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Supporting Syrian academics to be agents for change: The role of UK universities

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The Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara) has supported persecuted academics from across the world since 1933, combining its historical core Fellowship Programme with country programmes over the past decade, in instances where academics, as a group, are being specifically targeted by states or parties to a conflict.

Working in partnership with the 117 universities that make up the 'Cara Scholars at Risk UK Universities Network' the Cara Fellowship Programme offers periods of sanctuary in the form of doctoral and postdoctoral placements, to allow academics at risk to continue their work in safety until such time as they are able to return to their countries of origin.

The Cara Syria Programme was launched in 2012 in response to the country's civil war, which has precipitated the world's worst humanitarian crisis for over a generation. In 2015, the growing number of Syrian academics seeking Cara's help led to the decision to extend Syria Programme to the region and, following initial consultations, a round table (Cara, 2016) and needs analysis involving Syrian academics, a twelve-month pilot (Phase 1) was launched in Turkey in September 2016. Phase 2 was launched in October 2017.

The aim of the Syria Programme in Region is to use this period of uncertainty to connect and strengthen Syria's academic community in exile to ensure they can play their vital role in the rebuilding of Syria's higher education and research sectors when security allows.

The Programme provides *in situ* support across five strands: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Academic Skills Development (ASD), Research Incubation Visits (RIV), Cara-Commissioned Research (CCR), with a fifth introduced in Phase 2 – the Syria Research Fellowship Scheme (SRFS), offering small and medium research grants to support research of relevance to Syria and Syrian populations in exile. Central to each of these activities is Cara's partnership model, facilitating collaboration with colleagues from the wider regional and international academic and scientific communities.

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Volunteers from Kent, Edinburgh, Queen Mary's, Middlesex and Newcastle universities, with Syrian colleague Dr Marwan Hussein (second left), February 2018

Since February 2017, the EAP and ASD strands have been delivered through a blended-learning approach, combining two-monthly intensive residential events in Istanbul with weekly one-to-one English lessons and webinars to address the emerging academic development needs of our Syrian colleagues. A dedicated portal supports all online activities, which are delivered by over 80 volunteer tutors, facilitators and academics (hereafter collectively referred to as volunteer experts). The development and delivery of these intensive programmes of workshops and activities are guided by the EAP and ASD steering groups over email and Skype, with input from a wider pool of colleagues, and relate to themes such as research planning, teaching and learning, communication, and technology.

As the Syria Programme has developed, we have found ourselves working in a context that is often at stark odds with our professional experiences in the UK, and in which our assumptions, expertise, and practices are routinely challenged. This article provides us with an opportunity to take stock of our experiences thus far, and document some reflections and insights relating to our work on the Cara Syria Programme and its implications for academic development more generally. Over 300 Syrian academics are now registered with the Programme, of whom over 80 are actively involved in one or more of the Programme's five strands.

Synergistic language learning and academic development

As the Programme has grown, attracting a diverse range of participants from across the disciplinary spectrum, so too has its content and the number of volunteer experts working collaboratively to develop and deliver the complementary and overlapping strands. The demands of working in an unfamiliar environment, with an atypical cohort, have differed slightly for each strand, but the synergy that has developed between colleagues has been highly productive. It has fed into the development of materials, the forging of links between colleagues who often work quite separately in different parts of their home institutions, and deeper understandings of how academic literacies can be nurtured and developed. This has proved rewarding for the volunteer staff and created a stimulating learning environment for the participants.

For the EAP teachers, the Syrian academics differ in many ways from their standard international student cohorts. Most obviously, this presents in terms of their age and stage of career. They are intellectually sophisticated, having been practising academics prior to and in many cases since the crisis, but have a lower overall language proficiency than would be the case among international students in the UK. Many have quite substantial declarative knowledge of English grammar and lexis, but little procedural facility and need as much practice in producing oral and written outputs as possible. Materials need to be specifically written to be at an appropriate academic *and* language level. This is also a challenge for those supporting the ASD strand, even with the use of interpreters, and staff on both strands have also had to accommodate and adapt to the increasing variety of disciplines and a range of academic experience and roles amongst participants.

One constant throughout the Programme has been the use of technology – this has underpinned Programme delivery from the initial development of the dedicated Programme portal. Adobe Connect is heavily used as a platform for weekly online lessons with EAP tutors, and for the weekly webinars delivered as part of the ASD strand; technology is also key to the delivery of workshop sessions. Despite the advantages of a strong technological infrastructure, blending the use of technology in supporting learning with face-to-face sessions can be challenging. The programme has had to be 'fluid' and 'developing', combining the workshops and online learning (both webinars and online lessons), responding to participants' needs and dependent on the availability and experience of EAP and ASD staff. Session presenters have had to rethink materials for use in this context, bearing in mind that the participants are likely to be utilising their language skills in a translanguaging context in which Arabic will also be used, and also that much of the conceptual vocabulary of academic development corresponds to established academic norms in the UK and other Anglophone, Global North contexts, and may not be pertinent to the experiences of Syrian academics. As is discussed below, this has highlighted the inaccessibility of much of the academic development resource base due to cultural, contextual and linguistic biases.

These challenges, though, have prompted the academic developers and language experts to work increasingly closely and effectively in conjunction with each other. The fluid nature of provision moves away from a traditional structured programme, and the EAP and ASD staff have created sessions responding to the wide range of needs in what is more of a 'journeying' or a highly creative form of 'academic sociality'. This has generated an overwhelmingly positive response from those involved (both participants and volunteer experts), recognising the benefits of the immediate and tangible link between EAP and academic skills inputs, which are usually separated both temporally and spatially in the UK. Some anxieties persist, however, concerning how disciplinary foci should be accommodated. The Programme cohort at present comprises pure and applied hard scientists, social scientists, and a smaller number from the humanities, and we do not have adequate resources at present to provide discipline-specific content.

As language learning and academic skills development have been woven more closely together, the advantages of this approach have become more evident. The linguistic focus of EAP provides insights into how meaning is constructed through analysis of, for example, discourse, genre, sentence-level grammar and register. This is complemented by the understandings of the wider academic context and perspectives provided by ASD. In practice, during the workshops, this has been implemented by what is referred to as the 'pit stop approach' — an initial plenary is prefaced by a brief EAP session on key vocabulary before the ASD input. This is followed by group work, with EAP and ASD staff together providing intensive monitoring and support, then post-group work with an EAP review of common linguistics issues which had come up.

This combined approach to academic learning development is something that both EAP and ASD staff will take back to the UK context, prompting a rethinking of how staff and students' needs in the UK also might be better met.

Emergent observations about identity and located practices

Working on the Syria Programme has offered volunteer experts from both the EAP and ASD strands the opportunity to reflect on their professional identities as teachers within higher education. The flexible and organic way that the programme has developed, and the subsequent demands made on the practice of contributors, has resulted in value sets, practices and assumptions being made explicit.

Brookfield (2005, p. 27) notes that identities and related practices are both socially and culturally formed, and this has been brought into particular focus by the programme. Some lecturers from the ASD strand, for example, observed that their practices have felt challenged as a result of contributing to this project. One such challenge was the result of working across institutions, and the appreciation that approaches offered by different ASD peers varied. It offers a reminder of the diversity of academic developers as a professional group, and how practices, often influenced by earlier discipline training, can drive a range of lively and not always easily-reconciled approaches. However, the commitment of all to providing the highest quality learning opportunities for participants continues to be the overriding driver.

The adopted practice of co-teaching the workshops has encouraged a collegiate and more flexible approach. This has been welcomed, being in marked contrast to what is experienced by some ASD colleagues within their institutional roles. The freedom to plan workshops responsively and quickly, meeting identified participant needs and without recourse to institutional strategies, has been regarded as a positive. EAP volunteers have also welcomed the opportunity to act creatively and responsively, with an increased reliance on their skills and knowledge and flexibility. The format of the workshops, therefore, appears to enable the enactment of personal academic value sets, which institutional expectations and processes do not always enable.

In terms of the professional expectations of the ASD team members, some of the interactions with the Syrian participants have highlighted how culturally rooted the expectations of academic developers are. Reflective practice, for example, is a key tenet of academic practice within UK higher education and, whilst not universally embraced, underpins much practitioner curriculum planning. It is often regarded as a building block of academic identity and is for some a central tenet. However, the introduction of the concept during workshops with Syrian colleagues required a revaluation of practices by the ASD volunteers, since it does not appear to hold a similar role within the academic discourse in the building of academic identity in Syrian higher education.

Importantly, as the ASD staff have grown to know more about the background of individuals, there has been a recognition that care has to be taken when dealing with matters of identity. Asking for reflection that draws on personal understanding of self, which is common in the UK (see Kell and Camps, 2015, as an example), has needed careful thought. The heterogeneous nature of the group (there are many ethnic, cultural, ideological and political positions represented) and the possibility of unearthing trauma are currently issues that the team is pondering.

So, adopting workshop and online learning opportunities that have a focus on culturally appropriate, authentic learning opportunities, is increasingly recognised as key to successful progression of the programme. The building of trust has been a major aspect of what is increasingly considered a highly successful programme by participants and volunteer experts, borne out in a recent independent evaluation for the Programme's primary funders, the Open Society Foundation. The rapport and understanding that have been achieved over the past eighteen months between the UK and Syrian academics have provided an authentic virtual and physical academic space, and one that has particular significance for the Syrian academics who are currently not working in higher education, for whom it validates, sustains and develops their academic identity (Billot, 2010). Importantly, it seems that this space also offers UK academics contributing to the programme an additional professional location in which their academic identities may also be validated, sustained and developed.

Transcultural academic development

The transcultural dimension of the Programme has been a rich source of learning for UK academics. As noted above, the programme has constituted a unique academic space outside of the institutional structures and norms into which we are enculturated. At the level of *institutional* culture, therefore, the Syria Programme has served as a vantage point from which to look back on institutional practices, often entrenched and unquestioned, and has helped to make the familiar strange (Mills, 1959). Diversity of perspectives and practices is a fundamental condition of the programme, and we have had to learn to trust in others' approaches even where they are markedly different from our own. This has enhanced our agility as educators, encouraged us to experiment, play, and take risks, and fostered what Edwards (2008) has termed 'relational agency' – the capacity to collaborate professionally across disciplinary cultures and situational boundaries.

Some very interesting issues have arisen around multilingualism. Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, Russian, French and English are all used socially and academically by members of the cohort, and it has been fascinating, cognitively and culturally, to learn about how and when participants flip between languages, how they make meaning differently in these languages, how English academic discourse forces them into new ways of thinking about their work, and how their academic aspirations correspond to their uses of these languages.

Group work in Istanbul, July 2018

We feel we have only a limited understanding about what academic life entails for our Syrian colleagues, and how this differs from our own experiences. This has prompted a reciprocal process of knowledge exchange, as we seek to understand the differences and commonalities in our academic frames of reference, supporting our Syrian colleagues in their aim of engaging with, and simultaneously broadening our understandings of, international academia. Going forward, we hope to maximise this reciprocity through Syrian-led workshops, and by increasing Syrian representation in the strategic and administrative mechanisms of the Programme.

Planning and coordination

Organisational challenges encountered thus far include the personal and practical constraints faced by Syrian participants, including time and travel (many face restrictions on travel to other regions of Turkey due to the conditions of residential status), and their wide range of English language competences and confidence.

