# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Article</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4    | Editorial  
Learning and Teaching in Action - Spring 2015  
Charles Neame |
| 8    | Exploring the role of the Expert  
Sam Illingworth |
| 12   | Introducing ALF  
Joe McCullagh |
| 21   | Managing complexity through effective pre-entry and transition support:  
The Benefits of Peer Mentoring for Disabled Students  
Gill Rice, Samuel Parker, Nahida Shabbir and Alexandra Galbraith |
| 33   | 'People will never forget how you made them feel'  
Eileen Pollard |
| 47   | Programme quality documentation and Education for Sustainable Development: an overview across MMU.  
Valeria Vargas |
| 59   | Screencasting as a means of Enhancing the Student Learning Experience  
Paul Smith |
| 75   | MMU Flotilla – What would being in the top 50 universities for teaching look like?  
Eleanor Livermore |
| 82   | Contacts Page |
A great deal of interesting and important pedagogical work has been happening since the last issue of Learning and Teaching in Action, just some of which is reported in the articles that follow.

One of the reasons for the hiatus in publication schedules was to allow us to take stock of the rationale for a journal like this. It is always useful to have an outlet for discussions of good practice, of course, and a showcase to provide examples for each other, from which we can all learn. Alongside the natural inclinations of professional educators to innovate as a matter of course, and to talk and write about that innovation, very significant developments in pedagogy have been taking place at a strategic level. Not least, the Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment (SLTA) (http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltastategy/index.php) has been developed, as a concrete indicator of MMU's 2020 50:50 vision: to see the university achieve recognition for real success as an institution which integrates high quality teaching with high quality research. Unlike many strategy documents, the SLTA is designed to be an accessible resource for anyone engaged in learning and teaching to use; moreover, it is flexible enough to fit within each faculty's own disciplinary identity.

The 50:50 vision does not mean that research and teaching have to develop as parallel, unconnected streams that do not meet. On the contrary, wherever the two can be integrated, they should be integrated. An introductory discussion of research-led teaching can be found on the CELT website (http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/pedr/research_teaching.php) and, behind that discussion, there is a substantial literature on the subject to be explored. However, this does raise the question of research that is about teaching itself: how do we ensure that higher education as a subject is well understood as a result of our own theorising, and how do we develop and defend the pedagogies we deploy, without research? Learning and Teaching in Action is part of a wider determination to encourage and support pedagogic research; especially research around our own pedagogic practice. That
determination begins with a commitment to scholarship, both as a characteristic of good teaching, and as a prerequisite for effective research. At least two initiatives have helped to pursue that determination over the last year.

**Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) awards**

With a £64,000 fund from central resources, CELT has awarded funding for 12 projects since last summer. These awards aim primarily at supporting the development and evaluation of pedagogic innovation in MMU. Details of the projects, including regular updates from the project leaders from within the faculties involved, are available at [http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/sotl/index.php](http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/sotl/index.php). An initial evaluation of the scheme itself is currently underway, and project outputs will be disseminated at the MMU Learning & Teaching conference (July 15th, New Business School – look out for more details soon). All project leaders will also be producing reports for publication in future issues of LTiA or other journals.

**Higher Education Research Development Group**

The second initiative is the establishment of an informal Higher Education Research Development Group. This group, or community, serves to connect colleagues from across MMU who share an interest in research about higher education and higher education pedagogy. Some of that research will be intensive, complex, specialist and formal in nature; some of it will be more spontaneous and located in the daily practice of its authors. The MMU HE research community aims to bring colleagues with shared interests together, regardless of their particular research context. It will do so through a range of events that will be widely publicised within the university. In the meantime, any readers of LTiA who would like to
be kept informed via email are invited to indicate their interest here (http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/pedr/research_interest.php).

This issue presents an eclectic range of contributions from across the University, illustrating the diversity of our research in the process. Joe McCullagh, Associate Dean for learning and Teaching at the Manchester School of Art, introduces ALF, the School’s Art Learning Foundation, which has ‘gone live’ this spring. ALF will be a great platform for connecting MSA and the HE Research Community already discussed. Eileen Pollard, from the Faculty of Humanities, Language and Social Sciences, shares her perspective of the learning curve of the new lecturer. Paul Smith presents his experience of screencasting as a technique for engaging students more effectively in the complexities of studying chemistry. Sam Parker, Gill Rice and colleagues introduce a scheme for making MMU a more inclusive environment for its students, while Valeria Vargas reports on an analysis of the extent to which the language of sustainability is embedded in MMU’s curricula. We include a cameo of a different practical philosophy of teaching from Sam Illingworth, and as CELT’s July conference hits full planning mode, Ellie Livermore summarises the themes that emerged from the participatory activities at last year’s conference.

**Special issue facilitators’ open reflective paper**

In the coming weeks we will also be publishing an online special issue edited by Carol Yeager (SUNY-Empire State College) and Chrissi Nerantzi (MMU) in collaboration with the Open Knowledge Open Education Working Group. This is in the form of a collection of reflective papers from colleagues who have facilitated open courses. Their stories provide a rich insight into the facilitation experience that will be of interest to other facilitators. They will also be of interest to researchers since the accounts are made available as open data to encourage related research activities. This will be of value for the wider community especially as the facilitator experience in open courses is currently still under-researched. This publication signals the beginning of the Open Facilitator Project and the development of the Open Facilitator Handbook, by and for the community. This will include a dynamic facilitator stories collection that will continue to grow over time.
Following that, our next issue of LTiA is planned for the Autumn of this year. We would like to know what kind of papers and other contributions you would like to see in LTiA, so please let us have your feedback. Contributions for that and for subsequent issues of the journal are also encouraged (see author guidelines at http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltia/authors.php). I hope the varied nature of this issue’s content captures the broad church that the journal aims to serve. Please get in touch with your proposals and opinions.

