost of British ones. For the majority of graduates therefore, the knowledge, autonomy and control in so called 'knowledge rich jobs' becomes less and less. Automatic assumptions about national prosperity and an educated workforce are also called into question. The dominant model had been of a post-colonial division of hand and brain, where the developed West would continue to do the research and development in head offices, ensuring that high quality and high paid jobs stayed at the centre, while the grunt work of manufacture was done elsewhere. What Brown and his colleagues show, however, is that this is changing quite rapidly, research and development is also being offshored and in some areas, for example, nanotechnology, China is already ahead of America.

So how does this relate to the second argument about social mobility. The same research shows that in the US for example, what we are seeing is the emergence of a high-skill, low wage workforce, where graduates are increasingly doing more routine jobs and where pay and security are no longer guaranteed. Mass higher education systems are delivering more graduates, which outstrips demand for the sorts of jobs which underpinned middle class life-styles and aspirations. The link between education, skills and income has been broken and in many countries levels of social mobility are static or falling. Instead we are seeing increases in income inequality, with the top one per cent accruing ever more wealth, and with this, the formation of an immensely rich global elite. Companies increasingly target only graduates of elite universities, a handful globally. Work by Jane Kenway and colleagues (Koh and

Kenway 2015) show how this competition starts early with elite independent schools preparing the offspring of the rich. This global elite looks to the top few universities in the world and has less commitment to the nation state as such. So the terms of the policy rhetoric of widening access, the claims of knowledge work and social mobility look increasingly thin. What was understood as the traditional middle class and middle class jobs are no longer secure. The working and non-working poor are increasingly left behind and, therefore, the necessity for a higher education becomes even more compelling in terms of securing most forms of even quite routine employment.

The structure of higher education and implications for social justice

So what does higher education in this radically unequal world look like? I am going to draw on data from England, but many of the arguments are relevant for other mass higher education systems. To start with some general observations, higher education is increasingly stratified, with elite universities attracting much better funding and most of the world's research resources. The Times Higher Education World University Ranking, powered not un-coincidentally by Thomson Reuters a major multinational media and information company based in New York, looms large in the corporate imagination of university managers. Getting universities into the top 100 (or 500) has become a key performance indicator in many national higher education systems. The expansion of tertiary higher education has not meant more of the same and there is an increased diversity among institutions, including the rapid expansion of private provision and also partnerships, so in some instances it is difficult to judge whether an institution is public or private (Ball 2007). This is particularly true in newly expanding higher education systems. Work done by Milton Obamba (2011) on the Kenyan higher education system for example, shows that public and private institutions face the same pressures, and that private provision is expanding in all institutions. So when we talk about access to higher education, we see that students are accessing different things in more or less well funded settings, and increasingly students are having to pay for that access.

One of the conclusions that has flowed from the flawed social mobility argument is that higher education is a private good, and that therefore, as individuals benefit then individuals should bear a large part of the cost. In England we have seen dramatic increases in fee levels making English higher education some of the most expensive in the world, fee levels in some American universities are higher, but then so is the level of student support. Now it is true that graduate earnings are higher than non-graduate, but that is because those in the bottom deciles have done so badly and this explains why, despite high debts and with no guarantee of highly paid jobs, student demand is holding up. It is instructive to note that even the British government calculates that there will be higher than expected losses on student loans because of the increasing numbers of qualified students who will never meet the income threshold required to repay their debts. While student numbers are holding up, we also see that there are large gaps in participation rates between social groups, particularly at the most prestigious universities. First generation students, including those from some minority ethnic groups go to less prestigious and less well-funded universities. In England, while 70 per cent of students from manual families go to

new universities only 13 per cent go to Russell Group institutions (Boliver 2013). The figures for Black African and Caribbean are 77 per cent and 6 per cent respectively, although other ethnic groups do better, Chinese students for example, do better than every other ethnic group including white. These disparities matter and are linked to limited social mobility because, as we have seen, large international companies are increasingly recruiting only from the top universities. Many graduates are in effect in jobs which a generation ago would not have counted as graduate professions. So yes, poorer students are benefiting compared to their non-graduate peers, but inter-generational wealth and privilege is largely being preserved.

So even in terms of a limited understanding of higher education as a private benefit, widening participation is highly restricted, but of course this was not the vision that many people inside and outside higher education had of widening participation. Many of us had a vision of higher education as being more broadly about social equality and about gaining access to the broader goods of a university education. So what has happened to these visions? To consider this we need to move beyond purely economic arguments about benefits, think more broadly about higher education curricula and knowledge, and ask what this broader sense of participation involves and whether these aspirations have been realised.

Access to what?

If we think more critically about access to higher education we need to consider the sort of knowledge, engagement and opportunities that are open to people. Elite systems were in many ways uncomplicated in that knowledge prepared mostly white men for their roles in the professions and as leaders and rulers. In the twentieth-century, science came into prominence and with that an increased stress on the importance of research, but these developments went hand in hand with a continued recognition of the importance of a liberal arts curriculum in the education of an elite. This is a pattern that we can still see in many elite institutions today, the cultivation of the mind and critical abstract thought is recognised as giving access to what Lisa Wheelahan (2010) and Michael Young (2008) among others, have described as 'powerful knowledge'. Powerful knowledge is knowledge which gives access to better more reliable explanations of the world and abstract ways of thinking, which Young argues 'provides learners with a language for engaging in political, moral and other kinds of debates' (Ibid: 14).

One of the critical questions in relation to widening participation, therefore, is whether access to this sort of powerful knowledge is also being widened or whether the curriculum is being developed in other ways. In other words epistemic access is as significant as questions about social access. There are at least two significant arguments with regard to knowledge. The first is a trend to what Wheelahan describes as 'vocationalisation', and the development generic knowledge that does not have the same characteristics as powerful knowledge. The second is whether as newer groups enter higher education traditional certainties and knowledge are challenged. I want to suggest that these two arguments contain tensions, and that like issues of social access these questions are not easily resolved.

Firstly, to consider vocationalisation. Unsurprisingly, given the emphasis on individual social mobility and contribution to the economy, much curriculum development has been driven by notions of employability, and in a rather more enlightened mode by the idea of 'graduate attributes'. The argument is that we are preparing our students for a future in which they will need the soft skills to negotiate a job market in which secure employment is no longer guaranteed. The relationship of employment and the achievement of a first degree is in many cases loose. And employers consistently assert their preference for good, generic skills, and where the possession of a degree is assumed. Manz Yorke is among many educators who argue that we should see employability as a complex concept that is:

'... evidenced in the application of a mix of personal qualities and benefits, understanding, skilful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience'.
(Yorke 2006: 13)

What we have seen are curriculum developments designed to support this, whether within the pattern of more traditional degree courses or increasingly in the expansion of courses which look outwards from the academy to the market. This is a process Bernstein (2000) analysed as regionalisation whereby the curriculum is generic and projectional. Many of these developments have taken place outside of elite institutions and are marketed and targeted in terms of achieving higher levels of participation. We have seen the development of generic undergraduate courses like business studies, which in England for example now count for the majority of undergraduate enrolments. These courses differ from traditional professional courses like medicine, where the knowledge is more defined and has an understood relationship to abstract disciplinary knowledge. Traditional professional courses were under-pinned by powerful occupational interest groups who could define appropriate knowledge.

In contrast many newer courses are more generic with an emphasis on the contextual and with a variable relationship to disciplinary knowledge. Rather than educational knowledge being understood esoteric specialist knowledge, these courses veer towards mundane and everyday knowledge and do not give their students access to the specialist knowledge that form the basis of power. This means that many students are denied access to underlying principles and as Suellen Shay (2013) has shown in the South African context, this means that students who come into higher levels of tertiary education from what were previously technical universities lack the underlying disciplinary principles to succeed. Of course in the South African context this is closely tied to the failure to redress historic disadvantage for the black majority. As Wheelahan (2010) concludes from her research in the Australian context:

'This professional/occupational hierarchy reflects the class structure in society more broadly. The professions are dominated by the social elites, while at the other end, lower VET qualifications in new fields are dominated by students from low socio-economic backgrounds' (Wheelahan 2010: 159).

I want to be clear that this is not a lowering standards argument, these courses are designed to appeal to a wider audience but it is the curriculum structure that denies students access to abstract powerful knowledge. The lower standards argument in its populist versions is broadly that more must mean worse, and it is often pro-

pounded by those who are keen to defend elite provision and not uncoincidentally the social privilege this perpetuates.

The argument for access to powerful knowledge is one that asserts that newer participants in higher education should have the same access to knowledge as their more privileged peers, whereas quality arguments tend to be circular - elite equates to quality. What is cheering in terms of the quality arguments are findings from research by Monica Mclean and her colleagues (Macleane et al 2013) of sociology courses in higher education. They found that curriculum and pedagogy could not be read off from the ranking of universities. Staff in less prestigious sites had maintained a curriculum that challenged their students in the same sorts of ways as in more elite spaces, and the differences they found were not reducible to institutional site. We clearly need more studies which look at the relationships between newer curricula, powerful knowledge and what students at less prestigious institutions are being offered, if we are to make epistemic access a reality. Suellen Shay's (2013) work for example is being used in South Africa as part of curriculum reform and the broader debates about epistemic access that are taking place there.