A critical challenge has been the Programme's dependence on volunteer tutors and other *pro bono* support, involving colleagues from many different UK universities all contributing during marginal time alongside their core roles. There are practical difficulties in coordinating the efforts of so many contributors, ensuring a shared understanding of objectives and plans, and there is an inherent risk of plans losing momentum or lacking coherence and consistency. Thus far, we have largely managed these risks thanks to the trust that has developed amongst members of the core ASD and EAP teams, providing a form of distributed leadership and a growing acceptance and comfort for contributors in being adaptable and flexible in their approach. Kate Robertson (who leads the Cara Syria Programme) has also played a key role in encouraging, prompting and supporting contributors, particularly those leading the Programme strands and residential workshops. Coordination and communication are not always perfect, and the commitment of those involved means we can always see potential improvements, but the levels of engagement, quality of the activities and outcomes we are seeing from participants suggest we are finding a good balance and focusing our efforts on the right things.

Our approach to organisation and planning has evolved over time, and as we have developed a better understanding of the needs, experience and interests of our Syrian colleagues, and learnt together as a tutor team, so have we been able to adapt and take a more consistent approach to design and delivery. We are also finding ways to harness the expertise of colleagues with very restricted availability through what have been referred to as 'small acts', such as providing peer feedback on a workshop plan, attending an online planning meeting, or delivering a one-hour webinar. This has reinforced the Programme's ethos of collective ownership and distributed responsibility.

The dependence on volunteers from different institutions and disciplines also brings a number of benefits and gives the programme a distinctive and refreshing ethos and atmosphere. It has resulted in an emphasis on quality enhancement, innovation and engagement from a committed group of practitioners, working in a flat and highly collaborative structure. As discussed in more detail below, the necessity of working across multiple institutions and traditions has also exposed contributors to new approaches and techniques.

Other key success factors include the dedicated Programme online platform developed by David Read and colleagues at the University of Sheffield, and the contribution of translators and interpreters. We needed a mechanism that would allow participants to have weekly contact with their EAP tutors and, given the isolation of many participants and constraints on their time and opportunities to travel, we also needed to have a way of keeping participants engaged, connected and supported between workshops. The online platform provided is reliable and easy to use, and can be accessed both for streamed events and as an online archive for resources and materials.

Given the importance of English language skills to participants looking to engage on the international arena, we have run the majority of online and workshop sessions in English, and encouraged participation in English. The availability of professional translators, able to translate into Arabic during webinars and workshops and provide translations of material from English to Arabic in advance of and after workshops, has been extremely beneficial, particularly in enabling participants to focus on the ASD elements of workshops and engage on their own terms.

The approaches and insights we have gained from the Cara Syria Programme, particularly in organising and running the EAP and ASD strands, provide a legacy that can be applied to similar programmes in the future. Those of us who are involved are also taking these lessons back to our home institutions, in potential approaches to the integration of English language and academic skills training and support, in the effective use of technology to support dispersed communities of learners, and in building collaborations for learning and teaching that extend beyond, and in so doing enrich, our understandings of academic development and English for academic purposes.

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Editor's note: Cara was founded in 1933 as the Academic Assistance Council, became the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning and merged with the Emergency Association of German Scientists Abroad. As the SPSL, it supported Victor and Eva Ehrenburg to escape from Prague in February 1939 with their two children, Gottfried and Ludwig, who – as Lewis Elton – has been one the founders of modern educational development.

Thriving in the new age of metrics

Claire Taylor, Wrexham Glyndŵr University

This article draws upon aspects of Claire's keynote address 'Learning without Limits: Thriving (not just surviving) in Wonderland', delivered at the SEDA Teaching and Learning Conference and repeated as her Inaugural Professorial Lecture in May 2018. The text is given in full here: http://tinyurl.com.y8jaq9ud.

Here we are in the 'new age of metrics'. An age of measurement, analysis and evaluation manifest in many forms but looming large nationally in the form of measurement frameworks for teaching excellence, research excellence and knowledge exchange (or TEF, REF and KEF). The difficulties with a metrics-predicated approach to educating are well rehearsed. What are we measuring? Can it be measured? Are the measuring 'tools' the right ones? We talk a lot about proxy measures – are they really good enough? It's a challenging environment and one that can often feel overly transactional, demanding, stressful (especially when asked to justify poor performance against quantitative indicators) and at times divorced from the realities of the day job of 'doing learning and teaching'. So how do we journey through and engage with this landscape whilst safeguarding our sense of integrity and wellbeing and, crucially, ensuring lasting benefits for our students? How do we thrive in the 'new age of metrics'?

In a nutshell, I would suggest that as a community of educational developers we should focus on three things: 1) cherish and champion what matters; 2) be clear about our purpose; and 3) dig in for the long game. The long-term perspective is critical here because in a world of constant change and development, one thing will stay the same and that is the fact that TEFs, REFs and KEFs will come and go. Such interventions are aligned to political life-cycles of five or six years at a time and whilst each may continue for several cycles, they will eventually fade, or be re-imagined and replaced. They are certainly not mechanisms we should put our faith in long term. Rather, what stand the test of time are core pedagogical principles and personal and professional values. We all have these but perhaps sometimes they get buried amongst the pressures for the day job, and my encouragement to the educational development community is to bring these to the foreground. Pause a while, stop and reflect. What makes you 'tick' in terms of your practice? What values are at the core of what you do? What principles are totally non-negotiable, come what may? What matters?

For the educational development community, there can be no better starting point than the SEDA values:

1) Developing understanding of how people learn
2) Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical
3) Working with and developing learning communities
4) Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity
5) Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes.

The SEDA values provide a solid framework within which we can reflect upon and calibrate our professional activity, cutting to the chase of what matters. I commend to you the excellent guidance available on the SEDA website including sensible and helpful narrative such as:

> *'These SEDA values are not an attempt to prescribe what we think or believe or feel. But they are intended to inform our actions…So, the SEDA values are a guide for action. They are also a basis for monitoring and evaluating our actions and our achievements.'*

The SEDA values are deliberately written to be interpreted according to specific contexts, to be applied flexibly and pragmatically by both individuals and organisations, and to be added to, again to reflect individual and specific contexts and educational settings. But in order to see these values come alive, we each have a responsibility to make space to reflect upon our own values base and how those values manifest themselves in practice. This is a moment to cherish what matters and to be clear of our purpose in whatever role we hold. These are the things that have longevity and impact long beyond the short-termism of political whim.

However, by suggesting that we cherish and champion what matters and be clear about our purpose, what does that mean in practice when faced by initiatives such as TEF? Readers may be surprised to learn that, on the face of it, TEF and SEDA are not incompatible. One aspect of SEDA's core mission is to 'Lead and support improvements in the quality of students' educational experiences', whilst the Office for Students website says that, 'the TEF provides information about the quality, environment and outcomes of teaching at a wide range of universities and colleges'. One would hope that an educational developer committed to SEDA's core mission and working within SEDA's values would see positive TEF outcomes. But the key point here is that we should not allow TEF to be the driver; rather a commitment to cherish and champion what matters should be the motivational force that will result in excellent student outcomes – this is what will remain long after the TEF has passed on.

It is clear that in our roles supporting the development of excellent teaching that impacts positively on student learning we have to grapple with the challenges of how to evaluate success and impact. So, in the 'new age of metrics' we should embrace an element of metrics minded-ness but on the condition that this must be alongside qualitative evaluation that often gets pushed to one side. As educational developers we know that the results of truly great and impactful teaching can only really be evidenced through the changes we actually witness in our learners as they journey through their higher education experience. Great teaching goes beyond the mere transaction of sending and receiving information to the very heart of challenging, questioning, disassembling and reassembling the essence of knowledge itself, and that is a tricky thing to identify, capture and measure through metrics alone.

It is worth remembering, then, that TEF metrics are only proxy measures for capturing the complicated, mysterious and essentially experiential art of teaching; these metrics are mere shadow representations of excellence and not actual true measures. Therefore, it is a good thing that the metrics are supplemented by a written narrative from the higher education provider which can go some way to contextualising the metrics; the TEF specification (DfE, 2017) is clear that TEF judgements are holistically based on both metrics and on the qualitative written submission.

As educational developers, in addition to scrutiny of relevant data sets, we are well placed to actively seek out great teaching within our own universities and colleges; to look for it, identify it, enjoy it and celebrate it; to cherish and champion what matters. I can guarantee that the very act of doing this will help us to thrive in the new age of metrics, retaining a sense of purpose and perspective that looks to build upon a secure values base first and foremost. Great teaching touches the heart and the mind; it makes a difference that goes beyond metrics; it acts as a catalyst for deep and lasting transformation for the learner. This is something to cherish and champion.

Thriving in the 'new age of metrics' is contingent upon us being rooted in an approach that is values-informed, anchored by clarity of purpose and sustainable for the long term. The business of lifelong learning and development is more akin to a marathon than a sprint. It demands a framework that will outlast and outperform the passing fancies of politicians and policy makers. Therefore it is imperative that we, members of the educational community, individually and collectively articulate and hold on to the values and principles that we cherish and hold dear, create and safeguard the space to reflect and act upon what really impacts learning and achievement, and challenge ourselves to grasp and take forwards a more hopeful but also more courageous approach that may be metrics-minded, but that should never, ever default to being metrics-driven.

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SEDA (https://www.seda.ac.uk/further-guidance-seda-values; https://www.seda.ac.uk/core-mission-values).

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The Student Experience Framework: Enhancing the student experience through a framework for engagement

Fiona Shelton, Amy Kyte and **Russell Lewis,** University of Derby

Internal and external drivers both highlight the importance of the Student Experience. The onset of the Teaching Excellence Framework makes universities more accountable for the quality of the academic experience, much of which is driven by value for money in a market where fees are high and on the increase. Students therefore have high expectations of their university experience and what it can offer them in order to improve their lives.

Diversity across the sector indicates there is no one 'student experience'; rather individual students have their own experience (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013). It is therefore our responsibility to provide our students access to transformational academic opportunities, excellence in teaching and learning, and to offer activities beyond the curriculum, which will transform their lives.

Research undertaken at the University of Derby in 2015 highlighted that the University should establish an overarching framework for the student experience, and put in place a student engagement strategy. To address this, the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group requested the development of a Student Experience Framework (SEF), to articulate a cross-institutional approach to the strategic organisation of the Student Experience.

It was important to engage the whole University community in the development of the SEF; opportunities to participate in consultation were provided for all staff and students across our four Derbyshire campuses. Seventeen sessions were planned in late 2016; 519 students and 603 staff members participated.

The sessions comprised two activities:

1) A set of ten statements and questions were created as starting points for conversations:

- Are students consumers?
- All programmes (undergraduate and post graduate) should have placements or offer real-world learning opportunities
- Students are *not* capable of helping to design their own curriculum
- Should students have a peer mentor?
- What does Digital Literacy mean?
- Every student on every programme should have a personal tutor
- Should the University be a 9am-9pm university?
- Students' fees should be inclusive of all costs
- Do students need to take more responsibility to engage with activities outside of their programmes?
- Any other thoughts?

2) A 'washing line' activity, where participants completed statements reflecting the best and worst elements of the student experience. Small paper cut-out T-shirts and pants were used for the best and worst elements respectively, allowing participants the opportunity to 'air their dirty laundry' in an open forum.

Taking an evidence-based approach, we examined literature and research in relation to student experience and engagement, which enabled us to analyse the data sets to inform the development of the framework.

The evidence highlights the importance of students' personal expectations and priorities at university, as illustrated by Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation (Herzberg *et al.,* 1967). This theory proposes that there are two factors for determining satisfaction: motivators and hygiene factors. Herzberg *et al.* suggest that motivators, which are typically intrinsic, for example individual achievements or goals, lead to perceived satisfaction when fulfilled. Conversely, hygiene factors, which are typically extrinsic and outside of the individual's control, can lead to dissatisfaction if not fulfilled, even if the individual's motivating factors are being fulfilled. Further research from Redbrick Research undertaken at the University of Derby in 2016 demonstrates the significance of academic opportunities, with student priorities being primarily based around career aspirations and intellectual challenge. However, there are additional experiential reasons which also have an important role to play, such as gaining additional experiences and meeting new people or building social networks. Therefore, a thematic analysis resulted in the identification of the following six themes:

- Be distinct
- Think differently
- Create opportunities
- Get involved
- Go further
- Take the lead.