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CELT

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Exploring the role of the Expert

Sam Illingworth

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Frank Smith’s “To Think” states that “understanding is easy when it is not a particular focus of attention … when the brain is in charge of its own affairs…in the light of its own experience.” (Smith, 2014) Based on this thinking, my colleague Jennie Blake, from the University of Manchester, and I have developed a methodology, informed by Dweck’s work with mind-set, which puts the learner in control of determining value, and which itself values meaningful activity over the search for one correct answer (Dweck, 2006). This methodology leads to the creation of innovative learning opportunities, allowing teachers from different learning disciplines to contribute their expertise; in this way it can free the teacher from the role of the expert. To date this technique has been used by colleagues from The University of Manchester and me, to deliver a number of different workshops and seminars on ‘soft skills’.

Based on this methodology, I delivered a workshop at the 2014 Learning and Teaching conference run by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). The purpose of the workshop was to introduce this style of teaching to a cohort of colleagues from across the University, demonstrating its practicalities by implementing its own methodologies in the delivery of the workshop itself.

As discussed by McNeal (1998), the best classroom practices involve the participants through hands-on experiences, working together while they learn, using their knowledge and developing their skills. This method of learning can be thought of as experiential learning, which Kolb (1984, pp. 41) defines as, “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.” In addition to sampling some of the exercises that I had developed (for example using plasticine to explore concepts of time management), the participants were also encouraged to work together to develop their own activities using the facilitator-led model.
The facilitator-model to which I refer can be defined as one in which the teacher is part of a co-learning experience, but also provides the structure for this learning to take place; a leader but not an expert. I have used this facilitator-led model before in my teaching, mainly when working with my students on 'employability and research skills', such as time management and argument construction. Whilst the CELT workshop was a staff development training session, working with my colleagues was actually a surprisingly similar experience to working with my students; the key to both groups of participants realising the learning outcomes is to ensure that they have ownership of what they are doing, and that they feel empowered by what they know, share, and learn. For example, when brainstorming ‘Top Tips for Time Management’ I made my own list, selected from literature on the subject, and then later shared this with the group, after they had created their own list. In every instance that I have done this, as was the case here, the ‘top tips’ brainstormed by the group are almost identical to the list that I have curated from the literature. This approach lends further authority to the view that the participants have the required knowledge, and that they just need constructive encouragement on how to apply it.

The feedback that I received from the CELT workshop, despite its informal nature, was very encouraging. All of the participants informed me that they had enjoyed the learning process, whilst taking an active role in it. These positive responses were very reassuring, as creating a space for fun fosters a learning environment that promotes engagement, deep learning, and meaning (Robinson and Kakela, 2006). It is important to note that this ‘sense of fun’ should be actively pursued in the application of this methodology, as it leads to greater sense of ownership and involvement amongst the participants.

The MMU Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment (SLTA)\(^1\) is underpinned by the corporate strategy on Student experience\(^2\), which states that the University aims to “Create an excellent learning environment… Through placing students at the heart of the learning journey of a forward-looking academic community.” By challenging

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\(^1\) [http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltastrategy/](http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltastrategy/)
\(^2\) [http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about/corporate-strategy/student-experience/](http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about/corporate-strategy/student-experience/)
the role of the expert and by implementing this methodology in my teaching practices I am helping to ensure that the students themselves contribute towards creating an outstanding, inspiring and sustainable environment for learning (Principle 1 of the SLTA).

Following on from the CELT workshop, I have continued with my research into the use of this pedagogic technique, and also encouraged my colleagues to implement this methodology into their own teaching practices. I have also explicitly integrated the ‘facilitator-led’ model into my own teaching practices, initially by implementing this methodology into one of the level 7 units that I lecture, entitled: ‘Science Communication’. The students of this unit have benefitted greatly from a facilitator-led approach, especially towards the end of the module. It has allowed them to reinforce what they have learnt so far, and enabled them to share best practices and get assistance from one another in a very comfortable environment. As noted by Lizzio et al. (2002), interactive processes are greatly enhanced by making their motives transparent for students. By informing them of this method of learning in the build up to its implementation, the students will have time to reflect on what will be expected of them during the facilitator-led environment.

As well as implementing this methodology in my lectures, I aim to continue to use it whenever delivering workshops and seminars to my colleagues. My experiences at the CELT conference highlighted the fact that this learning technique is equally beneficial to educators and members of staff, and by doing so I will be helping to maintain and strengthen Principle 6 of the SLTA, i.e. that MMU “staff are lifelong learners, fully engaged with their own professional development.”

References


Introducing ALF

Joe McCullagh

Head of Design/Associate Dean, Learning, Teaching, Quality and Assessment
Manchester Metropolitan University

Introduction

In this short article I introduce you to ‘ALF’.

As Associate Dean for Learning, Teaching, Quality and Assessment, this pedagogic project will be used as a central strategic vehicle for Learning and Teaching in the Manchester School of Art.

My intention in this short article is to introduce and outline the process to you so far for ALF. ALF is now in the final stages of development and about to go live soon, but for now here is a brief introduction. Any feedback for ALF would be really welcomed.

Who is ALF?