Secondly, I want to turn to the arguments about newer students and change. I don't know whether some of you at this point might be thinking that the argument so far looks like a conservative defence of dominant knowledge practices, but I want to argue that it is not.

Powerful knowledge provides better ways of understanding the world, but this is not to deny that knowledge is also shaped by vested interests and that there are important arguments in the sociology of knowledge. My position accepts epistemic relativism, all knowledge is produced by human beings and we have no unmediated access to worlds outside ourselves, but rejects judgemental relativism. In other words I do think we can make, always fallible judgements, about the validity of arguments and that is what powerful knowledge is about.

So what does happen when newer actors come into higher education? I want to argue that they can and do challenge existing disciplinary knowledge and that they can and do propose better, more valid arguments (Clegg 2011). I will illustrate this by looking at what happened when a newer groups of actors came into the academy in numbers, namely women in the late 1960s and 70s and when that expansion also coincided with a broader radicalisation of students. What we saw was that as these newer actors came into higher education, new questions were posed and criticisms developed, for example, of masculinist, colonial and post-colonial biases in knowledge production. This is a complex story that cannot be rehearsed here, but over the last decades we have seen the development of powerful critiques across the social sciences and humanities and to a lesser, but significant, extent in the sciences. Women, and other minorities historically on the margins of universities, were able to attack the knowledge claims of the privileged and show them to be lacking, in effect producing newer, better knowledge claims. Looking at new voices in higher education is important, and radical versions of widening participation aspire to increase the number of people from different backgrounds and to challenge who gets to ask and answer questions in a culture. However, it is important not to dissolve knowledge

questions solely into questions of voice, or to whom is speaking. To do this we need to distinguish between different theories of 'voice'. Mine is a sociology of knowledge position that does not automatically privilege particular voices (Clegg 2011). There are other positions which do. One is 'standpoint' theory, which in its strongest version in feminism claimed that women, by virtue of their distinctive experiences and through the development of a feminist stance, could have insights that others could not. Truth in this version is therefore (partially) relativised to social group and made context dependent. These issues of standpoint and voice are likely to come to the fore as more diverse students get to participate. The development of Southern Studies is another example of this. My argument is that we must attend to cultural diversity and recognition, but that this entails important knowledge questions and we should be open to ways in which newer and better (although always fallible) knowledge claims can emerge. Voice does not foreclose the matter, it opens it up.

Arguments about traditional disciplinary knowledge and newer knowledge claims will continue to be fought out in higher education and we should welcome this, even when it makes for discomfort. I recognise that many scholars would reject my critical realist stance and argue that we cannot make the sorts of judgements I am suggesting that we can. But these arguments are about genuinely expanding knowledge, not about offering a truncated and limited curriculum to newer social groups while continuing to arm social elites with the best that education strives to offer.

Conclusions

In conclusion and to sum up my arguments. Neo-liberal justifications for widening access are highly misleading in terms of assumptions about the link between education, high skills and high wages. Social mobility is stalled in many economically developed countries. When we look at access to higher education we see a highly stratified picture, with elite universities attracting the socially privileged and with newer poorer institutions catering for the mass of students, including those belonging to social groups previously excluded from higher education. In terms of access to knowledge, there are good reasons for thinking that less privileged social groups have less access to powerful knowledge and that this is a major concern for radical educators, who believe that participation is about social justice and access to the goods of a university education, not just about private benefits. Finally, I have argued that new social groups have the potential to change the terms of the debate and produce knowledge challenges and newer, better knowledge

So in terms of my question has the potential of widening participation been realised my answer is no, and it is likely to remain that way since many of the tendencies I have analysed are outside the power of universities alone to change. What I am convinced of though, is that opening up universities to new social groups is something worth struggling for and that we should continue to struggle for both epistemic and social access in equal measure.

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Biography

Sue Clegg is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Research at Leeds Beckett University. She was previously Head of the Centre for Research into Higher Education and Director of Research Students at Leeds Metropolitan University. She was awarded the Rector's Award by the University of the Western Cape and the Distinguished Fellow Award by the University of Auckland. She was a Mellon Visiting Scholar at the University of Cape Town in 2014 and has been a Visiting Professor at the University of Technology Sydney.

Sue's research draws on critical realism and feminist theory. It includes close-to-practice investigations, often in collaboration with practitioners, as well as more theoretical work. She has explored the social and pedagogical significance of the gendering of information technology and critically analysed the use of these technologies in learning and teaching. She has developed a critique of the debate about

the nature of evidence-based practice. In more recent work she has interrogated seemingly mundane pedagogical practices, such as those involved in personal development planning, and explored how these are understood by staff and students and how they are reframed in policy discourse. Drawing on this empirical research she has elaborated on the importance of theorising temporality and reflexivity. She has taken a critical look at institutional practices designed to improve teaching, analysing the rhetorical repertoire of learning and teaching strategies and exploring how these strategies are mediated in practice. Sue has also explored issues of academic identity. Most recently she has been involved in theorising the nature of curriculum and researching extracurricular activity, and the formation and recognition of social and cultural capital. She is currently working on the significance of theorising powerful knowledge in higher education and the implications for theorising diversity.

Sue was Editor of *Teaching in Higher Education* from 2006-14 and sits on the editorial boards of *Studies in Higher Education* and *Higher Education Quarterly*. She plays a major role in the Society for Research into Higher Education and chairs their publications committee.

Using critical incidents to explore students' financial circumstances: a barrier to learning?

STEPHANIE FLEISCHER AND ANDREW BASSETT

Abstract

The findings from a longitudinal study of the financial circumstances of University of Brighton undergraduate students has shown how the financial reality of being in higher education may affect different groups of students, and have consequences for academic achievement and learning. Moreover, the landscape of student funding has changed dramatically over the last 30 years, with the introduction of student loans for living expenses in 1990, tuition fee loans in 1997, and the recent increase in tuition fees up to £ 9,000.00. Therefore, it is important as university educators to have some understanding of the financial challenges faced by our students if we are to help them to maximise their learning experience. This paper will use a series of case studies drawn from the research of the financial situation of University of Brighton students, to illuminate how students manage the competing demands of full-time study and their financial circumstances. More specifically, the case studies reveal the reality of balancing paid employment and study; the varying financial support received by students; the impact of living expenses; and what students perceive to be a value for money university experience; and how these factors may reflect certain socio-demographic characteristics of the student cohort.

Introduction

The findings from the study of the financial circumstances of University of Brighton undergraduate students show how the financial reality of study may affect students, and have consequences for academic achievement and learning. Student funding has changed over the last 30 years, with the introduction of student loans in 1990, tuition fee loans in 1997, and the recent increase in tuition fees up to £ 9,000.00.

At the University of Brighton, regular student finance surveys monitor changes within the shifting national student finance system to reveal the reality of balancing paid employment and study; the varying financial support received by students; the impact of living expenses; what students perceive to be a value for money university experience; and how these issues arise in certain student cohorts. Focus group case studies are presented as critical incidents for educators to be applied to their prac-

tice, to better understand the financial challenges faced by students, and possible effects on students learning.

Financial assistance available to second year student cohort 2013-14

The financial support system has changed several times since student loans were introduced in 1990-91 (Education Act 1990 and 1998, Higher Education Act 2004). It was the first time that students were able to borrow money against their future earnings. Tuition fees were then introduced in 1998 (£ 1,000.00 per year of study), and were subsequently increased in 2006 (£ 3,000.00 per year of study) and 2012 (£ 9,000.00 per year of study). These fees can be met with a tuition loan, which is paid back after the student has graduated and is earning more than £ 15,000.00 per year. The other main source of governmental financial assistance is the student maintenance loan, which is offered to eligible UK/home students. This loan helps to cover living costs, although the amount varies according to whether the student lives at home with their parents (maximum amount available in 2014: £ 4,375.00) or lives away from home (maximum amount available in 2014: £ 5,500.00). As with the tuition fee loan, the maintenance loan is also paid back after the student has left university and is earning more than £ 15,000.00 per year. In addition, 'Student Finance England' (2014) provides a maintenance grant, which is non repayable, but is means tested on parental income. The University of Brighton also offers extra financial support in the form of a £ 1,000.00 bursary for students from lower income backgrounds, and there is additional financial help for students with disabilities, children or dependent adults.

Background to 'The Winn Report: the financial situation of students at the University of Brighton'

'The Winn Report' is a summary of the findings from a unique survey, which examines the financial circumstances of UK/home full-time second year undergraduate students studying at the University of Brighton (Fleischer and Bassett 2014a). It has been regularly carried out since 1992 to record changes over time, and in 2014 the twentieth survey was conducted. It reports on issues and changes such as students' income from 'Student Finance England', students' attitudes to student loans, parental financial contributions, students' employment circumstances and the effect that this has on learning and study, students' expenditure, students' credit and debt, and the extent to which students agreed that their university experience provided value for money. The survey is now conducted online, and in 2014, was emailed to all University of Brighton UK/home full time second year undergraduate students. 534 students completed the survey, a response rate of 12 per cent. International and part-time students were omitted and a sample of 452 student analysed. Since the nineteenth Winn Report, focus groups have been carried out in conjunction with the survey. In 2014 two focus groups were conducted with students, who had indicated on the survey that they were interested in taking part in a group discussion. The topics of the groups focused on how students handle their finances, how they manage to balance term-time paid work and full time study, issues around information on student finance, and how students view their degree in terms of value for money (Fleischer and Bassett 2014b). The research was restricted to University of Brighton

students. However, including other institutions would provide further insights to students financial circumstances.

