



CETL Journal

# Innovations in Practice

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Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

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# Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of the Innovations in Practice Journal. This recently launched journal offers staff and students the opportunity to disseminate a range of innovative subject and pedagogically based practices with the intention of sharing these with a wider audience both internally and externally to the institution. The journal has been established as part of the dissemination strategy of our Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning which focuses upon leadership and professional learning.

Established as one of 74 HEFCE funded Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) the over-arching aim is to:

- Develop existing innovative approaches to work-related learning
- Enhance students' employability
- Develop leadership and entrepreneurial skills

The CETL is based within the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure and the School of Sport and Exercise Science at Liverpool John Moores University with a purpose of developing curriculum approaches that promote good learning for employability. The CETL sets out to enable students to become 'leading learners' who are also 'learning to lead'. As part of this process underpinning all our work is a research ethos where not only do we carry out innovative approaches to learning but we also evaluate the impact and then disseminates this to others. We aim to therefore model good practice which then can be shared and used by others and this journal is one of many forums in which we are seeking to disseminate our work. Indeed, in addition to the first issue of this journal we have also included an attachment detailing all the dissemination activities that have taken place to date which have been supported by the CETL.

The Editorial board has set out to provide as many opportunities for staff and students to contribute as possible and have included a series of headings which people can submit under. These include a peer reviewed section; professional matters; teaching matters; discussion forum; undergraduate / postgraduate section; case studies; book reviews; and reflections on practice. Whilst we are particularly encouraging submissions under our CETL themes of employability, leadership and entrepreneurship we do want to encourage anyone to consider submitting any aspect of their subject or pedagogical practices for consideration. Further details of how to submit and the author guidelines can be found at the end of this journal.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the members of the editorial board for their work in contributing to this first edition either by way of reviewing submissions, engaging in meetings and / or supporting staff and students to consider submitting to the journal. Indeed a key aim for me as journal editor is to encourage more staff and students to consider publishing their work not only in this journal but also to use this publication as a platform for disseminating their work in other publications.

This first edition has seen a wide variety of submissions on aspects which are either subject specific or more broadly pedagogically focused. This also reflects the diversity of work that goes on within the CETL; Faculties and institution at large and as such is an opportunity to celebrate and share the diversity of work that takes place. I am envisaging that the journal will be published twice a year in both hard and electronic copy and do hope that you find this edition both stimulating and inspiring to encourage you to submit to future editions.

**Philip Vickerman**
Editor; **Innovations in Practice**

# **Sport Education:** experiences and perceptions of both initial Teacher Education students and tutors

**Simon Roberts** and **Stuart Fairclough**

## Introduction

The principles of Daryl Siedentop's Sport Education (SE) curriculum model emphasise the benefits of team and group affiliation, a learner-centred pedagogy, and the development of a motivational climate for learning (Siedentop, 1994, Siedentop *et al*., 2004, Wallhead and Ntoumanis, 2004). As the popularity of this approach in schools continues to increase (Wallhead and O'Sullivan, 2005) it would appear logical that future teachers of physical education experience SE from an experiential perspective (knowing how) as well as from an academic and theoretical dimension (knowing about). Much of the SE research in the past 20 years has focused on pupil perceptions of SE (Hastie and Carlson, 1998), teachers conceptions and uses of SE (Alexander and Luckman, 2001), pedagogical issues which surround the SE model (McCaughtry *et al*., 2004), and the experiences of trainee teachers as they attempt to implement SE for the first time while on practicum (McMahon and MacPhall, 2007).

Findings from the study of McCaughtry *et al*, (2004) suggest trainee teachers of physical education encounter a number of pedagogical difficulties associated with some of the salient features of the SE model. These include inadequate subject knowledge to maintain a tactical instructional approach, a misunderstanding of the role of skill development, and open resistance to a number of the unique features which characterise the SE model. It is suggested that teacher training courses should engage with not only the theory of SE (knowing about) but also the practical implications for delivery (knowing how; McMahon and Macphail, 2007). In response to these appeals, a recent study by Roberts (2007) suggested the harmonisation of SE principles and teaching games for understanding (TGfU) pedagogy to assist trainee teachers gain experience and develop knowledge construction with the tactical elements of games play. However, with the exception of Kinchin *et al*, (2002) and Fairclough (2005) there is very little documentary evidence of the role of United Kingdom (UK) University Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses in preparing trainee teachers to teach SE, or of the experiences of ITE course tutors responsible for its delivery. This is a somewhat surprising finding as previous research has been particularly robust in advocating the potential benefits of SE and in particular the positive impact it has on developing physically competent, literate and enthusiastic pupils (O'Donovan, 2003). The potential for SE principles to be embedded into UK physical education programmes may therefore become marginalised if the teachers trained to deliver it find difficulty with SE pedagogical components, or worse receive minimal exposure to SE as an alternative curriculum model during their training.

This study therefore involved the implementation of selected SE principles within a practical games module on an undergraduate ITE Secondary Physical Education programme. Specifically, the research questions which guided this study were (1) what pedagogical elements of the SE model did trainee teachers perceive to be positive and/or negative, and (2), what pedagogical factors were experienced by course tutors delivering SE for the first time?

## Methods

### *Participants and settings*

Participants were two groups of Year 1 students enrolled on a BA (Hons) degree programme in Secondary Physical Education with Qualified Teacher Status. There were 30 students in each group (10 male, 20 female) aged between 18 and 21 years. Data collection occurred during a 20 week introductory practical games module, split over two semesters of 10 weeks each. The students' previous games experiences varied in relation to breadth of game forms and level of participation, though all students were competent in executing fundamental skills such as sending and receiving, which are common to most games.

The games module followed a multi-activity structure with each group receiving twice weekly one hour lectures. An aim of the module was to provide a basic introduction to skills, strategies, and rules within a range of games activities common to physical education curricula in English secondary schools. The games covered in semester 1 were rugby, badminton, football, and basketball, with hockey, rounders, cricket, and netball delivered in the second semester. Students received a total of four hours tuition in each activity, which was planned and taught by four tutors (three male, one female) who were expert in those games, and who each had more than 10 years teaching experience in schools and/or higher education institutions. One of the male tutors was the first author who had previous knowledge and experience of delivering sessions through SE. This tutor provided training, guidance, and resource materials for the other three staff to enable them to teach using the SE approach. The lectures took place either indoors (i.e., sports hall) or outdoors (i.e., synthetic pitch, grass, hard court) depending on the location of the most appropriate facilities and the weather conditions. The study received University Ethics Committee approval and written informed consent was obtained from staff and students before data collection commenced.

### *Intervention approach*

The study used a cross-over design which meant that at different times each group experienced games lectures through either a SE approach, or a traditional approach, where the majority of the planning and delivery was undertaken by the tutor. In semester one Group A experienced the SE model, whilst the same games activities were taught by the same tutor to Group B using a traditional approach. In semester two the groups received the opposite approach to the method experienced in semester one.

SE characteristics were integrated in the following ways:

- ***Affiliation:*** The two groups were divided into pre-organised mixed-ability teams of eight, which gave four teams per group. Limited prior knowledge of the students was used to ensure that there was an equitable blend of students in each team with knowledge and expertise of the different games. Teams were maintained intact throughout the semester.
- ***Seasons:*** Each teaching week of the semester was allocated for team practice and / or competition, giving a 10 week 'season'. Even though different games activities were introduced within that period the teams could still gain points that accumulated as the season progressed.
- ***Formal competition:*** Formal competition was present throughout the season with teams able to win points based on their performances. For example, in cricket, these ranged from a simple bowling accuracy competition, through to fun 'tip and run' games, and timed innings.
- ***Record keeping:*** Team members were responsible for keeping competition scores and passing these on to the tutors who adjudicated the team points totals. These were updated weekly and emailed to teams

in preparation for the following week's session or competition. In order to maximise active student participation in the teaching and learning process, this characteristic of SE was purposely taken on by the tutors.

- ***Festivity:*** Great emphasis was placed on the students enjoying the experience. To this end, each team was encouraged to came up with their own team name and colours.

At the first lecture the students were given a short outline of what the main principles of SE were and how these would be applied to their practical games sessions. After an opportunity to ask questions they were put into their teams and were then given an information sheet reinforcing the key principles of SE, and a description of the key roles each team had to fulfil (e.g., team manager, coach, captain, warm-up leaders, umpires, etc). Each team then entered into discussions about the roles and agreed who would adopt each one. To avoid information overload in the limited lecture time each student was given a copy of an article which provided a detailed and succinct synopsis of SE in the context of National Curriculum Physical Education (Kinchin *et al*., 2001). They were asked to read the article after the session and were encouraged to seek guidance should any aspect be unclear.

### *Research methodology*

As this research was concerned with the thoughts, opinions and emotions of the students and tutors, a qualitative approach to the data collection was deemed most appropriate. Whilst gathering quantitative data would have provided some indications of the students' and tutors' attitudes and preferences in relation to the SE model, this type of data would not have revealed the underlying reasons for their responses. After the final lecture at the end of each semester focus group interviews were conducted with five students from each group (three female, two male) that had experienced the SE model. The questions focused on some of the purported benefits of SE (e.g., session organisation, group dynamics, learning of skills and tactics, personal development, relevance to own teaching, and enjoyment), some which have been suggested in previous studies (O'Donovan, 2003; MacPhail *et al*., 2004). Two of the male tutors without previous experience of SE volunteered for a focus group interview which took place at the end of the module. Their interview questions related to their previous knowledge and perceptions of SE as a model of physical education delivery, as well as to themes similar to those asked of the students. All interviews were carried out by a trained researcher who was not a member of the programme team and was not previously known to the students or tutors. It was anticipated that the interviewees would feel more inclined to provide honest responses than if a programme tutor or colleague was conducting the interviews. Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the interviewer.

### *Data analysis*

Transcripts were initially proof read by the interviewer then sent to the interviewees for member checking. Aside from some minor grammatical and interpretation errors the transcripts were deemed to be accurate records of the interviews. Transcripts were then analysed using Nudist NVivo analysis software. Attempts were made to identify examples of the themes referred to in the interview questions. Moreover, other themes that were not deliberately introduced through the questions, but which emerged within the transcripts were also input into the software. Exemplar extracts from the interviews which effectively highlighted the themes were identified for use within the discussion.

## Results and discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to analyse the thoughts, feelings and emotions of trainee teachers of physical education and ITE course tutors as they experienced and delivered SE for the first time. Through focus group interviews three pivotal themes emerged as concerns or issues for further consideration in the training and preparation of trainee teachers to deliver SE. Firstly, the ITE tutors openly expressed opposition to the model and struggled with a number of the model's pedagogical requirements, which included ambiguity over their role, as well as questioning the student centred nature of the model. Secondly, both students and ITE tutors commented extensively about the planning implications for delivering SE and expressed concerns regarding the level of preparation required for a SE season. Thirdly, though the student cohort enjoyed the tactical games focus congruent to SE, they found difficulty in implementing tactical games concepts in student led coaching sessions.

### *Opposition to the model*

The key finding from the ITE tutors was their opposition to delivering SE as it appeared to conflict with their already deep-rooted teaching orientation and personal teaching philosophy. The challenges faced by teachers adopting alternative teaching orientations, such as SE are consistent with the findings of Light (2002). Although the ITE tutors were provided with extensive reading material and observed a number of SE sessions led by the first author, during the planning stages for the season it emerged that both of the tutors were sceptical about their teaching role, 'I am a bit concerned, having come from a school background, that I won't be doing that much in the lesson'. This comment was consistent with the other tutor who also expressed similar concerns prior to the season commencing, 'I was slightly concerned that, it would mean me relinquishing some control, I am new to the University and I may have to assert some authority'. This initial opposition to SE may be as a consequence of already well established teaching orientations and a reluctance to adopt alternative pedagogies due to feelings of anxiety or limitations in terms of previous experience of SE. Notwithstanding these initial concerns the tutors were however positive about 'trying something different' and were 'interested to see how the students responded to SE'.

At the conclusion of the season the ITE tutors highlighted specific issues which they found problematic and which would probably prevent them from adopting certain principles in their professional application of SE. These particular areas of concern related to the role of the tutor, and the volume of preparation required for high quality SE delivery.

### *Role of the tutor*

Both ITE tutors expressed concerns about their personal role of facilitator and questioned the student centred nature of the SE model. Both of the tutors commented on the ambiguity of their role, and were uncomfortable with students adopting peer coaching roles. A number of examples included:

> *'My role as the facilitator I found quite difficult as opposed to leading it, which I am very, very much used to'. (Int 1)*

> *'At times I did not know what to do with myself, just running round the side of the pitches trying not to interrupt, taking that step back is quite difficult'. (Int 2)*

> *'I think it would take me three or four goes to get to a level where I was happy and my input was correct and their input was correct and I sort of thought at times I had too much input, other times I stood back too much and some of the practices became a little ragged and the quality of their actual teaching was poor'. (Int 1)*

The student centred nature of SE allows for students to be involved in the planning and delivery of peer teaching episodes, and this aspect of SE has found particular favour with students in schools (MacPhail *et al*., 2005). However, previous studies have questioned the peer teaching requirements of SE and in particular the ability of students to plan, deliver and provide quality error correction feedback required to improve individual performance (Hastie, 2000). The evidence from this study suggests these concerns may also extend to ITE and to tutors responsible for the delivery of SE. One of the tutors for example noted an incident where the quality of the student led session was less than adequate and subsequently intervened:

> *'This model allows the students to deliver their own practices, but when they don't work we stop it and sort it for them. At this early stage I would question their ability to organise and run good practice sessions'.* (Int2)

This example refers to an ITE tutor intervention during a specific teaching episode, but it is not clear what impact these tutor interventions had in developing the trainees' content knowledge and pedagogical skills. The analysis of teacher interventions during peer coaching sessions has been subject to investigation recently in a co-educational, middle school setting in the United States (Wallhead and O'Sullivan, 2007). Based on the findings from this study a consideration for further development of SE in ITE may be to provide trainees with pre-lesson teaching task cards and additional preparation time to communicate pedagogical content effectively (Wallhead and O'Sullivan, 2007).

### *Planning and Preparation*

Both of the tutors claimed at the conclusion of the season that planning and preparation time for SE was far greater than for the traditional multi-activity format. In particular, the increased amount of time involved in preparing activity sessions outside the tutors' areas of expertise warranted attention. Some comments were:

> *'I would agree with PNT1 that there is more time involved in planning the sport ed model. I actually found that hard because I had lost that control, while I sort of trusted my knowledge on football sometimes I am thinking should I plan something just in case'. (Int2)*

> *'I was producing about 25 alternatives just in case something didn't go as I wanted it to. So preparation time is probably a lot more but I don't now if it's more effective'. (Int1)*

Clearly the tutors were concerned about the amount of time dedicated to planning and preparing for a SE season. This was a particularly interesting finding as one of the features of SE is the gradual empowerment of the pupils to deliver short peer teaching episodes. Despite this pedagogical shift from 'centre stage' to 'facilitation' the tutors still perceived the planning time to be extensive.

### *Difficulty in teaching from a tactical games perspective*

The comments expressed by the trainee teachers about SE were on the whole more positive. They appreciated the opportunity to engage with SE from an experiential perspective. They also commented favourably on the opportunities to be involved in practical delivery and appreciated the additional roles employed in a SE season. A feature of the SE model however, which generated both enjoyment and frustration was the emphasis of teaching from a tactical games perspective. Some typical trainees' comments were:

*'Where is the best place to move, when is the best time run, when is the best time to pass? We did dummy passes, decision making and lots of things like that, that can also be strategies and tactics in the game that you can use. So I think definitely that has improved, especially for me in rugby'. (SFG1)*

*'I mean you put the two goals on either side, it shows that a player should be looking at and using both widths which is something that would be very good in a game'. (SGG2)*

The comments above highlight the aims of a tactical games approach, in other words to contextualise the game and avoid an over reliance on isolated technical practice, which may not be transferable into games play (Light, 2002).

Paradoxically, although this feature of the model was well received the trainee teachers had difficulty implementing this approach into their peer coaching sessions and in most instances referred back to a technical instructional approach,

*'The tactical focus was really enjoyable, but it was really difficult to think of ideas. In the end I think most people would agree, we just did technical drills'. (SGG2)*

The difficulty associated with teaching games from a tactical perspective finds support from other studies (Brooker *et al*., 2000, Howarth, 2005, McCaughty *et al*., 2004). Consequently, when faced with the dilemma of teaching from a tactical perspective inexperienced teachers tend to revert to the 'safety zone' of technical skill-drill instruction. The investigation of a trainee teacher by Barrett and Turner (2000) demonstrated how attempts to teach games from a tactical perspective generated feelings of frustration, anxiety and a perception that tactical games instruction did not provide authentic learning opportunities for the pupils. In contrast, the participants involved in this study were provided with support mechanisms to help in the delivery of tactical games concepts. For instance, prior to the sessions trainees were requested to present a lesson outline to the tutors and discuss the tactical implications and the primary objectives for the session. However, in the final analysis most of the trainees abandoned the tactical elements of SE and adopted more traditional skill instructional approaches.

### *Conclusions and recommendations*

Despite there being an abundance of positive studies relating to the potential educational benefits of SE, it is worth noting that it is a complex pedagogical model, and ITE tutors must be aware of its complexities, and provide support mechanisms to assist trainee teachers to cope with its multifaceted demands. Initially, ITE tutors not familiar with SE may require additional training and an opportunity to experiment with a number of the SE features prior to working with trainees. Overcoming deep-rooted teaching philosophies is a more complex issue and adopting a more flexible approach, allowing ITE tutors time to reinforce SE principles may be required. In addition, it is clear that trainee teachers require assistance in delivering from a tactical games perspective. The temptation otherwise will be to ignore the constructivist nature of SE and revert instead to a traditional positivist approach and in doing so effectively abandon the salient features of SE. ITE tutors must attempt to support trainees in developing tactical games concepts and attempt to provide opportunities for trainees to implement these approaches in practical teaching modules. Finally, if the potential of SE is to benefit pupils in schools, trainees must be encouraged to implement these ideas whilst on school placement. It is the role of ITE to support trainees and teachers in this endeavour. Failure to provide this support and encouragement could lead to trainee teachers narrowing their pedagogical repertoire by making a hasty retreat away from alternative pedagogic instruction.

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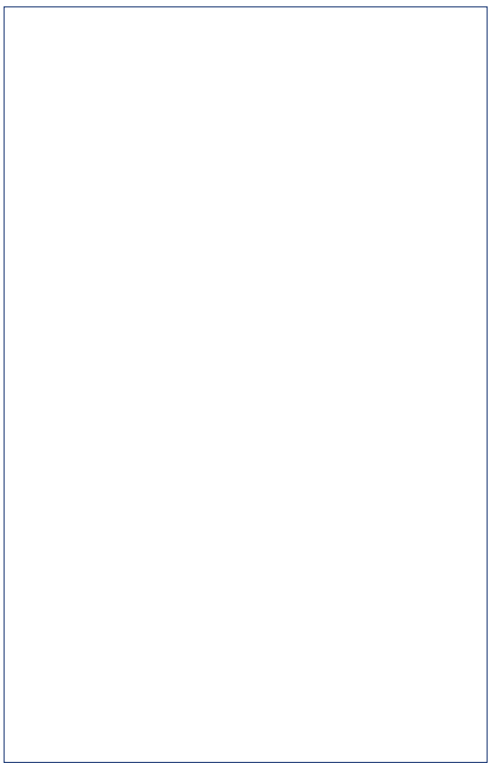
# Teacher CPD in the sun: different in diverse settings?

Michael Inglis



*A school staff room*

Poverty, famine, drought: three words regularly used by most people in the 'developed' world about a country they know little about. If only they knew about the relaxed friendliness, the green fertile landscapes, the culture of hospitality, the history (the only African country never to be colonised), the children of all ages playing their part in the community, the rich culture and unique mountain landscapes (more UNESCO World Heritage Sites than Egypt) and the paramount importance of relationships. I had a lot to learn and many pre-conceptions to overcome when I volunteered with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) to spend two years in Ethiopia (Feb '06 to Jan '08) working with teachers and teacher educators. 'International Development' is a complex and politically-loaded issue that can mean different things to 'donors' and 'recipients'. I want to give a very brief overview of my involvement in two on-going approaches to teacher development in Ethiopia, to provide some food for thought about effective teacher CPD in the UK.

VSO is an international development organisation that works through volunteers, with experienced professionals devoting up to two years to help fight poverty and disadvantage. Ethiopia has the largest VSO programme with almost 100 volunteers currently working in the education sector. VSO tries to achieve its goal by placing volunteers to work in partnership with local counterparts to support sustainable development. 2001 saw the government unveil TESO (Teacher Education System Overhaul), supported by VSO and other NGOs. I was involved in supporting two TESO elements: in-service development for teacher educators and in-service development for primary teachers.

Measuring the level of 'development' of a country is in many ways an impossible task, although there are many indices in use. On the United Nations Human Development Index Ethiopia is ranked 169 out of 177 countries, adult literacy is 36% (23% for women, 50% for men) and life expectancy is 52 years. Rapid population growth along with years of feudalism and brutal Marxist dictatorship in the 1970s and 80s contributed to a toxic cocktail of poverty and an inadequate education system (the structure of the system is summarised in fig. 1).