Let us start with a Problem:

Essentially, there is a great deal of exciting learning and teaching taking place in the school, however, this needs to be shared and experienced to wider communities within the school. There is also a further need to be able to share, research, develop, exchange work and ideas across the school on learning and teaching and to ultimately extend this to the university and beyond.

Response:

Let me introduce ALF. ALF is you, me. Conceptually, ALF is the student, the academic, the technician, the administrator, whoever is interested in learning and teaching.

ALF is Manchester School of Art’s Learning Foundation; it is about social learning and teaching. ALF manifests itself as an online designed blog. It will be an interactive learning space for those in the school and for those outside the school who wish to know what we are up to in terms of learning and teaching.
ALF is also a research publishing space to allow learning and teaching artefacts to be produced. ALF highlights these learning and teaching projects by students and staff in the school.

**Context for ALF**

ALF has its origins in the historical tradition of learning and teaching in the school. On investigating further research material from our Special Collections, I was inspired by the established and rich tradition of pedagogic education tradition of our own school. I took inspiration from Walter Crane, the school’s first head of design (1893 to 1898) who illustrated educational books and also created books based on his lectures whilst teaching at Manchester. Seminal books were published, incorporating his illustrated drawings; two notable books were *The Bases of Design* (1898) and *Line and Form* (1900). I also found his ‘Toy books’ as useful reference points, designed to stimulate the imagination, designed to be small and short in length.

Theoretically, the work of ALF principally draws heavily upon the pedagogic theories of social learning from both Wenger (1998) and Brew (2006). We were also recognising social learning in the context of changes in how students learn and the emergence of new graduate attributes. It is beyond the purpose of this short article to articulate further, however, these theories set within the context of research in learning and teaching in the art school have been further referenced and have been presented as co-authored papers at a number of international conferences, please see ‘further references’ below.
Sources of inspiration

In broader design terms, my motivation comes from the educational heritage of learning and teaching in art, design and architecture. My key influences are traced to the work of designers Charles and Ray Eames in the 1950s and to other periods such as Alan Fletcher in his work for 'Studio Vista' in the 1960s. The ALF project is also conceptually influenced by Gyorgy Kepes in his 1960s ‘Education of vision’ series and also the work of the amazing but short-lived American educational institute the liberal arts college, Black Mountain College (1933–1957), which was inspired by the principles of the educational reformer John Dewey, whose work focused upon reflection, democracy and embedded learning within a social community of learning.
Developing ALF

It was important to note, that I needed to carry out market research and an aspect of this crucially was whether the name Art Learning Foundation actually existed. Thankfully, it did not and Neil Ashdown (our Faculty Web Officer) and I were able to register the name of ALF, Art Learning Foundation, online.

In order to develop ALF further, I created a Design Brief; please see the brief outlined below. The brief enabled me to understand fully the nature of the project and for me to be able to brief colleagues. In order to gain further early feedback, the concept of ALF importantly was presented and discussed at School Communication Days where I was able to receive vital input into its development from academics within the school. As part of the process, I contextualised the project within what I felt is important in the major shifts of pedagogy as Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching and delivered a talk on ‘Social Learning and Teaching’.

I felt it was also important that ALF was fully developed in-house utilising the skills and expertise of my colleagues. This celebrates the concept of the ‘pedagogic designer’, which I have been developing further within the school. For the logo, I commissioned Hilary Judd a senior lecturer in Graphic Design who had previously produced some beautiful hand-drawn letterforms to create a number of hand-drawn ideas based for ALF. The hand-drawn letterforms were then refined further as part of final logo realisation. I liked the idea that ALF was to have a signature, hence, the use of the hand-drawn mark.
Hilary was given the brief and a number of random visual reference points to work with that were mainly taken from music references such as Miles Davis.

Hilary on reading the brief developed the hand-drawn ‘signature’ of ALF further and produced a great ‘signature/mark’ for ALF.

**Hilary’s ‘alf’ visuals**

The ‘mark’ was refined further and an appropriate typographic treatment incorporating Art Learning Foundation was produced resulting in the final ALF logo. The logo utilises Akzidenz Grotesk, one of the school’s brand typefaces.

I worked very closely with Neil in order to deliver an appropriate online platform for ALF. The technical aspects of this project working with content delivery are worthy of further discussion and cannot be underestimated. Neil’s technical creative expertise was vital in ALF’s development. We discussed heavily the nature of access to the platform, its audience, and the process of developing a social space. We settled upon the platform of a blog, however, we wanted it to look more bespoke and designed. Neil took the decision to adapt ‘wordpress’ in order to make the project more visual and bespoke.

**Design and content realisation**

Coming from a graphic design background, I developed the concept and design of ALF and translated this working further with Neil to create the online presence. I wanted the site to be linear and easily navigable. I created a simple structure that would allow the key sections to be accessible.

Importantly, for me the idea of ALF had to exist as part of the brand of the school. However, it had to have its own distinct identity. Working closely with Neil we developed a platform for ALF that is easily downloadable and importantly accessible. For the graphic imagery of ALF I took everyday photographs of the school.

The photographs were edited further and heavily cropped to be incorporated as key visual elements within ALF.
Screen shots of ALF

Screenshots below from the ALF beta version give you an idea of the content and design of ALF. Archives, comment boxes are currently being technically developed.