Summary of the online survey findings (2013-14)

Financial assistance

The vast majority of the respondents (92 per cent) had applied for a maintenance loan, of which, 73 per cent received a maintenance grant. Moreover, 23 per cent of students received a university bursary. Another important source of income for 63 per cent of the respondents was financial contributions from parents, with 47 per cent of students' parents contributing to monthly accommodation costs. Just 12 per cent of respondents still lived with their parents. In addition, 62 per cent of respondents had used their savings since beginning their studies (average £ 1,745.00).

Employment

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their employment circumstances, and how this impacted on their university study.

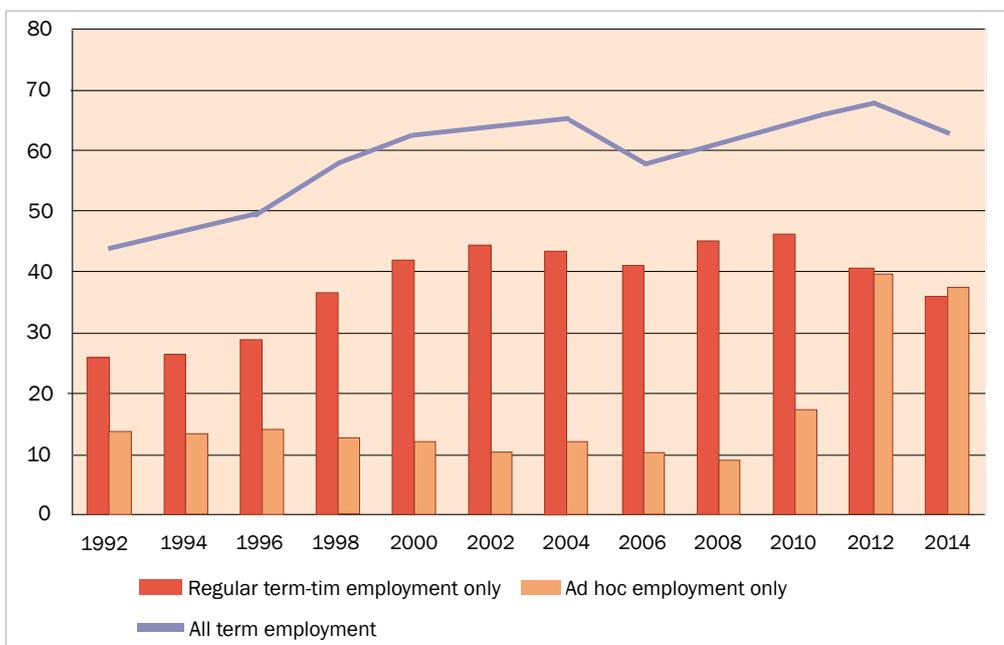


Figure 1: Term-time employment 1992-2014 (per cent)

Figure 1 shows that 2014 recorded the lowest proportion of students (36 per cent) in regular employment since the 1996 survey and an increase of ad hoc employment since 2013 (37.5 per cent in 2014). Attitude questions regarding employment were asked only of those in term-time work (63 per cent). Of those students, 62 per cent found that their work had a detrimental effect on the time they had available to study and 76 per cent of them stated that the combination of term-time work and academic study meant that they were often very tired. Those students who agreed that the quality of their academic work had suffered because of their employment, worked on average eight hours more than students who disagreed. 28 per cent of respondents agreed that they had missed taught sessions because of paid work, and those who agreed, worked on average, four hours more than those who disagreed.

Expenditure

The survey showed that the primary living cost was accommodation. 72 per cent of respondents lived in rented accommodation and costs continued to rise with 68 per cent of students in rented accommodation now paying £ 90.00 to £ 99.00 per week in comparison to 59 per cent in 2013, and 27 per cent in 2010. Table 1 shows other expenditure for 2013-14.

Living expenses	Expenditure
Rent	£ 90.00 - £ 99.00 on average per week
Utility bills	Less than £ 40.00 on average per month
Broadband/phone	Less than £40.00 on average per month
Food	£ 15.00 - £ 24.00 on average per week
Travel to university	46 per cent spent £ 10.00 or more per week
Books	37 per cent spent £ 50.00 or more per year
Printing and photocopying	38 per cent spent £ 20.00 or more per year

Table 1: Students expenditure

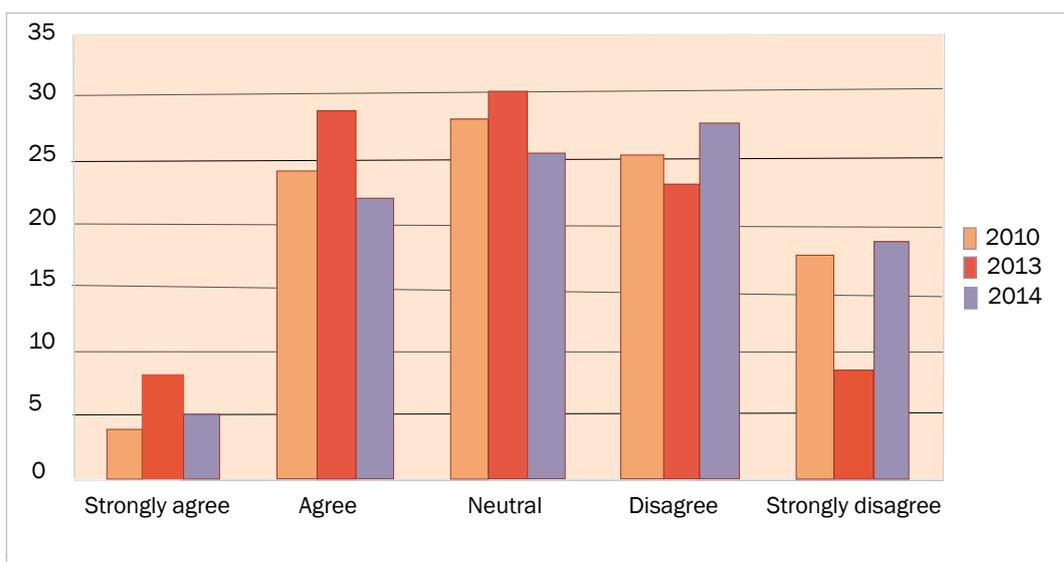


Figure 2: Extent to which students agree 'the university experience has provided value for money' (per cent)

Credit and debt

Over half (58 per cent) of respondents were in credit (excluding student loans), although this was more likely to be the case if they were living at home, receiving a university bursary, or getting financial help from parents. However, 21 per cent of the 42 per cent respondents who were in debt indicated that they owed more than £1,000.00. Furthermore, 13 per cent of all respondents had an outstanding balance on a credit or store card and 5 per cent of all respondents had a pay day loan. 57 per cent had an overdraft facility and 56 per cent of students with this facility had used it to the maximum. Only 11 per cent of respondents had accessed debt advice, although approximately two thirds of students were worried about debt while they were at university (64 per cent) and after leaving university (69 per cent).

Value for money

The final part of the survey asked respondents, the extent to which they agreed that their university experience had provided value for money. Figure 2 (previous page) shows that more respondents disagreed than agreed with the statement that their university experience had so far provided value for money.

Critical Incident as a reflective tool

Critical incidents have been mainly used in the health and nursing sciences to encourage practitioners to reflect on issues arising from their clinical practice (see Bassett 2013; Bassett and Baker 2015). For example, the nursing anthropologist Galanti (2008: xi) notes that:

‘People remember anecdotes much better than they do dry facts and theories. Theories that grow out of stories are much easier to grasp and retain than ones presented in a vacuum because they create a sense of empathy and resonate with our emotions’.

Using an adaptation of the occupational therapist Fitzgerald’s (2000: 190) critical incident concept, we define a critical incident ‘as something that is inherently not positive or negative, but which requires meaning, action or explanation; they are situations for which there is a need to attach meaning’. Conference attendees from the University of Brighton were presented with three critical incidents, which were extracted from the above student finance research (Fleischer and Bassett 2014a/b), and were asked to think about how the issues raised in each of the case studies related to their own teaching practice using the following questions:

- i What do you think are the barriers to maximising learning from a student’s perspective
- ii In what ways does the case study highlight any issues that you have encountered in your own teaching practice?
- iii Through your role as a university educator, what do you think could be done to address barriers to learning in this case or similar cases you have encountered in educational practice?

The following critical incidents are typical scenarios, which reflect real situations. However, The issues presented in the incidents were amalgamated fictitiously to protect participants’ identities.