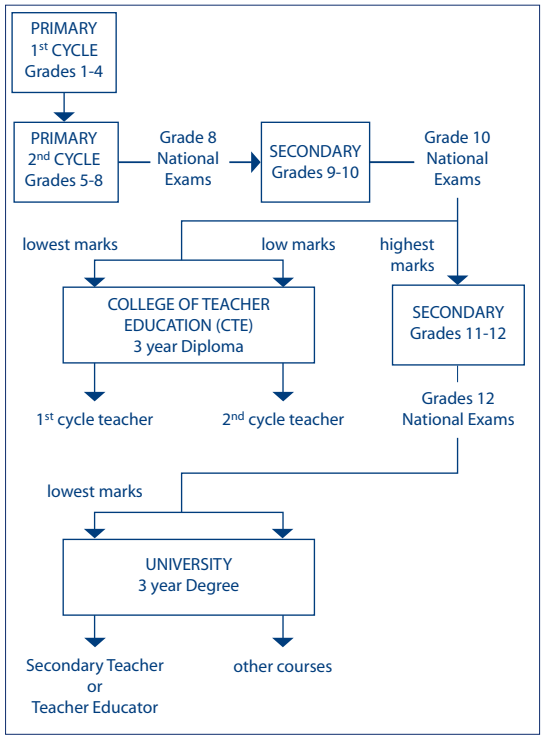



*Figure 1: Structure of Ethiopian education system showing routes into teaching (vocational and technical routes have been omitted for clarity)*

**Some of the key issues are:**

- Primary enrolment is less than 61% [4] (less than 9% for girls in some areas)
- Assignment of the lowest performing students who enter tertiary education (College or University) to teacher training e.g. one of my colleagues had wanted to do an engineering degree at his local university and become a civil engineer, and was instead assigned to a university at the other end of the country to train to become a history teacher
- Standards are very low
- Resources are scarce
- Competency in English is low (the language of instruction is English from 2nd cycle onwards, depending on Region)
- Few opportunities for professional development

*Debub Ethiopia CTE*

Awassa, a large town on the shore of one of the Rift Valley lakes, is the home of Debub Ethiopia CTE (College of Teacher Education); one of the many new private CTEs 'training' primary teachers. 'Training' is very much what CTEs see themselves as doing, with the term 'instructor' being used to describe teacher educators. The common teaching approach is lecturing to classes of fifty or more students, who copy copious notes written on a chalkboard by the teacher with little or no opportunities to practice what they are supposed to be learning. Until recently, trainee teachers had no school-based experience at all and often their instructors had none either. Teacher education for 2nd cycle is conducted in English, but the standard of English amongst the students (and many of the instructors) is poor with the instructors themselves having few skills for supporting EAL learners.

TESO introduced a new in-service professional development course for teacher educators, the first of its kind in Ethiopia, called the Higher Diploma Programme (HDP). I, the HDP 'Leader', led a group of twenty-five teacher educators for nine months as they participated in two two-hour training sessions per week designed to explore and practice reflectivity, active learning methods, continuous assessment methods and action research. Between sessions the 'candidates' completed reflective tasks and practised active learning methods, while building up a structured portfolio of evidence.

*A Higher Diploma Programme group*

*Exploring active learning*

I conducted frequent supportive lesson observations and one-to-one mentoring meetings to support the candidates while they explored teaching approaches which are quite radical in the Ethiopian context. The HDP also included a school-based placement so the teacher educators could have a brief experience of what it is like to teach in a primary school. A key aspect of the HDP Leader role is to select candidates to work alongside the Leader so they could lead future HDP groups without outside support.

Initial scepticism amongst the teacher educators gradually gave way to enthusiasm as they started to see some of the value in the active learning methods encountered during the HDP. In parallel with their struggle to adapt to a different approach to teaching and learning, was their evolving relationship with me. With lecturing being the norm at all levels in the Ethiopian education system there was an expectation that I would simply lecture, while my status as a foreign visitor meant that I was not to be questioned. The HDP has come about as a result of a top-down approach where the government worked with VSO volunteers to develop a programme which all teacher educators are required to complete in order to keep their licence to teach. Encouraging my colleagues to see me as a supportive facilitator and colleague, and not as a judgemental superior, required a long process of modelling this role and being endlessly positive and supportive. I was impressed by the bravery shown by many of the HDP candidates. Experimenting with new approaches which require teachers to interact with their students and to focus on learning instead of lecturing was a challenge for many. It was very satisfying for me to be able to assist many of the candidates to grow professionally and to see the effect in their classrooms. I was particularly impressed by the power of action research in helping teachers to reflect on their practice and start to feel empowered as professionals.

From the Rift Valley to the mountains: after nine months in Awassa working with teacher educators I started working with primary teachers at a CTE in Gondar, a city of almost 100,000 people at an altitude of over 2200 m. The schools in Gondar are typical of those found in many areas. Teaching standards are low, schools are poorly resourced and class sizes are large (often more than 100 pupils). TESO recognises the need for CPD for teachers and the role of CTEs in providing support.

*A typical primary class*

The approach being used to support the CPD of primary teachers is 'clustering' of schools. Groups of schools are linked together into clusters which share resources and CPD activities. Each cluster has a Supervisor, a former teacher, who co-ordinates CPD activities and also observes lessons. The lesson observation part of the Supervisor's role is problematic, being seen by many teachers as the Supervisor checking on them and making judgements for salary evaluation purposes. During the last five years each CTE has established a unit dedicated to co-ordinating the provision of CPD activities for schools by the CTE. My role was to work with two Ethiopian ex-school teachers based in the unit in Gondar CTE to plan and provide support for the eighty-three primary schools in Gondar. The unit had been established by a previous VSO volunteer who had struggled with the CTE seeing its role as providing only pre-service teacher training, with in-service training to be left entirely to the unit.

*Learning to teach maths using locally available resources*

*Practicing effective use of simple resources during school-based training*

In a resource-poor teaching environment many teachers tend to value the few available resources out of proportion to the actual difference they make to learning. My colleagues, and many schools, saw the priority as being the provision of teaching resources along with one-off training in how to use the resources. The teachers were then expected to independently change their teaching approaches and cascade the training to the remaining teachers within their school or cluster. Many of the schools had accumulated some impressive teaching aids made from locally available materials and had one or two teachers who had attended training based in the CTE. Unfortunately little, if any, effective cascading of the CTE-based training had taken place and few of the resources were in regular use. One teacher proudly showed me all the resources she had made while being oblivious to the thick layer of dust that betrayed their lack of use. When I had been a teacher in the UK my experience of CPD consisted of one-off training days, usually based outside of my school. My thoughts about the inadequacy of this approach were confirmed by my experience as a teacher educator in Ethiopia. The HDP in Debub Ethiopia CTE had shown how effective a regular, prolonged, supported, portfolio-based approach, designed to take place in the teacher's usual environment can be.

*Some very nice resources, but are they in routine use?*

Together with my Ethiopian colleagues we established a compromise model of concentrating on one cluster at a time for several weeks where we would go to the schools and conduct short training sessions to introduce active learning methods, and use of appropriate resources, which were simple and practical in the particular circumstances the teachers had to work in. Pre- and post-training supportive lesson observations were done to tailor the training content and to support the teachers to experiment with what they had experienced during the training. The ultimate intention was to establish a system of supportive peer observations, in collaboration with the Supervisor.

In Ethiopia well-intentioned plans never survive contact with reality for long! Communication with many of the schools was unreliable, compounded by the Ethiopian cultural attitude to time and the sheer logistical difficulties involved in travelling

*A well-equipped rural school (this one has a roof)*

(teachers arriving for training three days late or early was not unusual, given that some teachers lived more than two days journey on foot or donkey from Gondar). The biggest obstacle was encouraging the CTE to see in-service support of teachers as part of its role. Providing low-quality pre-service training, while accommodating a unit which tries to improve the quality of teaching in schools through in-service support of teachers who have been inadequately prepared by the CTE in the first place, is unsustainable. The key is for CTE teacher educators to support in-service teacher CPD alongside pre-service training. This is not only sustainable, but also facilitates the experience gained from in-service support feeding back into improving pre-service training. By the time I completed my VSO service I had started to succeed in encouraging CTE instructors to work with serving teachers, a success that the current VSO volunteer (who took over from me in February) can hopefully build on.

The challenges faced by Ethiopia are enormous. Assignment of the lowest performing school-leavers to teacher training continues to threaten the success of attempts to raise the status of teachers. The top-down attitude to planning and the lack of empowerment of teachers, a legacy of recent government systems that required unquestioning acceptance of policies, discourage educators from taking risks and trying new approaches.

For me as a professional, I have seen that teacher development can, and should, mean more than formal training sessions. Although the 'transmission' model of teaching appears to be a common feature of different educational cultures, it has become clearer to me that teachers grow more effectively when they are supported and empowered to be learners with responsibility for their own professional development. Sometime

after I started work in Gondar I read a review of international research on effective teacher CPD by UNESCO which articulated in depth many of the ideas I had started to form about what makes CPD effective. One of the findings is that effective teacher CPD may look and be different in diverse settings. Ethiopia and the UK can fairly be described as "diverse settings", but I wonder just how different the approaches to effective teacher CPD should be?

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# The impact on student learning in relationship to language, curriculum and the delivery of dance practice

Bernard Pierre-Louis

## Introduction

This reflective paper aims to delve into my personal experiences of teaching and facilitating dance within a University setting. A specific emphasis is the focus upon student learning and how it can be increased and impacted on through its relationship and response to aspects of language, curriculum and delivery. Although this personal account aims to establish an increase in student learning, it also relates closely to my teaching strategies as it is primarily my responsibility to make changes that influence student learning to take place. Indeed as Briggs (2003, pg6) suggests "expert teachers continually reflect on how they might teach even better."

As part of my dance practice I set out to try different approaches to my dance classes, and reflect on their success, "However, there are limits to what we can ourselves see as wrong with our teaching" (Briggs 2003, pg 68). This therefore led to me wanting to experience other ways of delivery that focus on student learning. An approach which has been particularly useful is to allow students time for practise and for movement to be absorbed. This allows time for me to observe the students, help those that are struggling, and make the decision as to what extent student learning is occurring.

## Sabbatical exploration

Within the University I teach the José Limón contemporary dance technique, which is the specialised technique I trained in. Subsequently the students taught by me have gained a knowledge and interest of the technique through my teaching and delivery and this links closely to my desire to increase students' knowledge and understanding of teaching strategies and techniques. Therefore I combined these two interests and visited the 'José Limón School' in New York in 2006 to take part in a two week workshop which was funded by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and learning. During these two weeks, I not only retrained in the technique so that movement vocabulary could be clarified in-depth to the students but it also allowed me to observe the way in which the technique was delivered. This ranged from the language and imagery that was used, to the actual structure and content of the classes. This experience enlightened me to new and exciting ways of exploring the delivery of dance which have proven productive in enhancing the students learning and understanding of Limón technique. Consequently this reflective paper sets out to share some of my experiences and findings of my visit to the José Limón School and key aspects are discussed in turn below:

## Curriculum

The José Limón curriculum I deliver within the university consists of varying practical and theoretical components such as the study of dance technique, anatomical studies, leadership skills, creative and choreographical studies, analysis, and research studies. This is delivered to the students at the beginning of the academic

year within a handbook, and is also discussed at the beginning of each module. This engages those students who are active learners, as they can begin to see what will be asked of them in that year. Indeed as Armitage (1999 pg 55) suggests "It is essential to student motivation that the teacher identifies and communicates goals and objectives to students and generates expectations in them."

In New York it was interesting to note that no handbooks or attempts to engage learners from the outset was evident but in contrast at Liverpool John Moores university there is an emphasis throughout the lessons and lecturers of what the students will be expected to produce and learn. This is particularly apparent when discussing assessments, as all students are made aware of what they will be doing in the assessments and what is expected of them, therefore there is an end goal for the students to work towards.

The dance curriculum at the University already aids all types of dance students and takes into account the different ways in which they learn. The students are given the opportunity to decide on a particular pathway, and choose different units within this pathway. This means that students can not only choose subjects which particularly interest them and they know they will be motivated by, but it also caters for those that are less academic, as they can choose a more practical route.

## Assessment

Assessment is critical in assessing whether the curriculum objectives are being met. Within technique lessons formative assessment is used to inform students how their learning is proceeding. Therefore, it allows me the opportunity to comment on the students' technique or progress, but also establishes which teaching techniques are aiding student learning, and which are not. Other assessment techniques are also utilised within the movement classes with one in particular being the **'question and answer'** method.

Within the technique classes, students are continuously asked questions regarding many aspects of the technique. I found this was a quick and successful way to assess student understanding and whether the objectives are being met. This was clear in a number of classes, where the students were finding a particular movement challenging, after the students were asked about that movement, it was evident that the students understanding was not there, and that a clearer explanation was needed. **'Question and answer'** was also used within the José Limón School, where it acted as a refresher/ immediate response to acquisition of the set dance genre. This was a productive method as the student on student support mechanism was clearly apparent post class and maintained external and independent learning.

## Delivery, structure and content

The idea of movement styles evolving and changing with time, applies to the delivery of a Limon technique class. Indeed there is no rigid, set Limon class and no two teachers will impart the movement principles in the same way. This was evident when visiting the José Limón School, as the resident tutor Risa Steinberg delivered her practical sessions in ways that presented comparisons to my personal delivery.

One of the reasons for visiting the José Limón School was to gain more options and strategies to improve my teaching and to allow me to develop as a teacher. The lecturer suggests a need to add on to movement material each week, so that students will have a wider vocabulary and a better understanding of the basic technique and how it can be developed. Armitage (1999 pg 60) also suggests this as part of *"a Behaviourist approach, learning should progress step-by-step*

*and build on previously learned material."* This was observed at the José Limón School, as the tutor repeatedly added to the movement from the day before. I also gained a large collection of José Limón vocabulary from the school, and taught this movement within my own university.

## Differentiation

Now that suggestions have been made about the flexibility of delivery and the ability to change our approach depending on the students, it is important to look at differentiation, and how it can be utilised within a lesson. There are many ways in which the lecturer allows for all abilities within the dance class, for example, *"The advanced version can be done without the arms if the student is having difficulty with the movement in the body"* (Lewis 1984 pg 86). This was seen consistently during my visit to the José Limón School. For example, the tutor leading the sessions would look at specific aspects of the body and in this case, lower body and upper body phrases were taught separately using selected terminology and movement tasks; thus students were given time to separate and examine areas of anatomy development as well as combine tasks to enhance their awareness and execution of anatomical and movement connection.

As stated previously, this method of delivery was constant throughout the duration of the course yet depending on ability of the individual, the option to focus on alignment of either the upper or lower body was always offered by the tutor as a form of 'post' class surgery. I found this tool useful as analysis, opinions and discussion of individuals were addressed which has greatly reinforced the author's belief of the benefits of Peer support. Furthermore, when returning to Liverpool I attempted to progress this post class tool used on the sabbatical by the setting up a 'Salvage' system for the level 3 dance undergraduates.

## Creating an independent learner

After University, students are expected to move into a career of their choice, where they will be expected to be independent individuals. Within the course at University, it is important that students are not 'spoon fed' and that they take responsibility for their own learning. This shift of responsibility happens gradually during the University process and by year three, students are expected to take part in peer assessment and appreciation, and act as teacher/coach to improve and advise on technique, *"Peer teaching is a powerful method of learning that is greatly underutilized, although it is highly effective for a wide range of goals"* (Briggs 2003, pg 112). This also takes place in the theory lessons as students are expected to write a log book reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses and to decide on how these can be improved. They also have the opportunity to write an Independent Study Unit, which the student takes complete control over. The Limon classes particularly emphasised the importance of working on their own as, José Limón was always encouraging people to find the dance that was in them; to find their own way and trust the creative process. Consequently the José Limón School's emphasis on independent learners was also shown through similar buddy systems and one to one pastoral techniques akin to how in Liverpool our dance department deploy support mechanisms.

## Motivating Students to learn

Understanding what motivates our students as learners and what they think is a good approach to learning in HE is crucial to our success as teachers. This is one of the reasons why I visited The José Limón School as I was able to train as a student, and this helped them me relate to the student experience and realise what motivated my own students in their dance classes. As my role was of student not lecturer, it became very clear that the besides self motivation and passion to experience and re-establish one's skill base, the inspiration to be challenged, develop new and

existing knowledge stemmed from the persona and delivery of the tutor. *"Motivation is a key factor in learning and is linked very closely to attitude." "How to arouse and maintain that desire is of concern both to the student and the tutor"* (Armitage 1999 pg 52).

## Language

Language is extremely important within a dance technique class, *"we should not underestimate the power of the language we use with students"* (Armitage 1999 pg 90). This was clearly evident in New York as methodology sessions directed by Steinberg provided not only greater insight and debate on the issues of delivery of José Limón technique but also the dance language that is used to clarify physical application and presentation. The resident tutor challenged the notion of what is said to students in a class situation, why it is said and most importantly, how beneficial is the outcome to learning. *"Knowledgeable experts are expected to transmit their knowledge to their students, who, in such scenarios, are seen as empty vessels waiting to be filled by the teacher"* (Owens 2007 pg 31).

This constant debate on discussion benefited me greatly to confront one's own use of vocabulary and through observation of dance colleagues and fellow university staff residing at my own university helped focus on redesigning how their use of language could be more accessible and value to student learning. It has become obvious to me that language is vital when explaining certain movement to the student. Language in dance technique offers diversity of information such as clear, direct anatomical information and also creative imagery.

## Conclusion

This reflective account has highlighted a necessity for further personal staff training and development in the use and development of dance language in technique and innovative approaches to practical delivery where the students will benefit from these skills. Indeed I believe based upon my visit to the José Limón technique school there is a need for dance tutors to revise their delivery programme by creating a forum for lecturers to debate how teaching of practical content must adapt to the emerging 21st Century dancer and, how this level of undergraduate learning must embrace new approaches to experiential learning and peer/self assessment. The experience of undergoing a sabbatical has clearly inspired me to continue to question my own practice and challenge myself and students in varying ways and I am grateful for the opportunity afforded to me from the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

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# Patterns of Student Attendance and Online Engagement with Blackboard in two Outdoor Education modules

**Tim Stott** and **Martyn Stewart**

## Abstract

Online learning (eLearning) has become a global phenomenon as higher educational institutions worldwide have entered the field in an attempt to enhance their students' experience of learning. At Liverpool John Moores University the Blackboard (Bb) Virtual Learning Environment was installed in 2001 and is now used by the majority of staff and students In this study data on student class attendance, performance (% grade) and frequency of use of Blackboard learning resources were gathered for two modules from the Outdoor Education programme.

In terms of longitudinal trends there was reliable evidence in two separate modules that Bb usage is linked to assessment deadlines. There was a strong highly significant positive correlation between attendance and performance (module final grade %) in OLFEO1202 ($r = 0.540$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 35$), and r increased to 0.654 when attendance was correlated with examination performance rather than overall module performance. There were insignificant correlations in both modules between attendance and Bb frequency of use and based on these data, we conclude that providing learning resources in Bb does not affect lecture attendance.

Students who have Bb use driven by assessment tend to be the poor performers. Evidence suggests that students who use Bb are largely the ones who attend, and absentees tend only to use Bb when an assessment deadline is imminent. Only 22-27% percent of absentee students accessed Bb content area prior to the next lecture.

## 1. Introduction and Background

The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as teaching and learning tools has rapidly expanded into higher education recently. Electronic learning (eLearning) is now becoming the norm at University and most higher education institutions (HEIs) have invested heavily in some kind of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to serve the needs of their students. The first versions of VLEs (e.g. Blackboard, WebCT) offered opportunities for the distribution or sharing of learning resources in electronic formats such as PowerPoint slides, lecture notes in Word or PDF format and links to web pages while recent upgrades offer greater opportunities to develop interactive resources to engage students such as quizzes, discussion boards, blogs and wiki tools.

One question which has arisen among University teachers as a result of such changes involves concern that an unintended consequence of on-line learning resources may be increased absenteeism (Grabe and Christopherson, 2005; Grabe *et al*., 2005; Vandehey *et al*., 2005; Weatherley *et al*., 2003). In 2005 nearly 100% of public schools in the United States had access to

the internet compared with 35% in 1994 (Wells and Lewis, 2006). Considering the rapid growth in online education, a key concern of educators and the public is the quality and effectiveness of online learning (Nachmias, 2002; Peled and Rashty, 1999).

At Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) the Blackboard (Bb) VLE was introduced in 2001 to provide flexibility for learners, who frequently do part-time work alongside their studies due to financial pressures brought about by changes in tuition fees and student loans, and to make learning resources accessible 24/7. In higher education in general, and LJMU is no exception, there have been institutional concerns over student retention rates which average ~20% and have been as low as 50% on some programmes. Linked to this are concerns about attendance at teaching sessions, which in certain lectures have been recorded at <50%.