Content

The categories developed for the space reference jazz and improvisation further, I guess I was 'listenin' to too much jazz when it was being developed! Importantly, the content and feel of the space is to be relaxed, and as Hilary pointed out when designing the mark for ALF that it should be friendly and also credible. We purposely did not want to produce a space that is one dimensional and content given, we want to engage social interaction and that the users would generate the content. The various sections allow an open structure to encourage this interaction. ALF is not meant to duplicate any learning and teaching activity but simply to signpost, to connect up, network
and to continue to stimulate the community of learners within the school and also beyond. I will act as the main overseer of ALF and also our Senior Learning and Teaching Fellow, Michael Gorman and it will be taking it further as an on-going pedagogic research project. ALF has already revealed other fascinating areas for research, particularly on why in the 1960s there appears to be a greater interest in pedagogy publications within art and design.

Next steps

This short article introduces you to ALF. ALF’s intention is to innovate within learning and teaching and to encourage social communities of practice. Importantly, it hopes to do this within a social and engaging way. I will be advancing some of the research ideas and concepts outlined in this article further in the future.

ALF is going through some technical updates at the moment. We will need to carry out further user testing and also content development. The school’s pedagogic research group will be asked to contribute to this process and content generation. We will have a ‘soft’ launch of ALF and we hope to go live in the very near future. Any feedback on the development of ALF will be very much appreciated.

References


McCullagh, J., McFadyen, J., Holmes, A., Crow, D., and McKeating,

Appendix 1

Design brief

Background

ALF
Alf will become Manchester School of Art’s learning foundation

ALF = ART LEARNING FOUNDATION
social learning and teaching

Conceptually ALF is the student, the academic, the technician, the administrator. ALF is about social learning and teaching.

ALF will be an online space that will be an interactive learning space for those in the school and for those outside the school who wish to know what we are doing in terms of learning and teaching. ALF will also be a publishing space to allow learning and teaching artefacts to be produced ie. Using our in-house risograph. ALF will show the learning and teaching projects by students and staff in the school. It is an open space for the whole school.

Problem: Essentially there is some really exciting learning and teaching in the school but this needs to be shared and experienced. ALF is set up to allow this interaction.

The strapline is ‘social learning and teaching’.

Design feel—fuzzy felt
The initial feel of ALF is that it came out of looking at Ken Garland’s work for GALT toys, a fuzzy felt idea and again referencing some of those beautiful learning and teaching handbooks by Alan Fletcher’s work here for Studio Vista. I wanted something exciting, friendly and interesting but credible.

Conceptually taking the idea of ALF as a person hence the hand drawn idea of the logo. The handdrawn logo is counterbalanced with some strong photography again referencing Ken Garland’s use of photography.

Identity
An identity for ALF. The identity should work on screen and off. Consider drawings ‘marks’ around the idea of ALF also for the navigation of the site. Colour palette wise we should use the school’s house style branded colours and also the school’s typographic specification of Akzidenz Grotesk. ALF needs to sit and work within the school brand as a sub-brand within. Also work in B/W.

Content ideas
Jazz! The influence of jazz on ALF is important as it typifies the idea of play and importantly improvisation.

Possible content ideas:
ALF takin’ off
ALF what’s cookin’?
ALF what you lookin’?
ALF what you watchin’?
ALF what you listenin’?
ALF what’s up?
Say hello to ALF?
Who is ALF?

ALF questions?
Alternative NSS artschool questionnaire find out how many students like the colour blue and prefer subway or sand bar to….

ALF academic stuff
Check out reading lists for staff, albers, dewey, vygotsky, interesting education stuff for staff and students, links to CELT, HEA, organizations

Top 10 pedagogoues of our time

Video wall
studio pedagogic films, link in to existing film course films

Ask ALF?
ALF’s JAM creative hour
Take part in creative day of the week, at between 7-8pm
Art jam upload your images, videos, work

ALF what’s up?
Conversations with ALF Staff and students talk about art/design/architecture stuff

See what your mates are up to?

Project wall, upload an image and words of project

Top 10 random images of the week

Twitter 150 words tell us what you think on learning and teaching

What have you learnt this week?

ALF wants you.
In 150 characters or images

Who is ALF?
What’s up
what your colleagues are up to.

ALF, vision on, turn on tune in alf in best artwork chosen by you and staff/possibly sell artwork and percentage would go to a nominated charity
Managing complexity through effective pre-entry and transition support: The Benefits of Peer Mentoring for Disabled Students

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Abstract

This paper explores the benefits of peer mentoring for disabled students making the transition into university and through the first year of their studies. Through a pilot peer mentoring project, established by the Learner Development Service in 2012, prospective and first year disabled students at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) were offered the opportunity to be paired with a student mentor. Information is provided on how the scheme operates and an evaluation of the project to date.

Introduction and background

One of the key remits of the Learner Development Service is to offer support, advice and guidance to prospective disabled students as well as those studying at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). For some disabled students, making the transition into higher education can be a confusing and challenging experience. This is partly because of the processes that disabled students have to undertake to obtain support for studying at university. Also, some students find coming to university stressful due to the nature of their disability, especially as it may make it difficult for them to engage fully in social activities and university life.

Increasingly researchers have been investigating the benefits of peer mentoring for students studying in Higher Education. Andrews and Clark (2011) carried out a three year research project looking at how peer mentoring has been successfully used in Higher Education...
Institutions to aid the transition from Further Education and to combat attrition rates in the first year. Andrews and Clark state that “Within the UK Higher Education context, peer mentoring relates to the concept of reciprocal peer support and learning whereby a peer mentor helps to enhance and promote the overall university experience of either an individual student, or group of fellow students. Peer mentors are generally (but not always) slightly more advanced in their studies than peer mentees. By using their own experiences and insights, peer mentors help newer students settle into university, building a relationship which often lasts through the first year – and in many cases beyond” (2011. p24). Findings suggest that peer mentoring can be effective at a number of points in the student’s life-cycle both from the very early transition period, in the first term and beyond.