Critical Incident A

Student A is a second year, 19 year old female photography student, and is the first member of her family to study in higher education. Although getting the maximum Student Maintenance Loan, Student A’s mother is unable to help her financially with day to day living costs and course related expenses. Because her tenancy in Brighton is for twelve months, Student A will have to pay rent when she returns home for the summer. Given these circumstances, Student A works in three different jobs during term-time. During a typical term-time week, Student A drives to Horsham a couple of evenings a week to work as a bar maid, and also works in one of the Student Union

cafes. On most weekends, Student A returns home (a two hour drive away) to work in a zero hours based job in a supermarket. Typically in a term time week, Student A works 20 hours on average, although her hours of work are variable. In particular, for certain periods at university, she has worked up to 45 hours in a week.

Critical Incident B

Student B is a second year, 24 year old female Criminology undergraduate. She lives with and financially supports and cares for her mother, who due to a chronic disability is unable to work. Although Student B does not state the type of job that she combines with university study, she works 22 hours a week for a company in Brighton. Previously, Student B worked 12 hours a week for the same company, but found that her income was not enough to support herself and her mother financially. The reality now for Student B is that to make ends meet, she has to work 11 hour shifts during the weekend. Student B also has dyslexia, which means that she has to take more time on core study tasks, such as reading academic material and writing notes. Although many students live in the parental home, this case study shows that at least some of them will have primary responsibility for meeting familial care and financial needs. Performing well at university therefore, is just one of their main priorities.

Critical Incident C

Student C is a 20 year old female studying Media Studies. She lives with her parents and two siblings and commutes by train to university three days a week. Although she does not have to contribute to the family food shopping budget or pay any rent, her parents are not able to financially contribute towards her studies in any other way because one of her siblings is also at university. Given these circumstances, Student C receives the maximum maintenance loan available for students living at home. Although Student C had a regular part-time job waitressing in the first year of her degree, she has not been able to find any form of regular employment during the second year of university study. Student C not only finds this financially hard to deal with, especially with the high cost of commuting to university, but she has always had some type of employment since the age of 14. Furthermore, Student C's course tutor is only available for tutorials or academic queries on a day when Student C does not have any lectures or seminars. Although Student C can email her tutor any time, if she wants to have a one to one tutorial with her tutor, she has to travel to campus, which is a 50 mile round commute. Thus, Student C is faced with the dilemma of attending a tutorial and paying a train fare that she can barely afford, or face the reality of completing course assessments without the guidance and help provided in the context of a tutorial.

Discussion and conclusion

Most conference participants were able to relate the critical incidents to a real life situation from their teaching practice, or they had encountered similar situations where students' barriers to learning were a result of financial difficulties. A few of the conference participants suggested that the negative effect on students' academic performance was sometimes due to students' bad judgement or unbeneficial choices rather than financial challenges alone. It was mentioned that each student needs personalised consideration depending on their individual circumstances. For

example, Student A could have tried to seek a job closer to university, which would have allowed the student to use her time more effectively. The conference attendees pointed out that this kind of advice could have been given by the student's personal tutor or their student support and guidance tutor (SSGT). Financial difficulties in particular, are known as a key reason for students dropping out of university. It was also suggested that relevant information regarding financial support (e.g. to students with disabilities) needs to be clearly communicated to the students, and that referral procedures via SSGTs are vital.

Another discussion point was that of student expectations. In particular, students' expectations of the amount of effort and academic work required, which can differ from the reality of full-time university study. Academic study may especially be underestimated where a student has other commitments, such as care responsibilities, which can take priority when pressurised for time or money. Furthermore, student expectations do not always conform to the expectations set by tutors or the university. Students who live with their parents, may save money on living expenses, but are often faced with high travel costs to commute to university, particularly if they live at some distance from the university. Students do not always seem to budget for these costs when starting their course. Whilst some of the educators at the conference session insisted that students signing up for a full-time course should expect to attend every day, other conference participants were willing to offer online tutorials, using available technologies to bridge the gap. Staff offering extra support could set an expectation for other staff, who may not be prepared or required to go the extra mile.

Finally, it was acknowledged that many students were disadvantaged because their parents' circumstances did not allow them to financially contribute on a regular basis to living costs. The role of the University of Brighton bursary was discussed and whether the bursary makes a difference to students' financial circumstances and experience at university. Students' learning and academic performance may be affected if parental incomes between £ 25,000.00 and £ 42,000.00 fall outside the university bursary offer. Therefore, it was suggested that additional research needs to examine what a university bursary means to students, and its impact on learning and staying at university. This would also offer a chance to find out more about how individual students budget and manage their finances, as well as their expectations and perceptions of what things really cost while studying at university.

In conclusion we have shown that whilst the statistical presentation of data is useful in highlighting broad trends around the financial circumstances of students, 'critical incident' narratives have demonstrated more of a capacity to connect university educators with the lived realities and experiences arising from these circumstances and how they could be researched further.

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Biographies

Stephanie Fleischer is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Applied Social Science, University of Brighton, which she joined as a researcher in 2005. From the start she was involved in delivering research methods teaching and soon became a lecturer with the embedded role of student support and guidance tutor, helping first year students in their transition to university. Stephanie is a course leader for BA (Hons) Social Science. Her research interests are in student financial circumstances, absenteeism and first year student experiences, with a specific focus on international student retention.

Andrew Bassett: After completing his PhD in Clinically Applied Anthropology at Nottingham Trent University in 2013, Andrew has been a lecturer and researcher in the School of Applied Social Science, University of Brighton. During this time, he has helped Stephanie with research on the Winn Report and Widening Participation, and has researched and published in the academic areas of cultural psychiatry, medical anthropology, and mental health nursing. Currently, Andrew is working with colleagues from Nottingham University Nursing School in promoting critical incident analysis as a method of learning about cultural issues that affect nurses' clinical practice.

What Works? Students' experiences and perceptions of belonging, confidence and engagement during the first year at the University of Brighton

JENNIFER JONES, DR RACHEL MASIKA, RACHEL BOWDEN, JULIE FOWLIE,
MARILYN FYVIE-GAULD, DR ELIZABETH GUY AND PROFESSOR GINA WISKER

Abstract

As a participant in 'What Works' (2013-17), an HEA-led programme that aims to enhance student success and retention in higher education, the University of Brighton is conducting an ongoing evaluation to investigate students' experiences of starting their degrees, including retention interventions in three disciplines: Business Management, Applied Social Science (Hastings) and Digital Media courses. This article presents findings of the 2013-14 University of Brighton qualitative study, which accompanied the UK wide What Works survey led by Mantz Yorke. Findings suggest that learning, teaching, assessment and interventions helped to enhance students' engagement, confidence and sense of belonging to peer learning communities in each discipline. However, data also identified transitional challenges that students faced and highlighted suggestions for positive change. This has helped inform further discipline related developments in teaching, curricula and interventions in 2014-15, contributing to the university's commitment to providing an engaging and successful experience for first year students.

Background

Jointly supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Higher Education Academy (HEA), 'What Works' aims to support student retention and success in UK higher education. The programme involves the University of Brighton and 15 other institutions (including Salford, Bournemouth, Staffordshire, Glasgow and Ulster) and varied disciplines. The ongoing project (2013-17) seeks to improve student engagement, belonging, retention and success during the first year through to completion, by building on learning from the What Works programme, through the HEA change process.

Our university is committed to delivering a transformational student learning experience, where students are active participants in learning communities, engaged in the co-production of knowledge across disciplines. We strive to develop and build on Student Retention and Success Framework successes. This aligns with other institu-

tional initiatives related to the student experience, within which effective school level practice can thrive, and lead to further improvements in student engagement and belonging evidenced through increased continuation and success. We are achieving this by reviewing current strategic strengths and challenges at institutional and discipline levels; continuing consideration of What Works research outcomes, implementing agreed interventions and evaluating their effectiveness on student engagement, belonging and success. What Works involves our staff and students across the institution and is facilitated by three schools, the Strategic Planning Office, the Centre for Learning and Teaching and the Senior Management Team. This supports a culture of institutional and individual responsibility for creating a sense of belonging for staff and students.

In 2013-14, the National Student Survey (NSS), other evaluation results and the What Works team identified courses which would benefit from change to improve student retention and success. Three courses in Brighton Business School (BBS), School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics (SCEM) and Hastings School of Applied Social Science (SASS) developed interventions focusing on induction, active learning and teaching and co-curricular activities. Course changes were implemented to aid first year students' early academic and social engagement, belonging and ownership.

Our article focuses on the three university course related retention interventions, their evaluation through qualitative research, and ways in which the findings help inform good practice in teaching, learning, assessment, student support and further enhancement of the interventions. We will present literature that informed the research, followed by a background to the interventions, key findings, implications and discuss how these have helped inform intervention developments in 2014-15.

Developing a conceptual framework for student retention and success

Linked to student engagement and success, student retention refers to whether and how long learners remain within education to complete a programme within a set period (Jones 2008). Addressing first year student non-continuation remains a key challenge across UK higher education. Reasons for first year student non-continuation relate to issues including: inadequate prior information about the programme and institution; finance; choice of course; academic challenges; extra-curricular commitments; belonging to the university; and friendship (Yorke and Longden 2008; Quinn, Thomas, Slack, Casey, Thexton and Noble 2005). In this context, Thomas (2012) found that students' development of a strong sense of belonging is crucial, and that belonging emphasises collectivism, collaboration and social participation as key motivators in students' success and engagement (Thomas 2012). Yorke (2013) proposes three interlocking spheres (academic, social and professional services) to instil belonging, helping to enhance student retention and success. His model for evaluating belonging focuses on four concepts:

- Motivation
- A sense of belonging

- Confidence
- Engagement (Yorke 2013)

Wenger (2009) argues that learning should take place through active participation in the social world. His *Social Theory of Learning* (2009) conceives students' learning as social participation involving: engagement in activities with people, playing an active part in social community practices, constructing identities within these Communities of Practice (CoPs) and reflecting on and interpreting experience (See Figure 1).