These articulate opportunities and activities based around academic and 'hygiene' factors, as identified in the research as the significant elements of student satisfaction and engagement.

Drafts of the SEF were taken to meetings within the University's deliberative structure, reviewed by the Students' Union, and were made open to comments by students and staff members. Feedback that was received helped to refine the language and tone used within the Framework and a final version was approved by Academic Board in May 2017.

The resulting Student Experience Framework (SEF, 2017) maps the rich opportunities with which students can engage, and highlights the social and cultural aspects of student life. It articulates to students how they can engage more broadly with the University, including opportunities for international study trips, change-agent projects and involvement in key University processes. The University is very clear that we position our students as partners in our academic endeavour and not as consumers of education. Our philosophy is based around the principle that students can achieve at a level that they did not know that they were capable of; opening up new areas of knowledge and understanding, and challenging every student to reflect upon their broader opportunities to engage with the cultural and societal issues within the region, the country and globally.

Evidence of effectiveness and impact

The SEF is monitored at the University's Student Experience, Learning and Teaching Committee (SELTC). The terms of reference for SELTC reference the SEF to ensure regular and effective reporting of its implementation and related outcomes. A direct outcome of wide-reaching consultation is the ownership of the SEF at discipline level. For each initiative that has already been undertaken we have sought feedback and measured engagement.

We engage students proactively in shaping their experience through influencing learning, policy and process, to enable a 'student as partner' culture. For example, students are involved in recruitment panels for new senior and academic staff and co-chair SELTC which oversees the implementation of the University's core strategies and the progress of institutional KPIs. Students hold the committee to account to ensure that issues affecting the student experience are addressed.

The University's Learning and Teaching strategy has established 30 hours of work experience within all undergraduate courses to ensure links to real-world learning and our Assessment and Feedback strategy aligns to this where staff are required to set innovative and meaningful assessment tasks. For example, Law Students have engaged in real live cases, one of which reaching national acclaim on the BBC – a former suicide case which had been closed, and which has now been reopened by the Italian police as a result of the students' engagement in the examination of the case.

In 2018, a new 120K International Travel Award was launched enabling multi-disciplinary student groups to travel on fully-funded places, thereby removing financial barriers to enhancement of social capital and global mindset, and positively impacting on their future aspirations. Forty students visited Iceland in the first round of this initiative, where 100% of students undertaking the trip reported an increase in skills based on the UUKI research (UUKI, 2017). A typical student quote from the trip: 'The most rewarding, enlightening and incredible challenge presented to me to date.' In addition, a further 40 students undertook a short break to Budapest and the final trip of 2018 saw 40 students travelling to New York and Washington for a week of history, politics, sightseeing and culture.

Students are encouraged to engage in community projects through the innovative 'Make a Change' fund, enabling students to bid for funding which demonstrates a positive impact in the region. Projects to date have included investments in local schools, women's centres, girl guides, homeless charities and student debating, to name but a few.

We recognise that self-employment is a growing destination choice for many of our graduates and offer an award-winning 'Be The Boss' programme – a comprehensive support package around business start-ups. Launched in 2017, over 60 new business start-ups have been supported by our Careers and Employment Service.

Students are invited to participate in professional dialogue with the Vice-Chancellor and wider University Executive group (VCEG), where questions are posed relating to student experience in its broadest sense and actions are taken away to be addressed.

Reflections on the project

The team developing the SEF were given a six-month time frame for development and completion. Whilst this was achieved it would have been beneficial to have engaged more staff and particularly more students in the consultation phase. Once the draft framework was available, we would have liked to have worked with more students to formulate the language of the framework and its design.

Research (Yorke and Longden, 2008) indicates that there is no single element of the student experience that can be controlled to enhance satisfaction or retention; the totality of the students' experience is critical. On reflection, we have debated if we asked the right questions which would help us to fully understand the lived experience of our students. Additionally, we could have asked students to collaborate with us to develop the questions and be part of the subsequent thematic analysis.

As a result of these lessons learnt we have engaged students more fully in informing our processes, policies and direction of travel. Such activity is key to the SEF and subsequently now an integral component in our planning and development of student-related initiatives.

Something as simple as the launch of the SEF should have been easy to organise but proved challenging, so we reverted to a virtual launch which includes a film, social media communications, a presence on the student intranet and a digital SEF. As a multi-site institution, attempting to bring together students from different disciplines to one location is always a challenge for us.

Engagement in the first rounds of some of the SEF initiatives has been really positive; however, we were expecting more applications for areas such as the International Travel Awards. As a widening-access University we have 22.3% of full-time students coming from low participation neighbourhoods, 97.5% from state schools, and 16% of full-time, undergraduate students declaring a disability (HESA, 2016-17). Outward mobility aids students' personal development and makes them more attractive to employers, equipping them with an increased global outlook. This is especially true for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (UUKI, 2017). Good practice identified by UUKI relates to offering short-term international opportunities. The trips offered reflect the advice from UUKI and we still did not see the uptake in applications we expected. We therefore need to explore why more students did not apply, what would encourage greater engagement and utilise the ambassadors from the first trips to advocate the benefits of undertaking international travel to other students.

At one of the Q&A panels with VCEG, students raised questions about how the University was encouraging students' participation in different activities. This suggests that we need to improve communications about the SEF and the benefits within it.

Follow-up and future plans

The SEF provides an evidence-based articulation of our student experience offer at the University. VCEG have currently endorsed the SEF until 2020, allowing us to assess the longitudinal impact of the initiatives within the SEF against the University's performance in key sector metrics such as NSS, DLHE, and non-continuation rates. We will also use this time to monitor engagement and outcomes to inform our long-term strategic approach to the student experience beyond 2020. Additionally, measurable baseline statements are being created with which academic staff can self-evaluate their programme to the SEF, allowing them to understand where their programme complements the framework and where possible developments may need to occur.

At its conception, the SEF was going to be nuanced to reflect the University's holistic student body, including those studying in further education or at a postgraduate level, as well as the University's online and distance learning provisions. However, we decided against this as there is a strong belief that the SEF was created to be inclusive of all learning styles offered at the University and therefore should be applicable to all students. Initially, this has been realised as can be seen by the first wave of applications for the maiden International Travel Award, which saw applications from students studying through our online provision abroad. It will be imperative that we ensure that the SEF continues to be applicable to all students and offers inclusive opportunities for participation including for those students traditionally viewed as hard to reach.

We are proud of the breadth of opportunities that the SEF affords and has brought together for our students but recognise that there are a few initiatives within it that are yet to be fully realised. These include initiatives that need rolling out holistically across the University once they are ready to move beyond the initial pilot and evaluation stages.

Whilst we are confident that the current version of the SEF enhances the students' experience and offers opportunities for engagement, as we build subsequent versions we will align these to developing initiatives within the sector such as the requirements from the Office for Students, TEF metrics at institutional and subject level and to reflect the changing landscape of the higher education sector from 2020 and beyond.

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Let the bandwagon pass: A role for active learning in lectures

Wendy Garnham, University of Sussex

At the University of Northampton, the new Waterside campus development will not have any large lecture theatres. In a recent article published by JISC, entitled 'The large lecture (theatre) is dead', Professor Alejandro Armellini from Northampton argues for active blended learning where student-centred activities form the basis for teaching. Nicola Woolcock, writing in *The Times* in October last year talked of the 'Death of the university lecture theatre' and Tony Bates, writing in 2014, predicted the end of lectures as we know them within ten years.

The demise of the lecture

Freeman *et al.* (2014) compared active learning methods with traditional lecturing and suggested that lecturing in undergraduate science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses increased the failure rate by 55% compared to a drop of 36% with active methods. Bajak (2014) describes lectures as ineffective and boring too! In 1996, Bales was estimating that only 5% of information presented in a lecture was remembered. Stuart and Rutherford (1978) suggest that the optimum length of a lecture may be thirty minutes due to the decline in student concentration that occurs.

This would suggest, therefore, that the lecture should be phased out. But is this really the case or is it a case of 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater?' Should we really be abandoning the lecture in favour of purely constructivist methods?

Student experience

I would argue strongly that we shouldn't. When students are asked about their experience and perception of lectures, they frequently report that lectures are worthwhile (Bates *et al.,* 2017) and evidence suggests that this method of teaching elicits the lowest level of anxiety in undergraduates (Adib-Hajbaghery, 2011). Students perceive that they are more engaged, learn better and enjoy themselves more when attending lectures (Gysbers *et al.,* 2011).

The same cannot be said for active learning. Although there are a bountiful number of studies that report positive effects of active learning on achievement (e.g. Sahin *et al.,* 2015; Park and Choi, 2014), student satisfaction does not always follow suit. For example, students are frequently found to report that they learn less in active learning contexts and this has a direct impact on their perception of both the course and the tutor (Lake, 2001). Not all students are willing to participate in small group activities (Fritschner, 2000) and remain external to any discussion, a point addressed in the compassion-focused pedagogy approach developed at the University of Hertfordshire (Gilbert, 2016).

Academic rigour

Aside from the emotional impact of lectures on students' perceptions, there is a strong case to be made for the retention of the lecture in terms of the organisation and modelling opportunity it offers. Lectures can give students a context for any independent reading that they are doing and, when delivered effectively, can enthuse and motivate them to continue and extend that process. Students need to have a firm foundation from which to develop critical thinking. A good lecture can serve as a model of how to bring together disparate lines of research to work through an argument critically (Burgan, 2006) and therefore prepare students for how to organise and present information effectively in discussions of their own.

A way forward?

This is not, however, an argument to return to traditional 'death by PowerPoint'-style delivery. Instead it is a plea to explore the potential of incorporating active learning methods into lectures to make them more interactive. Ernst and Colthorpe (2007) have trialled this approach successfully in delivering physiology lectures; McCullough and Munro (2016) have used it with finance students and Hake (1998) has used it with physics students. Some authors have used role play (DeNeve and Heppner, 1997), poetry (Healy and Smyth, 2017) and even magic tricks (Moss *et al.*, 2017) to increase interactivity in lectures with notable success. Active learning is therefore not an alternative to the traditional lecture but rather can become an integral part of it.

So should we be happy to sit back and watch the demise of the traditional lecture? This would suggest not. We should instead be exploiting its strengths and building on those to develop it and make it relevant to the modern student. We should be looking to make the most of our lecture theatres, not to do away with them. Student enjoyment can be the first step in student achievement. Surely we have a duty to instil passion and interest in our subject as much as to guide students towards higher grades? I rest my case with a quote from Waldeck and Weimer (2017), who argue the lecture is certainly not dead and 'active learning is not a panacea' (p. 248). As the poet William Cowper famously wrote in 1785: 'Variety's the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavour.' Rather than limiting the number of ways to learn, we should instead be expanding these. Divergent thinking is perhaps needed here more than ever before.

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Leading educational change initiatives – A practical 3-pronged approach

Jaki Lilly, Anglia Ruskin University

What was the most difficult question you were faced with in an interview? Ones I can remember include 'how will you look after your children in a full-time post?' Yes, a long time ago but even then my answer was, 'that's an illegal question!' I did get the job. Or another one 'We expect you to bring in income, we would be looking for £1 million a year.' My answer: 'Do you think if I could bring in £1 million a year I'd be applying for this post?' I didn't get the job!

But these aside, the most enduring question I have been posed is 'What is your leadership style?' This question perhaps is the most difficult for me since some 20 years ago, I applied for an internal promotion and was interviewed. 'What is your leadership style?' was put to me by a panel member halfway through the interview. My first answer was 'collegiate' but I received the reply 'No, what is your leadership style?' I made four more attempts to answer and received the same reply until eventually I was let off through the intervention of a senior member of the panel. I didn't get the job! Answering this question became even more difficult for me as I progressed through various management programmes, and became familiar with theories of leadership from such seminal authors as Kurt Lewin and David McClelland. What did the interviewers want me to say? What would your answer be?