Andrews and Clark identify the ways in which mentor support provides a ‘safety net’ for new students during the transition and through the first term. They highlight that there can be a significant benefit for mentors involved in peer mentoring schemes, as well as mentees. This is both in terms of satisfaction gained from helping those new to the university settle into their new environment and also from an employability perspective, as it can add key skills to a CV and so enhance employability. This has particular relevance for this student cohort as Government statistics indicate that disabled people remain significantly less likely to be in employment than non-disabled people. In 2012, 46.3% of working-age disabled people were in employment compared with 76.4% of working-age non-disabled people (Dept. Work and Pensions, 2014).

Griffin (1995) developed a mentoring scheme at the University of Huddersfield with the aim of providing peer support for those students new to higher education who had made the transition from local colleges. Griffin highlighted that there were multiple benefits for the mentees who engaged with the programme. These included clarity in understanding university procedures, finding their way around campus, keeping them motivated during the first term and having someone around who understood their problems. Husband and Jacobs (2009) identified a number of key benefits to a university, as an organization, following the implementation of a successful peer mentoring programme. These include reducing the social exclusion that some students experience when beginning university by
promoting a positive and caring atmosphere within the institution. Also, it helps in reducing drop-out rates and increases performance, motivation and satisfaction of students. Based on this evidence and also attendance at a one day conference at Aston University, on the benefits of peer mentoring, Learner Development decided to pilot its own peer mentoring scheme.

When considering implementing peer mentoring schemes, Andrews and Clark (2011) make a number of key recommendations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as follows:

1. Consider embedding peer mentoring as part of the institutional retention strategy.
2. Decide on the form of mentoring programme to be introduced.
3. Design a robust and well managed programme.
4. Appoint a dedicated person, or persons, to manage the programme.
5. Ensure effective marketing of the programme.
6. Introduce a rigorous mentor selection and training process.
7. Take care in pairing mentees and mentors to ensure a good match.
8. Make clear the availability of on-going support.
9. Evaluate the programme at an appropriate point or points in the year.
10. Consider academic credit/recognition for mentors.

These recommendations provide a useful framework and the Learner Development Service utilised this model in the development of its peer mentoring scheme. The following section details how the Learner Development Service implemented its mentoring scheme.

**Aims**

The aims of the Learner Development peer mentoring scheme are:

1. To provide prospective and first year disabled students at MMU with the support of a peer who has experience in at least one year of Higher Education and who also has experience of the Higher Education support process for disabled students.
2. To facilitate the transition for disabled students making the step up from further to higher education.
3. To enhance a sense of belonging within the wider university community.
4. To reduce the number of disabled students who withdraw from the university during their first year of studies.
5. To support and develop a number of current disabled MMU students to become peer mentors.
6. To develop and enhance skills that will benefit mentors’ employability when they graduate from MMU.

Methodology and Methods

Although the value of peer mentoring is recognised within existing research findings, before implementing a peer mentoring scheme Learner Development decided to conduct research amongst existing disabled students via questionnaires. This was partly because very little published research exists for this student cohort. All disabled students registered on the Learner Development database (approximately 2,000 students), were invited to complete a questionnaire online via Bristol On-line Surveys, which generated fifty five responses. A range of questions were asked including whether students thought they would have benefited from having a mentor, the type of information that would have been useful to them and whether they wanted both face to face and e-mentoring. Also, students were asked whether it was important for the mentors themselves to have a disability or Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD). Ninety three per cent of respondents indicated they would have wanted a mentor had the opportunity been available for them. The main reasons given were to find out information about their course/department, or about the support available for disabled students. Two thirds of respondents also stated that it would be important for them to have a mentor who is also disabled or dyslexic and had been through the higher education support process.

Based on the findings a targeted pilot peer mentoring scheme for disabled students was trialled throughout the 2012/13 academic year. The target group of students for the pilot scheme were identified as first year students who have a Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Asperger’s Syndrome or a physical disability, such as Epilepsy. Students identifying with mental health difficulties or those with SpLD’s were not included in the pilot project, because
these groups represent substantial categories of disabled students within the university and there was a concern regarding resourcing a large mentoring project. It was felt that by trialling and evaluating a small scale project valuable knowledge would be gained in how to further develop and establish a high class peer mentoring scheme.

In Spring 2012 through liaison with the Widening Participation team at MMU, who already had successful mentoring schemes in place for care leavers, it was agreed to work collaboratively to develop the Learner Development peer mentoring scheme. Due to care leavers and disabled students having different needs in terms of support and navigating the support available within the university and through Disabled Students Allowances, it would not have been appropriate to develop one scheme. Responding to student feedback from the questionnaires the decision was taken that mentors would be recruited from current disabled students and students with SpLDs at the university. The Widening Participation team agreed to fund payment for mentors attending training sessions and for any face-to-face mentoring they undertook. As an incentive for mentors to remain on the scheme it was also agreed that each mentor would be paid a £50 bonus upon completion of a feedback questionnaire at the end of the year. For the majority of mentors payment was a secondary concern and the issue of payments proved unproblematic throughout the pilot. The bonus was paid to ensure that the pilot project could be comprehensively evaluated. The scheme was administered by one Learner Development Adviser and one Administrator, alongside their other roles within the Learner Development Service. A student intern was employed for six months to assist in the initial running and evaluation of the pilot project.