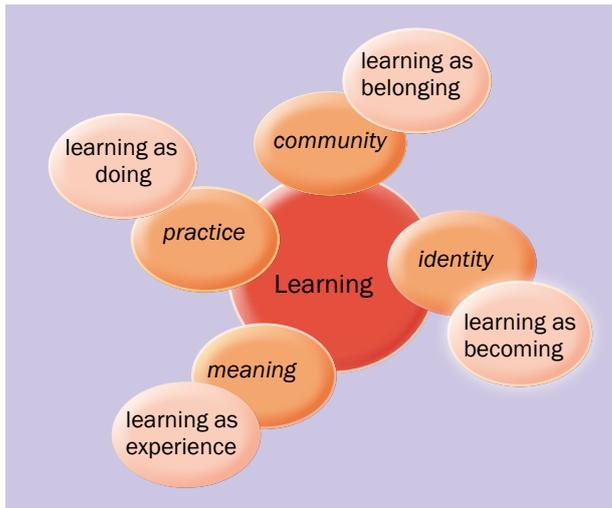


Figure 1: Components of a Social Theory of Learning (Source: Wenger 2009: 212)

Wenger's model (2009) aligns with Yorke's conceptual themes (2013) by describing the community, practices, meaning and identity dimensions that are imperative for nurturing a sense of belonging, building confidence and engaging students. The combined conceptualisations offer a powerful framework for designing and evaluating the University of Brighton retention interventions.

Student retention and success interventions 2013-14

Business Management

All first year University of Brighton Business Management students attend a Developing Academic and Employability Skills (DAES) module. In 2013-14, we introduced 'My Uni Course', a studentfolio blended learning resource introduced in DAES early in Semester One. Students used My Uni Course to reflectively record ten milestones relating to key achievements, and create a final webpage and Personal Development Goal plan. Milestones related to: Welcome Week, the Welcome Week Posters Competition, seminars, Team Skills Development Day, assignment feedback, their final year presentation, their business idea in the Business Project, the Development Centre, and their Business Project presentation and achievements. This intervention aimed to enhance students' belonging and engagement through supporting them to develop: emotional resilience, stronger links with their group and personal tutor, personal development planning skills, evidence of achievement, social knowledge construction and identification of role models.

Applied Social Science

Pre-university course

A summer pre-university course, specifically open to non-traditional students, aimed to introduce students to higher education by providing them with academic assistance and available pastoral support, including the Disability Team. Each day of the course related to a theme involving subject specific work including academic skills and an introduction to the library and databases. An important aspect was the involvement of other students continuing into Year 2, who would then become mentors to first year students throughout the academic year. An additional two day post-clearing transition event also took place in September. This included students from the pre-university course and clearing students. It was anticipated that providing students with a clear idea about the course prior to enrolment would help students focus on what they really wanted.

Blended learning project

This project, introduced within one module in Semester One, aimed to help students engage more fully in their degree. Competing claims upon students' time including caring responsibilities and work, were making it difficult for students to fully integrate into university. The blended learning project allowed for an adaptable way of working as well as encouraging friendship, linked directly to retention (Wilcox et al 2005), providing students with the opportunity to engage with and own their degree. The aim was to create an integrated means for staff and students to perform elearning tasks built on a flexible platform that allowed for rapid development of dynamic web pages and site structures.

Digital Media Courses

It was decided that an extended induction would help address problems of engagement and retention, whilst supporting students to:

- Make informed decisions about whether digital media is 'the right course'
- Engage in learning before they arrive and during the first weeks, in order to successfully survive the learning curve of technical modules such as programming without becoming demotivated
- Prepare for personal changes in the first year and be able to cope
- Form links with peer mentors who have befriended them before they arrive

The Computing Division designed an engaging pre-entry online learning resource: Count Down to Uni Challenge. New students were invited to complete tasks, including creating their own online superhero identity, to familiarise them with digital media courses and university life. The incentive to engage with pre-entry learning during induction week required students to complete the tasks extending into the first module in Semester One. Students were also asked to design a mobile app as a group assignment. Peer mentors, who were progressing into Year 2, supported new students in pre-entry learning and a social media space (Facebook) supported new student and mentor interaction.

Evaluation

We conducted an evaluation of the retention interventions, which included quantitative research (Mantz Yorke surveys); and an additional qualitative study (whose findings form the main focus of this article) to complement the survey. The survey sought to measure students' attitudes about involvement in higher education. The qualitative-based focus groups generated rich data from which we were able to gain a better understanding of students' views on, and experiences of, starting their degrees including the retention interventions. Together they have helped contribute to identifying strategic factors that lead to positive change.

Appreciative Inquiry approach

We designed a two stage small-scale qualitative study adopting focus group discussions incorporating Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a research approach, categorised as Action Research, using focus groups as a means for participants to reflect on and discuss positive aspects of their experiences in relation to a topic, and build on these experiences in order to suggest future enhancements to practices and processes within organisations. In theory, such suggestions for change are then put into practice (Ludema et al 2006). The first stage of our research in autumn 2013, consisted of two focus groups with nine first year Business Studies students and seven first year Applied Social Science students. The second stage, of three focus groups in February 2014 involved eight first year Digital Media students, four first year Business students and five first year Applied Social Science students.

In the focus groups, we posed questions to group participants, focusing on beneficial aspects of retention interventions that they experienced. Participants built on positive experiences, as a means to explore possibilities related to the future development of interventions (Fitzgerald, Murrell and Newman 2002). AI allowed for opportunities for participants to talk about problems. When negative views emerged during discussions we explored these further, in order to elicit suggestions for positive change and solutions, following suggestions made by Bushe (2007).

Findings

Linking back to our conceptual framework for this study (Wenger 2009; Yorke 2013), overarching themes that recurred across focus groups included the following:

- Belonging to the university: feeling welcome and developing a student identity
- Belonging to the course: Communities of Practice (COPs)
- Engagement: subject enjoyment and the lecturer's teaching style
- Confidence: positive online experiences, building on previous learning and supportive staff and mentors
- Challenges: early transition and online issues

The qualitative findings are supported by the University of Brighton's (unpublished) What Works survey results (University of Brighton 2013-14), which show that at the time of the survey, University of Brighton students appear on average more confident

and engaged than in other universities. However, the survey also shows that University of Brighton students' sense of belonging appears slightly lower on average than in other universities. See Figure 2:

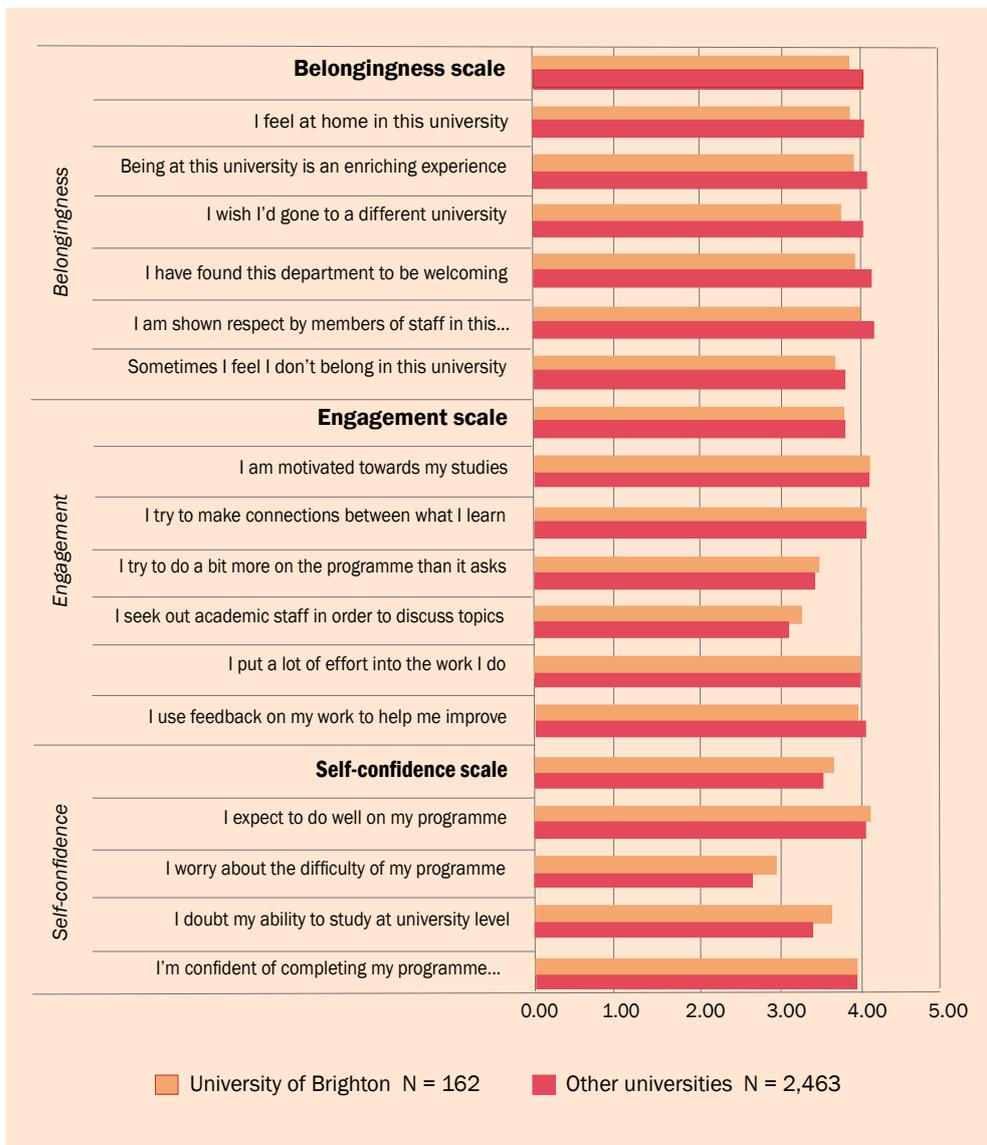


Figure 2: University of Brighton Engagement and Belonging Survey (2013-14)