Fast forward many years and I am working in Higher Education as an academic in an academic staff development leadership role. My role requires leadership of many different teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) enhancement CPD initiatives for the academics with whom I work and for whom time is limited. There are many competing pressures on academic colleagues who not only provide the most visible student-facing body of the institution, but who are also required to generate income and produce highly rated research. The academic audience is diverse – our institutions are made up of experts from many different disciplines which are often associated with traditional teaching practices and when time is limited, 'why change practices which work?' This provides a context for the academic developer to get things done wherein there is no hierarchical power relationship but plenty of responsibility. (One of my colleagues used to refer to this position as the 'Inverted Harlot'!)

Arguably, formalised TLA CPD is a relatively new demand on academics. In the past, much of my own teaching and learning-related CPD was informal and gathered when chatting to colleagues on a tea break or at lunch, but these opportunities are diminishing – is there still a staff restaurant and/or common room at your institution? Times change, the Government introduces new initiatives and quality measures, and institutions become more corporate in pursuit of competitive advantage. The Teaching Excellence Framework links the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to institutional income, and corporate priorities follow. As academic staff developers, our leadership of teaching, learning and assessment CPD is in the spotlight.

In order to allocate time to TLA CPD, academic colleagues and managers must be convinced of the benefits to themselves, their disciplines and their students and this provides the context in which I have developed my approach to leadership. Just being 'collegiate' does not necessarily get the job done, and if the job isn't done, it is me who has not achieved my objectives! Over time, I have realised that whilst still being 'collegiate' I have systemised a number of approaches to leadership to account for the academic context and the various stages of the initiative.

My tips for leading and getting things done in an academic context

I take a tried and tested approach to leadership. No fancy theories. No ambiguous claims.

Lead from the front: Get management buy-in before you start working on the initiative

As I meet colleagues in similar roles around the country, I am surprised at how often they ask 'how do you get senior management buy-in?' Well this is how I do it. For most of the initiatives I wish to introduce I first prepare a paper to present to a relevant committee – learning and teaching development, quality enhancement, Corporate Management Team and, sometimes, Senate. The paper sets out the rationale and objectives for the initiative, our position in comparison with the rest of the sector, a short proposal and plan for action, and key questions that we as an institution would need to answer before going ahead. If the need for this work is not clear to the committee, then there will be little likelihood of success.

Coach alongside: Convene a short-life working group

I ask the relevant committee to convene a short-life working group, and usually an academic member of the committee volunteers to chair the group. Representatives of other academic and professional services groups (HR, staff unions) and the Student Union, are nominated by members of the relevant committee. At this stage, I already have senior management buy-in, and champions of the initiative from key members of the university community.

Push from behind: Play an active part in the working group
The members of the working group are busy people. I will be on the group, to answer questions about the proposal and to take notes for formal feedback to the relevant committee. Sometimes I will find myself undertaking much of the work to assist the chair such as providing draft plans and solutions, organising meetings, chasing up group members, keeping track of progress and timelines, and creating formal draft paperwork to be discussed by the working group.

Back to the front: Scheme leadership
Job done, initiative designed. So what happens next? One of my managers once said to me 'don't drop the baton'. A scheme without a leader and champions soon loses its momentum.

So next I take on the role of scheme leader. As leader I need to provide the support, development and management of the scheme required to maintain it. Schemes sometimes need professional accreditation and ongoing reporting; all need guidance, VLE support and development sessions (workshops or webinars) and formal annual reporting to the relevant committee on progress and uptake; and often an online means to participate.

Amongst others, I have used this approach to develop and maintain our accredited HEA recognition scheme, our Teaching Review Scheme, our University Teaching Fellowship Scheme, and our Academic Honesty Policy and support for students to develop good academic practice.

And my most recent answer to the interview question 'What is your leadership style?' was, 'Well, sometimes I lead from the front, sometimes I coach alongside and sometimes I push from the back!' I did get the job!

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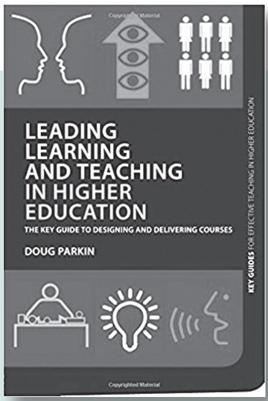
Book Review

Leading Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

by D. Parkin

Routledge, 2017, pp. 250



This book guides teaching practitioners in their journey to become academic leaders in education. It focuses on contemporary leadership theories and applies them in an academic context. Admittedly, the leadership theme which takes centre place is a very popular one in most industries and one which has seen a great many publications in recent times. This book thus incurs the risk of being yet another one in the rather conspicuous leadership library, with arguments becoming increasingly repetitive and somewhat tired.

Leading Learning and Teaching in Higher Education has a lot to offer, however. For starters, its engaging structure involves the reader in responding to the book's challenges interactively. The activities it contains stimulate thinking and guide readers/practitioners through reflection and self-evaluation. The proactive approach adopted across the book is useful, inspirational and refreshing. Useful because it develops leadership skills within the context of teaching and learning in HE without losing sight of the individual and her or his personal attributes, skills and qualities when faced with the task of leading for the first time – typically teaching units or degree programmes. Inspirational in that the author stipulates that *leading is learning* and moves on to show that the learning is a *sine qua non* of leadership: in other words, no one is born a leader but most can learn how to become one. Refreshing in its attempt to develop first-time leaders by taking them through the practical steps of reflective practice by questioning action and stimulating self-evaluation (and regulation). Sets of targeted questions at the end of each chapter push the reader to evaluate the positives and negatives of the leadership journey. Thus the author helps the readers to find their own response to the challenges established at the beginning of the chapter.

In ten chapters, Parkin covers leadership in key areas of university education, most of which have been the topic of recent debate, such as course design (chapter 6), assessment and feedback (chapter 7), course delivery (chapter 8), student engagement (chapter 9) and last, but certainly not least, leading oneself (chapter 10). Much to its credit, this book tackles topics which are the backbone of teaching in higher education without falling into the trap of becoming too prescriptive or of preaching ideological truths; rather, the author looks at these themes from the perspective of becoming a leader by offering a model (Programme Leadership Model) which is as much a frame of reference as it is an adaptable tool (chapter 2), to which the author consistently links back in his exploration of leadership in these respective areas. This approach creates a coherent cycle which makes reading this book a meaningful experience.

Another aspect of *Leading Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* which is worth mentioning to the prospective reader is the use of power language (p. 181ff.). The author places emphasis on the importance of developing 'leadership' language by constructing a narrative which is brave and positive. Power language, Parkin maintains, is all about turning 'pain language' into (pro-)active discourse. By extension, using power language effectively translates into the ability to tell a convincing story. Leadership story-telling is a craft, the development of which requires effort, vision and empathy. Only through a coaching process can all these skills be developed; a guide for this process is exactly what Parkin provides in this densely written book. In line with Parkin's views, I, too, am of the opinion that a modern, academic leader is neither the dispenser of ideology nor the enforcer of dogmatic work ethics. By contrast and more dynamically, a leader becomes one upon learning to tell a credible, meaningful story, in words as well as in actions. This book supports us along that journey.

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Undergraduate student views about assessment workload

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Introduction

This article reports on one aspect of a one-year project undertaken at City, University of London, in 2017/18. The project was initiated in response to concerns expressed by students and staff about the volume and relevance of assessments, the overlap of submission dates and the transparency of assessment criteria. The aim of the project was to scope the extent of the issues in order to develop a toolkit for staff that would support assessment development and respond to the concerns.

This pan-university project was led by the Department for Learning Enhancement and Development (LEaD) in collaboration with Associate Deans for Education. Institutional funding allowed Learning Development Fellows (LDFs) to be appointed in some schools. A project group was established consisting of the Associate Deans for Education from all schools (n=5), the Student Union Vice President Education, and Learning Development Fellows (n=4). The group was chaired jointly by a Deputy Dean from one School and the Deputy Director for LEaD.

The project had several strands and involved mapping all assessments across all undergraduate programmes against both programme and module learning outcomes, as well as reviewing submission dates. This article reports on focus groups with students about the activities they engage in when developing their assessments and the time they spend preparing for the assessments. It contributes to the scholarship of assessment, increasing knowledge about student approaches to assessment, with reference to their views about workload.

Literature review

In the United Kingdom, student workload has become more of a focus in higher education since the introduction of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System ('ECTS') as part of the Bologna process (see e.g. Scully and Kerr, 2014 and Fielding, 2008). As suggested by Chambers (1992), an appreciation of student workload allows for the uncovering of the 'hidden curriculum' (Snyder, 1971), and encourages a deep approach to learning. The recent HEPI and Advance HE survey (Neves and Hillman, 2018) notes an average of 31.2 hours worked per week by students, split relatively equally between contact hours and independent study. Many Higher Education Institutions, including our own City Credit Framework, allocate 10 hours of study to each credit within a degree, in order to address parity of workload between students and modules. Thus, a 15-credit module is associated with 150 hours of study, which include contact time, self-directed study and assessment; however, these hours are only notional, and the number of hours expected for undertaking assessment are often not transparent.

There is a wealth of evidence of the impact of assessment on students, with reports of the domination of assessment over all aspects of students' educational experience (Miller and Parlett, 1974; Gibbs and Simpson, 2005). Whilst identifying the importance of transparency in assessment, with information about credit frameworks supporting student appreciation of the amount of effort required, Fielding (2008, p. 14) notes that 'there are no simple answers as to how student assessment workload should be measured and standardised'.

Nevertheless, some studies have been conducted which aim to establish student workload in relation to assessment. Crook and Park (2004) used electronic assessment diaries to monitor assessment loads, and to establish volume, timing and validity of assessments. They found no relationship between the time spent preparing each assessment and the number of assessments undertaken, and no relationship between how much of a module each assessment was worth and the time taken to undertake that assessment. Whilst there was agreement that students spent more time on essays and reports than on other types of assessment, in other respects there was a great variation between students, who spent between 3.5 and 10 hours per assessment (all in 10-credit modules). Crook and Park (2004, p. 12) explain this variation by suggesting that 'we should consider the fact that students may naturally be more enthused to work on certain types of assessments than others […] and/or that they are particularly inspired by their lecturers to invest time and energy into a particular assessment'.

The variation in student approaches to assessment is also supported by Abbott *et al.* (2014) who investigated student preferences in assessment and reported student concerns about fairness and clarity in assessment criteria, alignment of course content to assessment and consistency in adherence to marking criteria. Students agreed that they prefer to have early information about assessment, and that they prepare differently for different types of assessment, but, similarly to Crook and Park's (2004) finding, there was great variation in the types of assessment that are preferred by students, and how they prepare.

Additional studies investigate *perceptions* of workload. Scully and Kerr (2014) report on a survey of students' workload via study diaries and qualitative comments. The study was conducted in response to student concerns about workload, and the related issue of surface approaches to learning, also reported by Gibbs and Simpson (2005). They suggest that there is a mismatch between lecturer and student estimations of required workload, and that clear communication of expectations is a factor in reducing student perceived workloads. Similarly, Kember and Leung (1998, p. 302) examined the relationship between perceived workload and the amount of self-directed study undertaken by students. They found no relationship between these two factors, and conclude that 'actual workload alone is not a good measure of perceived workload as only 4% of the variance of perceived workload can be explained'.