Table 1 – Mentors and mentees by disability group

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<th>Hearing Impairment</th>
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<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
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Widening Participation subscribe to an E-Mentoring website, called Bright Links, which could be utilised to offer prospective students e-mentor support before they came to university. This was beneficial as it meant that students did not have to use their personal email account. The Bright Links website includes a ‘Knowledge Bank’ containing information on a large range of subjects that students making the transition to university may find useful, such as study skills, student finance and living on a small budget. Bright-Links allows the administrators of the scheme to view usage on a weekly basis including email volume. Furthermore, it allows emails to be viewed and moderated by the staff running the scheme. The email software has advanced features that will hold emails for moderation if they contain web-links or trigger words, such as those with sexual connotations. Mentors and mentees were informed that their emails may be flagged for moderation. Once enrolled, mentees were able to have continued contact their mentors via Bright Links, as well as having the opportunity to meet up with their mentors at monthly meetings organised by Learner Development. Social activities were also arranged, such as ten-pin bowling or meeting up for refreshments. A termly newsletter was distributed to mentors and mentees containing articles and activities of interest.

Eleven mentors were recruited for the 2012/13 academic year from a range of disability groups, as shown in Table 1. Mentors attended two compulsory half days training sessions where they learnt about the range of services available within the university. This included training on setting boundaries with mentees, using Bright Links, supporting students with Asperger’s Syndrome and also the support they could access in their role.

In order to evaluate the pilot peer mentoring project eight mentors attended one-to-one interviews in March 2013 to discuss their experiences, approximately a year after they were first recruited. This included the training they received, using the Bright Links e-mentoring system and the regular group meetings for mentors and mentees. A focus was also placed on the skills which they felt had been developed as a direct result of becoming a peer mentor. Mentor feedback indicated the training had been beneficial with a number commenting that training on Asperger’s Syndrome had been very informative. Mentors viewed the training as an opportunity to meet the other mentors and develop peer support within the role.
This highlights the importance of ensuring that mentors fully engage with training sessions and that a range of activities are designed in order to foster co-operation and build up rapport between mentors.

Engagement between mentors and mentees

Mentors had very different experiences engaging with their mentees, ranging from mentees not engaging with the project, to having regular emails and face-to-face meetings. A number of mentors commented on how easy it was to stay in contact with their mentees and how well they got on. They also highlighted that their mentees had been in contact very regularly initially, but as the term progressed contact became infrequent. This supports previous research findings suggesting that transition is a key period when support is required. The mentors felt that the mentor–mentee relationship was useful to the mentees, with one of the mentors commenting on their mentee’s shyness and how they find it difficult to talk with other students. Another mentor stated that face-to-face meetings were important as her mentee was very concerned about socialising and making friends. This again highlights that the decision to combine online mentoring with opportunities to meet at group meetings, was a successful one. For those mentors whose mentees had not been in contact with them, mentors emailed once a month, providing opportunities for contact.

Bright Links

Mentors found the Bright Links e-mentoring system really useful and easy to use. One of the mentors liked how Bright Links keeps track of emails showing them in a thread, while another appreciated how the format is uncluttered. Mentors found this information and the activities on Bright Links helpful with one student working through all of the activities. Mentors identified that using Bright Links did have some drawbacks. One mentee reported that they were not receiving Bright Links messages. Another commented that the emails were not instant as some were held for moderation if they contain web-links or certain trigger words. Despite this, Bright Links remains the safest and most effective way for Learner Development to offer a pre-entry
peer mentoring service compared with allowing students to use their personal email accounts.

Group meetings

Mentors responded extremely positively about the group meetings and the opportunity for them to meet face-to-face with both their own, and other, mentees. Mentors enjoyed the chance to socialise with both other mentors and mentees. This helped them build rapport and it was a useful forum to swap advice and share experiences. One issue identified was the difficulty for mentors and mentees to attend the monthly meetings in Manchester from the Crewe campus. When the scheme expanded, separate meetings were held at Crewe campus for the 2013/14 academic year. Mentors also made suggestions about how the meetings could be developed in the future. Mentors are increasingly encouraged to take an active lead in setting the agenda for group meetings and delivering some group activities as the scheme expands. This started to happen towards the end of the pilot year with one mentor leading activities at group meeting. It is anticipated that this will give further employability skills to mentors in terms of leadership, organisation and presentation skills.

Skills development of mentors

During interviews, all mentors commented that they had gained new qualities and skills from being a mentor. One mentor stated that the peer-mentoring project has offered them the chance to socialise, noting that before they would not have had the confidence to talk publicly. He commented, “It was the first time that I had spoken to such a large group of people.” Through participation in the project, he now feels that he would be able to participate in group work on his course. For others, it increased their understanding of disability and working with a diverse group of people. The mentors stated they gained a greater awareness of the support services within the university. One student commented about the positive aspects of mentoring stating, “I think I’ve helped my mentee, she says thank you for talking about things. I would have liked to have had a mentor when I started university.” Many of the mentors said they had gained
confidence, organisational and interpersonal skills all of which are key to employability. Mentors highlighted the skills they had gained through the mentoring project and how they have enhanced their CV’s.