The second stage of focus groups suggested that students continued to negotiate new academic identities linked to learning communities. Participants' strengthened membership of CoPs supported their learning in different contexts, such as group activities in courses, and social networks such as Facebook. Participants appeared engaged by subjects they enjoyed most with disquiet over options they considered irrelevant. Participants' confidence increased as they successfully completed course-work, assignments, exams, presentations and learned how to work as a team. There was an increasing focus on employability in group discussion, where students described activities that were relevant to future work as 'exciting'. Some participants noted course improvements related to working online and overcoming transition challenges, but issues relating to some online platforms' relevance and group work

issues were also mentioned. The following sections expand on the key themes of belonging, engagement, confidence and challenges.

Belonging to the university: feeling welcome and developing a student identity

Across focus groups participants described varied ways in which they felt that they belonged to the university. Supported by Thomas' earlier work (2012), factors that enhanced student belonging and identity related to people, friendship and communication including:

- The welcoming university environment
- Participating in extra-curricular activities
- Having and using a UniCard
- Identifying with other students
- Making friends
- Parents who valued education and sharing their values
- Regular emails and support from university support staff, academic staff and mentors

University of Brighton student identity development linked to belonging was also evidenced by factors that helped students to self-identify with the university, including:

- Countdown to Uni Challenge in Digital Media
- Living near or in the university
- Signing up as a student ambassador
- Visiting the library regularly
- Openness to starting an LGBT society in Hastings

Belonging to the course: Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Supported by Wenger (2009), belonging to a course peer learning community, both face to face and online, was a strong overarching theme. Participants described different aspects of belonging to a CoP they found beneficial:

- Friendship
- Mutual respect
- Shared goals
- Working as a team
- Contributing individual strengths
- Helping each other

- Discussion and debate
- Online communication through social media
- Employability

Students reported that with time they got to know each other, grew more relaxed with peers and lecturers, and realised that other students experienced mutual challenges and shared interests. Participating in group activities developed students' sense of belonging to the course and interpretations of what was being learned (Wenger 2009). Participants described their changing abilities aided by collaboration, group configurations, and teamwork to achieve learning outcomes. The Applied Social Science web-resource, Kura, and Count Down to Uni Challenge in Digital Media, exemplify how belonging to course learning communities was facilitated through online communication. Creating a mobile app as a group assignment in Digital Media was another means of enhancing participants' sense of belonging to a peer community. Business Management participants often spoke of seminars, group activities and assignments as strengthening their peer community membership, and were conscious of the need to work effectively as a team in terms of future employability.

Student engagement in learning

Yorke and Longden (2008) emphasised the importance of institutional commitments to learning and engagement, incorporating academic and social components in curriculum design. Exciting aspects of starting degrees were often described by participants in this study as:

- Intellectual challenge of working and thinking at a higher level
- Freedom to work independently and creatively
- Love of subject
- Being in a new place and meeting new people
- Working collaboratively both face to face and online
- Inspirational teaching
- Lecturers' enthusiasm, warmth and encouragement
- Connecting online resources and activities (e.g. Kura, Basecamp and My Uni Course) to learning

Course structures that reinforced learning, satisfaction, performance in exams and course work, and stronger relationships with staff and peers, were factors that participants emphasised in the second stage of focus groups as aiding their motivation. In Digital Media, students appeared engaged by the practical nature of the course, work experience, networking opportunities, and designing a website. In Applied Social Science, students were engaged by a passion for their subject, learning relevant to their own lives and inspired teaching. In addition, students appeared increasingly

engaged by course experiences that were linked to employability, particularly in Business Management and Digital Media.

Students' developing confidence

Yorke (2013) and Thomas (2012) describe confidence as a main building block for student engagement and retention. Confidence building aspects of students' early experiences of starting degrees often mentioned in our study included:

- Building on previous learning
- Achieving academic success
- Positive constructive feedback from lecturers
- Approachability of academic and support staff, and mentors
- Leadership opportunities
- Employment related experiences
- Working as a team
- Developing effective time management
- Experiences of living independently
- The safety net of course online environments

The second stage of focus groups provided rich descriptions of students' increased confidence related to learning to learn, teamwork and overcoming challenges. These changing abilities were evidenced by students' descriptions of achievements and how these related to learning activities, processes and outcomes. In Business Management, confidence building benefits of My Uni Course that were often cited, included its provision for:

- Opportunities to reflect
- A record of learning development
- A means to receive feedback

In Digital Media, participants mentioned how designing a mobile app and website helped to enhance their sense of achievement and confidence. In Applied Social Science, students found that the pre entry activities helped them to form links with peers and staff, increasing their confidence.

Students' first year challenges

Aspects of students' experiences that were less engaging included some induction activities that aimed to help students settle in, but which were considered irrelevant to students' learning. Additional early challenges often mentioned across focus groups included: the overwhelming amount of information, pace of study and technical issues when working online. The second stage of focus groups highlighted fewer

technical challenges, but revealed heightened questioning of the relevance of some online platforms. Group work emerged both as a challenge and an achievement for many participants across disciplines, where students were learning how to work together, and recognising how to rely on each other's strengths to achieve learning outcomes.

Discussion and conclusion

Most participants across focus groups were engaged with learning and being at university. The data suggests that the key dimensions of Wenger's (2009) Social Learning Theory (meaning, identity, community and practice) were in place for some learners. Many participants felt they belonged to their university and course, and were developing a strong discipline identity, which Thomas (2012) suggests supports retention. An overarching theme related to students' belonging to their course, was their membership of peer CoPs where face to face and online collaboration and discussion enhanced student engagement, confidence and belonging.

Positive experiences of learning, teaching, assessment and pastoral support when starting degrees and settling in to university, were evident across the dataset. These enhanced student motivation, belonging, confidence and engagement, Yorke's (2013) conceptual thematic categories. Participants' sense of belonging, regarding academic and social engagement was high. Their sense of being accepted, valued, included and encouraged by teachers and peers, and feeling an important part of the life and activity of the classroom (Thomas 2012) were demonstrated.

However, participants expressed mixed feelings regarding interventions designed to help support their transition into university, where positive experiences generally related to activities which were directly relevant to academic content, such as sample lectures; and less positive experiences related to activities considered irrelevant to their course. Many participants across groups talked about being overwhelmed by information, the pace of work and life when starting university. Some participants across groups talked about frustrating online difficulties early in the first semester.

The following ways in which discipline specific challenges could be overcome through development were suggested by participants:

In Business Management/My Uni Course:

- Improved accessibility and user friendliness of the online platform
- Incorporated hyperlinks to the external business world
- Publicity relating to student events
- Milestones relevant to academic learning
- Greater student online collaboration, discussion and debate
- Articulating goals and ways in which to achieve these
- Recording achievements and looking back on stages of progress

In Applied Social Science

- Printed hand-outs and reading materials should be provided for all lectures
- Academic writing support should be provided early in the first semester
- Bursaries should be more fairly allocated

In Digital Media

- Interactive group activities, such as designing an app, would be well placed in the first semester in order to encourage the formation of a peer CoP
- More local media industry trips/placements would help to motivate students

The findings suggest that enhancing student engagement and success involves learning, teaching and support provision, including retention interventions that promote student face to face and online learning communities. Such provision should address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, disciplines and schools. This research also identifies three significant foci related to enhancing learning, teaching, assessment, support and discipline related interventions:

- i Building student engagement means enhancing processes that support learning such as learning communities, in ways that cater for student diversity.
- ii Varied institutional provisions, both academic and extracurricular, can help convey the message to students from diverse backgrounds that they belong. However, current university learning, teaching and support practices that influence students' identity development might still be enhanced, in order to better cater for students' individual needs related to: housing, transport, finance and work life balance.
- iii Greater attention might be paid to different types of first year student learning communities (such as social media), and how these can be integrated in teaching and retention activities aimed at fostering engagement and belonging.