At LJMU there is much evidence of well-embedded use of the Blackboard VLE to encourage active learning and by 2007 the majority of staff use it to upload content, though there are pockets of resistance due to concerns over the impact on student attendance. In the BSc (Hons) Outdoor Education programmes, several Blackboard modules were populated with content in 2000-01, with all modules fully utilised by 2003-04. However, this may not necessarily be the case for all programmes across the University. This study investigates relationships among Blackboard use by students, module performance and attendance in two outdoor education modules at Liverpool John Moores University, UK.

### *1.1 Review of the Literature*

Online learning (eLearning) has become a global phenomenon as higher educational institutions worldwide have entered the field in an attempt to enhance the students' experience of learning (Davis and Wong, 2007). Although a body of research has documented that differences in learning between traditional classroom and online courses are not significant (Russell, 1999), few data are available from which we can gauge the differences in, and relationships between, student achievement and behaviour in the online setting. In order to examine student behaviours online a number of researchers have used computer log analysis (i.e. machine collected usage statistics) (e.g. Peled and Rashty, 1999; Rafaeli and Ravid, 1997; Zaiane and Luo, 2001). Rafaeli and Ravid (1997) examined the correlations between student achievement and online usage behaviour measures and found a positive correlation between student achievement and their actual reading amount. Using regression analysis they found that online usage variables could predict 20% of the variance in student grade.

Morris *et al*. (2005) examined student engagement in asynchronous online courses through an empirical analysis of student behaviour online and its relationship to persistence and achievement. Their multiple regression analysis revealed that approximately 31% of the variability in achievement was accounted for by student participation measures. Weatherley *et al*. (2003) investigated the impact of making lecture outlines available on-line via Blackboard 5 on exam performance of students enrolled in an introductory psychology course and found that across the three examinations, students in a course with access to information via Blackboard performed significantly poorer than did students in the class without access to it. They suggest that the decreased exam performance may have been the outcome of decreased lecture attendance due to access to

lecture information outside of lecture. The authors warn educators not to rush to introduce technology into their teaching without giving serious consideration of the potential positive and negative outcomes. Bassili (2006), on the other hand, found that instructional mode choice was not related to examination performance, suggesting that the choice to attend lectures or watch them online had more to do with individual differences in promotion and prevention orientations, than with pedagogical characteristics that impact learning.

### *1.2 Research questions*

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in student engagement with online courses in Blackboard and the relationships between online engagement, lecture attendance and overall achievement in the module. Specific research questions were:

1. How do levels of class attendance and Blackboard use vary during a module ?
2. What is the relationship between class attendance, Bb use and student performance ?
3. Which students are accessing content from Blackboard ?

## 2. Research Design

For the 2007-06 academic year two modules in the Outdoor Education programme were selected for this study: OLFEO1202 Geographical Basis of Outdoor Education (Level 1, 24 credits, 35 students, delivered semester 2) and OLFEO2103 Human Geography of Upland Landscapes (Level 2, 12 credits, 33 students, delivered semester 1). In both cases the author was module leader and delivered all the teaching (with assistance for the fieldwork elements) so this gave greater control on the research design.

Both modules are delivered via 2 hour teaching sessions on campus, though OLFEO1202 included two field days and a day visit to Liverpool Science museum. Online resources in Bb included Lecture Powerpoint slides; Word files containing additional notes; and, revision quizzes for each topic (18 in OLFEO1202 and 6 in OLFEO2103) all mounted in the module content area of Bb. Student attendance at each teaching session was recorded, and the Bb statistics tool was used to study the frequency of visits (daily or weekly) to content areas of the Bb module sites in order to examine patterns of behaviour for accessing 'passive' learning resources delivered alongside class material (lecture notes, supplementary reading etc).

The statistics tool has limitations in that it was not possible to tell which files students were accessing in the module content area, how long they spent on Bb or what students do with content if downloaded. Also, since some days showed unreasonably large numbers of hits for individual students it was decided that recording the number of accesses per day would be unreliable. Therefore, for each day of the study, the most reliable way to record data was to simply note whether a student had, or had not accessed the content area.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### *3.1 How do levels of class attendance and Bb use vary during a module?*

Fig. 1 shows levels of attendance and Bb use for each module. The assessment deadlines are indicated and the increase in Bb use around assessment deadlines is clear. The first assessment in OLFEO1202 (Fig. 1A) was an online examination (a test mounted in the module content of Bb) with 20% module weighting which explains the exceptionally high proportion of students (100%) accessing Bb at that time. The second assessment deadline in OLFEO1202 was a coursework submission and the third a written examination. The final one was a field report submission at the end of the semester which did not require the use of Bb and this may explain the low proportion of students accessing Bb then.

*Fig. 1: Levels of attendance and Bb use for OLFEO1202 Geographical Basis of Outdoor Education (Level 1, 24 credits, 35 students, delivered semester 2) and OLFEO2103 Human Geography of Upland Landscapes (Level 2, 12 credits, 33 students, delivered semester 1).*

Fig. 1B shows the levels of attendance and Bb use for OLFEO2103. The first four assessment deadlines could be misleading here as they are not coursework submissions or examinations as such, but student seminar presentations where students were set the task to research a topic unique to each individual, then to give a 5-minute presentation to the rest of the class. Bb use is highest around this time, apart from at the end of the module when the final assessment was a 1.5 hours written examination and Bb use steadily increases in the 1-2 weeks before that and peaks the day before the examination.

These data clearly show a pattern whereby Bb use is quite closely linked to assessment deadlines.

### *3.2 What are the relationships between class attendance, Bb use and student performance?*

Table 1 presents correlation coefficients between attendance, performance (module final grade %) and Bb frequency of use.

| | **OLFEO1202: Geographical Basis of Outdoor Education** Level 1 2006-7, n = 35 | **OLFEO2103: Human Geography of Upland Landscapes** Level 2 2006-7, n = 33 |
|---|---|---|
| Attendance v performance (grade %) | **0.540***** | 0.211 |
| Bb frequency of use (no. days accessed) v performance (grade %) | 0.196 | **0.369*** |
| Attendance (%) v Bb frequency of use (no days accessed) | 0.125 | -0.126 |

* = significant at 0.05 level;
** = very significant at 0.01 level;
*** = highly significant at 0.001 level

*Table 1: Correlation coefficients between attendance, peformance (module final grade %) and Bb frequency of use.*

There is a strong highly significant positive correlation between attendance and performance (module final grade %) in the 24 credit OLFEO1202 ($r = 0.540$, $p < 0.001$, $n = 35$), but for OLFEO2103 $r = 0.196$ and is not statistically significant. This may be due to the shorter duration of this 12 credit module which had six teaching sessions and two student led seminar sessions, whereas OLFEO1202 had 12 teaching sessions. In the School of Biomolecular Sciences at LJMU, Gatherer and Manning (1998) found a statistically significant correlation between examination performance and lecture attendance ($r = 0.341$, $n = 152$, $p < 0.0005$). For ethnic minority students only, the correlation coefficient became 0.603 ($n = 31$), whereas for Anglophone non-ethnic minority students it was only 0.276 ($n = 121$). In this study, when attendance is correlated with examination performance, rather than the whole module performance which includes coursework submissions, the correlation coefficient strengthens to 0.654 ($n = 35$), suggesting that attendance is a better predictor of examination performance, than overall module performance.

In OLFEO2103 there is a weak correlation between Bb frequency of use (no. days accessed) and performance ($r = 0.369$, $n = 33$, $p < 0.05$) but not for OLFEO1202. However, it is the final row of the table which is of greatest interest. There are insignificant correlations in both modules between attendance and Bb frequency of use. If, as some staff have suggested, students are accessing Bb learning resources as a substitute for attending lectures, we would expect strong negative correlations here. Therefore, based on these data, we conclude that providing learning resources in Bb does not affect lecture attendance.

### *3.3 How does students' use of Bb relate to assessment deadlines ?*

In order to examine how students' use of Bb related to assessment deadlines, the frequency of Bb use within three days, and within seven days, of assessment deadlines were extracted from the dataset. Table 2 presents correlation coefficients for attendance and performance indicators v. frequency of Bb use within three - and seven days of deadlines.

| * = **significant at 0.05 level**<br>** = **significant at 0.01 level** | **OLFEO1202: Geographical Basis of Outdoor Education**<br>Level 1<br>2006-7, n = 35 | **OLFEO2103: Human Geography of Upland Landscapes**<br>Level 2<br>2006-7, n = 33 |
|---|---|---|
| Attendance (% attended) v percentage of Bb accesses **7 days** before assessment deadline | **- 0.367*** | - 0.047 |
| Performance (% grade) v percentage of Bb accesses **7 days** before assessment deadline | - 0.199 | -0.132 |
| Attendance (% attended) v percentage of Bb accesses **3 days** before assessment deadline | **- 0.442**** | 0.274 |
| Performance (% grade) v percentage of Bb accesses **3 days** before assessment deadline | **- 0.360*** | **-0.393*** |

*Table 2: Attendance and performance indicators v. frequency of Bb use around deadlines.*

Seven of the eight correlation coefficients in Table 2 are negative, indicating that the higher the attendance/performance indicator, the fewer accesses of Bb within seven- and three days of the deadline students make. In other words, poor attendees/performers tend to use Bb more close to deadlines (presumably as a means of catching up on aspects of the module which they have missed). Fig. 2 is a model to show possible user categories based on attendance and Bb use near deadlines.

*Fig. 2: Model to show possible user categories based on attendance and Bb use near deadlines.*

The negative correlations in Table 2 would suggest that the majority of students would fall into either the top right or bottom left categories, or at least they would if the negative correlations were - 1.000. However, Fig. 3 shows that, as might be expected, a cohort of students has users in all four categories depicted in Fig. 2.

*Fig. 3: Relationship between module performance and % Bb use near deadline.*

Three students fall into the bottom right category – these are low attendees / performers and assessment driven Bb users who gained <40% and so would have been referred. One student came in the bottom left category and did not perform well, nor use Bb near assessment deadlines. The majority of students, however, fall into the top left (high performers / regular Bb users) category.

### *3.4 Do students who miss lectures tend to access notes from Blackboard prior to their next lecture?*

The percentage of cases where an absentee accessed Bb content area prior to the next lecture was 22% in OLFEO1202 and 27% in OLFEO2103.

However, because of the uncertainty about what students do with the content they access, it is not possible to make any firm conclusions from these observations. It could be that a student could access a particular file in Bb content area once, download it from the system and use it off line numerous times later. Some students open up files on the system and print them out, taking the printed material into lectures or using it later for revision. It is therefore difficult to account for these types of actions in a study such as this.

One thing this study has shown is the difficulty of gathering precise data on students' engagement with Bb using the course statistics tool. Nevertheless, some useful patterns have been observed which, it is hoped, will assist staff in the design of modules and the deployment of Bb as a learning resource.

## 4. Conclusions

- Longitudinal trends: there is reliable evidence that in two separate modules that Bb usage is linked to assessment,
- Correlations: Bb use does NOT replace attendance (there was a significant positive relationship, not negative),
- Students who have Bb use driven by assessment tend to be the poor performers,
- User behaviour: evidence suggests that students who use Bb are largely the ones who attend, and absentees tend only to use Bb when an assessment deadline is imminent.
- This study suggests that teaching and support staff should not be concerned that providing learning resources via Blackboard will result in reduced attendance at teaching sessions. The findings here do not support that.

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# Raising the Quality of Initial Teacher Training in Physical Education
# A National PE ITT Project.

Patricia Shenton

**Background and context:**

In July 2004 the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) and Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) identified a pattern of weaknesses in Physical Education Initial Teacher Training (PE ITT) provision in England. The quality of provision was judged to be weaker than other subject areas with only one 'A' grade provider and a significant number of 'C' grade providers. Consequently the TDA was keen to promote a sector response to improve and develop high quality provision in Physical Education. It commissioned a National Project to build on existing professional networks and good practice with the main purpose of helping to raise the quality of PE ITT provision with an overall focus on:

- building the capacity of high quality trainers of PE ITT
- consolidating and extending existing networks at regional and national level
- developing appropriate resources and materials to support PE ITT
- ensuring the dissemination of effective and efficient practice

A three year contract was agreed with Liverpool John Moores University leading a consortium including the British Association of Advisors and Lecturers in Physical Education (Baalpe) and Physical Education Association (PEA UK), now amalgamated as the Association for Physical Education (afPE) and the Youth Sport Trust (YST). * This Consortium's overall objective was to ***plan and manage effectively and efficiently a national strategy to raise the quality of ITT in Physical Education***.

At the start of the Project there were 32 Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and 7 School Centred ITT Providers (SCITT). It is important to stress at this stage that the main focus of the project was to secure quality improvements in secondary provision focusing on raising quality in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in partnership with schools and School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) provision. As the project progressed significant efforts were implemented to engage with Graduate Training Provision (GTP) and PE ITT focussed Primary Education.

In November 2007 a substantial report was submitted to the TDA which demonstrated that despite a number of significant barriers that emerged throughout its three year duration, the PE ITT Project successfully achieved the great majority of its aims and helped strengthen the ITT Network for PE. A strong regional support structure has also emerged, stimulating a culture of peer support, openness and sharing amongst Providers.

The main objective of this article is to focus on key aspects of the HEI partnership with schools and the SCITT secondary provision. Information is adapted from the full report.

## Support mechanisms for the project

In order to improve the quality of physical education in initial teacher training the following systems and processes were established to facilitate delivery of the strategy:

- A Regional / National infrastructure supported by Regional Co-ordinators who aided in establishing and improving communication amongst Providers through a key Action Plan
- Innovation Grants to facilitate collaboration between Providers
- PE ITTE Website for use by all providers
- Publication of Advice & Support Materials
- Production of Observing and Analysing Learners' Movement (OALM)

The report drew on a range of evidence, including ongoing evaluation reports (TDA), specific documentation including action plans and case study materials of the regional co-ordinators; a significant review of innovation grants, web-site, OALM and advice and support materials. Evidence was also drawn from interviews with a range of Providers, members of the Consortium and Regional Co-ordinators and an analysis of the Project questionnaires alongside regional/national conference evaluations.

A Regional/National infrastructure supported by Regional Co-ordinators, establishing and improving communication amongst Providers through a key Action Plan

At the outset of the Project, five regions were identified which linked closely with those identified by the Department for Children Schools and families (DCSF), YST and Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) in the delivery of the National PE and School Sport Club links Strategy (PESSCL) strategy. This helped to create synergy and continuity between ITT and continuing professional development (CPD).

Six experienced PE Practitioners were appointed as Regional Co-ordinators to work on the project on a part time basis. The regional co-ordinators were the delivery agents to promote and develop high quality PE ITT working towards improving communication and establishing regional networks. The key to meeting this objective was the development of learning networks based on local knowledge and expertise and the establishment of close working relationships.

A PE ITT action plan that had been founded and compiled through an Audit based upon individual and collective needs of providers and reflecting the key aims of the PE ITT project was an important part of each regional coordinator's role. Regular regional workshops and individual provider visits also raised the profile and importance of the self-review and action planning process which was critical to quality improvement. Where Providers fully engaged in this process of setting specific and measurable targets, significant progress was made.

Providers appreciated the fact that the Project was not just about the identification of areas for development but also harnessing, celebrating and sharing good practice. This was disseminated through the national and regional conferences / workshops, articles, newsletters and innovation grant projects. Additionally, where providers were undergoing an internal re-validation process or preparing for Ofsted Inspection, regional co-ordinators were able to offer considerable experience and support.

The function of peer support became more apparent as the project progressed, for instance Regional co-ordinators also supported tutors who were new to ITT or had transferred from another institution

*'As a new Physical Education lecturer I found the support and guidance given to me by the PE ITT network invaluable. The ability to talk through issues early on with other course leaders helped ease any anxieties I had. The fact that I was able to benchmark against other institutions enabled me to develop management and quality assurance strategies. (ITT Provider, March, 2007)*

As the project progressed, each coordinator selected areas of activity based on the needs and developments within their own region. They were also given the responsibility for developing an aspect of their own expertise that would help to develop areas identified in the PE ITT action plan through their visits to Providers. These included aspects such as Learning Communities / Mentor recognition and accreditation, Early Years and Primary PE, Information Communication Technology in PE, Assessment for Learning, and Dance. Subsequent presentation of these activities at the regional and national conferences have provided valuable networking opportunities, for Providers to reflect on their own existing practice, sharing experiences and expertise, and in keeping up to date with new initiatives.

### Innovation Grants to facilitate collaboration between Providers

Innovation grants were introduced to encourage and facilitate effective innovative practice, leading to higher quality provision. Primarily:

- small scale funding, in each of the three years of the Strategy, to each Region, to support research/innovation in aspects of PE ITT
- encouraging Providers to work collaboratively towards addressing an identified area in need of development.
- disseminating Innovation Grant Resources across the Regions and nationally.

The resources produced are pertinent to both secondary and primary PE ITT. A few have been specifically designed to support work with primary trainees. These include supporting trainees through web-based provision and one Innovation Grant focused on developing trainees' subject knowledge for primary dance.

*Participation in the innovation project exists directly from our involvement with the PE ITT project, through which the encouragement, support and guidance for a successful bid was readily available.*
*(ITT Provider NW July 2006)*

Principal avenues of effective dissemination of the Innovation Grants have included Regional Newsletters, Regional and National Conferences / Workshops and the PE ITTE Website. Overall, the inclusion of innovation grant opportunities within the Strategy has proved beneficial in demonstrating the value of small scale research in PE ITT and in promoting productive collaboration across the sector.

### Development of a PE ITTE Website for use by all providers

A PE ITTE website (**www.peitte.net**) was developed to:

- ensure access to general information about current developments in ITT, key personnel and organisations in ITT, news, events and publications
- publicise the range of initiatives and actions of the PE ITT Strategy, including specific pages dedicated to contributions by the Regional Co-ordinators
- provide on-line Advice and Support Materials
- provide a forum for the sharing and development of ideas in PE ITT

The site has been open to all users free of charge but users were required initially to register in order to access the Advice and Support Materials. It was felt that this would allow tracking of users in relation to this area of the site. However, since a new site format was launched in June 2007, the need to register has been removed, as it was felt that this feature could deter use. Essentially, the site is able to support the now established infrastructure and collaboration activities of PE ITT providers.

### Publication of Advice and Support Materials

The writing, publication and distribution of 23 Documents arranged in 4 Volumes of Advice and Resource Materials originated on the specific individual needs of PE ITT Providers and evidence gathered through Ofsted reports, and regional and national workshops and conferences. Authors were selected from a range of experts in physical education including the regional co-ordinators. Providers were able to utilise the material in reviewing their practice and establishing quality assurance and enhancement procedures within their own and the PE ITT partnership network.

### Production of Observing and Analysing Learners' Movement (OALM)

OALM is an interactive CD Rom designed to promote high quality movement education and physical education for children aged 7-14 by enabling trainees, teachers and other practitioners to observe, describe and analyse learners' movement.

In the context of the overall aim of the Strategy to improve practice in ITT, the Project enabled the development of OALM by providing:

1. Additional Funding to the PEA UK to build on the success of 'Observing Children Moving' (OCM) and ensure the development and production of a high quality resource targeted at Providers of PE ITT,
2. The writing of a module on the use of OALM (Number 8) as an element of the Advice and Support Material,
3. Dissemination of the resource through national conference and regional workshops and regional coordinators.

The resource produced is pertinent to both secondary and primary PE ITT and was initially promoted through the National Conference for ITTE which raised awareness of its availability and demonstrated its potential. This was a clear endorsement of the value of the resource in raising standards in PE ITTE.

Several ITT Providers have effectively used the resource. Evidence indicates that the resource is considered to have unique potential and when disseminated with training it has proved a valuable analysis tool. OALM is a unique and valuable resource and has much potential to make a major contribution to helping trainees and teachers develop their knowledge and understanding by observing, describing and analysing learners' movement and enhancing their understanding of motor development.
Used effectively in the training process it has the potential to serve as model of good practice of using ICT to enhance the learning process for trainees and undoubtedly contributes to the aims of the Project by assisting those working with learners aged 7-14 to provide movement learning experiences that match pupil needs.

## Support from the Association of Physical Education

During the latter stages of the project, afPE provided added value by leading a day on the challenges of increasing diversity in recruitment into ITT for secondary physical education. This emerged from the partnership project between afPE and the Ethnic Minority Foundation, funded by Capacity builders. The day was attended by the lead officer on diversity from the TDA, and he has encouraged providers to access funding for research to address this challenge. This provides one example of the added value brought by the subject association to the project, and demonstrates the potential for relating better, the research, policy and practice surrounding PE ITT.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout the Project, factors emerged that were beyond its remit and which influenced the Consortium's review of the impact of the Project. Such factors included:

- The change in Ofsted reporting and consequently the difficulties in judging the improvements in grades directly through the subject area of physical education.
- Problems in identifying weak providers in physical education despite the overall institution carrying a M&QA grade of A or B.
- For a few co-ordinators, a significant amount of time had to be diverted to supporting weak providers.
- A significant increase in GTP places from September 2005 which caused difficulties in gaining access to an accurate data base indicating their location, particularly those who chose to function for one year only.
- The lack of information/Ofsted results regarding the quality of individual GTP places in physical education.
- A number of problems associated with the lack of quality opportunities for training in physical education for primary ITT trainees.