Taken together, the literature surrounding student approaches to assessment, and actual and perceived workload, suggests not only that there is a great deal of variation between students, but that student perceptions of workload are likely to be only loosely related to actual workload. This makes it difficult for those planning assessment to advise students, and to account for assessment workload sufficiently in curriculum development. To address these issues, as part of a wider project on assessment, we investigated the time taken for our undergraduate students to prepare for their assessments, and the tasks they engage in during this preparation.

Method

As this project was an evaluation of current practice, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic inquiry was considered an appropriate methodology because this approach considers the context within which evaluation takes place as central to understanding the reality of the situation. This was important in terms of gaining insight into different disciplinary practice with the University comprising of five Schools. Ethical approval for the project was gained for the entire project, including the student focus groups that are the subject of this paper.

The Student Union Vice President Education emailed all Undergraduate Programme Representatives in order to recruit students for the focus groups. The e-mail included the participant information sheet and the consent form. This led to 15 students being recruited across four of the five Schools with 13 students being third year undergraduates.

The focus group interviews took place at a time agreed with the students which led to five focus group interviews of between 40 and 50 minutes. Students received a voucher for their participation. All interviews were undertaken by the Deputy Director of LEaD and all students who participated consented to the interviews being audio-recorded. The audio recordings were professionally transcribed, and the data was thematically analysed. The focus groups concentrated on the time spent preparing assessments, and the range of activities undertaken.

Findings

The students had been engaged in a full range of assessment tasks including unseen examinations consisting of essay questions and multiple choice questions, a range of written coursework assessments such as reports, case studies and essays on specific themes, practical assessments such as Observed Structured Clinical Examinations (OCSEs), music studio activities, verbal presentations, and group projects which were both written and verbal. Group projects were the one assessment type that all students had some concerns about. These concerns related to all students gaining the same grade and the issue of students who are perceived not to do their share of the project. The students all preferred having more than one assessment in a module irrespective of the credit value; they felt that having one assessment which was awarded 100% was high risk, particularly where there was a lack of clarity about the assessment requirements.

The activities that students engaged in when preparing assessments were varied as one would expect, irrespective of the assessment task they were engaged in. Students discussed going to the library and using the internet to search for evidence for their work. They reviewed their class notes and presentation slides on the virtual learning environment, and sometimes met with lecturers to clarify points. Some students were very strategic in planning, and for examinations would review past papers to look for recurrent themes. Some also focused on the assessment criteria and what was required. There were mixed views about study groups with some considering them a very useful approach with students sharing their resources and notes, but others preferring to focus on their own studies. In terms of using formative assessment opportunities (other than online quizzes) there were again some mixed views. Some students did submit formative work for comment and felt reassured that they were on the right lines, whilst others felt that they did not always gain constructive and useful feedback so did not use this as an approach.

None of the students were able to provide any definite length of time they spent preparing assessments. However, they noted that for some, particularly examinations, they would start several weeks before and revise a topic per week, whereas for some coursework they might just do this over a few days. They were asked if the percentage allocated to the assessment task influenced their decision about how much time to spend on preparing the assessment, but they all said this was not the key factor, agreeing with the findings of both Crook and Park (2004) and Fielding (2008). Instead, factors that influenced the time they spent were whether they liked the focus of the assessment and enjoyed studying it further, and whether they perceived the assessment would be difficult. Again they were unanimous that group projects always took the most time because of the difficulties in meeting with others in the group and agreeing what would be in the final project.

Whilst we did not gain any specific data which we could use to influence future policy, such as indicating for students how many hours each assessment might take them to prepare, the project has provided us with some useful data to design a recording tool for students to document their assessment preparation activity and time involved. We now know that whatever tool we design, in addition to collecting information on the activities they engage in and the time taken, there also needs to be reference to the type of assessment, whether or not it was a group project, and whether this was a topic area they enjoyed.

Conclusion

Despite moves towards recognising student workload, hours assigned in module specifications are at best 'notional' and often give little indication of how much time students should expect to spend preparing assessments. Whilst there are a number of approaches to measuring student workload, none is without problems, and a great deal of variation between students and assessment is evident. The focus groups reported here have confirmed many of the findings of previous studies, and provide future directions for developing a toolkit of resources to support assessment.

To develop further insight into student activity around assessment we plan to undertake another study with students in the next academic year, but will develop a tool for them to document activity over one term and take into account the views they have provided in the focus groups.

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Developing teaching practice with Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Dr Kevin L. Merry, De Montfort University

Introduction

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a key pillar in De Montfort University's strategic approach to the development of learning and teaching practice. UDL also aligns with the institutional Strategic Framework 2015-2020, and represents a distinct strand in the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (ULTAS). Furthermore, since 2015, UDL has been the focus of several strategic learning and teaching projects which form part of the institutional corporate portfolio.

What is UDL?

UDL represents a set of principles for curriculum development. A UDL curriculum is one that incorporates a variety of options to allow it to be accessible and inclusive for individuals with different cultural backgrounds, disabilities, different learning styles and preferences, and different learning abilities. Hence, a single, optimal learning solution for every learner is discouraged using

Figure 1 The three principles of Universal Design for Learning

a UDL approach to curriculum development. Instead, UDL reflects an awareness of the unique needs of each learner in a wide variety of learning contexts. Accommodation of the aforementioned differences, to create learning experiences that remove barriers from the learning environment, is the key aim of a UDL curriculum. Subsequently, the opportunity for effective learning for all learners is optimised (Rose and Meyer, 2002; Burgstahler, 2008).

UDL is based upon three principles: 1) multiple means of representation, providing learners with a variety of ways of acquiring information via learning resources; 2) multiple means of engagement, taking into account learners' interests and learning preferences ensuring that they are appropriately challenged and thus motivated to learn; and 3) multiple means of action and expression, allowing learners with alternative ways to demonstrate their understanding (Davies *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, in the most basic sense, implementation of a UDL approach to curriculum design is one that embraces each of the three principles of UDL shown in Figure 1.

Why UDL?

De Montfort University is a diverse institution. Student diversity data for 2015/16 indicated that the average proportion of students declaring a disability was 18% and that there were 51% black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students within the total student population. The University also has a long record in supporting the widening-participation agenda and has traditionally attracted a high percentage of students from underrepresented groups. This is due in part to the geographical location of the University in a multicultural city (Leicester) and in a relatively low-skilled region (East Midlands). Hence, a single learning solution for every learner is simply not appropriate in such circumstances. Subsequently, the University has embraced UDL as an institution-wide approach to learning, teaching and assessment as a means of enabling effective learning among its diverse body of students.

A second key driver in the move toward a UDL approach to learning, teaching and assessment was the government's decision to make changes to the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) ahead of the 2016/17 academic year. Such changes meant that some support roles including note-taking support, library support assistants, laboratory or workshop support, readers, scribes, study assistants and specialist transcription services, would no longer be funded by DSA from September 2016 onwards. With a disabled student population approaching one-fifth of the entire student population, such changes imposed several pedagogic challenges for the University. UDL is the key solution to meeting those challenges.

UDL staff development journey

The starting point for the UDL staff development journey was an audit and review of all DMU curricula against the key principles of UDL, undertaken by academic staff during the 2014/15 academic year. As a result, curriculum changes to further embed UDL elements were undertaken by staff via a series of mandatory academic development initiatives. Such initiatives consisted of two initial workshops: 1) UDL Introduction, which introduced academic staff to the concept of UDL; and 2) UDL and DMU Replay in Practice (Figure 2), a session which supported staff in developing a UDL approach to their teaching.

Figure 2 Universal Design for Learning staff development journey

The UDL and DMU Replay in Practice workshop was delivered weekly for two hours in each of the faculties by staff from the L&OD team and staff from the Centre for Enhancing Learning through Technology (CELT). The workshop provided development in UDL teaching practice and training using DMU Replay.

DMU Replay

DMU Replay is an audio and video service provided to students in support of teaching. DMU Replay includes audio-visual recordings made during scheduled teaching, and videos created separately from scheduled teaching, specifically for the purpose of blended or distance learning. The recommended platform is Panopto, with access for students provided via core technology including the VLE. In June 2016, it became mandatory for staff to record all staff-led teaching to ensure the widest possible access.

The normal requirement is a screencast *i.e.* audio is recorded, synchronised with a slide presentation and/or screen content if used. Staff-facilitated teaching may also be recorded, where appropriate, to support students' learning, to allow reflection and the analysis of activities undertaken in class. However, it is recognised that a wide range of learning activities will not be suitable for recording and that the act of recording has the potential to impact on some students' confidence and the extent of their participation in class. Hence, recording of staff-facilitated teaching is not mandatory. Despite there being no mandatory requirement to record staff-facilitated teaching, staff are expected to make the learning covered during such sessions available to learners in line with UDL idea number 4 described in Table 1.

1.	Making learning resources available in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) at least 48 hours in advance of teaching sessions in a modifiable format
2.	Emphasising active learning and knowledge checks during all teaching sessions
3.	Signposting opportunities for self-directed study during teaching sessions
4.	Allowing learners to replay, review or revisit learning covered during teaching sessions via the VLE
5.	Providing flexible ways of formatively and summatively assessing learners
6.	Ensuring that the VLE meets minimum standards for the enhancement of learning through technology

Table 1 Six Universal Design for Learning ideas for consideration

The cheese sandwich

To further develop UDL teaching practice, the UDL and DMU Replay in Practice workshops introduced the concept of the 'cheese sandwich' approach to supporting learning. Essentially, the cheese sandwich approach emphasises the Learning for Mastery (LFM) approach to teaching (Bloom, 1968), where contact time or the 'cheese' in the sandwich is used to develop learner mastery of content. Content is mastered through the development of cognitive skills via active learning techniques interspersed with knowledge checks and regular in-session feedback (Petty, 2009). The pre-session element of contact time, or the 'first slice of bread', is used to prepare students for contact time by providing teaching materials in advance, signposting content and outlining the cognitive load of the forthcoming session. The 'second slice of bread', or post-session element of contact time, is used to further support student mastery of content by allowing learners to replay, review or revisit learning covered during teaching sessions. This is done by capturing the teacher-led parts of sessions using DMU Replay or capturing student-led parts of sessions via notes, summaries, wikis, blogs, pictures *etc.* All post-session resources are uploaded to the VLE, and staff are encouraged to include an accompanying formative assessment task to further support content mastery. The cheese sandwich approach is summarised in Table 2.

UDL staff development framework

DMU's staff development framework consists of four pillars: 1) Teaching Practice, 2) Research Practice, 3) Leadership, and 4) Personal Effectiveness. The Teaching Practice pillar contains ~40 different initiatives (workshops, events, schemes *etc.*) that are intended to enhance teaching practice across the institution. UDL is an underpinning feature of the design and delivery of each initiative, and has been blended with the United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) to show colleagues how adoption of the UDL principles can provide tangible enhancements to their ongoing professional development.

Following positive staff feedback on the UDL Introduction and UDL and DMU Replay in Practice workshops, the content of both workshops was embedded into the University's three-day introduction to learning and teaching course entitled Effective Learning and Teaching @ DMU (ELT@DMU). ELT@DMU is a prerequisite course for all staff new to teaching, covering basic approaches to teaching, supporting learning and assessment. The course is also a prerequisite for entry onto the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE) as shown in Figure 3.