What Works programme: moving ahead

In 2014-15, the University of Brighton What Works programme focuses on implementing change informed by the findings from last year's research (quantitative and qualitative); and evaluating the impact of developed course activities and retention interventions again this academic year. We are continuing with quantitative and qualitative evaluation along the lines of last year. However, this year, the qualitative research is exploring staff as well as student perceptions of learning, teaching, assessment, support and retention interventions.

Retention Interventions have been developed as follows. In Business Management, My Uni Course: studentfolio is simpler, requiring students to make three learning journal entries rather than 10 milestones; relates more fully to academic course content and rewards students' engagement through success by their production of a publishable webpage. There is greater emphasis on students' employability, since the webpage can be made available to potential employers. In Digital Media courses,

pre-entry activities are more relevant to the course. Welcome Week included an app design workshop to help foster the building of a peer-learning community, and help increase students' confidence by being prepared from the beginning of Semester One. Potential group work issues are being monitored closely and team skills are being promoted by tutors. There is a greater focus on students' understanding of future employability. In Applied Social Science there is increased support for students' academic skills development, including academic writing. This is being facilitated by a more effective and formal mentoring scheme. In addition, resource provision have been improved, including pre-printed readers and hand-outs for all modules.

Lessons learned and ongoing challenges

Although improvements in student retention rates across the university have been recently evident, enhancing student engagement and retention still remains a key focus for our university. The work of the project team, and the related Success, Retention and Improvement Team (SRIT) to which it reports, will contribute through its range of activities across the year to continually maintain the institution's focus on the strategically important issue of student retention and success.

Added to the benefits of an increased focus of attention on the three What Works discipline areas, there has been the perhaps less intended, but equally welcomed benefit of bringing a cross-institutional team of interested colleagues together to share experiences, knowledge and support.

The longitudinal nature of the project means that findings are still emerging and the available data including: the focus group outcomes, the Engagement and Belonging Survey results and institutional course level progression data, need further triangulation. It will then be critical that the institution carefully reviews outcomes and themes, and identifies other areas with challenges in these areas that could benefit from lessons learned. Ensuring the continued dissemination and discussion of themes and outcomes as they emerge will be key in assisting this process. One of the challenges going forward will be to continue to keep this issue at the top of the institutional agenda, alongside other key and potentially competing areas of institutional priority.

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Biographies

Jennifer Jones is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Learning and Teaching, University of Brighton. Her recent research interests focus on the experiences of first year students, international students, student transitions, engagement and retention. She is currently studying for an EdD exploring PhD students' experience of participating in learning communities, and ways in which this influences their academic identity development, engagement and success.

Dr Rachel Masika is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Learning and Teaching, University of Brighton, researching higher education. Rachel has an MSc (Econ) and PhD in Development Studies, and is currently investigating social justice and critical professionalism in higher education institutions as well as the meso-level dynamics of teaching, learning and curriculum change.

Rachel Bowden is Head of Institutional Research and Deputy Director of the Strategic Planning Office at the University of Brighton. Prior to this she was a research fellow in the university's Education Research Centre, working for the then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Watson. Her research interests lie in the area of higher education research, in particular; aspects of the student experience that relate to retention and success; higher education policy and management; the development of professional doctorates in the UK; university league tables; and the postgraduate taught student experience. Rachel is currently project managing the university's par-

ticipation in the HEA's What Works? Student Retention and Success Programme and is the joint Institutional Representative for the university in the HEFCE-funded collaborative Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP).

Julie Fowlie's professional background is in management development within the financial services sector. She is a Principal Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at Brighton Business School. Her main academic interests are exploring the role of HEIs, and specifically business curriculum, in developing employability behaviours; seeing the distinction between behaviours as opposed to skills and knowledge as important. She has co-authored a book designed to help students develop good personal, academic and employability skills which was first published in 2009, and the second edition is due to be published in 2015.

Marylynn Fyvie-Gauld is a Principal Lecturer at the University of Brighton and has had an interest in education of non-traditional students since 1995, when her research on undergraduate student experience was published. Marylynn is the Course Leader for Applied Social Science delivered at the Hastings campus of the University of Brighton, a degree that appeals to the local and often mature non-traditional students. The course has been involved in the HEA 'What Works' since 2012, and has developed a number of initiatives specifically involving non-traditional, mature students.

Dr Elizabeth Guy is a Senior Lecturer in the Division of Computing, University of Brighton and Course Leader for the undergraduate degrees in Digital Media and Digital Media Development. Her PhD thesis was in the area of Computer supported collaborative work and she maintains a strong interest in social and cultural aspects of software design, development and use.

Gina Wisker is Professor of Higher Education and Contemporary Literature, and the Head of the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Brighton. Her role is leading educational development for the university, working with others towards the achievement of the learning and teaching strategy, and engaging with and leading higher education research across the university and partner colleges. Gina is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and a National Teaching Fellow. Gina researches and publishes in both learning and teaching, specialising in post-graduate student learning and supervisory practices, and in her discipline.

Beyond the curriculum: how the Overtime project prepares students for life and work in liquid modern times

SIMON McENNIS AND BEN PARSONS

Abstract

The Overtime project is an initiative which aims to help prepare students for life and work in an uncertain world. It is a web-based VLE owned and operated by the students on the BA (Hons) Sport Journalism course at the University of Brighton. On the surface, the website is vocationally beneficial by facilitating journalism practice in a trusted environment, while improving employability in acting as a showcase to prospective employers. However, the Overtime project also operates at a deeper educational level in its empowering of students and existence within a troublesome space between curricular and extra-curricular. This paper discusses the pedagogical theory and concepts behind the project before outlining its implementation. It concludes by arguing that the Overtime project offers a resistant model to the neo-liberalism and marketisation of UK universities by occupying a position more in tune with the needs and trajectory of a liquid modern society and knowledge economy.



Figure 1 (above) Overtime home page

Figure 2 (left) Printed edition of Overtime in the local newspaper, Eastbourne Herald

Introduction

One of the key challenges facing providers of higher education courses is how to adequately prepare graduates for life and work in a society that is experiencing rapid change driven by global capitalist systems and information technology. It is no longer satisfactory to seek to develop knowledge, skills and abilities according to the current state of society, industry and economy knowing they will still carry long-term relevance and applicability. The future requirements of the knowledge economy and information society are therefore characterised by uncertainty (Barnett 2004).

Higher education therefore requires a broader pedagogy that prepares students to be flexible, innovative and adaptable in a rapidly evolving world. There is a need to think beyond the curriculum, because rigid academic structures built around performance assessment do not reflect the increasing complexity of the post-industrial world. To fully prepare students for an unknown future then, higher educators need to step outside university education as a measure of performance and explore the liminal and troublesome spaces between curriculum and non-curriculum. This involves a re-consideration of educators' roles and responsibilities in creating a liquid and fluid learning experience, that doesn't necessarily fit into formal structures and frameworks.

This paper outlines a project to achieve these aims on the University of Brighton's BA (Hons) Sport Journalism programme, which enrolls more than 150 students. A virtual learning environment, namely a website called Overtime (www.overtimeonline.co.uk) has been developed with the aim of exploring these liminal and troublesome spaces, which will hopefully give students the confidence and flexibility to flourish both at work and in life, long after they graduate. Overtime is run by the students and provides them with a platform to be creative and explore ideas in their journalistic outputs. Students determine the organisational structure and make decisions over content. They are encouraged to use the website as a vehicle to innovate and experiment in their use of social and digital media. Overtime has been shortlisted by the BA (Hons) Sport Journalism course's accrediting body: the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), as one of the top four student journalism websites in the country. A member of academic staff checks the site post-publication to ensure that content is ethically and legally safe.

The theory behind the project will be outlined before an illustration is provided of how the project works. Conclusions will then be drawn about what potential use the Overtime model could have for wider higher education beyond media courses.

Conceptual framework behind the Overtime project

The Overtime project applies the principles of Bauman's concept of liquid modernity (2000) as adapted to a higher education environment (Barnett 2004; Savin-Baden 2009) and the media industry (Deuze 2007). Bauman used the term 'liquid modernity' to describe the fluid human condition in post-industrial society in which flexibility and mobility are the dominant characteristics of life in modern society. The constant deskilling and reskilling of the workforce (Beck 2000) means higher education needs to be about more than knowledge and skills. Bauman argues that an increasingly privatised and consumerist society places greater emphasis on individualism with

nomadism now the defining characteristic of the modern human being. Society's inhabitants now flow across communities and countries changing jobs, habitats, identity and politics.

Deuze (2007) applies Bauman's theory of liquid modernity in trying to make sense of the considerable change and upheaval that media workers have undergone in the twenty-first century. Deuze argues that media now exists in liquid form with boundaries breaking down between commerce and creativity, individualism and teamwork, producers and consumers and security and independence. Journalists now have to multi-task and work across different platforms in response to the merger of media industries. Media organisations have interpreted these shifts in different ways and therefore, this implies that graduating students from the BA (Hons) Sport Journalism course are unlikely to experience the same or similar occupational roles and duties from one job to the next.