Nevertheless, in building on existing PE ITT Network activities the Project was successful in helping providers to raise their standards of provision by balancing human-relation aspects of change with the desire for a culture of high quality and excellence in ITT. The collaborative elements of the Project have laid the ground for a sustainable improvement in the standards of initial teacher training in physical education. In meeting the majority of its aims the Project now provides the opportunity for the PE ITT Network to build upon its success and use the impetus to develop a strategy for continuity and sustainability in a number of key areas.

Central to the success of this process is the leadership and co-operation that the lead organisation such as afPE will make in realising development and innovation in ITT. Key areas for development include:

- Maintaining a regional and national network infrastructure for the Primary and Secondary PE sector in HEI, SCITT,GTP and Training Schools under the aegis of afPE. An Advisory Board will provide support and guidance for future work and operation
- Transferring the web-site to afPE's platform to ensure sustainability and maintenance
- 'Regional Advisers' to help to sustain effective regional networks and workshops
- Ways of gaining funding streams to facilitate CPD development particularly for the writing and dissemination of research informed teaching/learning and scholarly activities within and across regions
- The piloting of standardising characteristics/benchmark statements in HQ PE in ITT and mentoring
- Developing Learning Communities/Mentor recognition and accreditation processes
- Supporting Primary ITT, foundation and formative physical education, review of KS 1 and 2; and links with the new Secondary Curriculum.
- Developing ideas around ITT and Physical Education's role in health education and promotion. afPE has identified this as a corporate priority.
- Publishing guidance documentation to improve training in the following areas: helping trainees to make appropriate decisions on the use of ICT to support planning, teaching, learning and assessment of pupils' progress; the delivery of Key Stage 3 curriculum; the development of innovative ideas in assessment for learning.
- Further work with providers to promote diversity in ITT recruitment for physical education.
- More effective links between policy, research and provision in PE ITT
- Providing opportunities for all ITT providers, HEI and Training Schools to work together through workshops in designing provision that is in line with the new secondary National Curriculum

The PE ITT project has strengthened the existing HEI network. It has given Providers real focus and purpose, challenging them to reflect and engage in a continuous improvement process. Successful learning communities are about people and processes which empower individuals to become leading learners and learners leading. Impact in the short term is often difficult to measure because of the

qualitative nature of the way of working. True success comes when ways of working and practice have been changed, then, and only then can real impact on trainee/pupil learning be measured.

> *'By making connections with one another, and keeping them going over time, people are able to work together to achieve things that they could either not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty…We can conclude with some confidence that there is a close relationship between people's social networks and their educational performance' (Field 2003, pg4)*

Continuation of peer support and encouragement of good practice for both secondary and primary ITT providers will be supported by afPE, as the single association for physical education. Its role within the Council for Subject Associations will enable collaboration with other ITT subject areas. For instance, continuation and the availability of innovation grants would be an excellent way to develop links between research, practice and policy; and provide further incentives to sustaining an effective learning community for PE ITT.

## Future directions

Future support work for the PE ITT Network should be seen within the context of the breadth of policy demands on physical education and school sport, which contributes significantly to education, sport and health national strategies. Thus support will be required, not only for curriculum reform, educational standards and achievement and expectations of subject associations' role in implementation and exemplification; but also in the light of PSA 22 which requires higher levels of participation in high quality physical education and sport (the 5 hour ambition); and the child health and obesity agendas, especially related to healthy schools. The need for concerted effort to achieve "high quality" will be shared by the PE ITT Network, and it is essential that the work which has been started can be continued and enhanced.

## General information

PE ITT Consortium - core team:

- Pat Shenton, LJMU
- Sue Wilkinson, Baalpe/afPE,
- Andy Wild, PEA UK,/afPE
- Jo Harris, PEA UK/afPE
- Julie Whelan,YST
- Jonathan Sibley, DfES/HEI Development Officer

## Areas of Activity within the Consortium

- LJMU - overall project management and contractual liaison with TDA. This included operational tasks such as overall project administration and financial management, contracting and managing of the regional co- ordinators (RC's), the management of regional and national conferences/workshops, and the line management of an HEI Development Officer funded by the DfES

- baalpe the design, development, content and support of the PE ITT website and the content and authoring schedule for all written resource materials. It also had responsibility for the contracting and management of the Continuing Quality Improvement (CQI) programme

- PEA UK - the management and monitoring of the Innovation Grants, and development and dissemination of the CDRom Observing and Analysing Learners' Movement (OALM).

- YST - working with BAALPE to publish resources, including production design and dissemination

## Regional Co-ordinators:

- Andy Frapwell, Regional Co-ordinator, South West & West Midlands
- Val Rimmer, Regional Co-ordinator, East & Central South
- Jon Spence, Regional Co-ordinator, London & South East
- Nicky Hepworth, Regional Co-ordinator, North & North West / Yorkshire & East Midlands

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Advice and Support Materials, (Volumes 1- 4.2006-07), PE ITTE Project

## Web Links:

- Association for Physical Education: **www.afpe.org.uk**
- Training and Development Agency for Schools: **www.tda.gov.uk**
- Youth Sport Trust: **www.youthsporttrust.org**

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# Understanding student engagement: evaluation of an intensive five-week transition programme

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## Introduction

Every September, a new cohort of individuals, eager, keen and excited set out on a University voyage of discovery. From the moment of entry into the University, views and opinions begin to form. The Institutional and staff interaction with these students would appear crucial to the creation of this first impression and those constructed subsequently. For many students, the first few steps of this voyage will be the most challenging (Cook and Leckey 1999). This paper sets out the approach of one programme regarding the transition into University life and academic culture, focusing on ensuring optimal support, enabling students to 'find their feet', generating fun, enhancing engagement with the subject and further personal learning journeys. Tinto (2002: 7), states "the ability of an institution to retain students lies less in the formal programs they devise than in the underlying commitment toward students which direct their activities." Although this approach was never about retention, it is about that commitment to the student that hopefully enhances engagement with all aspects of University life.

## Literature Review

### Learning about self and approaches to learning

The transition from school to University is a major step for students (McInnis and James 1995). A 'gap' or 'gulf' is often experienced when aspirations and expectations of university are compromised by the students actual experience in the first few weeks of study (McInnis and James 1995). Cook and Leckey (1999) highlight the difficulties presented by school-based learning journeys and the subsequent disconfirmation between expectation and perception of the University experience. All students beginning University are in a stage of transition; students will hold certain preconceptions (McInnis and James 1995). These preconceptions often form as a result of parental attitudes or understanding of University information gleaned from discovery days, comments or experiences from peers or other family members. However, student preconceptions are often ill-founded; with anticipated learning journeys based on school experience which often fail to verse the student with firm understanding of key concepts or appropriate (independent) study skills (Cook and Leckey 1999). The feelings associated with transition include excitement, anxiety and confusion (Brookes 2003). This seminal initial stage at University in the first few weeks can have a substantial effect on student's eventual socialisation into university culture. It is also important to prepare students for what is expected of them early on in order to align their pre-conceptions with the reality to Higher Education [HE].

### Engagement with PDP and the subject

This student-centred, gradual approach to induction Billing (1997) suggests, is accepting of the widening diversity of students needs, the importance of articulation to students of personal roles and responsibilities, of avoiding information overload and the importance of connecting the induction activities to programme content and ethos. Stephenson and Yorke (1998) suggest that the early weeks of University courses should focus on providing a combination, of subject content and personal development activities such as learning styles or study skills. This sea change as an approach to the curriculum is echoed by Parker (2002). Parker (2002) suggests a more radical rethinking of the whole approach to teaching and learning in HE. Parker's (2002: 374) paper is concerned with making a distinction between:

> A 'subject', which is taught and assessed in a variety of ways, and a 'discipline', which is practised and engaged with. Phrases like 'passive, taught, learned, delivered' are used when citing subjects but disciplines are referred to as 'engaging, transforming, informing'.

Parker's (2002) research demonstrates that students often reported disillusionment with undergraduate courses. When coupled with Longden's (2006) findings relating to 'academic boredom' caused by low contact hours and an inability to make good academic use of free time, Parker's (2002) assertions take on added significance and demand an Institutional response to create engaging, student-focused, high contact transition programmes.

### Role of personal tutor and peer-support

Peer support mechanisms emerge strongly in the literature as a key determinant of success (Young, Glogowska and Lockyer 2007). Allowing students to spend more time in smaller groups encourages a greater sense of belonging and solidarity and aids student retention. Etter, Burmeister and Elder (2001), support this highlighting peer group tutoring as a valuable instrument in the integration process. Furthermore, Johnson (2003) reported that smaller groups within larger cohorts, exhibited greater cohesion, confidence and assimilation into the institution. Students experience a sense of identity and belonging in an effective group that perhaps is not offered elsewhere (Jacques, 2000).

Personal tutors have a key role to play in facilitating this togetherness. Billing (1997) suggests having an acknowledged, friendly, point of contact within the institution and, more importantly, the course, is vital for students to embed into the programme of study. Cook and Leckey (1999) suggest staff awareness of student backgrounds, requirements and aspirations is fundamental to student retention. Although in the past this personal tutor system has not flourished, sometimes referred to as tokenism (Yorke and Thomas 2003), recent evidence suggests a substantial improvement (HEQC 1994 cited in Billing 1997). Additionally, the importance of good peer and social networks is often highlighted as an effective mechanism for students, in overcoming problems (Thomas 2002).

### The transition programme

The traditional induction period of the first week in the first year, worried the programme team in question. The team were unsure of what was actually achieved and whether staff expectation of students was being suitably expressed. Information overload (Billing 1997) was a concern, as was making this period student-

centred (Billing 1997). Front-loading seemed to be a sensible way forward (Tinto 2002). A decision was taken to unpackage the traditional induction and devote the first five weeks of the semester to construct a programme to interest and excite the students about learning and the subject itself. This paper will develop the innovative ideas created as a solution to this problem, mapping the findings against students' views of the experience. The paper will also share the impact on practise for the future.

One of the key foci of this transition period was for the students to get to know each other and feel a sense of belonging. Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld (2005), when examining social support, indicate the relationship with tutors and students is crucial; small group-work is one way of achieving this (Yorke and Thomas 2003). Hence, personal tutor groups (n=10) formed the central component of much of the transition programme. The building of this relationship between the tutor group and tutor was considered crucial and the programme ensured all groups met with the designated tutor, on average, four times per week during the first half of the semester. It was hoped that this would enable the student to have a safe and friendly place in which to go for help. Upcraft and Gardner (1989 cited in Lowe 2003: 54), state that "academic and support services should thus be concentrated most heavily in the early part of the first year, with intrusive, proactive strategies being used to reach new students before they have an opportunity to experience feelings of fear, failure, disappointment and confusion." Students were also taught in 'colour' groups (n = 30) and as a whole year.

## Methodology

### Transition period outline

All 104 September entry undergraduates onto a Sport Development course at a North-West University undertook a five-week transition programme. The first week focussed on the students' personal beliefs and identity pertaining to sport, whilst the remaining four embraced core elements of the programme; physical activity, physical education, community and inclusion. Each week featured three or four days of intense student contact, leaving Wednesdays free for University sport. The programme included innovative learning environments [ILEs] (e.g. cartooning, smoothie making, Google mapping), movies, non-traditional physical activities (e.g. free running, Speedminton and Rock-It-Ball), lectures, website construction, mini research projects, guest speakers, debates and daily reading tasks. Additionally, students spent several sessions each week in personal tutor group seminars. Throughout the entire transition period, activities were based around the recurring theme – 'what is sport to you?'

### Research design/method

The research utilises longitudinal action research design, with its findings being used to develop the model for the next year and tracking the current participants over time at University. Data were collected through student focus groups and questionnaires. Review questionnaires were completed each week by all students, featuring Likert scale items relating to student perceptions of the sessions during that week. Students were asked to rate the overall quality, facilitator competence, enjoyment and purpose of each element of that week's programme. Students were also asked to rate the strength of belonging to tutor, practical and year groups. Questionnaires were administered in the most convenient tutor group meeting towards the end of each week and were completed within the session. Open questions at the end of each review questionnaire enabled students to articulate feelings about any particular session or the overall experience to that point. Focus groups were conducted with two groups of students at the end of the first, third and fifth weeks.

## Results and Discussion

### Introspective and subject-based engagement with scholarship

A fundamental aim of the transition programme, alongside ensuring students did not suffer academic boredom (Longden 2006), was providing a learning environment perceived to be 'fun'. Evaluation of enjoyment across the activities revealed a fairly positive overall perspective of the transition programme. The majority of the students either strongly agreed or agreed with statements related to enjoying individual sessions. By pooling these findings, Table 1 reveals the mean percentages of the overall picture, alongside activities categorised as practical, lectures or ILEs.

| | Strongly Disagree N (%) | Disagree N (%) | Neutral N (%) | Agree N (%) | Strongly agree N (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Practicals | 0.50 (0.8) | 3.75 (7.5) | 20.25 (33.7) | 24.50 (41.6) | 9.50 (16.4) |
| Theory lectures | 2.53 (1.3) | 5.90 (9.7) | 13.50 (22.5) | 21.54 (36.1) | 16.00 (27.2) |
| Alternative learning environments | 1.75 (3.4) | 7.75 (11.9) | 18.25 (33.8) | 15.00 (28.0) | 11.00 (20.2) |
| Total mean | 1.59 (1.8) | 5.80 (9.7) | 17.30 (30.0) | 20.35 (35.2) | 12.16 (21.3) |

*Table 1: Mean and frequency's of respondents for enjoyment of session by category (%)*

Table 2 reveals theory lectures to be the activities students agreed most to enjoying (pooled mean of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' = 63.3%), followed by practicals (58.0%) and ILEs (48.2%). Examining the total mean, just 11.53% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with statements relating to enjoyment. When asked to articulate the most enjoyable sessions across the five weeks, the majority of students highlighted the practicals and movies.

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data reveals two components which would appear to directly impact on the enjoyment of sessions; purpose and variety/novelty. A number of students linked statements of enjoyment with understanding the purpose of why sessions were conducted. "I like the fact that we have been watching the films a lot, they have a purpose and we have been learning though watching them" (Focus Group Week 3). Failing to see the purpose in subject-based sessions has not been commonly reported in the transition or retention literature, but is more commonly apparent within certain aspects of study skills such as the teaching of statistics. This also appears true for personal learning experiences: "I'm confused about 50% of the tasks, why we are doing it, specifically the shield for the E-portfolio" (Focus Group Week 3). Undergraduate failure to understand the purpose of PDP-related activities such as the personal shield example cited by the student above is common within the personal development literature. These findings suggest failure to understand the purpose of sessions could impact on student learning and enhance the likelihood of the onset of academic boredom, complementing and extending Longden's (2006) understanding of this phenomenon. Understanding of purpose related to subject-based and personal learning sessions can be considered as supplementing Yorke's (1999) findings highlighting the importance of unpacking institutional considerations of values and goals.

When asked what aspects of the transition programme had been particularly enjoyable, students cited both variety and novelty of activities: "I like the fact we have done lots of unusual sports like Rock-It-Ball, things that we have not tried before, it was interesting and I enjoyed it." (Focus Group Week 3). "A variety of activities meant that there was always something different to do." (Questionnaire Week 5). None of the students reported feeling that they had not been involved with a variety of innovative experiences during induction. Despite reporting activities as innovative and new, students did not express that such activities had violated expectations of academic life, suggesting it is not necessarily the learning environments which disconfirm McInnis and James' (1995) and Cook and Leckey's (1999) preconceptions of HE, but other aspects of University life. Although the intensity of the transition programme did appear to contravene student expectation of the early weeks of University, this did not have a negative impact on the student experience:

> I was not expecting to do so much work in the first week but maybe that's a good thing, I needed the extra push…I thought it was going to be sitting down, doing all the admin stuff and getting lectured on what they expect from us all the time. They have done it though lots of little practicals…made it clear you get out what you put in. (Focus Group Week One)

Variety and novel activities were also cited by students in relation to enabling and facilitating learning:

> *Some of my friends at other Unis have gone straight into three hour lectures and dread going to Uni…they ask me what I have been doing; 'Oh, I did Rock-It-Ball today and some other sports' and they say 'are you just messing around?'; some of them did not get an induction or only a day and we get six weeks of it. It is very enjoyable. Not messing around, practical learning. We have learnt more though the practicals and the different activities we have been doing that what we would just being sat in a lecture hall making notes. It is letting us realise that we do know the answers to some of the questions we just need to broaden our knowledge. (Focus Group; Week 3)*

Although this particular student focuses on subject-based learning, the concept of 'broadening' of knowledge was also evident in the form of study skills. Students embraced Parker's (2002) discipline-based (as opposed to subject-based) focus of the transition programme by citing several elements of the personal learning sessions as the key aspects of the first few weeks. In particular, students cited goal setting, learning to learn and time management. Furthermore, students commonly cited this broadening of understanding in relation to challenging preconceptions. The learning of the differences between certain terms which students have either not previously considered or thought synonymous is widely evident within the qualitative data. Table 2 illustrates the session challenging students' preconceptions.

| | Not at all | Somewhat | Greatly |
|---|---|---|---|
| Movies | 11 (14.1) | 32 (41.0) | 35 (44.9) |
| Practicals | 2 (2.6) | 35 (44.9) | 41 (52.6) |
| Theory lectures | 4 (5.1) | 38 (48.7) | 36 (46.2) |
| Tutor group meetings | 6 (7.6) | 42 (53.2) | 30 (38.0) |
| Group study | 9 (11.5) | 41 (52.6) | 28 (35.9) |
| Guest speakers | 8 (10.3) | 38 (48.7) | 32 (41.0) |

*Table 2: Frequencies (%) of students being made to 'think in a different way' by session category*

## Inter-relational engagement

### Relationships with staff

Overall, the findings show the students connected with the staff from Week One and the major categories comprised enthusiasm: "We are going to be close with our tutors, seem enthusiastic and help to get you motivated" (Focus Group; Week 1) and time commitment; "they all seem like they are here for us." (Focus Group; Week 1). This perception continued as the students moved through the first few weeks. These findings underline those of Wilcox *et al*. (2005); which are further extended by following students throughout the rest of transition programme. By Week 3, students noticed that staff contact was not split equally between the programme team; "There is obviously some that you get on with more like your tutor that you see more. But people like your year tutor you don't get to see too much." (Focus Group; Week 3). At the end of the transition period, the students commented on the staff helpfulness; 92.3 % rating helpfulness good or very good at week 5. Students also highlighted the importance of availability; 55.1 % of the sample felt that a sense or a strong sense of connection with staff. Comments included; "I think the staff have done a brilliant job, whilst being very entertaining and helpful" (Focus Group; Week 5); "The staff have helped you when you needed help" (Focus Group; Week 5); "I feel we have been well looked after by our tutor" (Focus Group; Week 5). One issue that did come to light was some inconsistencies between staff in relation to availability; some students felt that; "It would be better if my tutor was there more often"; "rarely see them." (Questionnaire; Week 5).

### Peers

The social integration of the students has been seen by many (Billing 1997; Upcraft and Gardner 1989; Wilcox *et al*. 2005) to be crucial to the student adapting to the entry into University and adopting new behaviours for success. Over the five weeks, students rated the sense of belonging; Table 3 reveals the majority quickly had a sense of belonging with the tutor group. This developed for this first three weeks, plateaued at Week 4, before improving again by the end of the transition programme.

| | Not at all | Starting to feel like I belong | I have a sense of belonging | I have a strong sense of belonging |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Week 1 | 3 (5.9) | 3 (5.9) | 23 (45.1) | 25 (49.0) |
| Week 2 | 0 (0.0) | 2 (3.5) | 26 (45.6) | 29 (50.9) |
| Week 3 | 0 (0.0) | 4 (6.3) | 17 (26.6) | 43 (67.2) |
| Week 4 | 0 (0.0) | 4 (7.7) | 13 (25.0) | 35 (67.3) |
| Week 5 | 0 (0.0) | 6 (7.7) | 18 (23.1) | 54 (69.2) |

*Table 3: Frequencies (%) of students reporting level of tutor group belonging*

Comments from the students included "I like that they put us in our tutor groups on the first day so we have started to get to know people as well- which has been a key thing for me, getting to know everyone first week" (Focus Group; Week 1). A small percentage were constantly less positive about the tutor group, this appears to be related to the member of staff running the group rather than relationships with peers and complements discussion within the staff section above. One individual commented that they didn't value "tutor group meetings because I feel I don't know my tutor" (Questionnaire; Week 5). Furthermore, students indicated "Thoroughly enjoyed the first few weeks,

the activities have helped me settle in and make friends quickly and easily." (Questionnaire; Week 3). One comment at the end of Week 5 echoes this "would be nice to get to see more people in different groups" (Questionnaire; Week 5). Student belonging appears to be linked to the size of learning group. Students appreciate mixing and meeting a wide variety of the year group. Thus, these findings appear to complement those of Billing (1997), Upcraft and Gardner (1989) and Wilcox *et al*. (2005).