For one student, the experiences she gained helped her gain a job as an Outreach ambassador. Another visually impaired student felt that by being a mentor demonstrated her interest in other people, important to her studies in psychology. She has also worked in other areas of the university now registered with the Jobs4student scheme stating, “I didn’t know it was ok to disclose a disability and that adjustments would be made for me. I have worked as an IT rover, in an administration office and at graduation ceremonies. I am also going to be an ambassador and give tours at the next open day”. This feedback highlights that the benefits to mentors can be as significant.

Results and Discussion

Thirteen students contacted Learner Development to request a mentor both before and during the 2012/13 academic year. All remained enrolled at the end of the academic year, which is positive as student retention was a key driver for introducing the peer mentoring scheme. Although it is difficult to predict the progression rate from year to year, due the complexities and challenges experienced by some disabled students, amongst the pilot year mentees, an 80% progression rate would have been expected. Findings from the pilot indicate that engagement varied between different mentors and mentees. Four mentees did not engage with their mentor at all despite requesting a mentor. Several of the mentees contacted their mentor for a period prior to starting at MMU and subsequently attended some group meetings. However, they did not continue to email their mentor via Bright Links. This highlights that the focus of the scheme should remain on support during the transition period, and through the first term, when mentor support is mostly utilized. A further three mentees attended some group meetings and engaged with their mentor at these sessions.

Two of the mentees had regular weekly contact with their mentors throughout the academic year, both through Bright Links and face-to-
face at group and individual meetings. From the record of contact sheets completed and returned by mentors it is clear that these mentoring relationships have provided the mentee with both someone to talk to and advise them, pointing them in the direction of other support services as required. Table 1 shows that the majority of mentees were those with either Physical conditions or Asperger’s Syndrome. This is encouraging, as Learner Development has found that these groups of students often need high levels of support during the transition phase from Further to Higher Education.

Besides benefiting mentors and mentees, this project has also had a positive impact on the Learner Development Service. There have been a number of occasions throughout the year where mentees have highlighted issues, or these have become apparent at group meetings, that warrant further discussion and intervention with a Learning Development Adviser. This has led to occasions where review meetings have been arranged and the individual mentee’s support revised as a result. Mentors have also been able to refer their mentees back to Learner Development at times when they have felt it necessary. One mentor comments, ‘It is good because now I feel like I can really help her. Because she’s been having a lot of problems with one of her tutors and she didn’t want to make a big deal of it. So I went with her to Learner Development to get some help’. This highlights how the development of rapport with the mentors on the scheme can further lead to an increase in student satisfaction, both for mentors and mentees, ensuring timely support is provided.

The peer mentoring scheme has encouraged mentors and mentees to take an active role in university life, better enabling them to navigate their way into and through university and to develop transferable skills which are required both for academic study and for future employment. Evaluation indicates that the scheme has engendering confidence and self-belief, with some graduate mentors successfully securing employment in their chosen fields.

Expansion of the Scheme

For the 2013/14 academic year the scope of the project was expanded to cover all disability groups as the pilot year has shown
the benefits of offering such a service. Expansion of the project estimated that a maximum of a hundred students would take up mentor support, though the actual number was forty-six mentees for the 2013/14 academic year. To ensure that sufficient mentors were available for the 2013/14 academic year Learner Development recruited fifteen students to become mentors in addition to the six existing mentors who were continuing from 2012/13. All of the existing mentors expressed a wish to be involved in the training of new mentors and two of these students delivered talks at the information and training sessions in May 2013. The long-term aim is that this will contribute towards the mentoring project becoming a more student led and sustainable project.

The second year of the Peer Mentoring scheme continued to build on the successes of the first year and has adapted to be able to offer mentors to all prospective disabled students. Data extracted from the Bright Links website shows that over 750 messages were sent during the 2013/14 academic year between mentors and mentees and that the website is most heavily used just before the start of autumn term and during the first few months of term. The results of feedback from mentors show that they have welcomed the opportunity to train as mentors and offer support based on their own experiences to new students. It is particularly encouraging that mentors see the benefits that being a mentor can have for their future employability and that one student credited the scheme for helping him to achieve a job after graduating in his dream career path.

The more experienced mentors will be encouraged to become more active in leading activities and training in subsequent years. This has the potential to reduce input by both adviser and administration staff for the coming year. However, the matching of mentors and mentees and overall responsibility will remain with Learner Development. With mentoring being developed university wide through MMU Futures it offers the opportunity for mentors to be involved in other schemes and for new mentors to receive generic training via this initiative. For the 2014/15 academic year fifteen new mentors were recruited and trained. Mentors are encouraged to support up to four mentees and to attend the monthly group meetings where possible. Also, mentors can volunteer to compile a termly newsletter for mentees during the 2014/15 academic year for which they will be paid for completing.
Conclusion

The Learner Development peer mentoring scheme has been running since the 2012/13 academic year. Both mentors and mentees have been enthusiastic about the scheme. Many mentees have found it reassuring to have mentor contact prior to starting university and during their first year of study. The monthly group meetings have provided students with the opportunity to speak to their mentor and Learner Development staff in a relaxed setting and develop confidence in a supportive environment. Parents of disabled applicants attending pre-entry events run by Learner Development have been positive about the scheme: knowing that additional support for their child is available. It has also been welcomed by mature students attending university for the first time. There is evidence that mentors have assisted mentees to liaise with Learner Development to resolve support issues in a timely way. Through involvement with the scheme the employability skills of mentors have been enhanced, with some mentors being offered other employment opportunities as a result. Establishing the scheme has also raised the profile of the Learner Development Service within the university. The overall analysis of establishing the scheme has been positive from both the perspective of students and the institution.