Barnett (2004) provides a liquid learning framework that calls for educators to develop learners as adaptable humans rather than focus on assimilating students into an existing work and life environment. He describes this as learning for an unknown future, in which knowledge and skills form only a partial picture. Barnett believes that we cannot prepare students to resolve uncertainty, but instead to embrace it and to be equipped to face the anxiety that comes with it. He argues that the emphasis needs to be on human qualities such as humility, thoughtfulness and resilience. Barnett believes this could be attained through the curriculum, but a broader pedagogical strategy is being suggested in this article. The curriculum is essentially structured learning, but to truly prepare students for an uncertain and liquid world, we must blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning as much as possible. This includes the dissolving of hierarchical lecturer and student relationships. The curriculum is, by definition, hierarchical in that it is an imposition of the educator's world view upon the student. Barnett (2004) urges us to consider multiple realities and the Overtime project empowers the student to identify and implement their own world view and interpretations of reality.

Implementation of the Overtime project

The Overtime project was conceptualised by Simon McEnnis for the Special Study element of the PGCert Learning and Teaching in Higher Education at the university in 2010, and the initiative became operational in February 2011. The project has now been running for more than three years, which is the equivalent length of one entire undergraduate cohort passing through the BA (Hons) Sport Journalism course. The transition of the website into a fully functional project can be seen as an appropriate time to articulate the pedagogical rationale and practical operation behind it.

The use of a website as a vehicle for the project's pedagogy is significant. Students must be participants and collaborators within a digital culture, which is breaking down the binaries of existence into liquid and fluid forms. Savin-Baden (2009) tells us that 'Web 2.0 offers a different textuality, since they are rewritable technologies that are increasingly ushering in new issues and concerns, such as consensus over authority and process over product' (Ibid: 8). Digital work and life environments are

a central characteristic of liquid modern society, so it is therefore appropriate that a course-specific response is a technological vehicle.

The site benefits from financial support from the School of Sport and Service Management for web hosting and buying sports photographs from a picture agency. Lecturers also select the editor in an annual process (candidates submit applications which are assessed by staff, who reach a consensus view). An assigned lecturer liaises with the editor to help him/her to formulate their goals for their tenure, advise on opportunities within the university and offer practical assistance where asked. However, the students determine what goes on the site and how it is presented. They plan, write, edit and upload the content themselves. The lecturer monitors the site for potential legal and ethical issues.

Another means of support is that lecturers can make short periods of time available for editors to address the incoming first years, to explain the site and how to take part in it. The editors can also use the lecturer as a conduit for information. For example, they can ask the lecturer to use internal email to disseminate invitations to submit articles. The fact a lecturer is involved conveys to the student body that the site is institutionally recognised. However, it is important that the student editor conveys this message because it means the wider student body is aware that participation in the site is not monitored, required or regulated as part of the formal learning and teaching structure.

Students are organised in a devolved traditional newsroom structure that consists of third years as editors and first/second years as reporters. This is, however, fluid and only exists as a framework. That *Overtime* is a mixture of traditional newsroom structure and complete editorial freedom is symptomatic of the complexity inherent in the liquid modern society outlined by Bauman (2000), Deuze (2007) and Barnett (2004).

Overtime fosters a sense of community within and across the three year groups on the course. It introduces new first years to second and third years, not only socially as fellow students, but in a professional interaction between writer and colleague or writer and editor. One example of working across year groups was the university's Varsity sports day in March 2014. The site ran a live blog on the event, with first years at the sports pitches on the Falmer campus reporting to second years editing the site in an office on the Eastbourne campus. Students work together in review and mentoring capacities, with junior students submitting copy to the editorial control of senior students. This is a peer review process neither instigated nor overseen by staff, with pedagogical and social benefits for both editor and writer. This interaction, outside a traditional learning or assessment setting, encourages the development of 'human qualities' advocated by Barnett (2004). Further, editors from the third year can mentor and act as peer reviewers for junior students. The achievements of previous cohorts set a standard for the next group of editors. Each year group can anticipate the editorial control of the site as its inheritance, while the culture of participation evolves.

Innovation and creativity are features of Deuze's media work (2007). Students may feel less comfortable experimenting in new forms of journalism and storytelling with-

in the curriculum, where 'getting it wrong' could have consequences for their grades and feel more inclined to be conservative in a context of assessment and formal learning. They can therefore innovate without fearing that the outcome will influence their results.

This was evidenced on Overtime in 2013 when level 5 students, having studied podcasting in the curriculum, initiated a daily football podcast featuring discussions of the main issues of the week. They quickly found that the conversational medium offered an outlet which traditional reporting did not. Individuals established their own personas, and editorially the students could explore creative approaches to the talking points, including humour. Such opportunities would be restricted or even non-existent within the traditional assessments of the course.

Overtime provides opportunities for students to show initiative and proactivity in achieving their ambitions, in contrast to their experience on their course in which lecturers provide resources and set targets. In January 2014, Overtime's student editor successfully applied for a Springboard Grant from the University, receiving £500.00, and decided to use the money to create a printed edition. Ultimately, this was published by the paid-for print weekly *Eastbourne Herald* as two separate four-page supplements (figure 2). The money was controlled and the deal with the *Herald* brokered by the editor. A by-product of this arrangement was that the editor founded a Student Journalists' Society in order to use Student Union banking facilities. His successor as editor is aiming to make the society a focal point to pursue independent fundraising for the site, for example, with sports-themed pub quizzes and other events. Money would be raised with the purpose of promoting student journalism through Overtime, for example, by paying travel costs to attend events. Here, the traditional course provides a gateway to this extra-curricular personal and social development.

The journey of Overtime contributors is more important than their destination. To facilitate this, the website is a not-for-profit model and does not contain advertising. The final product of a published story is only part of a more holistic process in which the students must have an idea for a piece, plan their task, liaise with an editor, execute their plan, write their piece and have it edited and uploaded. All stages of that process are worthwhile pedagogical exercises in themselves, regardless of the professionalism of the finished product. Lecturers must be prepared to accept varying degrees of perceived journalistic quality and standards on the website. If this was monitored, it would reinforce the hierarchical relationship between lecturers and students that this learning space is trying to eradicate, leading to a disincentive for innovation or 'self-starting'.

Overtime is a website in the public domain and available through search engines. Therefore this encourages students to take responsibility for their decision-making processes and quality of outputs. It also acts as an incentive to contribute knowing that their work could potentially be seen by a wider audience rather than within the confines of the university.

Although neither participation nor quality is monitored or assessed, the site is not wholly outside the traditional delivery of the course. Lecturers can support the edi-

tors and encourage participation within the curriculum. For example, in February 2014, first-year students were set the task within the curriculum of profiling university sport teams as a formative assessment. The lecturer gave feedback to the students on their pieces for education purposes, and suggested that they forward their pieces to the Overtime editors as they populated their site in the build-up to the Varsity event previously mentioned. Several pieces were posted on the website as a result.

In 2012, Overtime was shortlisted by the course's external accrediting body, the National Council for the Training of Journalists, for its Best Student Publication award. That gave a formal recognition of the achievements of students both before and after that year. It provided a benchmark for future editors and contributors. The 2014 Varsity blog attracted hundreds of readers to the website and on Twitter, while the *Eastbourne Herald* supplement attracted coverage on trade website: holdthefrontpage.co.uk and reached readers through the newspaper's circulation of 16,815 (Joint Industry Committee for Regional Press Research 2014).

Limitations and future research

The project raises a series of issues at a practical level that will need consideration as Overtime continues to evolve. For example, student participation is not guaranteed while existing media norms and practices could be reproduced through an internalisation of values to the detriment of experimentation or innovation. Also, there is the danger of clique formation, which could act as a barrier to widening access to the rest of the course.

There is also a need for empirical research with the student body as participants, to see to what extent the Overtime project's pedagogical aims are being met.

Conclusion

The neo-liberalism and marketisation of universities has led to greater attempts to measure, standardise and quantify higher education, yet this is counter to the principles and trajectory of a liquid modern society that prioritises flexibility, elusiveness, mobility and adaptability both in work and life. Performance indicators attempt to pin down the student experience while curriculum structures neatly package learning outcomes and assessment. The Overtime project advocates a liminal and troublesome space that is intangible, inconsistent and unpredictable.

In many ways, media-based courses have a responsibility to try and lead the way in developing experimental pedagogies that push the boundaries of what liquid learning can look like. Yet it is hoped that the principles and practice behind the Overtime project can act as a blueprint that can be appropriated by other vocationally driven higher education courses that are not specifically media oriented. Either way, if our students are graduating into a liquid modern society and the complexity and contradictions that come with it, then we need to re-assess our role as higher educators and look beyond the curriculum and into the liminal border spaces.

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Biographies

Simon McEnnis is a sports media academic at the University of Brighton and researches into how sports journalism practice is adapting to digital environments. He worked as a sports journalist at *The Sun* for nine years. Simon is also Media Consultant for Sky Sports News, where he delivers an in-house development programme to staff. Simon is an examiner and distance learning tutor for the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ).

Ben Parsons teaches reporting, media law and shorthand at the University of Brighton. As a journalist he began his career on www.sportinglife.com, before training as a reporter at the *North-West Evening Mail* and joining *The Argus*, where he was Crime Reporter from 2008 to 2013. His research interests include the pedagogy of journalism and public interest journalism in a post-Leveson environment.

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

www.brighton.ac.uk/clt

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