## Conclusion

The transition programme outlined in this paper appears to effectively operationalised many of the elements suggested as good practise by the literature. The integration of intensive, supported activities combining individual, social and academic perspectives of the early weeks of University life, has elicited an encouragingly successful programme. The transition programme has allowed students to have fun, engage with some degree of acquisition of subject knowledge and personal learning strategies, enabled the generation of social networks and varying perceptions of belonging, dependent upon group size and the commitment of the personal tutor to the process. Furthermore, the transition programme prevented information overload and academic boredom; factors commonly associated with University induction processes. Transition programmes should encompass as greater variety of activities as possible; novel sessions may also be received well. Strategies to enhance the capacity for intra-course networking should be carefully constructed by programme teams. Furthermore, it is imperative that personal tutors of first year undergraduate students are committed to the process of transition; facilitating an enhanced sense of belonging. This belonging is particularly effectively generated through regular small group activities. Students reacted positively to demanding workloads and intensive timetables, although the long-term impact on progression, performance and retention is unclear. Further research should focus longitudinally, considering the impact transition programmes such as this can have on all aspects of students' University lives not only within the first year of study, but throughout the entire undergraduate course.

## Contact

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# Who said being a subject mentor was a cushy number?

**Barbara Walsh**

Who wants to take on the responsibility of becoming a subject mentor. In days of old(was it really that long ago!) the students were 'supervised' on their teaching practice, there was no need to mentor and guide the student as this was all done by the University. How times have changed, unfortunately some head teachers still think that trainees are only supervised and the only reason you request trainees in your department is so you can sit in the staff room drinking copious amounts of coffee whilst the trainee does all your teaching (I hope I haven't touched a raw nerve with some of you!)

Since the introduction of circular 9/92 by the Department of Education (DfE 1992) Initial Teacher Education (ITE) became school-based which meant that not only did the amount of time trainees spend in the school increase but the responsibility of the training has gradually transferred from Higher Education (HEI) to schools. This required a radical change of thinking from supervision to training and mentoring. Subject staff were asked to 'volunteer' to take on this new role sometimes with no official training. The opportunity of attending mentor training and mentoring the trainee were seen as good professional development opportunities (albeit in many cases no time was given for this and certainly no protected time to be able to meet with the trainee). The subject of payment is still a delicate issue and one which is still problematic in many schools. HEIs have no jurisdiction over schools as to how the payments they receive for trainees is used. Some still see it disappear into the abyss that is the school budget, others see the department getting a percentage of the money which although is not a huge amount does go towards funding extra consumables. Some fortunate mentors actually receive some payment for their time and effort, so which such variable practice you can see why it is still a touchy subject. Mentors when asked their preference agreed that to be given the protected time to take on the mentoring role properly is their first priority (although never turning their nose up to some extra pounds in the wallet!)

So what is expected of the school and especially the subject mentor in developing the trainee, and how is this distinctive and complimentary to the training they receive in University? Barrett *et al* (1995) discovered that trainees felt that schools rather than HEIs contributed significantly to the development of practical teaching competencies and recent local research shows this is still very much the case. However the trainees believe that HEIs do provide theoretical perspectives, different approaches to practice and appropriate pedagogies which many subject mentors have not got time to cover in their extremely busy days (some of you might now be thinking what about GTP trainees but this is another article altogether!!) It can therefore be seen that trainees perceive school-based mentoring to be the key element of the ITE experience. Indeed their ongoing success in teaching is very much dependent on how successful that relationship between trainee and mentor is.

So what qualities do you need to be a successful mentor. Some of those qualities can be seen in the table below, these are taken from a small scale research project with 75 PGCE PE trainees from Liverpool John Moores University before they embarked on their first teaching placement. The following attributes were listed, supportive, encouraging, understanding, honest, consistent, approachable and above all be a good role model. How many of you know you are a role model? Not only to the trainees but to other members of staff in your department and the rest of the school? It's a scary thought but one the trainees see as extremely important. So what and how does a role model work? Some believe it means the trainees become 'clones' of their mentors in other words when you are teaching my classes you do exactly as I do regardless of whether it fits your personality or the trainee does not feel comfortable with it. Trainees want to be seen as individuals who need to find their own identity as a teacher and their own teaching 'style' (some of you might be thinking just how much time do they need!!) Sometimes we overwhelm them with so much information they lose their focus on other important areas.

**Qualities of a subject mentor**

| | |
|---|---|
| be a good role model | supportive |
| a good teacher | encouraging |
| problem solver | understanding |
| someone to look up to | honest |
| professional | consistent |
| organised | approachable |
| use different strategies to control pupils | enthusiastic |
| good subject knowledge | punctual |
| good communicator | available |

So what is a role model? It firstly means you have to look at your own practice and routines, are they something that you think the trainees should model!!!( this is where panic starts to set in!!) are you organised and well planned for your teaching week? Do you set a good example with your appearance and body language (and you thought it was the trainees who needed the help!!!) Being a role model can be an important part of your own personal development, it is an opportunity to influence others by your behaviour, beliefs and values. For example what beliefs would you like your trainees to have about physical education, teaching, learning in general, their possibility of achievement? It is linked to the place of control i.e. 'Does the world happen to me or do I happen to the world'

Role models are fundamental to the development of a healthy internal feeling of control. The requirements of a role model are very much linked to the attributes of the mentor mentioned earlier, i.e. being approachable and available to allow the trainee to see a range of different approaches to abilities, age ranges and other staff. Whether you like it or not they are going to model these beliefs on you, what a responsibility. It is worth reflecting on this part of your role as a subject mentor as it is an area that will particularly influence the progress of your trainees. So what training can you do to become a more effective role model? Your comments would be welcomed and can perhaps form an article for a later publication.

Another major concern of the trainees is an understanding from their mentor of where they are up to in their training i.e. first placement of a PGCE or second year of a four year undergraduate programme. There is sometimes the belief that one size fits all in other words all trainees regardless of their experience should all be treated the same and that 'to be thrown in at the deep end' is the best way because that's how you were trained and it did you no harm (no comment!). As we all know schools have changed dramatically even in the last five years, so an understanding of their knowledge and experience is vital if a smooth transition into solo teaching is to happen. This where audits and information from the HEIs is an absolute necessity so mentors can plan accordingly.

The very mention of subject knowledge sends a ripple of anguish down many a subject mentors spine. We often hear subject mentors berate the lack of subject knowledge that trainees now have, however in the partnership between HEIs and schools this has to be seen as a joint responsibility. Many of our subject mentors are involved in the initial interview phase for trainees entering onto their respective programmes of study and most are alarmed at the lack of subject knowledge the trainees are bringing with them onto their degree programme as a consequence the list of conditions of entry are getting longer. If you think back to your own induction year (probationary year if you are as old as me!!!) we knew we were not the finished article as far as subject knowledge was concerned but we certainly seemed to have a wider knowledge of different areas of activity.

The establishing of a relationship with the University link/liaison tutor is also a key to a successful partnership. This becomes even more critical if the University staff are not subject specific which can sometimes be the case. If the link/liaison tutor is always changing the subject mentor does become very wary of how to proceed certainly if there are concerns regarding the trainee. This can also prove difficult if the trainee does not know or has not met the link/liaison tutor before they start the placement. Therefore this relationship is critical if the trainee is to receive the correct guidance and support from both parties.

A huge concern of the trainees is the need for acceptance from the mentor and not to be seen as a burden. For some trainees this means accepting them as learners and not the finished article. Some trainees feel vulnerable and exposed in the early stages of their placements if they are not accepted properly and this is where the trust element starts to break down. They need to feel as though you are on their side and not an obstacle to their progress. Being welcomed into the school/department appears to symbolise an approval and acknowledgement of them as a teacher and the mentor plays a big part in this. They need to feel part of the teaching team and that they have a name (not a Student!). That they are welcomed with a smile makes a real difference to their confidence and self belief and is an indication of how quickly the trainee settles into the school situation. How they are accepted into the staff room is also important (there are still some schools where trainees are not welcome), they need to know whose chair they must not sit in and which area is the noisy area (strangely this always seems to be where the pe department sit!). They need to be welcomed by other members of staff again this is a key role of the mentor, some trainees still find it very hard to step into that den of iniquity that is the staffroom! The trainees feel unwanted if they are not accepted here, they need to get a feel for how the school works and there is no better place than the staff room to find this out!!!! The biggest burden on mentors is how trainees accept praise and constructive criticism. Many trainees see constructive criticism as a personal

attack on them they see it as destructive and not as the help it is supposed to be. However trainees recognise that if they are to develop as a teacher they need to have both, which does not help the poor subject mentor!. They have to tread a fine line between being too nice and too hard (you might now be questioning why you volunteered for the job in the first place!) As mentioned earlier where they are in their training has a real effect on how the trainee deals with this situation.

Initially most trainees get frantic about organisation and management of the learning environment and they forget other areas like parts of their lesson plan or a set of markers etc however this is all part of the learning curve and how they are supported in this process is critical to the speed at which they progress. They need to feel confident in their own ability and feel that their mentor is encouraging and supportive. From the mentors point of view the trainee has to be seen to listen to advice and to act on this accordingly. The worst kind of trainee is the 'I know everything, you can't tell me anything' who think they know better, unfortunately they tend to hit the ground rather hard and at great speed!! However it is the mentors role to pick up the pieces and comment on what is needed to improve and not just to provide emotional support although in the initial phases this is also critical.

So without being seen as being over protective how do you give the trainees personal, physical and professional space? After all they are teaching your classes and you have to in some cases pick up the pieces afterwards! Good mentoring is about letting go and letting them explore, using questions in your meetings that allow the trainees to discover for themselves which solution is most appropriate rather than you telling them all the time(of course this will not work all the time!) On the flip side trainees need to e guided in asking the right questions to get the feedback they need.

There are obviously many other areas to explore in the world \of the subject mentor the most important is if the mentor-trainee relationship does break down the consequences for the trainee are dire. They can lose confidence and self esteem very quickly and in extreme cases lose their enthusiasm for teaching.

We all interact differently in our interactions with other people especially in a one on one situation, it is certainly not always predictable, especially when the subject mentor is also stressed about some aspect of their job or their own relationships within the department. Again it is a very fine line of how to approach the situation so the relationship between mentor and trainee is not damaged.

Then of course there is the little matter of how the subject mentor supports the trainees in reaching the standards…

Whoever said mentoring was a cushy number?!!!…

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# Reflections on an international work based learning experience in Namibia

## Cath Walker

**Introduction:**

Nine students from the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure undertook an international work based learning placement in Namibia thanks to an innovative exchange programme managed by United Kingdom (UK) Sport. The purpose of the project was for students from Liverpool John Moores University to use traditional African games to help educate young Namibians about how to prevent the spread of the aids and HIV virus. In Namibia thousands of children aged 15 and under are infected by aids and around 85,000 children have lost one or both of their parents to the disease.

The international student placements were organised as part of the IDEALS (International Development through Excellence and Leadership in Sport) advanced exchange programme for young people aged 18-35 years. This programme offers UK students the opportunity to gain practical experience of sports development overseas while also developing their leadership and coaching skills.

Five of the placement students acted as mentors organising sports activities for young Namibians whilst working as volunteers with PAY (Physically Active Youth), a non-governmental organisation affiliated to the University of Namibia. Two students delivered sports activities on behalf of SCORE (Sports Coach Outreach) while the remaining two students organised the Namibian team for the Special Olympics in Shanghai.

These placements were very challenging and life changing experiences and students travelled to some of Namibia's remotest communities using traditional African games to help young people learn more about HIV/AIDS, how it is transmitted, what safe sex is and how to minimise their risk of infection.

In order that all relevant students could apply for this placement opportunity, the Faculty of Education Community and Leisure and the Marie Crabbe Trust provided funding to meet students' accommodation and travel costs whilst in Namibia. A competitive interview process, involving Faculty staff and representatives from UK Sport, was used to select the nine successful students. Students then had the chance to turn the tables when they interviewed staff to see who would accompany them to Namibia.

Prior to leaving Liverpool, the nine students worked closely with Catherine Dean from UK Sport and Oscar Mwaanga, an IDEALS consultant with extensive experience in using games to help educate people about HIV/AIDS. This support proved invaluable when the students were developing their new resources and educational games for use during their placements.

The students have for example adapted the game Mandondo-Manshika, a traditional Zambian game similar to skittles but played with corn husks. By making each husk represent different things, such as sexual health, education, lack of knowledge, understanding, economics, tradition and values, they hoped to increase people's understanding of HIV/AIDS and how they can prevent further infection. They also worked closely with colleagues from the University of Namibia, sharing best practice on aspects of the UK's approach to teaching Physical Education and sport at school and club level that could be harnessed in Africa.

## Thoughts on Namibia

In the vast open country we passed umbrella-shaped acacia trees, ancient baobabs, animals both wild and domestic and a landscape whose magnificence seems endless. There is the smell of food roasting on wood fires and aromatic vegetation like sage, but also that of noxious diesel exhaust, road works and dry sandy dessert.

The history of Namibia, like all places, is shaped by its environment. It is a harsh landscape, dry and dusty, in some places overgrazed and deforested. It is hard work to extract food and water from baking dirt. The rivers run low even during the 'wet' summer season, and are often bone dry during the winter, when the sun blazes from a cloudless blue sky. In the north, animals congregate around shallow pools of water. The vegetation consists of spikey stunted trees, low bushes and brown grasses, all competing for water.

The people however are resilient and are shaped by this environment. One of the first words shared with us in the induction during the first two days of the visit sums up this - 'Ubuntu'. This is an ethnic or humanist ideology focusing on people's loyalty and relationships with each other. The word has its origin in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa. Ubuntu is seen as a traditional African concept.

The translation means
**'I am, I, because of you and you are you because of me'**

As part of the placements and experiences the students quickly realised the significance of this word. They as individuals and as a group have changed and are continuing to change as a result of their interaction with placement providers, communities and children in Namibia. The students relished the opportunities to develop youth-led community based initiatives, turning their passion, enthusiasm and audacity into innovative sustainable activity programs. In schools and communities in Namibia, there are very few sports coaches, and a limited supply of sports equipment, even though there are many children eager to learn how to play sports.

The host placement providers (SCORE, PAY and Special Olympics ) argue that Sport is a highly effective way of teaching Namibian children about perseverance, team spirit, and a healthy life style, while providing them with great fun. Indeed many of the children are extremely eager to play sports, simple games and improvised activity. One of the most successful games introduced by the students was in fact the "Hokey Kokey", illustrating the universal appeal of games to children.

In addition to the main project work, students have had the opportunity to give academic support to students, desperate to pass 'grade 10' in order to progress in school'. Over 55% of young people in Namibia fail to complete grade 10 and this academic support is vital to assisting the PAY initiative to redress this issue.

## Concluding thoughts:

The nine students in each of the three placements proved themselves to be exceptional individuals. Their confidence and support of the placement providers and importantly the recognition and opportunity to be proactive regarding the work they undertook in Namibia offered a strong foundation to their personal and professional growth. Indeed students were involved in designing and running coaching and leadership workshops for community coaches and writing and producing development plans and sports manuals for placements. They also organised the official launch of a basketball court and designed organisations newsletters.

Arguably this has demonstrated to the students that everything people do is shaped by the resources that are available, and, what is more important, by what is not available. In both urban and rural areas, they saw the everyday difficulties people face in acquiring basic resources. They met children who instead of studying spend much of their day undertaking chores to support their families. The students also gained some understanding of the spiral of poverty, how people can be forced to spend all their time working for life's necessities with little time left to improve their situation. Thus, they have come to realise the value of natural resources and infrastructure and that things often taken for granted back in the UK.

The fact is that many of our students will someday be managers, teachers and policy makers. This will help them realise that in the future, when they are making decisions, those decisions will have ramifications. There is no doubt that study abroad produces better rounded more socially aware students that are prepared to see the potential that sport can bring to many marginalised communities. This programme and the people we met along the way are the ones that can teach us so many new things, give us new knowledge that will change our view of the world, and in doing so help us to see ourselves in very different ways. It also provides an inspiration to continue to strive for equity and the success gained through hard work.

Despite all these obstacles, the children the students supported found the strength and desire to wake up every morning and go to school, not because they see it as an obligation, but just because they have the dream to improve their lives and leave all their horrible experiences in the past. One student commented after the first three weeks of the placement:

"I have learned so much that I could never learn in a classroom and my hope is to bring awareness to others and change any misconceptions people might have of this amazing continent. It is an amazing honor to represent your university. This opportunity is making me appreciate that I don't need to be told things, I can seek information and opportunity and learn new things everyday."

From a staff point of view, this programme would better be described as a journey, a transition for students (and staff) which expands your understanding and realms of possibilities. At the end of my three weeks in Namibia with the communities, I found myself standing back and realising I too was only beginning again as a student, but endowed with a more critical mind, and a human with a hidden perspective of the world - both natural and cultural.

For the students this was a most unique academic experience of their lives. You learn things by yourself instead of being told what you have to learn. The experience was life-changing and had the capacity to shift perceptions, build communities, and fulfil potential of students, of staff, of placements and of communities.

The placements also provided the students with the opportunity to naturally grow in confidence, independence and maturity. They have learned to work as part of a team, sympathise with the needs of others and, above all, realise the great rewards that can be gained from their hard work and commitment.

This experience will change them as people.
**"They are who they are, (or who they will become), because of this opportunity"**

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# Some Thoughts on Falling

## Andy Boorman

### Introduction

Most have experienced that unsettled feeling – looking down that deep stairwell or approaching the edge of a large drop. Fear of falling, a survival mechanism shared with many living creatures, affects homo sapiens in different ways – some will draw the line at rambling along an exposed footpath, others will push their psychological limits on vast craggy precipices and many will be happy somewhere in between those extremes. For those that choose to go rock climbing this fear may be part of the attraction. However, most climbers, even the experienced variety who understand the capabilities of the equipment and the safety systems employed, are genuinely frightened of falling off, especially when they are leading (going first) on a rock climb.

**Figure 1**. *Leading a grade 6b climb in Sardinia, November 2003.* Photo, Andy Boorman. Climber, Antony Ingham.

*"Why shouldn't I climb above that bombproof running belay? It's sure to hold me. What am I anxious about? The rope's strong and new, I've checked my knot, the harness is buckled up and hasn't taken a fall yet, my belayer[1] is switched on, I'm not going to hit anything – just a short flight, it should be fun!"*

NB In the event of a fall the leader will eventually be halted several metres lower as the rope from below (held by the belayer from the ground) comes tight through the running belay located just to the right of the climber's knee.

This topic fascinated Steve Parry[2] who, inspired by 'Fear of Flying' a short article in 'Climb' magazine (Binney and McClure, 2005) decided to investigate this topic for a Level[3] dissertation entitled:

*'How repeated indoor lead falls affect a climber's cognitive and somatic anxiety, and the degree to which these affect a climber's self-confidence and performance'.*[3]

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1 *A 'belayer' is the person who holds the rope of the climbing leader, paying out slack and holding a fall as required*

2 *Graduated 2006 BSc Outdoor Education, John Moores University now working at the Outlook Centre, Deiniolen, who specialise in delivering adventure through the medium of Welsh*

3 *This paper is a summary of his findings, thanks are due to Steve Parry for agreeing to this precis. Any errors are the responsibility of this author.*

## Background

Research by Pijpers *et al* (2003) indicates that novice climbers feel over anxious on higher routes and this interferes with their movement behaviour. It is proposed by Hurni (2003 p.100) that *"one of the most difficult mental challenges to be overcome in climbing is the fear of falling"*. Extensive physical and mental relaxation strategies are available to athletes such as climbers; many are specifically practised to reduce anxiety before, during and after 'performances' 4. Examples of such strategies are self-talk, centring, meditation, visualisation, progressive muscular relaxation, Tai-Chi, yoga, desensitisation, NLP, psycho-muscular training etc. (Bollen, 1994, Butler 1997, Cox 2002, Goddard and Neumann 1993, Hardy *et al* 1996, Hackford and Speilberger 1989, Hurni 2003, Jarvis 1999, Richardson 2001, Strobl and Zeller 1997, Twight and Martin 1999 and Whitaker 2000).

Strobl and Zeller (1997, p.119) state that: *"self-belief in one's own ability is the basis to any athlete's confidence."* Conversations with and observations of rock climbers over many years 5 indicate that 'self-talk' of the positive type can serve to boost confidence and combat anxiety, and that frequent 'visualisation' of the sequences of moves on a hard climb, combined with actually pre-viewing success, can lead to focussed and worry free climbing with the desired outcome. Moran (1996) and Eysenck (1992) support the value of positive attitudes, focus and self-belief, the former explaining that worries and irrelevant thoughts can cause people to withdraw their concentration, and the latter stating that irrelevant tasks, like worry and self-doubt, wastefully reduce the working capacity available. Peter (2004, p 40) reports that:

> *"Climbers often give themselves a talking to, either in their heads or out loud: 'come on', 'I can do this', 'the runner is good' and so on. Positive thinking can help turn aspirations into reality and avoid the downward spiral that anxiety causes."*

Cognitive anxiety (mental symptoms) and somatic anxiety (physical manifestations) and how they affect performance are well-researched topics (e.g. Hackford and Spielberger 1989, Hardy *et al* 1996, Jarvis 1999). Many psychologists believe that high arousal can certainly maintain or enhance performance. Uni-dimensional theories such as the *'drive theory'* (refer to Bunker *et al* 1985, Weinberger and Gould 1995 for explanations) hypothesize that the greater the arousal the greater the performance, whereas more complex theories such as the *'Inverted-U'* hypothesis (Figure 2) and the *'Multi-Dimensional Anxiety Theory'* postulate that athletes can become under as well as over-aroused; that there is an optimum level of arousal for different people and different activities; and that we need to distinguish between and take account of both 'state' and 'trait' cognitive and somatic anxiety.