In 2017, the PGCLTHE was revalidated. A key intention behind the revalidated programme was that it would exemplify UDL in terms of its approach, providing the perfect model upon which to base practice, as well as deliver key theoretical content on UDL. The programme uses the 'cheese sandwich approach' to developing learner mastery via a flipped classroom approach to content delivery. Hence, as part of pre-session contact, learners are given access to a pre-recorded online lecture using DMU Replay, freeing up contact time to develop content mastery using active learning techniques. Learners are given the opportunity to replay, review or revisit learning covered during contact time as part of post-session contact. Post-session resources support learners in completing a piece of formative assessment known as a 'patch task'. As per flexible UDL approaches to assessment, the patch tasks can be completed in any

Pre-session	*In-session*	*Post-session*
Session summary provided including learning outcomes Cognitive load of session provided Teaching materials provided to support learning including: • Screencast/video • Slides • Notes • Readings • Task(s) Signposting of additional/ further content	Focused on cognitive skills development Alignment of teaching activities with session outcomes Teaching activities include: • Active learning • Knowledge checks • Formative assessment • Tutor feedback • Peer feedback	Learners able to replay, review or revisit learning via: • Screencast • Notes • Summaries • Wiki • Blog • Pictures Formative assessment task reflecting learning outcomes and aligned with teaching activities set – completed for next session

Table 2 Cheese sandwich approach to supporting learning

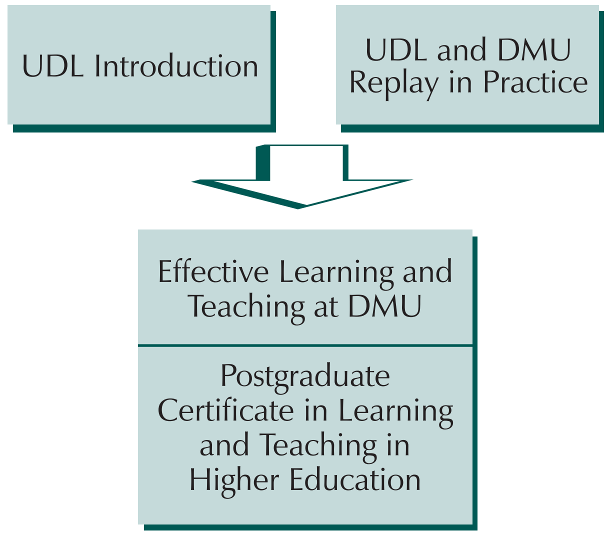

Figure 3 Relationships between various Universal Design for Learning staff development initiatives

format the learner chooses. Previous examples have included a written piece, poster, screencast, podcast, mind map and diagram. Learners receive feedback from their peers on their patch tasks during subsequent sessions. The new programme with its UDL approach has been well received by colleagues, gaining a 100% overall satisfaction score in the first round of course feedback. Also identified in feedback is the influence UDL approaches have had on staff teaching practice, with many commenting on how they have modified their approach to teaching based on what they have learned about UDL as part of staff development initiatives, and the positive impact this has had on the student experience.

A quote from a PGCLTHE participant 2017/18:

> *'The PGCLTHE has helped me advance my UDL practice more than I ever thought possible. Learning how to deliver learning and assess students in flexible ways has improved how I support my students and this has been reflected in their feedback.'*

Concluding comments

UDL is now part of the learning and teaching DNA of De Montfort University. It represents a key driver in the strategic direction of the University, and is the key pedagogic model for the design and delivery of learning, teaching and assessment.

UDL is no longer a novel concept at DMU, having been embedded deeply into matters concerning learning and teaching, especially the development of staff teaching practice, for several years. However, to those less well acquainted with UDL it pays to remember one small idea. It's just good teaching practice!

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Flipping heck! Can we get students to engage in large group settings?

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The curriculum at the heart of this article historically and continuously strikes fear into many a student. What is this horror, you may ask? You may have experienced it yourselves. Essentially, mathematics and statistics for non-mathematicians, in this case on business and management programmes. The current nomenclature for the curriculum in question is Business Analysis for Decision Making (for brevity, forthwith referred to as Business Analysis).

As a Higher Education (HE) lecturer, for almost 30 years overcoming mathematics anxiety is the 'holy grail' of my continuing professional development. Numbers and the diversity of student cohorts have increased, technology to assist learning continues to develop, but the core mathematical topics required for business and management have changed little in 20+ years. At the Faculty of Business and Law, Northumbria University, students can now choose from over 20 full-time undergraduate (UG) degrees. Examples include BA (Hons) Marketing Management, BA (Hons) Business with Human Resource Management, and BA Accounting. Business Analysis is one of six modules that form the first-year core curriculum delivered to approximately 800 students per year. As indicated by the example programme titles on which this curriculum is delivered, the background experience of mathematics for students studying this module can vary significantly.

Maths anxiety is not a singular entity of concern. Current student cohorts are classified as digital natives and this is accompanied by certain expectations of IT capabilities. From anecdotal observation by colleagues and myself, this IT capability appears to be narrow and generally not educationally based. A more pressing unease for the Faculty is in respect to student attendance and engagement, particularly within lectures. This is not unique to this particular subject or even University. There is increasing global evidence of research into student engagement *e.g.* Kashif and Basharat (2014).

My host faculty also investigated this in 2016/17 through a task group of which I was a member. This task group undertook two main strands of enquiry: student consultation and a comprehensive programme of lecture observation. This task group highlighted a clear mismatch between peer observation and student views. Academic peers felt that lecture quality exceeded expectations whereas students felt that material covered could either be read or watched online and expressed a desire for lectures to *'add value'* beyond this, making specific reference to linking lectures more closely to assessment requirements.

One of my key duties within the task group was to conduct a literature search on innovative lecture practice. This revealed that the flipped classroom was a particularly popular technique. Originating with the US secondary school system, in its simplest form the flipped technique uses classroom contact to complete what was traditionally homework, and vice versa.

By 2013, Jacob Bishop and Matthew Verleger noted the 'buzz' around flipped learning and its increasing use within HE. At that time, both felt there was no unanimous definition of how the flipped model should be applied in HE settings. Therefore, they boldly proposed that within HE, a flipped classroom should consist of some form of computer-based instruction outside the classroom and an interactive activity within the classroom based on the student completing tasks.

Most literature suggests there are a number of advantages to using the flipped model. For example, by introducing interactive tasks, the passivity associated with only listening is decreased, permitting contact time to be utilised for higher-order cognitive activities, and by allowing students to assume ownership of their learning, student engagement and assessment performance is potentially increased (Albert and Beatty, 2014; McLaughlin *et al.,* 2013).

Through natural progression, Business Analysis's resource base was closely aligned to that required in a flipped classroom. For example, all lecture content was captured on video. Additional resources such as annotated worked examples and interactive quizzes were also in place. The Business Analysis curriculum consists of six topics (*e.g.* Correlation) delivered on a repeated 12-week semester, *i.e.* approximately half of the first years study the module in semester 1, the remaining students in semester 2. Contact hours are restricted to one 50-minute lecture delivered to all 400 students together and one two-hour IT workshop delivered to 20 students at a time. The IT workshops utilise a spreadsheet rather than a specialist statistical package for numerical calculation. This is principally because spreadsheet skills are also known to be a key attribute required by employers. Due to the numbers involved, a team of staff deliver the IT workshops with an academic leader, in this case me, who conducts all the lectures.

To satisfy professional body regulations linked to some programmes, assessment is via an examination. It is not practical or reliable to conduct a computer-based examination; therefore students undertake six preparatory tasks (one per topic) applying relevant spreadsheet techniques throughout the teaching programme. This preparatory work is then taken into an examination where questions focus on the analysis and interpretation of the numbers produced in the preparatory materials.

To support the flipped model, we knew that lectures and workshops could draw upon one example to illustrate the spreadsheet skills required and the theories and/or analysis required behind the topic (*e.g.* Correlation). In total, Business Analysis had 30 examples of preparatory work and practice examination questions. This large number had been designed to account for the diversity of programmes studying Business Analysis – by offering one example per topic across five categories of programmes: Accountancy Finance and Economics; Business and Management; Human and Organisational Management; Logistics, Enterprise and Innovation; and Marketing and Tourism.

In light of the extensive resource base, literature commendations for the method and the student views emanating from the task group in relation to the 'added value' of lectures, the flipped model was worthy of consideration.

As mentioned earlier, students are not as capable with IT as we had anticipated. In the case of spreadsheets, although many students have used a spreadsheet, their previous experience is basic and appears to be limited to data entry, basic formulas and perhaps graphical construction. In terms of this module, in the very early stages of teaching there is a sense that mathematics anxiety is exacerbated by spreadsheet shock.

Spreadsheet shock is a self-generated term used to express how many students claim to be familiar with spreadsheets but within two to three weeks of teaching, realise how little they actually know, or may have incorrectly assumed to be simple. A common example of the latter is that many students find that constructing a graph from scratch is more complex than they were previously led to believe.

Although not excellent, workshop attendance was traditionally far better than lectures. The team and I surmised that, due to the practical nature of the subject, students were under the impression that 'workshop only' attendance was sufficient. However, this did influence the efficiency of workshops; due to poor lecture attendance staff felt forced to conduct mini-lectures before students could get started. This, in combination with the spreadsheet shock encountered, influenced the amount of content students could cover in the time available. Often, the practice examination questions could not be completed.

Therefore, to account for the multitude of influences, the flipped model was designed as follows:

- As online materials were already available in the form of video files, quizzes would now be utilised as the computer-based instruction outside the classroom. This was clearly signposted to students on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and students were guided to utilise these resources both before and after any contact sessions according to their need
- Workshop sessions remained largely unchanged. However, the realities of practice needed to be taken into account. Through a combination of demonstration and in-class practice students would complete up to two of the preparatory examples in line with their programme specialisms
- To ensure lectures could focus on practice examination questions, all five preparatory examples were completed and made available via the VLE a few days prior to a lecture. Students were requested to print the practice exam questions and the completed preparatory work provided and bring these to the lecture with them
- The lectures themselves then focused on the (analysis and interpretation) elements as represented by the practice examination questions. Due to the large cohort, the interactive lecture content was generally in the form of polling questions using TurningPoint software and filling in the blank slides.

Due to my own personal interests in pedagogic research, evaluation of the model was formalised through an action research methodology. It is acknowledged that there is a vast diversity of practice within action research. Cassell and Johnson (2006) attempted to capture this diversity into five main themes. In this particular case, as defined by Cassell and Johnson (2006), an inductive action research practice was observed – positivist in origin, a natural stance for a statistician, but additionally utilising qualitative data.

As the first-year curriculum is delivered on a repeated semester basis, at the point of writing this article two cycles of action research (*i.e.* Semester 1 and Semester 2) have been completed.

Several different forms of evaluation have been undertaken: attendance, student views and examination performance. Northumbria University's main method for collating attendance is through battery-operated handsets designed to read bar codes (*i.e.* Student IDs). As these need to be manually handed around, they are recognised as unreliable but are the only practical option available for large lectures. Due to the reliability issues, lecture attendance is rarely recorded and this was the case here with previous cohorts. However, in the case of workshops, previous cohort attendance levels were available, because in IT labs attendance can be manually recorded via the internet. Multiple student evaluation formats were analysed, *e.g.* the standardised module evaluation questionnaires, feedback which arose from staff and student liaison meetings, and focus groups. In the case of the latter, it is worth noting that these took place after the examination linked to the first semester had been completed.

Semester 1

The flipped classroom model was introduced to the students in September 2017. Students were provided with a full explanation of the flipped technique and its rationale in the first lecture. This was accompanied by a written teaching and learning plan providing a week-by-week breakdown of activities and expectations. Later in the semester this was repeated as in-class and email reminders as a response to observed student behaviour. We noted a distinct lack of preparation, to the point where basic materials such as pen, paper or a suitable electronic alternative, were not brought to classes.

It appears that the flipped model improved attendance, albeit marginally; average attendance rates for workshops being 72% compared with 65% for the equivalent 2016/17 cohort. No suitable formal comparison could be made for lectures, but figures illustrate a 48% average lecture attendance, anecdotally a slight improvement on 2016/17. However, only one in ten of the cohort attended at least half of the lectures. Additionally, staff involved in the module are united in the belief that for attendance to be considered acceptable an individual should attend at least 80% of the total sessions. On this basis, overall attendance is very poor with only 12% of the cohort illustrating this level of attendance.

