

Title: **Academic practices and communities of practices: can academics open up the disciplines to new learners?**

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Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Understand why independent learning may be a troublesome concept
- Recognise alternatives to de-contextualised study skills
- Reflect on their own disciplines and communities of practice and consider how students are invited in to these

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

In this session we would like to share the conclusions of some research with our SEDA colleagues and to ask for their help in continuing to develop how we work with students.

In 2009/10 we undertook some action research to develop our own practices. Motivated by our experiences that 'study skills' don't work we wanted to explore other ways to facilitate the transition to higher education for the social science students we work with. Our research focused on students' and staff understandings of independent learning; everyone seems to hold independent learning in such high regard but we were sceptical that it could be developed via a study skills module or that many students or staff had a clear and shared understanding of what it was. In this session we would like to share our conclusions with you – a key one being that for us independent learning should be abandoned and that we should focus on facilitating learning.

However, we would also like to seek the help of SEDA colleagues to develop our practices. We are suggesting that as academics our role in the 21st Century is to focus on students' learning as well as the subject content. Instead of doing this via study skills we have been piloting an approach where we focus on academic practices within the discipline. Alongside this we are working with students to invite them into their communities of practice. We would like to propose that these strategies are ways forward for academics enabling them to focus on learning development without becoming educational theorists. We would also like your help to develop these ideas further and to think about how we put them into practice.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Introduction to the session – who are we, our aims for today [5 mins]

Activity 1: Ask delegates in small groups to discuss this question [15 mins including feedback and discussion]

Are there ways of thinking, researching, writing and practicing which are peculiar to your discipline? How are these conveyed to students?

Presentation of our research on independent learning; brief overview of what we did and why; findings and conclusions [10 mins]

Discussion - academic practices and communities of practice: the way forward for 21st Century academics: Do other SEDA colleagues use these strategies? How do they work in practice? Have academic colleagues embraced these approaches? How did you achieve this? What do we do about multidisciplinary programmes? [10 mins]

Conclusion and close: encourage networking and exchange of names and contact details of colleagues who'd be interested in thinking, talking, working & researching more in the area of academic practices within the discipline and communities of practice. [5 mins]

References

Whilst there are no texts mentioned in the outline, some key writers that have and continue to influence our thinking are: Ursula Wingate, Tamsin Haggis, Pierre Bourdieu (especially his work on academic discourse) and Stephen Kemmis on action research.