*Figure 2: Inverted U Hypothesis. Williams et al (1993).*

4 *Author's note - the term a performance on rock may be used in praise or sarcasm!*

5 *Author's observations, collected during 43 years of climbing throughout Europe, USA and Canada.*

Hardy *et al* (1996 pp 151-152) developed these ideas further, proposing a 'cusp catastrophe model of anxiety and performance'.

> *"The model predicts that increases in cognitive anxiety will have a beneficial effect upon performance at low levels of physiological arousal, but a detrimental effect upon performance at high levels… "*

The model also predicts

> *"… that at low levels of cognitive anxiety, changes in physiological arousal should have relatively small effects upon performance… However, at high levels of cognitive anxiety, the effects of physiological arousal can be either positive or negative relative to baseline performance, depending upon exactly how high physiological arousal is."*

The 'catastrophe' part of the theory is observed when continual increases in physiological arousal (very close links to the psychological here) cause "a sudden and dramatic decline in performance." After such a 'catastrophe' (e.g. wobbly knees, know as 'sewing machine leg' in the trade, leading to a big fall) research and experience indicate that it often takes the performer a considerable time to calm down and be able to continue with the activity at a suitable level.

Fawcett *et al* (1986) believe that fear is a necessary element to climbing and without it there would be many more accidents and deaths. But if participants in the sport are going to make progress as climbers they need to find ways to control excessive levels of fear which may hinder performance. Parry's research attempted to measure anxiety levels and their affect on performance, hoping to clarify whether a lead climb fall exercise in a controlled situation could help desensitise the climber and thus reduce anxiety and its many manifestations. In 'Fear of Flying' Binney and McClure put forward training schemes for beginner, intermediate and advanced climbers, aiming to help them overcome the 'falling' fear. Parry's study used Binney and McClure's (2005 pp 42-43) 'Intermediate' scheme as a basis for experiments with volunteer climbers:

> *"The key here is don't look down to check if the belayer is ready. You've got to feel comfortable in your mind that the belayer is watching you and that they are ready to take your fall. Take short falls near the ground but far enough above it so you don't land on your belayer's head or deck. An overhanging wall is better suited to this strategy at first so that you don't feel you are going to hit a hold. First, try letting go when the rope is clipped above you then slowly begin to lower the point you're clipped in. At your chest, then your waist, then at your thigh, the changes will depend on how comfortable you are. Once you're happy letting go with the clip below your feet, essentially, for indoors, you've cracked it. The next stage is doing it at the clip below the belay, it's higher up and more scary. Last, but not least, climb right to the top, don't clip the belay and lob off."*

## The Research Project

The aim of the project was to determine whether the training advice above reduces somatic and cognitive anxiety in intermediate climbers. The objectives were to:

- Test the subjects' somatic anxiety using heart rate and blood pressure monitors.
- Test the victims' cognitive anxiety using the Spielburger *et al* (1968) State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) questionnaire.
- Carry out structured interviews with participants aiming to highlight any post training changes in participant climbing performance.

## Experiment design

The experiment took place at Awesome Walls (Liverpool) using four male and three female volunteer climbers, aged between 19 and 28 years, all judged capable of leading in control up the chosen route. This was a straightforward but fairly overhanging corner: thus no physical obstacles, just the psychological ones. Two competent belayers were roped in. Each climbing volunteer was asked to take a series of nine leader falls at the seventh quickdraw (running belay), starting with the quickdraw at head height then with it progressively lower until it was just below the feet (Figure 3).

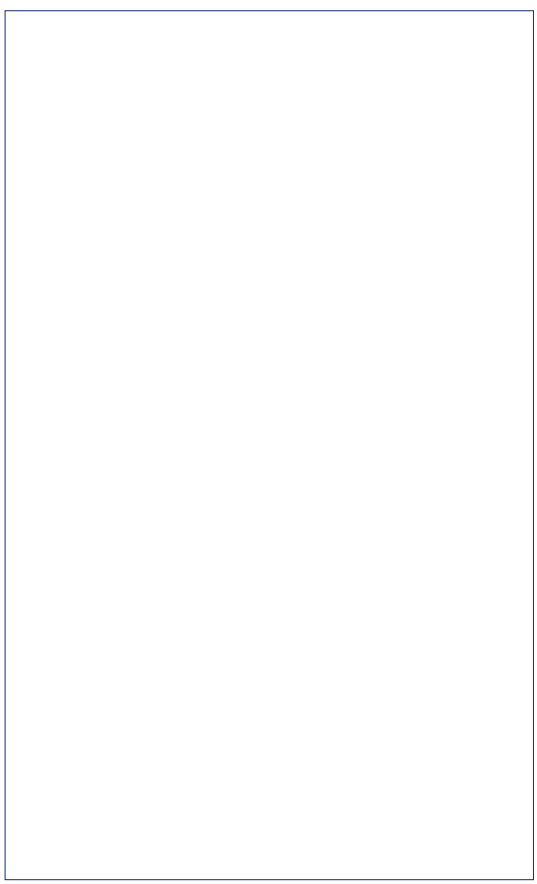

*Figure 3*
*'Flying' student, taking part in the research project at Awesome Walls, Liverpool.*
*Photo: Steve Parry, November 2006*

Unfortunately, due to equipment and design difficulties, all results from somatic anxiety tests had to be discounted. However, each individual did complete the cognitive based STAI X-1 questionnaire eleven times: before the warm-up, before each lead/fall sequence and at the end of the experiment. This questionnaire has been assessed for reliability and validity and is one of the most widely used instruments for measuring anxiety (Barnes el al. 2002).

Participants were briefed to answer openly and honestly, otherwise results could have been unreliable. They were instructed to use 20 statements to describe themselves 'at a given moment'. To do this they circled one only from the numbers 1- 4, where 1 means 'Not at all', 2 means 'Somewhat', 3 means 'Moderately so' and 4 means 'Very much so'. E.g.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ I feel calm | 1 | (2) | 3 | 4 |
| ■ I am tense | 1 | 2 | 3 | (4) |
| ■ I feel self-confident | (1) | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| ■ I am jittery | 1 | 2 | (3) | 4 |
| ■ Etc, etc. | | | | |

The mean of this collection of numbers was then calculated for each occasion the questionnaire was administered, thus providing quantative data about participant feelings (n.b. positive item scores such as 'I feel calm' were reverse scored before the final mean value was calculated). In order to provide further information all participants later spent a day climbing with the researcher, followed by semi-structured interviews designed to give qualitative data on participant anxiety levels to be discussed alongside the quantative results from the questionnaire.

**Results and discussion**

A mean of all participant STAI test results showed a general decrease in anxiety of nearly 50% throughout the training exercise, although there were small increases before most victims took the falls at navel height and again at shin height. The most significant drop in anxiety was on the final readings, ten minutes after the end of the experiment – possibly indicating relief that the test was over safely? A paired t-test was used to compare the 'before' and 'after' results, indicating with a high degree of significance that the 'training' reduced cognitive anxiety overall throughout the experiment [6].

Analysis of the material collected during the later interviews helped to strengthen the validity of those results. The open questions asked to each participant were:

1. How do you think your anxiety would portray on a line graph?
2. Why do you think your anxiety, as shown by the STAI results, increased / decreased between the first fall and the last?
3. How did the training affect your performance and why?
4. Did the training have a negative or a positive affect on your psyche for climbing?

6 *Original dissertation not at present available in order to access these statistics.*

When answering **Question 1**, six of the seven participants thought that their anxiety levels slowly decreased throughout the training, whilst Subject 7 believed their anxiety level fluctuated during this period. Subject 7 was the only one of the group whose anxiety increased dramatically as the falls became more realistic. It should be noted that this subject had previously suffered a ground fall with injury. This fall occurred whilst climbing outside using natural protection. It could be argued that this subject should have been excluded from the study, as such previous experience would affect the results. However, inclusion can be justified as this study was designed to investigate a technique used to desensitise climbers in order to alleviate their fears of falling. Material from later semi-structured interviews reveals that Subject 7 did later appear to have gained in confidence.

The observed drop in most subjects' anxiety could be explained by the following:

- Prior to the training the route used was unknown to the participants so may have had a higher perceived danger (Boyd and Munroe, 2003). Anxiety lessened as the climbers became more familiar with the route.
- According to Kerr's (1985) Reversal Theory athletes are able to shift their interpretation of feelings from unpleasant to pleasant. Boyd and Munroe (2003) state that rock climbers often use reversal and are generally less aroused than we may think and often enjoy high arousal. Thus, even though the climbers in this experiment initially had heightened anxiety, these feelings may have 'reversed' to provide a feeling of 'enjoyment' as the training progressed.
- Freischlag and Frieschlag (1993) in Boyd and Munroe (2003) found that individuals who participated frequently in climbing often reported reduced anxiety whilst climbing: but those subjects weren't being asked to jump off!

When answering **Question 2**, four of the subjects believed that their cognitive state anxiety decreased because they "got used to the falls". Long (pers. com. 2006) explains that this change could be due to desensitising and this opinion is supported by other commentators. Long advises an approach of "tackling fears by dividing them into manageable chunks" and overcoming each one at a time. According to Goddard and Neumann (1993 p. 80)

> *"…progressive desensitization involves gradually exposing yourself to more intimidating situations in order to reach a goal that may initially seem inconceivable."*

Young Jack Osborne illustrates this process in the TV documentary 'Adrenaline Junkies', when he's encouraged to take bigger and bigger leader falls in the Verdon Gorge[7]. Parnell (2005 p 29) interviews Jack, who reveals he was absolutely *"freaked out"* by the experience, but was able to persevere and eventually overcome his fear of falling.

Hardy (in Fyffe and Peter 1997 p 344) states: *"perhaps the best inoculation against over-anxiety is self-confidence."* Although all participants in this research were aware of the capabilities of the climbing equipment and systems before this experiment, four of them felt that some of their decrease in anxiety throughout the training was due to an increase in confidence in the equipment and

7 *Les Gorges du Verdon located in Provence, France, provide an international venue for extreme rock climbing, sporting vertical and overhanging limestone walls up to 400 metres in height.*

protection systems (it is relevant to note that three of these participants had never taken a lead fall indoors or out although Participant 7 had in the past taken a serious outdoor fall – 25 feet to the deck). Hardy (ibid) feels confidence will not necessarily assist climbers to combat anxiety if they already suffer from it, but perhaps may eliminate the possibility of being anxious in the first place (e.g. the climber should have confidence to trust their own judgement: that really is a bombproof running belay and it will hold – have faith!). Trusting climbing systems should therefore help to increase confidence and reduce the fear and likelihood of failure.

Replies to **Question 3** indicate all participants felt the training had influenced their performance. Five of them felt that fear of falling was not now as much of a concern, all reported enhancement in later performance and four noted they now felt more "daring" whilst climbing indoors. Such progress is explained by Eysenck (1992) and Hardy *et al* (1996) who take the view that irrelevant thoughts like worry and self-doubt cause unwanted levels of arousal, wastefully reduce working capacity and result in poor performance. According to Bunker (1985 p 151):

> *"The relationship of arousal and athletic performance is an excellent example of the hypothesized inverted-U relationship. This concept implies that for optimal performance each individual must attain an intermediate or moderate level of arousal. At the two extremes, either very low or high arousal levels, the performance or behaviour may appear quite similar."*

Thus it could be argued that climbers should not desensitise themselves too much with regard to fearing the fall, they may need the excitement in order to keep their attention, keep them alive and help them to put in a good performance.

One of the limitations with this piece of research is that although participant 'state anxiety' was measured, 'trait anxiety' was not: it may well be that paticipant 6, who showed the least anxiety during the experiment and also reported little change in attitude, is by nature laid back, displaying generally low trait anxiety. Hackfort and Spielberger (1989) stress the importance in this sort of research of pre-testing of trait anxiety. To perform to their optimum, Hanin (2003) explains that some performers can be high in anxiety, have self-confidence and feel relaxed at the same time, whereas others can feel low in anxiety, have self-confidence and also be relaxed. Parry suggests that participant 6 would need to be more aroused before performing at optimum level, whereas participant 7 (the one who had taken a previous ground fall) needed to lower anxiety levels before performing well. Participant 7 reported that before the training experiment she didn't believe she was capable of completing the tasks and, although she notes no real increase in performance, she now feels less anxious and more confident when tackling overhanging rock. This could indicate some degree of desensitisation as a result of the training. Ideas from Hardy *et al* (1996) support the phenomena of her poor performance, suggesting that over-arousal of the mind can cause a 'tunnelling' effect that eliminates relevant cues, resulting in low achievement. Hardy (in Fyffe and Peter 1997 p 345) explains *"When anyone gets anxious, there is a tendency for them to attend only to those aspects of the environment which they consider to be important"*; in this case that could mean just the consequences of

falling off instead of concentrating on strategies to ensure that this did not happen. Marten (1987) states that distractions and negative thoughts can harm a performance, so by attending only to the relevant stimuli needed to perform a task effectively and by ignoring irrelevant stimuli like excess fear, one should be able to perform optimally. Post training, participants 1 and 2 believed they were thinking less about falling and that performance was enhanced by a decrease in anxiety and negative thoughts.

To have any long-term affect on the fear of falling, Long (pers. com. 2006) suggests *"…it probably needs hundreds of repeats"* in order to ingrain the results effectively. **Question 4** requires the participants to describe whether the training had a negative or positive affect on their 'psyche' for climbing. Parry suggests that a preferable question may have been 'Did you notice any change after the training?' In hindsight, it would probably have been better to employ a 'performance profile' (e.g. Sellars1997) to try to establish any long-term affect of the training on the seven participants. However, the data collected indicated that all felt the training had been a positive experience. As Long explains, the 'fear of flying' training method must have positive results every time if it is to have a productive effect (e.g. no injuries, major mental traumas etc) although it is hard to assess if such a brief training session could be credited with having long-lasting results.

## Conclusions

Results suggest that such a 'Fear of Flying' training course can decrease cognitive state anxiety in a climber. However, the study scope was restricted by a small sample size, and the omission of trait anxiety tests further limits the findings. It appears that it would be hard to test levels of somatic anxiety in a meaningful way, but with detailed planning and sophisticated equipment this should be possible. The research does confirm that the training appears to have had a positive influence on the performance levels of the participants, both reducing cognitive anxiety in most cases and in all cases increasing confidence in the equipment, the belay system and the belayer.

*Figure 4*
*Sandra Wroten practicing falling at Smith Rock, Oregon USA*
*Arno Ilgner, © arno ilgner March 2008*
**http://www.ukclimbing.com/articles/page.php?id=874**

Climbers aiming to design and use a desensitisation programme linked to the fear of falling will find that Ilgner (2006) offers some useful material, specifically dealing with the mental aspects of climbing and offering advice on controlling fear and managing risk:

> *"We tend to practice falling, or anything stressful, to get it over with. This will not only delay our learning of the skill but will also cause us to learn it incorrectly. Our body will learn to tense up. Learning how to fall means we learn to remain relaxed while falling."*

Ilgner suggests a learning-based approach to practicing falling, recommending small increments from simply hanging on a rope, swinging around on it, through to falling on a slack top rope then taking progressively longer lead falls. Participants should stay with the same fall length till they are comfortable i.e. they should breathing, looking down and relaxed throughout the fall; the arms should beheld outwards, not grabbing the rope (serious hand injuries have been inflicted on rope grabbers!). Also stressed is that the belayer's technique must be effective, acting to cushion falls gently rather than halt them abruptly, putting extra stress on all parts of the system including the falling climber.

MacLeod (2007) reviewing Ilgner's ideas, reflects that:

> *"mental performance in climbing is a process, not a sudden event to be conjured out of the depths of your mind when 20 feet out from a runner. And that process starts long before you even tie onto the rope at the base of the route. It also refocuses you on using your mind as a tool to get clearer understanding (and therefore control) over the actual task you are setting yourself when leading a route; observing the right things, focusing on the right tasks at the right time, eliminating extraneous and inhibitory thoughts and tasks, and the steps that need to be taken to arrive at the moment of truth – commitment".*

So, hope I've not lowered your anxiety levels towards a state of slumber; it's off to the climbing wall now to start taking those monster falls – that's commitment for you! Anyone want to belay?

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# Evaluating the impact of trainees' engagement…

in the early development of a 'Professional Learning Community' (PLC) upon perceptions of their own subject knowledge and support structures and their appreciation of their own and others' professional knowledge.

Eiméar Holland

**Keywords:** Professional Learning Communities, Teacher Isolation, Sharing, Appreciation of Teacher Knowledge, Perception of Knowledge Base and Support Structure.

## Introduction

International Problem: The DfEE (2001) maintained that many believe that the most effective professional development comes through learning from and with other teachers (Cited in Keay, 2007, 210). However, it has been argued that in a culture of individualism, teachers operate in seclusion with their "*doors closed*" and their arm around their work (Hargreaves, 1994 cited in Stoll *et al*., 2006, 141). Liston *et al*. (2008) report that Initial Teacher Education (ITE) does not provide trainees with sufficient knowledge for contemporary schools. Moreover, Darling-Hammond (2000) communicates that "education schools have been variously criticized as ineffective in preparing teachers for their work" (166).

Local Problem: These concerns were the motivation behind this study. The selected cohort was in their final year of a 3 year Key Stage (KS) 2-3 with Physical Education (PE) course. The researcher collated and analysed all module handbooks which verified the aforementioned concerns. KS2-3 trainees spend 39.6% of the suggested *"24 weeks"* in secondary placements (Stephen *et al*., 2004). Trainees spend 30% of their time at University learning how to teach core subjects for primary education which impacts further on their knowledge development for PE. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of engagement in the early development of a PLC upon perceptions of their own subject knowledge and support structure and appreciation of their own and others' professional knowledge.

Lave and Wenger (1991) view such professional learning *"communities of practice"* as "a close knit group of workers, who share knowledge, tasks and activities" (Cited in Keay, 2005, 141). The researcher planned and organised a number of processes to encourage trainees to share resources and ideas for good teaching and learning. This paper reports on the evaluation of this intervention.

### Research Questions

**Does engagement in the early development of a PLC:**

1. Increase and improve the quantity and quality of sharing between trainees?
2. Improve trainees' perception of their knowledge base and support structure?
3. Increase trainees' appreciation for what their peers can learn from them and what they can learn from their peers

## Methods

Participants: "Implied consent" was indicated by the potential sample (n=12) "by the subject[s] taking the time to complete" and return the research tools (Berg, 2004, 65). The return rate was 67% (n=8). According to Mangione (1995) a response rate of 60%+ is "acceptable" (Cited in Bryman, 2001, 132).

Data Collection Procedure: Data was collected via email attachments and anonymity was secured through the employment of an impartial member of staff who received the returns and assured the confidentiality of the source. Tools included a self-designed PLC Questionnaire and a Diary entry. A 3-point likert scale response style (1=Not increased or improved – 2=Increased or improved lot) was adopted. Participants completed a one-off diary entry to express their views of the experience.

Data Analysis: Questionnaire responses were visually analysed utilising tables, bar and pie charts displaying percentages of answers falling into each of the variable categories (For the purpose of this short paper, %s will be added together and rounded off to the nearest decimal for positive responses to express value added). The mode was employed to illustrate the most frequent response category. Diary entry data was analysed using the method of descriptive coding (Robson, 2002).

## Results and Discussion

The response: 'increased or improved somewhat' was calculated as the questionnaire mode (52%). This was followed by 'increased or improved a lot' (45%) and lastly 'not increased or improved' (3%). The following themes were identified:

Sharing: 87.5% of participants agreed that the quantity of resources being shared had increased. Participant 2 elaborated that recently, the quantity "produced for lessons [had] also increased". Participants unanimously agreed that the quality of resources had improved with them *"producing pieces of work... of a higher standard than previously"* (Participant 4). 100% of participants agreed that the quantity of ideas being shared had increased. Participant 5 commented: *"I do feel that more ideas have been shared among peers and the quality of these ideas have improved drastically"*. Participants unanimously agreed that the quality of ideas being shared had improved.

Knowledge Base and Support Structure: Without exception, participants responded that their knowledge based had improved. Participant 7 claimed: *"It has helped me expand my own knowledge within areas that were previously weak"*. 87.5% agreed that their support structure had improved. Participant 3 stated: *"I feel that I have learnt from different people in the class"*.

Trainee Appreciation: 100% of participants appreciated that they had more to offer their peers. Participant 5 demonstrated positive change by maintaining:

*"I have great confidence in that... [I] could aid their teaching in many ways"*.

Participant 7 insisted *"that by sharing resources, I have begun to see the extent to which other people can help and aid me"*. 100% of participants responded that their appreciation for the contribution of experts in the group had improved. 87.5% agreed that their appreciation for the contribution which novices can make had improved. Participant 5 maintained that in what can be learned from them, *"an expert or a novice is the same"*.