Student evaluation indicated that students had strong concerns that a flipped model was non-traditional and this was affecting their learning. Could this be a major influence on attendance?

Throughout the feedback process at no point did students acknowledge that their own lack of preparation was a factor of concern. Lack of even minimum preparation was clearly a considerable issue. For example, despite providing students with materials to print and sending email reminders, it was not until the last two topics, when handouts were physically distributed within the lecture sessions (against University policy!), that we felt the lecture activity was received positively. One elected student representative did state their peers were clearly not making the most of the opportunity the flipped model presented. A control/experimental group study conducted by Strayer (2012) involved introductory statistics, and the findings illustrated that the traditional setting was preferred over the flipped classroom model and therefore suggested a flipped model may not be appropriate for all subjects.

The impact of attendance and unpreparedness was noticeably reflected in examination performance. Failure rates were high, with 38% of students failing in comparison with 17% in 2016/17 and the average pass reducing to 42% in comparison with 54%. As expected, correlation between attendance and performance was significant ($p<0.01$). Correlation values between lecture and overall attendance was more prominent than that of workshop attendance ($r=0.31$, 0.30 and 0.18, respectively). Downturns in performance are not unique in flipped settings. Rodriguez (2016) noted flipped models in engineering topics also experienced declines in performance.

Despite these findings I had faith that over time the flipped model could work. Action research enables small changes in practice to be evaluated; in this case, some very small adaptations to practice were made in semester 2. In an attempt to minimise the focus of a flipped classroom being *different,* in the second semester any *direct references* to a flipped model were removed. To emphasise the required preparations, weekly emails repeated as VLE announcements distinctly outlined the expectations for the following week (Figure 1).

Furthermore, I made a commitment to take a stricter stance during the lecture in respect to the materials students should bring.

Semester 2

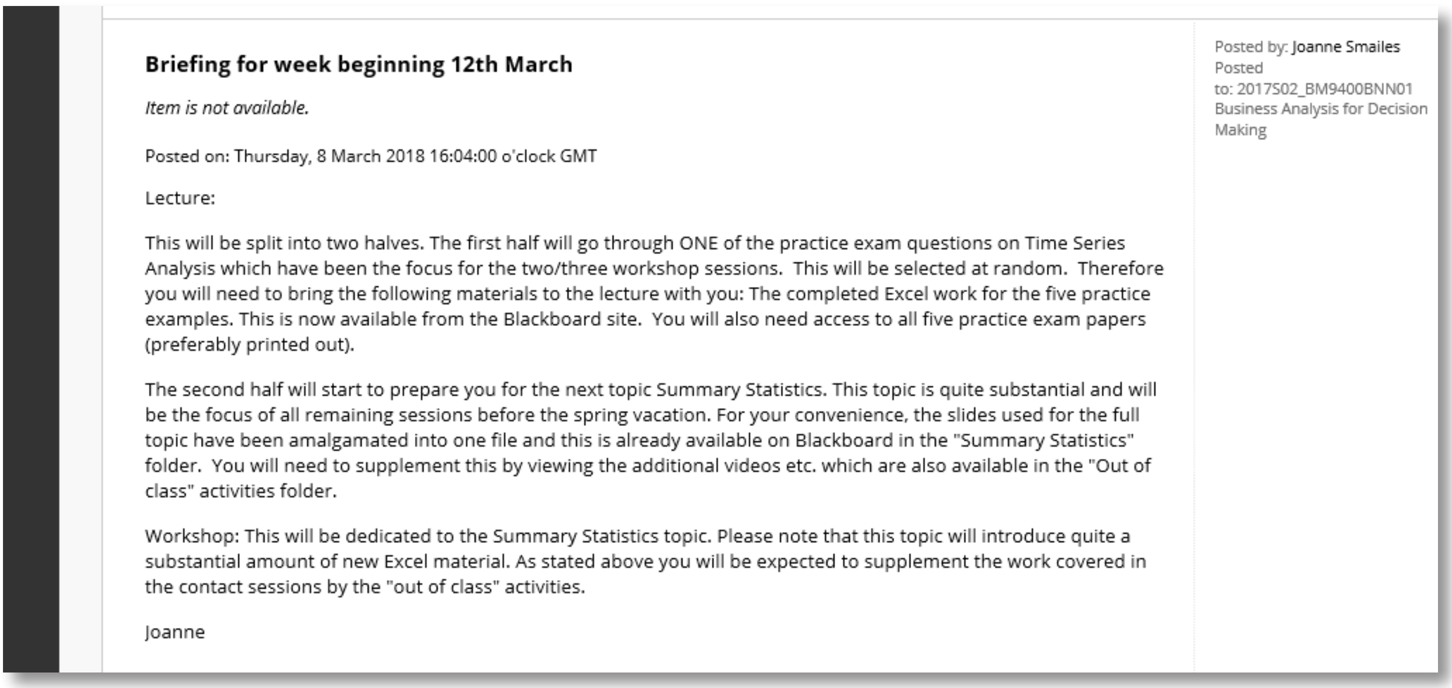
Significant contrasts in the outcomes compared with Semester 1 emerged. Firstly, the priorities for attendance appeared to have switched from workshops to lectures. Average lecture attendance rates had increased slightly to 56% with six out of every ten students attending at least half of the lectures. This may connect with a critical incident in week 4 of the lecture programme. As noted above one of the modifications was in relation to my own strictness in lectures. For the first couple of weeks I emphasised that students needed to have materials with them and allowed them ten minutes to get materials and come back. In each case, a large proportion would leave – not all would return! By week 4, I was very firm and told the students if they had not come prepared, they should leave and not return. Approximately one in four of the attendees did exactly this; from that point onwards lecture attendance did reduce but the attendees were at least arriving prepared and engaged in the interactive elements of the lecture.

In contrast, workshop attendance declined to an average of 39%. In 2016/17 semester 2 average workshop attendance was 63%. Levels of acceptable individual attendance continued to be poor with only 15% of the cohort reaching an attendance rate of 80% or more.

The most notable differences between semester 1 and 2 were in respect to both student evaluation and examination performance. Examination performance was almost identical to that in 2016/17 with an average pass mark of 55 in both years and a very slight improvement in failure rates (15% in 2017/18 vs 16% in 2016/17).

Significant correlations between attendance and assessment were still evident. However, in this semester, the correlation values for all three factors were very similar to each other and higher than those found in semester 2 (Table 1).

All forms of student evaluation were generally positive. For example, the use of TurningPoint for interactivity was directly praised and the lectures being different from those of other



Briefing for week beginning 12th March

Item is not available.

Posted on: Thursday, 8 March 2018 16:04:00 o'clock GMT

Lecture:

This will be split into two halves. The first half will go through ONE of the practice exam questions on Time Series Analysis which have been the focus for the two/three workshop sessions. This will be selected at random. Therefore you will need to bring the following materials to the lecture with you: The completed Excel work for the five practice examples. This is now available from the Blackboard site. You will also need access to all five practice exam papers (preferably printed out).

The second half will start to prepare you for the next topic Summary Statistics. This topic is quite substantial and will be the focus of all remaining sessions before the spring vacation. For your convenience, the slides used for the full topic have been amalgamated into one file and this is already available on Blackboard in the "Summary Statistics" folder. You will need to supplement this by viewing the additional videos etc. which are also available in the "Out of class" activities folder.

Workshop: This will be dedicated to the Summary Statistics topic. Please note that this topic will introduce quite a substantial amount of new Excel material. As stated above you will be expected to supplement the work covered in the contact sessions by the "out of class" activities.

Joanne

Posted by: Joanne Smailes
Posted to: 2017S02_BM9400BNN01 Business Analysis for Decision Making

Figure 1 Weekly email example

All p<0.01	Lecture attendance	Workshop attendance	Overall attendance
Exam mark	r = 0.445	r = 0.458	r = 0.485

Table 1 Correlation coeffcients linked to Attendance and Performance

subjects was viewed as refreshing – a total contrast to the first semester. Focus groups were designed to concentrate on generic issues of student engagement. All participants acknowledged that Business Analysis was viewed as the most difficult module studied during the first year. As part of the focus group activity (conducted by an independent researcher) participants were asked to think of a module or a course that had engaged them and one that had not, including school experience if necessary. Many students (including a number who had failed the module in Semester 1) cited Business Analysis as a subject that had most engaged them. In light of the previous evidence, a sign of hope for the future.

Conclusion

It is recognised that there are a number of complex and multi-layered dimensions to the context in which a flipped classroom is applied that require further exploration in future cycles of action research. The application of a flipped model to Business Analysis has not yet achieved what was initially anticipated – maths anxiety and spreadsheet shock remain, and there is still room for improvement in performance. Despite students themselves expressing a desire for lectures to make clearer links to assessment and go beyond what can be read or viewed online, attendance remains a major issue. It would appear that individuals tend to take a very piecemeal approach to attendance. Therefore, although the flipped classroom model encourages a greater level of student engagement in classroom activity, this is not reflected through improved attendance levels. Evidence collated here suggests this could be strongly linked to their own commitment to preparing for contact sessions. However, as illustrated by stark contrast in student views and results across the two semesters, the psychological impact of full disclosure is a particular curiosity. Should we simply not mention the 'F' word?

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Internationalising the curriculum in a Danish university – Learning through collaboration

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Introduction

This article provides insights into academic developers' transferable learning from engaging with grounded Internationalising the Curriculum (ITC) projects at a Danish university. After setting the context for the University of Southern Denmark's (SDU) ITC and Internationalisation at Home (IAH) initiatives, we review the 'Developing Students' Intercultural Competences' projects which were co-designed and led by teachers, students and two academic developers at SDU in 2017. We conclude by sharing our five key learning points.

Internationalisation at SDU

Like many universities, SDU's strategic commitment to increasing numbers of international staff and students indicates a predominantly structural approach to internationalisation (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2015). An internal review of SDU's five faculties' interpretations of internationalisation led to a student entitlement, for those studying a five-year Bachelors/Masters degree programme, to either a study-abroad semester or an IAH course-based experience during the same semester.

IAH reflects SDU's interpretation of a Danish Ministerial commitment to graduate employability and its requirements for all university students to 'obtain an education with a global perspective' (Ministry of Education) in the belief that international experience adds a unique professional quality to graduate employability.

Responsibility lies with SDU's International Department to facilitate study-abroad opportunities and with faculties to provide IAH for non-sojourning students. The university offers general guidelines for an IAH semester: courses should be taught in English, they could include an international approach and student groups may include international and Danish students. Without a university-wide commitment to ITC principles (Leask, 2009) such wide parameters lend themselves to diverse interpretations of IAH at faculty, programme and course level. We are a long way off aligning with ITC learning outcomes (LOs) and course assessment in other than discrete ITC courses (Jones and Killick, 2013; Killick, 2015), or integrating intercultural graduate competences at programme level (Haigh and Clifford, 2011). Nevertheless, the concept of student entitlement is a significant lever for IAH.

Teacher responses to Internationalisation at Home

With the exception of programmes of study which include discrete ITC or intercultural competence development LOs, programmes of study at SDU tend to accommodate IAH by teaching in English and, where recruitment permits, student groups are internationally mixed. Teachers who participate in courses on internationalising the curriculum are often positive about the concept although they are generally a self-selecting group. Even so, these teachers can be unclear how IAH could be integrated into their courses without adding significantly to their workloads or wedging it into courses where it does not naturally fit, a particular concern in theoretical courses.