## Strengths and Limitations

A mixed method design created greater confidence in the data. (Denscombe, 2007). A self design Questionnaire allowed for greater project specificity (Reid *et al*., 1987). Though easy to analyse, the Likert scale was limited by a 3 tier response option and the nature of ordinal data allowed for analysis which was no more rigorous than mere ranking. It also can lead to indecisive middle of the road answers reducing reliability and validity of data (Altrichter *et al*., 1993). Though Diary entries allowed for "honest Feedback", this data could be considered very subjective (Reid *et al*., 1987, 122). Anonymity and confidentiality was ensured via the aforementioned collection procedure possibly resulting in more honest feedback. This may however have impacted negatively upon the return rate and with an already small sample, this further reduced global generalisability of the results. However, in the case of negative responses, it is necessary to acknowledge that *"mutual trust is developed slowly"* (Stoll *et al*., 2006, 228). The length of this intervention (6 weeks) was possibly too short to fully illustrate the depth of potential benefits.

## Conclusion

Eraut (1994) insists that a shift in professional development is necessary whereby ITE moves away from being a *"creator and transmitter"* of knowledge towards a facilitator which enhances the knowledge production capacity of the community (Cited in Day, 1999, 153). We are therefore asking of ITE for trainee teachers, what we ask of teachers for their pupils. The aforementioned findings strongly reflect McLaughlin and Talbert's (1993) view that *"learning communities constitute the best context for professional growth and change"* (Cited in Day, 2004, 142). Creating, sharing and critiquing resources, ideas and plans for team teaching resulted in this PLC *"crafting a shared repertoire of practice".* (Tony quoted in Keay, 2005, 148). In line with Mitchell and Sackney (2000), the results of this project suggest that a PLC has the potential to ease professional isolation by *"opening doors and breaking down walls"* (Cited in Bolam *et al*., 2005, 22). Fullan (1982) claims that *"change is a process, not an event"*, and though it is difficult to resolve existing barriers for the entire profession (Cited in Craft, 1996, 19), it is necessary to acknowledge that *"at the heart of the change is the individual"* (Stoll *et al*., 2006, 243). Therefore, ITE needs to develop independent and self-sufficient trainees who, having reaped the rewards already, will seek out and promote learning communities. However, it is necessary to acknowledge Mulford's (2004) research which suggested that evaluating the success of a PLC depends on its stage of development (Cited in Stoll *et al*., 2006). Though these results are very positive, it is important to acknowledge that *"professional development is likely to be of a higher quality if it is...sustained over time"* (Garet at al., 2001, 933). Therefore, it is clear that more research is required which must be of a longitudinal nature.

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# Continuing the Sport Development spirit using P2P networking as the catalyst.

**Ian Beattie, Track Dinning** and **Louise Williams**

In recent years, social networking has progressed from being a niche phenomenon to being culturally mass adopted (Gross and Acquisti 2005). Numerous emerging Peer to Peer (P2P) websites such as Facebook, You Tube and My Space have started to provide extendable benefits from traditional networking, to communities based on a "...shared real space" (p.4). Further to this, within a recent study held at Carnegie Mellon University (USA) of 4540 Facebook user profiles, undergraduate students recorded the highest membership and usage, with the university's alumni holding the second highest percentage (Gross and Acquisti 2005). Taking this into account, the adoption of the rapidly developing and popular medium of Facebook as the initial point of contact for the new Sport Development alumni, appeared well justified.

The word `Alumni' is often a grey area when it comes to maintaining effective networks to keep in contact with past student cohorts, and can often be an unwanted responsibility. However, by drawing on the popularity of P2P social networking sites such as 'Facebook' to create an official Sports Development Alumni networking site named *Live...Sport*©, the strength of the connection and networking opportunities has risen to a new level. One of the Sport teams CETL projects has been concerned with developing more effective links with the alumni of the Sport Development Programme, to tie-in with the 10 year anniversary of the first cohort in 2009. In order to 'revamp' the current ad-hoc links with past students, a staged process (figure 1) was adopted so as to provide a comprehensive and robust P2P networking community Sport Development alumni. The anticipation is that *Live...Sport*© would not only engage students past, present and future with the programme team but also with fellow peers.

The first stage was to research current alumni networks from other institutions and to develop an understanding of the most effective medium used to connect with former graduates. Within this stage it was imperative to map-out the necessary components of an effective marketing campaign which would not only attract the graduates, but would allow staff to stay in touch with them, as well as to offer the use of *Live...Sport*© as a source to network and gain contacts which they could use for their own professional development. In order to do this, the research included examining the content of 7 alumni associations (North West and North East) and also their mechanism for delivery, for example, in online communities or traditional postal methods. The general trend was for online


*Figure 1: Creating Live...Sport©*

communities offering a variety of opportunities for the associated alumna including newsletters, reunions, hosting of posted stories and events. One alumni association also offered a comprehensive whole range of business services including conference facilities, placement student links, business start up and also discounted services including printing, hotels and car rental, which were well advertised. However, whilst most appeared to offer a wide variety of services and opportunities for the alumna's, none were programme specific and lacked any real identity due to over complicated names or no name at all. Most of the alumni sites offered password protected access with a login page to create unique username profiles for the past graduates to use as contact, however, most did not offer or encourage active networking amongst the alumna's but more aligned with being comprehensive newsletters and information pages. After researching the 7 alumni associations, it was felt that *Live...Sport©* would provide a unique brand identity for the Sport Development Programme, offering similar services to other alumni associations, but having 'the edge' of being more personalised, and also by fostering and encouraging proactive networking by the collaboration of the P2P group as the catalyst for *Live...Sport©*.

Following this, it was important to gain a base of contacts from the 10 years of graduates. To do this, a group was set up on Facebook called *The Room* which is administrated by two past graduates of the programme (and now teaching staff) who have different contacts within different cohorts. Initial take up of *The Room* proved to be a success with 17 new members within 6 hours of it being set up, and growing to a total of 83 past graduate members. However' the overall success of this medium is yet to be completely revealed given its infancy, but early figures are encouraging.

The purpose of having the P2P venue is easily justifiable given the global growth of Facebook as a social networking platform, with current estimates of 37 million active users, of which over half return on a daily basis to the site (Perez 2007), with Facebook ranking 9th overall in terms of internet traffic (Bugeja 2006). Furthermore, Gross and Acquisti (2005) suggest that it is not unusual for successive social networking sites, such as Facebook to experience viral growth with a 20% increase on participation rates per month in the infancy of their inception. By utilising this contemporary method of communication, the likelihood of creating a sustainable and constantly developing database is more significant than relying on traditional methods such as direct mailing (See table 1 for The Room membership statistics). Admittedly, whilst maintaining The Room is straightforward and not particularly time consuming, it does require either administrator to monitor all activity which occurs.

| Date | Members | Years covered |
|---|---|---|
| Thursday 19th March | 17 | 3 |
| Thursday 26th March | 46 | 8 |
| Current membership | 83 | 9 |

*Table 1: The Room membership growth*

The final stage of the process will be to leverage *Live...Sport©*, through the LJMU Sport Development webpage to create a mechanism for an official database to include relevant contacts details and to act as a host for both advertising and networking opportunities.

The website will provide opportunities for past graduates to connect not only with the Sport Development portfolio of programmes (the undergraduate Sport Development degree, the MA in

Sport Development Management, the BA (Hons) Coaching Development and the MA in Leadership in Physical Education and School Sport). This will provide a plethora of opportunities for cross networking between graduates who now work in a wide variety of fields. In addition, LJMU hosted CPD courses and advertisement of courses will be provided by the *Live...Sport*© alumni. The intentions of *Live...Sport*© has connections with the LJMU WOW model in terms of sharing the idea of a continued involvement of employers. *Live...Sport*© however, has the possibility to go further in its remit to in continue to support graduates to enhance their employability and subsequent careers through CPD.

One of the marketing tools used to help promote the name of *Live...Sport*© has been the use of wrist bands. Inspired by the success of high profile campaigns such as the Lance Armstrong Foundation's Livestrong, and Nike's Stand up Speak up, the strength of which was in the visible identity provided by the wristbands, *Live...Sport*© is hoping to emulate something similar among the Sports Development graduates through its use of wristbands. The wristbands are engraved with the *Live...Sport*© brand and website address, and is an attempt to enable word-of-mouth association to develop and also for the graduates to stay connected with their degree programme. This, it is hoped, will help the Sport Development Programme to start to create its own brand identity. The wristbands are provided free to all past graduates upon receipt of their contact details needed for the database. In order to minimise both costs and unwanted mailings, *Live...Sport*©, is completely electronic based in terms of administration and initial enrolment. It is acknowledged that gaining this contact information to send out wristbands might be problematic using traditional methods, therefore the use of Facebook (which is accessed regularly by all the current members) is vital to maintain the communication links.

Based upon the research already undertaken and the apparent popularity of the Facebook group The Room, *Live...Sport*©, is expected to be a success for the Sport Development association of past graduates. It aims not only to be a short term 'hit' for generating a solid database, but to be a hub of opportunity for graduates and staff to network and enhance their personal development as well as that of the company with which they are involved. The *Live...Sport*©, brand could be 'rolled out' across other programmes within the Centre for Sport, Dance and Outdoor Education to create *Live...Dance*© and *Live...Outdoors*©. Utilising an approach more in-line with modern social networking platforms such as Facebook, and the branding of an official Sport Development alumni through *Live...Sport*©, the new era of creating sustainable networks with past, present and future students is only just beginning...

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# Our Body of Knowledge

## Elizabeth Smears

### Making Sense of Experience

I have always loved being physical; moving my body in dance or sport, gardening or playing with the children; physicality has been so very important to me throughout my life. I have focussed on physicality through my professional practice in using dance movement and through my research, so I have ruminated on the significance of physicality in our lives. On occasions it seems that there is a chasm that divides my experience of physicality from the theoretical ideas presented in the literature about embodiment and how our bodies can be used as a resource to generate knowledge. I am interested in how we make sense of physical experiences.

It is the writing of John Heron (1992) who captures for me the disparity I feel in the different ways of knowing what I experience. Along with Peter Reason (1988) they develop a model of co-operative inquiry. They recognise three different kinds of knowledge: experiential knowledge gained through direct embodied encounter with persons, places or things; practical knowledge, that is knowing 'how' to do something often associated with skill or competence; propositional knowledge, that is knowledge about something, often expressed in statements or theories. Heron (1992) adds to this the notion of presentational knowledge, which he explains is based on how in the first instance we order our tacit experiential knowledge into spatio-temporal patterns of imagery, a symbolised sense of meaning which is evident in movement, sound, colour, shape, poetry, drama and story. Imagery/imagination appears to be the catalyst that bridges the divide between experiential knowledge and propositional knowledge. It is this framework coupled with the insights of Susan Griffin (1982) that provide the rationale for using narrative to provide insight into the meaning of experience

Susan Griffin illuminates for me the tension that resides between knowledge, language and the body. Her writing on poetry as a way of presenting knowledge recognises the body as a source of truth. She suggests that the body is the seat and author of intellect, perception, imagination and vision. It is in returning to the body that buried feelings, buried perception and lost knowledge can be found. She suggests that the language of poetry is a medium of sensuality and thus it allows the body to speak its knowledge. Poetry as a way of knowledge according to Susan Griffin allows for the relationship between art and politics to blend;

> *Poetry, by making a pact between the body and soul, gives to the political imagination a dimension of meaning without which it loses its way.* (p.241)

In concordance with feminist praxis and Susan Griffin's arguments about the nature of knowledge and how it is generated, this reflection addresses itself to my subjective experience of how a cycle accident brought to the fore the experience of embodiment. It is a narrative that gives you, the reader, a flavour of how the experience of embodiment can provide a conduit to a source of knowing that has far reaching impact on a sense of 'being' and concomitantly on professional practice.

Language can be constraining, and here I depart from the more usual academic style of writing, for it seems that for me to communicate about physicality I need to embrace a more creative expressive language that comes in the form of

stories, poetry or unsubstantiated prose that falls off the end of my fingers as smatterings of ideas and ruminations that are doused with thought and feeling; this is the order of my subjective experiences of embodiment.

## The Background

It's June 14th 2007, a lovely bright day, intermittent sunshine, little wind, and an empty cycle path alongside the River Mersey. I pedal along, communing with the seagulls, taking in the space and aware of my breath and the heat generated in my body from cycling at a comfortable speed. No great hurry, likely to be in good time to catch my ferry home. I feel confident in my body, mildly invincible. I rest on a history of athleticism, physical competence, good spatial awareness, quick reaction times, strength and endurance. In a previous life I have been a competitive sports woman, county badminton player, county squash player, regional cross country runner and so on and so forth. My academic work and professional practice also have engaged with themes about the body and physicality. I have worked with disabled people, many of whom have a greater awareness of the fragility, vulnerability, mortality and arbitrariness of human experiences. I have an identity that is interwoven with my physicality. And I am aware that it is so often the case that we become immersed in those things that interest us most because we need to find a way in which we can integrate what we find out into our own lives.

## The Accident

I take the corner, not fast; there is some limited vision because of the high wall which I am circling. I take a wide trajectory, to gain a greater arc of vision. I have my hands gently resting on the cruise holds, and then immediately in front of me is another cyclist. From nowhere then, to here and now, we simultaneously turn to avoid one another, both in the same direction and then comes the slow and unstoppable crunching sound of our collision. We are both thrown in opposite directions to the ground, bikes remaining behind us mingled in an echo. I lie there still. I remember making small noises that were there to tell me I had hurt myself, however I don't remember having immediate pain. What I do recollect are the light hearted thoughts like 'whoops!, wonder if I'll catch my ferry, wonder if my bike is still good enough to cycle on, hope the wheel isn't buckled'. And finally, 'can I move my body, what's the damage?' I have no idea for how long I lay still. There was what seemed like a noisy expansive silence that appeared to surround me. I remember saying, 'sorry mate, are you OK', clearly taking responsibility for the collision, and yet I was indeed no more to blame for this accident than my counterpart cyclist.

The response to my apology from the cyclist was that he had dislocated his shoulder, and recognised that this was what he had done because as he said "I've dislocated it six times before." He said we needed to get an ambulance. My reaction was, well let's see what we should do in a minute, I just needed to calm down first. However I kept on repeating this mantra inside my head, and felt very confused as to how to proceed. I know my partner is unavailable. Eventually I secede to the realization that an ambulance is necessary. I disentangle myself from my bike, and move slowly towards a nearby bench, where I sit in silence alongside my fellow cyclist.

"Have you got a phone? I haven't got one" he says. I don't respond immediately, I'm still thinking do we really need to call an ambulance. I eventually say I have a phone and retrieve it from my cycle bag. I call 999, never having required attention from the emergency services before, I'm amazed at how calm and directed I am in response to their questions.

They tell me an ambulance is on its way, at which point I start to feel extremely cold, and have a sense that I am hanging onto my life, the thread is unfurling and I'm not sure how much longer I can 'hold on'. I tentatively feel my shoulder, there is a significant protrusion, I take my hand away, I realise that there is justification for not trying to progress my travel. The cold and the life feel to be draining out of me. I hear in the distance the sound of a siren, I hope it's an ambulance, I hope it's for me.

Paramedics arrive, they ask some details, they look, they assess which of us needs the more immediate attention. They request another ambulance so that both of us can be transported to A&E. They ask me if I can stand and walk to the ambulance which is located 25 metres away at the end of the path. I grunt, nod, but can hardly communicate. I can't make eye contact, I have closed down within myself, and all my resources are dedicated to keeping myself 'here'. I stand but find I can barely move, my legs can't move, I shuffle a first step supported by a paramedic. I'm dizzy, I realise the paramedic is talking to me in a caring way, and asking gentle questions about the accident, about my family, about how we are progressing and what I need to do, encouraging words. I can't respond, the paramedic is talking to the me that is not here.

I am supported as I get into the ambulance, helped to lie down, checked for pain, given oxygen, asked questions about my personal details; DOB, address next of kin, allergies etc.

I'm given analgesics, told they'll take a couple of minutes, asked to score my own pain. I don't know, I can't compare my relative experiences of pain; childbirth is so very different to trauma. My focus is about trying to stay 'here'. I am concentrating deeply in trying to retain some recognisable aspect of myself, I feel like I am really fighting to stay, and at the same time the paramedic is trying, through conversation, to retain some sense of a shared reality with me. He talks, I listen with occasional responses as the ambulance heads off to the hospital. I wonder where I'm going, I wonder for the whole journey. I want to know where I am being taken, but I cannot find the vital force within me to ask this simple question. It's the Royal Liverpool Hospital A&E dept.

We arrive, the paramedic driving the ambulance opens the rear doors, she comments that I'm getting a little colour back; I don't look quite as ashen as when they first saw me, I have been in shock. I start to feel the impact of the morphine, I feel cushioned, life is moving about me like a series of scenes. I am wheeled on my bed through corridors to a cubicle in A&E, great care is shown by the paramedics, my personal possessions, including my dear bike are accounted for and left with me in the cubicle.

I am seen by house doctors, registrars, nurses. I wait, and some more, then I am sent for X-rays. I meet my fellow cyclist in the X-ray waiting area. We don't talk; we make brief eye contact, though this speaks volumes. I have no sense of any anger or animosity that we could hold towards one another, just a reality that we are both here. This is what has happened to us today.

The doctor returns to show me my X-ray. There is no fracture; I think 'great, nothing broken'. There is however a severe displacement of bones, which suggests that a number of ligaments have been torn. I am to return to the next fracture clinic. I am damaged.

*the lost voice*
*tragedy to be named*
*body to be claimed*
*rhythm to be moved*
*heart to be soothed*
*space to be shared*
*voice to be heard*

What follows over the next days, weeks and months are innumerable visits to hospitals for consults, surgery twice, physiotherapy three times a week, and six months of strong pain relief. I have been submerged and I have lost myself in the medicalised world of mortality. A trauma of whatever form takes time to adjust to. We are not the same as we once were. Aspects of one's sense of self are thrown up in the air and what comes down seems to be reconfigured. Issues of confidence, in my case physical competence, are reviewed and reconsidered. The fragility of life has become known again, a dusting of chance, or encounter with fate leads to a reappraisal of issues of agency and control.

## Subjectivity and Reflexivity

A theme that emerges through this account is how we access knowledge of our self, and what bearing this has on our professional practice. Ethnomethodological tradition in sociology suggests that it is the process of reflexivity that creates a sense of order to the descriptions of our experiences. Early work by Mead (1934) and Garfinkel (1967) identified reflexivity as a way in which the individual turns back and attends again to their experiences. In this way the whole social process that has bearing on experience is captured and brought to conscious awareness. At the level of theory Foucault (1977, 1980) illustrates the binding tension that determines our subjective experience. He presents a critical analysis of the 'new paradigms' of modernity which value human agency. He suggests that the individual's ability to manufacture and control meaning is a misnomer that is based on the person being both subject and object of their own understanding. Foucault argues that the person as subject is glued from within by the phenomena of responsible agency which he writes about in terms of 'confession', and from without by the apparatus of surveillance, which he terms 'discipline'. The result is that the self is both the subject and object of discourse; we reproduce the constraints to which we are subjected in a way that validates our own subjectivity. The question that Foucault raises for me is can a critical incident impact upon one's subjective experience so dramatically that it allows for a significantly fresh appraisal of how meaning is constructed?

The cycle accident brought me into contact with a number of discourses. I became acquainted with the discourses that reside within the healthcare system, and in due course I became re-acquainted with those that makeup professional practice in education. What I became intimately aware of is the connection between the ways in which my embodied self becomes integral to the processes of power that permeate our institutions and their practices. Power for Foucault infiltrates every dimension and aspect of our lives, as he explains;

> *"When I think of the mechanics of power, I think of its capillary form of existence, of the extent to which power seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture what they say, how they learn to live and work with people."* (quoted in Sheridan, 1980, p.217)

The recognition that we are embedded in the discourses that envelope our lived lives and experience is at issue when considering the power relationship between staff working in Higher Education, and between staff and students. How professionals in practice engage

with the theory is of significance. What I believe receives relatively little recognition is how professionals create awareness of the power dynamics that envelop their practice alongside strategies to engage in wider and deeper self knowing. The social constructionist account of reflexivity develops this theme by suggesting that in giving accounts of ourselves we are constituted and reconstitute our social worlds. Reflexivity, argues Giddens (1991), is one way in which we can retain control over our personal world, which can bring with it self-confidence. Paradoxically, reflexivity also opens the doors to uncertainty and questions, which may well diminish a person's confidence in self. For me, the significance of engaging our bodies to develop greater embodied awareness is the sine qua non of erudite, effective and useful practice. The question that is raised for me is what impact does a reflexive account of my physicality, post trauma, have upon my own professional practice?

## Embodied Knowing

According to Mary Starks Whitehouse (1958) movement is a manifestation of oneself in the social world, one that is both a language and a communication. Whitehouse argues that our sense of body awareness is often neglected and therefore seldom developed; the result being that our movement repertoire is diminished and as a consequence we are only partial in our awareness of self.

Her theory is that for most people the tempo and pattern of physical movement is habit formed, automatic, unconscious and usually organised towards a utilitarian end. Having experienced an accident my body can no longer move in its habitual way. Movement is constrained and painful. There is well documented evidence (Sanford 1991, Herman 1994) that describes detachment from one's body as a means of distancing oneself from the associated feelings of distress or pain. By making the body-self an 'it' and relegating the 'I' to the mind, we split ourselves into thinking and verbal beings with bodies that consist of feelings and non-verbal expression. The result is that the body becomes alienated and therefore unknown; it is irrational, makes no sense and it is without words. The language of the body seems to be without meaning.

The question of how one derives meaning from experience is of central concern. The experience of embodiment that magnifies the critical importance of the body suggests that bodies 'make themselves felt'. In this light, movement and indeed physicality can be recognised as a non-verbal language and one that may allow meaning to evolve. Whitehouse argues that it is the subjective experience of movement that is the basis of our authenticity, and therefore recognition of our sense of self. Whitehouse believes that awakening the kinaesthetic sense is possible in all kinds of movement, but this only becomes conscious when the inner connection, the subjective experience of movement, is found. In this sense authentic movement arises from listening to the body. It is the basis of allowing the body to be moved and only through this process can one speak of being embodied, physically conscious, fully focused and alive.

The more we reclaim body awareness, that is, our capacity to observe and our willingness to feel, the more ways we can communicate. The development of skills to access embodied knowing is a critical resource for reflective practice and inter-professional communication. It can be argued that professionals, who develop an embodied awareness of self, have a further and useful resource to draw upon when communicating with others. It seemed to me that in order to reconnect to my sense of self and begin my recovery I needed to 'walk my talk'. The necessity to listen to my traumatised body had never been more prescient.

## Reflections on the Accident

The biographic backdrop of the accident is brought into sharp relief, the twine of my life thread is felt and I can see again how I have ravelled myself. And yet it is as if I can see for the first time. I have woven myself together to create a physical biography that has provided me with a line of continuity. It offers strength and enduring recognition as an embodied woman. This accident has proved to be an opportunity to notice what I have and indeed have not integrated into this narrative. If my narrative expands what are the implications for how I continue to live in and through my body. How has this accident, this new embodied awareness changed the way I see myself and my professional practice.

For example, in teaching and learning the tension that I now recognise that I hold in my body, how does this impact upon the ways in which I relate to colleagues and student? Is there a relationship, and indeed some insight into how I recognise 'will and surrender' in my body and how this is played out when I structure learning opportunities for students. Is there a stridency in my voice that I can now recognise on particular occasions? This awareness gives me more choices; I can choose to let my voice be heard in a variety of ways. With greater awareness comes greater choice, and a greater capacity to be.

In answer to the questions that cascade about my accident I reiterate 'it wasn't anyone's fault, just bad luck'. This resonates, 'bad luck'. How do I deal with things that don't go my way? Do I hold steadfast, become more resolute, and look for the 'silver lining'? Can I continue in the way I intended or do I have to let go of some grand design that I had on my work, relationships, health, and body. How do I work with people who do not get what they want? How do I respond to others who request more from me?

My performing body is not responding as it used to. I do not have the control that I once had, and by will power alone I cannot make this immediately better. I cannot control my body, it is experienced as a loss of physical control, but for me it resonates much more deeply, it is grief. When I felt out of control and so physically and emotionally compromised how could I negotiate the healthcare system, and as I returned to employment how could I work again with colleagues and students? This lack of confidence offered me a chance to engage afresh with how I responded to vulnerability and weakness. It has offered me the opportunity to engage again with how students might perceive the education system. I have been able to engage more with students' experience of fragility. I have been more willing to listen to students when they express concerns about how they feel anxious and out of control. I have been able to respond when they express how overwhelmed and excluded they feel in a Higher Education culture that speaks a 'foreign language' and has in place procedures that are unfamiliar and not understood.

I reflect upon how I engage in learning. I consider how I received the authoritative information that was proffered about my body by the healthcare professionals. It was so alien to me, like the two dimensional drawings that illustrate 'something' about the body that I inhabit. I can work with visualising the constituent elements of my body and how they need to move in three, no four dimensions. I need to revisit how I convey 'information', what media I use to support student learning.

I have been a medical case, a 'subject' who has been duly assessed, diagnosed, offered treatment and rehabilitation. I agreed to this process. So what does informed consent really mean? How

did I accept the voluntary submission of my body, indeed myself, to the trauma of surgery, not once but twice, to have my bones chopped and drilled and artificially bound in an attempt to 'repair' the damage. How could I have consented to something that I only understood in an abstract way? This makes me question how I claim knowledge and share information. I reconsider the sources of information that are relied upon in order to be more informed. It is a question that goes to the heart of my personhood, not about the source of knowledge, but about the capacity of human beings. What persons do I need to trust, and what does trust really mean?

It is an ontological insecurity that places me in the midst of our post structural and postmodern world. And yet this grief which is an experience that gathers momentum, drawing in the losses of a lifetime, is a life process. This loss of 'my world' is a transformative opportunity for it allows for the emergence of a reconstituted self. The purging process that grieving presents can find resolution in a realignment of oneself with a 'voice' that reclaims afresh one's sense of agency.

The curiosity for greater self awareness has impacted upon my professionalism. This critical incident, a traumatic accident, and the rehabilitation and recovery took me away from my routines and expectations in my ordinary and familiar life. The imposition of having to take time away from work, allowed for a reconfiguration and ongoing resettlement of some aspects of my sense of self. It is in the shedding of that which is habitual, that one can gain greater clarity of what is important.

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# Is it time to review our relationship with schools?

John McCormick

Craig *et al* (2006) argue most school training partnerships operate on a 'supply led' model in which the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) sets targets and provider's approaches to schools with many holding traditional views about what partnerships constitute. Indeed, Clemitshaw (2004) argues that Circulars 9/92, 4/98 and subsequent TDA Standards have done little to encourage dialogue between Higher Education Institution (HEI) staff and teachers other than in ways which perpetuate traditional models.

The 2007 Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) standards (TDA, 2007), on their own, do not change this situation but the continuum containing them does represent a change. In addition, other factors now influence trainer-provider relationships and even the notion that partnerships exist solely for initial training is no longer tenable. The intention of this paper is therefore to engender a debate through which the Faculty develops a strategy for making involvement with Liverpool John Moores University more attractive to schools. To do this the paper will:

- identify some of the factors which are currently influencing school and teacher attitudes;
- consider the implications for Initial Teacher Education Work-Related Learning in general;
- outline situations which this universities may be able to exploit.

The terms 'trainees' and 'students' are often used interchangeably however for the purposes of clarity the term 'students' is used throughout this paper to represent all undergraduate and postgraduates who may have an interest in school placements

**Some factors impacting on our relationship with schools**

## 1. Target setting

Local Education Authorities (LEAs), schools and departments now have to set clear targets and monitor their progress towards them. Nationally, targets for 2007 included

> *"85% of 14 year olds to achieve at least Level 5 in English, mathematics and ICT, with 80% achieving Level 5 in science, with this level of performance sustained to 2008."* (**http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ts/informationcentre/nattar/**)

In 2006 Wirral LEA had a target of 78% of Key Stage 3 pupils achieving level 5 in science; Liverpool had a target of 71%. These targets remain in place for 2008, suggesting that, at least locally, National targets are not being met. One likely effect of a failure to achieve targets is increased pressure on schools to find ways to address perceived weakness. This raises the question of whether or not the university can support such initiatives, to our own and our partners' benefit. It could be argued that a HEI should not solely be used to support the acquisition of targets but to support long term sustainable change which will support high quality delivery. Although the question as to whether the two are compatible within a work-related learning environment is a point for further debate.

## 2. Every child matters and changing attitudes to other adults in the classroom

The setting of local and national targets in subjects such as maths and English is complemented at school level by the 'Every Child Matters' aim that each child will "Achieve stretching national educational standards at secondary school" (DfES, 2004); an aim which can be met through a "principle of personalisation" (DfES, 2004, p.3) Many schools find that personalisation through the targeting of individuals or specific groups often pays dividends, and it is increasingly seen in our schools. However, targeting individuals is not always cost-effective, and it can create such a pressure on teachers' time that areas such as planning or producing resources for whole-class teaching suffer. To some extent this has been ameliorated by reliance on non-teaching staff, and it is here that there has been a shift in attitude which could be exploited by HEIs.

The employment of classroom assistants, cover supervisors, learning mentors and others, and the use of volunteers such as student associates have helped to bring about a change of attitude in teachers. Whereas they might have formerly viewed teaching as a solitary profession they are using other adults in the classroom, often extensively, to provide personalisation. They are beginning to appreciate that, "The creative use of a range of other adults, each bringing their own skills and experience to pupils' learning, is a boost to teaching not a threat". (DfES 2002, p 24)

Personal experience, corroborated to some extent by discussions with mentors, is that the people working alongside teachers often lack a high level of subject or curricular knowledge or teaching-related skills. As a result they cannot always give specialised support and teachers cannot use them as creatively as they would like. This can be said to be the case with students to some extent, especially where the tasks they have to complete and areas where they have to demonstrate competence do not always match the school's agenda. As a result students' ability to give support at a subject-specific level is not always fully exploited. However, students do receive consistent training in some techniques and curricular issues and are expected to demonstrate their own learning, which is not always the case with classroom support. It must not be forgotten that the teacher's role is to support the student. However, comments received from mentors do show that the students they take do often provide support. Is it possible to realign training expectations to match identified school needs as this would have the potential to increase their value in the classroom and thus make more teachers willing to develop partnerships?

## 3. Workforce remodeling and professional learning teams.

The changing attitude of teachers goes hand in hand with workforce remodeling. Remodeling is changing the teacher's role, with the aim of achieving "More effective team working, where teachers orchestrate the work of a range of other adults within and outside the classroom to enhance student learning" (DfES 2002, p 12).

One consequence of this change is that different roles within the classroom are more likely to become more clearly articulated and the value of an individual more appreciated "This Agreement will also have significant implications for support staff and other professional staff in schools. Support staff will be increasingly recognised for the contribution they make to raising pupil standards". (Association for Teachers and Lecturers *et al,* 2003, p3). The phase 'support staff' in this document appears directed at permanent staff such as personal administrative staff, Higher Teaching and Learning Assistants and cover supervisors. However, bearing in mind unions' earlier reference to "the creative use...of adults" in "Time for Standards" (op cit) a clearly articulated agreement with an element of permanence could encompass student placements. This may present an opportunity which the Faculty and universities could exploit.

As remodeling proceeds and issues involving role identification are resolved more stable yet possibly still ad-hoc structures known as professional learning teams are likely to emerge. In these educators "work in cooperative groups to identify issues and goals, research professional literature, share experiences and problem solve in real situations directly related to student achievement" (Daye, 2004)

The National College of School Leadership has commissioned at least one report on the potential of professional learning teams to support school improvement. Murphy and Gompertz (2003) contend that professional learning teams are part of the national remodeling agreement, although it is difficult to find specific references to such teams, and particularly to their engagement with literature and research, in many of the Workforce Agreement Management Group notes and reports. Furthermore, there appears to be little use of research in school improvement plans. Professional Learning Teams appear to have some way to go to become fully embedded in school cultures.

This is one area where HEIs can make a contribution. A recent survey shows professional mentors appreciate many of the positive effects of training partnerships in subject departments and schools, including a positive impact on teachers' professional development and departmental knowledge:

| North West Professional mentors' judgment of the impact of Initial Teacher Education on: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very negative | negative | Neutral | positive | Very positive |
| their own CPD | | | 7 | 52 | 41 |
| colleagues' CPD | | 1 | 2 | 65 | 32 |
| department knowledge | 1 | | 25 | 64 | 10 |
| climate of learning | | 4 | 23 | 67 | 6 |

*(source: Craig et al, Escalate, 2006, ongoing study)*

This may be something on which to build. The ability of HEI tutors to access and interpret research data gives them a capability to provide support in a range of ways, from briefings of students and teachers to individual consultancy with senior staff engaged in Doctorate level research. This will become more important as the 2007 standards (TDA, 2007) for the profession become embedded but it could equally be of value where non-QTS programmes are involved with schools. There are also clear links to the Faculty's existing policy for mentor recognition and accreditation and a framework exists which could provide a foundation for further development.

The issues addressed in points 2 and 3 therefore raise a number of questions. One is
'to what extent do the 2007 Professional Standards for Teachers allow for flexibility in ITE programmes of study and school experience so as to enable trainee teachers to work flexibly in schools?'

**Another is**
'Can non-QTS programmes systematically market themselves, if necessary by restructuring to exploit opportunities which exist in schools and Local Authorities?'

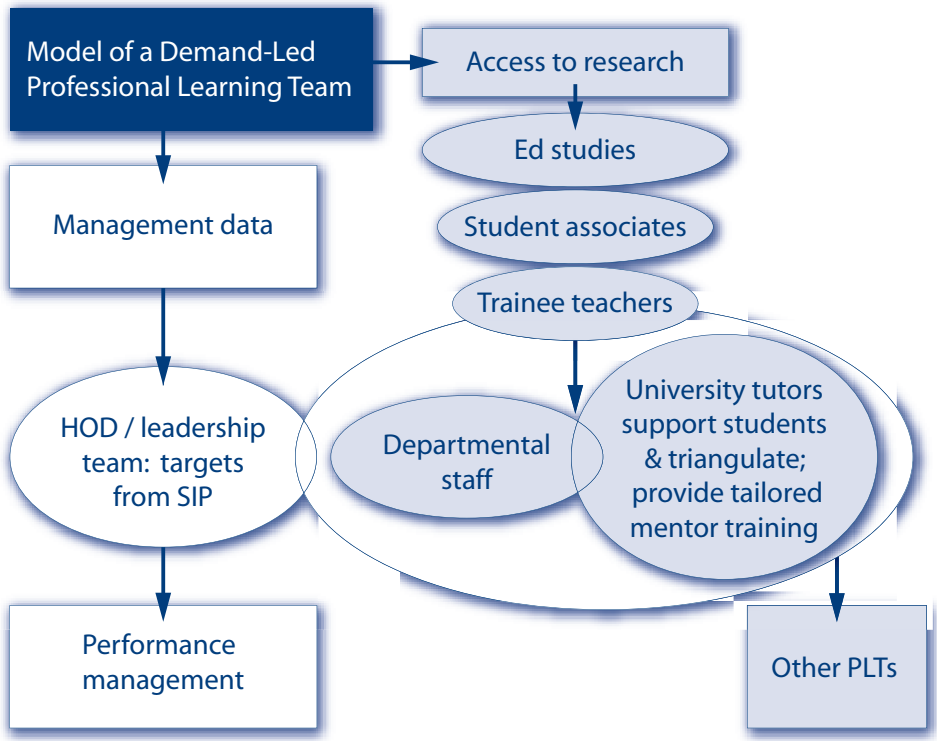
**A third might be**
'How can the Faculty benefit through supporting career development of staff in schools?'

## 4. A continuum of standards

The 2007 standards now form part of a continuum of Professional Standards for Teachers (TDA, 2007) which is likely to encourage a change in teacher attitude. The 'Q' Standards require a commitment to collaborative and cooperative working (Q6) and to work as a team member (Q32). Many of the skills required by threshold, expert and advanced skills teachers can be developed and demonstrated only through work with or leadership of teams and a number of the more advanced standards require engagement with research-derived information. In this context a commitment to the use of evidence is consistent with a Professional Learning Team. These teams could include students, who are assigned tasks by the teachers, and University tutors, who could provide access to a research base or consultancy.

Thus it becomes possible to envisage professional learning teams which include teachers, students and HEI tutors. These teams could support 'paraprofessionals' (student and otherwise), trainee teachers and also practicing teachers but it would take a change in the model of partnership to truly support school improvement.

As well as the supply-led model, Craig *et al* (2006) describe a 'demand-led, school improvement' model, where schools view training as part of the school improvement strategy and seek a partnership with an HEI. Such a model allows the development of professional learning teams which identify opportunities and develop strategies which support the achievement of school targets and the career development of school staff, and which meet the individual needs of students. The diagram below outlines one such structure:




At one end of the PLT is the School leadership team and HOD, who frame targets; at the other is the Higher Education tutor, who provides support to the students and the department and who, through tailored mentor training or other support, addresses some the professional development needs of a continuum of practitioners. At the centre are the departmental staff and the student(s) who work together to develop solutions and effective practice in addressing problems and achieving school targets. In doing so both develop skills which are necessary for that particular stage of their career:

One aspect of this model is the capability of the HEI tutor to provide support away from the school and independently of the school experience, through preparation and seminars, tutorials as well as supporting students and school-based tutors. Given that training institutions already address issues which are current in school this may not require change in the content of their courses, rather some adjustment to current methods of delivery. For example, rather than generic sessions on national strategies, child development or behaviour management, there could be case-study seminars where the situation in a particular school is examined and suggestions made for trainees to implement, with a subsequent report-back. Logic dictates that for optimum effectiveness schools need to outline their proposals and targets in good time for university tutors to prepare their teaching of students and their training for mentors, and that a dialogue is maintained between school and Higher Education staff. It also suggests that synergy and economy could be achieved by running sessions jointly for QTS and non-QTS students.

## Implications for students

*"Professional learning involves collaboration"* (Munro, 2005, p15)

One implication of a changed model is that students could be expected to collaborate during placements. Although the school improvement model of teacher training does not require students to work collaboratively within a school there is increasing evidence that paired or group placements can be more effective than placement of individual students. A well-established 'buddy' system in physical education at Liverpool John Moores University has shown students can support each other, and the Teacher Training Resource Bank (TTRB) website contains positive findings from a small number of studies on paired or multiple placements in Initial Teacher Education. In these, paired placements were viewed positively by trainees, who were found to work together to propose solutions or complete tasks which would be problematic if they were assigned to individuals at an early stage of training (Murphy and Gompertz, 2005). These placements do not necessarily involve more work for teachers, possibly because the students do make use of each other rather than referring to school mentors. In other words, once a problem is outlined to them the trainees work together (with, according to Clemitshaw [2004] an increase in creativity) rather than depend on the mentor for guidance throughout. An American study (Grassl and Mingus, 2007) found pairing a mathematician and a maths educator (sic) in the classroom was beneficial, suggesting that appropriate pairing of non QTS and QTS students from different programmes within the faculty might be worthwhile and that pairing opportunities could be explored on a faculty-wide basis.

In addition, there appears to be evidence that pairing or group placements allow for more personalisation through group and individual work with particular pupils, such as those with special needs or who are 'gifted and talented', and that the pupils benefit from this. An ongoing project involving undergraduate and postgraduate science students at Liverpool John Moores University seems to bear out these findings, although systematic evaluation required to allow conclusive findings to be drawn has yet to be undertaken. In this project groups of students have been placed in schools whose mentors had the freedom to determine projects for the students to undertake collaboratively. Through these the students have supported departments in ways which they would not have been able to manage as individuals. In addition, 'personalisation' of the curriculum and targeting of individuals has been enhanced. Mentors and students have reported very positively of the experience and the evidence to date suggests that collaborative ventures in respect of a school improvement agenda can be successful.

Overall, a considered analysis of costs and benefits suggests students, teachers, pupils and school staff can all benefit from paired placements. Although final Initial Teacher education practices may not offer opportunities because of the need for periods of sustained solo teaching collaborative pairings may operate successfully in the earlier stages of training, or between QTS and non-QTS courses. Clemitshaw (2004), for example, makes observations on the benefits of placements, stating for example that: "Schools can enjoy 'economies' from paired placements in that such placements bring in twice the partnership resources without doubling the amount of mentor work as peer support, peer collaboration and peer learning creates more autonomous trainees." (Clemitshaw , 2004, p11). From this he offers a number of recommendations based on the premise that paired placements are beneficial to all involved.

**Implications for the Faculty**

Although the involvement of Initial Teacher education students requires reference to the QTS standards the adoption of a demand-led model, in which students become part of a team addressing the school improvement agenda and HE tutors provide support, has the potential to address a number of issues of concern to the Faculty, particularly the provision and maintenance of high-quality placements and the development of mentors. It would seem, therefore, that the Faculty could explore the possibility of adopting such a model with partner schools. This would require reflection on

- the potential for collaboration and synergy between QTS and non-QTS courses with subject and curriculum leaders reviewing work-related expectations to identify common areas for students to explore and to provide flexibility for schools;

- feasibility of paired or multiple placements, for QTS and non-QTS students, with joint review of assessments by University subject and curriculum leaders supporting future collaborative activity by trainees;

- there may be a need to explore funding models and/or to revise the nature of school-based training so it becomes self-directed. For example, given that HEFCE funding does not support school-based training, what are the possibilities for current general professional studies programmes being opened to students on non-QTS courses? How creative can the Faculty be in using what funding it does receive?

School and LEA partners could be expected to play a substantial role in any review which followed from a period of reflection in order to

- inform the process
- ensure ownership of a new model of training;
- encourage of a demand-led approach to placements;
- identify school-based targets and potential projects for trainees.

They may need to be involved in the exploration of funding models. However, the Faculty must have clear objectives when inviting school involvement in any review as care must be taken to ensure programme outcomes continue to be achieved.

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