Internationalisation and academic development

Since 2015, SDU's Centre for Teaching and Learning has been supporting teachers and programme leaders with ITC initiatives mainly through pedagogic courses and consultancy. Capitalising on the university's focus on internationalisation, during the review period and prior to the launch of the study abroad and IAH entitlement, we (Donna and Anne, the two academic developers) secured internal, matched project funding for the six-month project, 'Developing Students' Intercultural Competences'. The project's target group was teachers and programme leaders, interested in internationalising courses and programmes. In addition to directly supporting projects during the funded project timeframe, we were committed to developing a sustainable online resource (see Website) for teachers and programme leaders at SDU, which we would continue to maintain and update. The project funding increased our dedicated ITC work-time and funded IT specialist support to develop the project web page, e-learning resources and video editing.

'Developing Students' Intercultural Competences' project design

We conceived of the 'Developing Students' Intercultural Competences' project as a grounded project to support teachers who already had ideas about how they wanted to internationalise their courses or programmes. Whilst this was not a research project, our interests in enabling change through facilitation and iterative action research cycles chimed with elements of 'systemic action research' (Burns, 2014). We knew we could only select elements of Burns's conception of systemic action research, but that in itself was of interest to us – to experiment with an approach designed for complex systems and identify which elements could be applicable at programme or course level in a university context. In view of this, together with university teacher and programme leader concerns about accommodating another top-down initiative, we were determined to keep the project as open and grounded as possible. We launched the project, inviting bespoke project ideas from teachers across all faculties in response to the following project outcomes:

1) Students equipped with intercultural competences, which will better prepare them for the complexities of changing, globalised professional and social environments
2) Developed student and staff awareness of the relevance of intercultural competences
3) Contributed to student engagement and retention by developing their intercultural competences during their academic studies.

The seven projects

The project call elicited seven diverse project ideas, from teachers and a programme leader in three faculties: Humanities, Engineering and Health, and two unforeseen cross-faculty, student-led projects. In the case of the student-led projects, students responded to the project invitation thinking that it was advertising an existing student workshop on developing their intercultural competences. Having told them there was currently no such workshop, but if they would they like to co-develop one we would support their initiatives, three students on one campus and one on another campus volunteered.

The projects ranged from programme-level Project 1, which included iterative consultation with the programme leader leading to bespoke workshops for the teachers and students, to course-level Projects 3-5, which included iterative consultancy, leading to the updating of course descriptions and the development of intercultural learning activities and e-resources. Project 2 differed with its specific focus on introducing teachers to the relevance of internationalisation in their engineering courses; this was planned as the kick-start for a three-year IAH focus across these courses. Projects 6 and 7 were student-led and resulted in cross-faculty workshops on intercultural group work, mainly targeting students and staff from student services.

Working collaboratively – Iterative consultancies

During the consultancies with the project leaders, we used a questioning approach to facilitate the project leaders' analysis of the situation in their programme or course, encouraging them to plan bespoke actions and therein develop their own theories of change. Alongside this facilitator approach we shared ideas on inclusive teaching and learning and identified relevant resources and comparable course initiatives, whilst remaining mindful of each project leader's expert status and tacit understanding of his/her courses and student or teacher needs. We were determined that the project leaders should retain ownership of their projects and that changes would be of their making; we very much saw our role as facilitative with pedagogic input. Whilst project leaders looked to us for guidance and input, there was evidence of project leaders asserting their project ownership when they rejected or modified our suggestions, citing their tacit knowledge of what they thought would work best in their situations. These consultancies resulted in agreed delegated actions and follow-on consultancies, hence the term iterative consultancies. All workshops were co-designed with the project leaders and although we led the workshops, all project leaders participated. In the student-led projects, the project leaders made significant contributions in the form of a videoed role play of a dysfunctional student group (Project 7) and the inclusion of employer perspectives on intercultural competences (Project 6). Table 1 provides an overview of the seven projects and you can access the Project Leaders' Talking Heads videos and see their projects' action plans on the webpage (see Website).

Project number and title	Project activity	Target group	Project outcome
Programme level			
1. Successful student integration across cultures	1. Teacher workshop on facilitating intercultural group work and developing authentic tasks 2. Student workshops on effective intercultural study groups	BSc and MA Web Communicaton Teachers and Students	1. Inspired teachers 2. Programme team integrating intercultural group work and authentic tasks in courses 3. Danish and international students informed about working in intercultural study groups
'The MSc in Web Communication will be open to international students from Sept 2017, and I want to ensure all students on the programme benefit from an internationalised curriculum so they can learn and study together well in mixed cultural groups.' (Project Leader)			
Course level			
2. Preparing engineering students for working in the global workplace	Workshop: Facilitating intercultural group work and integrating international perspectives	Engineering Teachers on the Product Design and Integrated Design courses	1. Inspired 8 teachers 2. Kick-started 3-year plan to internationalise the curriculum
'This project aims at the 50% of the students who do not study abroad and how we can activate the incoming exchange students in the internationalisation of the home students. Moreover, we would like to develop a framework of progressive steps during the first 4 semesters where international understanding is incorporated in the courses and projectwork.' (Project Leader)			
3. Flipped learning approach to intercultural competences	Develop flipped learning activity including videos from software engineering industry on intercultural competences; integrate activity into course	BSc Software Engineering students	Students engaged with flipped learning activity on intercultural competences
'This course is developed in response to software industries saying they need software engineers to understand and be able to manage the cross-cultural environment. I wanted to find ways to make this meaningful for the students so they see the relevance for now and when they get jobs.' (Project Leader)			
4. Occupational Therapy in Scandinavian contexts	Embed intercultural competences in Programme of Study Description Develop online intercultural learning activities	Occupational Therapy MA students SDU in collaboration with Rehabilitation MA students from NTNU, Trondheim, Norway	1. Revised Programme of Study Description 2. Identified practical ways to optimise intercultural learning between Danish and Norwegian students
'We decided to address SDU's internationalisation strategy by including an international, blended learning assignment by getting mixed groups of Danish and Norwegian students to appraise journal articles using Skype or Adobe Connect and Office 365.' (Project Leader)			

Project number and title	Project activity	Target group	Project outcome
5. Intercultural communication focus from Session One	Integrate intercultural competences in course content, clarify student expectations of course assessment	BA in Business, Language and Culture (English, Spanish or German) students	1. Aligned learning outcomes and assessment 2. More engaged students 3. Updated Programme of Study Description explicitly addresses intercultural competences
'I wanted to integrate activities to help the students develop and practise their intercultural communication competences across the course so they would be aware of its importance in business communication and be better prepared for the assessment which has an intercultural focus.' (Project Leader)			
Cross-faculty, student-led projects			
6. Developing intercultural competences at SDU	Two workshops: 'Developing students' intercultural competences' and 'Making group-work work: developing intercultural competences'	Students, student services, course teachers	1. Positive evaluation 2. Student initiated network and Facebook Page on intercultural competences 3. Recognition of need for more student workshops on intercultural groupwork
'I strongly believe that it is essential for all to recognise that SDU graduates not only leave with a solid education, but also to possess the relevant new learning and an awareness of working with various cultures in an international setting. I saw this project as a way to address this need.' (Project Leader) *'To contribute, even in a small way, to friendly co-existence…perhaps it should go on tour.'* (Supporting Teacher)			
7. Developing intercultural competences	Workshop: Developing intercultural competences	Students, student services, course teachers	1. Positive evaluation 2. Recognised need for more student workshops on intercultural groupwork
'We wanted to develop our own intercultural competences so we can work well in intercultural groups and to co-develop a workshop to benefit other students.' (Project Leaders)			

Table 1 Overview of 'Developing Students' Intercultural Competences' projects at SDU, 2017

What we learnt about academic development and IAH

There are different ways to evaluate the projects but here we focus on what we as academic developers learnt from these projects, regarding the process and the outcomes and what might be transferable for other academic developers in similar situations.

Working collaboratively

Anne and I had initially planned to each take responsibility for different projects but we soon moved to a co-facilitation approach. We constantly reviewed and discussed projects, drawing on our different professional, academic and intercultural (Anne is Danish, Donna is British) knowledge and expertise. This meant we shared first-hand experience of all projects, which was resource effective as we shared ideas between projects and developed our own project discourse which facilitated our ongoing collaboration. There is of course a risk that symbiotic, professional relationships cloud objective criticality, and maybe it did, but we had robust discussions and collaborating with the project leaders kept us grounded and focused on their needs. These working partnerships facilitated the creation of professional, safe spaces for ideation, experimentation and reflection.

Project pace

As the umbrella project was time-limited to six months, each project had its own intense focus. It was beneficial to have frequent, often weekly, iterative consultations with project leaders, approximately four per project. They needed to be scheduled with enough intervening time for actions to be achieved but not too long to reduce a project's pace. We ensured each meeting resulted in a list of actions with clearly delegated responsibilities.

Questioning approach

Project leaders were at times surprised by our facilitative questioning approach – some expected more direction and decision-making from us. Some comment in their talking heads videos (see Website) on how the approach ensured they retained leadership and responsibility for their projects. The student project leaders particularly noted how they were encouraged to take responsibility and act independently: all subsequently contributed to conferences on student partnership.

Working to deadlines

Managing dual roles as facilitators and project managers has its challenges. Although we were committed to the facilitative questioning approach, when deadlines were imminent and we needed agreement from divergent ideas, we adopted a more prescriptive approach. Finding the balance between tight deadlines and diverse ideas can be constraining but the need for decision-making can also be seen as a catalyst for the creative process. We had to learn to accept that we make the best decisions we can under the circumstances.

Project outcomes

As shown in Table 1, each project achieved its own short-term outcomes: workshops were well attended and evaluated; resources were integrated into courses; course designs were developed and the project leaders found the collaborative process supportive and insightful. Longer-term impact is harder to evaluate and the very nature of short-term projects omits longitudinal impact evaluations. However, learning from this project reinforces the value of integrating longitudinal evaluations into future projects.

Conclusion: Key learning points

1) *Grounded projects* — whilst we were working within the framework of a university project on ITC, the grounded nature of the individual intercultural competences projects enabled the project leaders to explore their own ideas about integrating ITC into their courses and programmes. *Key learning points:* start with teachers' or students' grounded ideas, remain flexible and open to new ideas, be ready to step away from the usual role of pedagogic expert, find the balance between collaborator and project manager.

2) *Iterative consultancies* – the consultative relationships scaffolded project leaders' initiatives and enabled the fruition of a diverse selection of ITC product outcomes over an intense time period. Through the combination of iterative consultations, facilitative questioning and pedagogic input, we were able to complement the project leaders' tacit knowledge of their courses, subjects and students and develop productive and respectful collaborations. *Key learning points:* meet regularly, use deadlines to spark creativity and manage process, be open to changes, be experimental, accept we make the best decisions we can at any given time.

3) *Responsive to partners' professional development needs* – teachers or students who volunteer for such projects are taking on extra work, with hoped-for rather than guaranteed outcomes. These projects' leaders valued the close collaboration with academic developers and the bespoke professional development it provided. *Key learning points:* listen to project leaders and help identify their professional development needs, scaffold learning, step back, be flexible and prepared to do more or less than you expected.

4) *Be open to surprises* — through the serendipitous collaboration with students we have examples of authentic collaborative learning processes and outcomes which are accessible through the Website. Student partnership is a relatively new concept at SDU and the student-led projects provide tangible examples of how it can work in practice. *Key learning points:* keep project calls open, be open to novelty and surprises, from the outset have expectations of initiative-taking, co-creation and shared responsibility.

5) *Project outcomes to share* – a project webpage (see Website) enables easy dissemination of ITC project processes and outcomes. By capturing project leaders' stories through talking heads videos and summary action plans we can provide busy teachers with authentic stories and accessible resources to inspire their own ITC. *Key learning points:* factor in time and resources for preferably online project outcome dissemination, have a project requirement for project leaders to provide talking heads videos and action plans which can be shared online.

Website

SDU Centre for Teaching and Learning – Internationalising the Curriculum (ITC.sdu.dk or http://tinyurl.com/ybpak4ra).

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