References


‘People will never forget how you made them feel’ (Maya Angelou$^1$)

Eileen Pollard

*Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Chester*

This reflection offers a response to the concrete experience of having my teaching observed as part of a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP). I used David A. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model (1975) to launch a small action-based study following this experience. My pilot produced a sample of material about what both students and teachers potentially think we are all doing in a higher education lecture theatre. These findings led to my considering what constitutes a lecture, whether or not it is ‘redundant’ in the current online landscape, and, if not, what aspects of the pedagogy of this ancient technique we might wish to emphasise or recapture.

As a new lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, I undertook a PGCAP and this reflection on being observed is thus a Socratic product of an ongoing dialogue with my tutor. I was observed lecturing approximately forty third-year undergraduates on William Morris’ utopian novel *News from Nowhere*, with large-group teaching as the agreed focus. The research design of the resulting pilot study primarily consisted of two open questions – 1. In one sentence, answer the question – What is a lecture? 2. What three key words spring to mind when you think of a lecture? I wanted to test the implications of any preliminary findings in new situations, according to Kolb’s model, to help me reflect on how I might continue to develop my large-group teaching methods:

$^1$ Cited in Kelly, 2003
Figure 1. Kolb’s Experiential Learning Model

Kolb has described action-based learning as the ‘practical counterpart’ to this experiential model of learning. In this model, a concrete experience is the trigger for first reflection and conceptualisation, before re-engaging with experimentation and experience.

This reflection acknowledges the small size of this initial study. However, it is representative of my own continuous critical reflection about teaching methods; a process that forms part of every teacher’s developing professional understanding.

Although I have been teaching seminar sessions for the last two years, I have only recently started lecturing, or large-group teaching. In fact, my observed session was only the fourth lecture I had delivered as an Associate Lecturer. This inexperience is significant for the work of this reflection because it is linked to my decision to undertake informal research. In my department ‘new’ Associate Lecturers do not typically deliver lectures (despite their role title) because this type of session is simultaneously seen as more difficult and more important than the seminar.² As Gill Nicholls points out: ‘Practice, in this case teaching, does not happen in a vacuum, but occurs in a range of social, political and ideological contexts’ (2005:612). Culturally, it is an honour and a privilege for an English department Associate Lecturer to be given responsibility for the delivery of a lecture, and a sign of advancement. The ideological contexts of the Associate Lecturer, both narrowly on a departmental level as well as more broadly on a national one, is a HE cultural

² I work primarily in the English department at MMU, although I also have a part-time contract at the University of Chester.
phenomenon worthy of a study in itself. These factors contribute to the fraught position of the lecture in my department, my faculty and the university environment as a whole. I wished to address the tension between teachers realising that the lecture is seen as an outmoded format that bores students (Clark 2010) and those self-same students maintaining a remarkably rigid stance about what constitutes a lecture, and what they have paid to receive. I wanted the study to initiate a probe into the stereotype of the lecture theatre as a ‘fish counter’; or rather explore whether or not students entertain nostalgic notions of the lecture as central to the university experience while simultaneously disengaging from the form. It was this perhaps anecdotal teacher/student contradiction that inspired my study – ‘what is a lecture?’

As I am new to lecturing, I try different mediums and techniques in order to engage my students and retain their attention, which I have seen wander more easily in lectures than seminars. For example, I use Prezi, rather PowerPoint, as it is simpler to customise Prezi presentations and you can more easily move between the slides and then return to the overview (see figure two). It is important to recognise that students do respond to ‘the new’, and that contemporary culture is predominantly visual, which precludes, in my view, not using any visual material at all. Also, I tend to limit the number of slides to four and talk extensively around the bullet points on each rather than presenting numerous slides all packed with information. One student responded to the second question in my study with the words – ‘Informative, Overload, Concentration’ (see appendix) – which I think illustrates the problem with presenting too much information, too fast.
This policy of less-is-more similarly informs the structure; consequently, there are four slides, and a corresponding four sections to the lecture, each concluded by a one-minute paper for the students to undertake individually to check that the learning has taken place for that ‘block’ before moving on. Adopting this structure is in line with research that suggests that on average people can concentrate for fifteen-minute blocks (Postman:1987). For clarity, I time the students with a large, digital stopwatch onscreen for the duration of the one-minute papers. I always design a structured hand-out to accompany my oral delivery, which is similarly split into four and contains details of the one-minute tasks that the students can then answer directly on to their hand-out – see figure three below. I try to use humour to assist my delivery, and often my first one-minute paper is a joke (figure three again). For my News from Nowhere lecture, I also wore a t-shirt that read ‘… but it was all a dream…’, which was an ironic reference to the formulaic ending of the novel and an attempt at ‘wearing the session’ as clothing.
TASK = Was Morris associated with – a) Morris dancing b) Morris Minor motorcars c) The English Arts and Crafts Movement

As my lectures often involve questions and quizzes – as suggested here with the multiple-choice about Morris – I sometimes award prizes for correct answers, generally a chocolate bar, or an ‘IOU one prize’ post-it note. All these techniques, the integrated interaction through the one-minute papers, the jokes and the use of clothing, are designed to cultivate a feeling that the lecture is ‘live’, and thereby prompt an edge-of-the-seat engagement. The observation helped me realise that I was pushing and questioning the implied boundaries and hierarchies of the lecture format, in pursuit of what I perceived as creative, inclusive and engaging teaching practice. The reflection process involved my continuing to think about lectures with less rigidity, in the spirit of the flipped classroom (Lage, Platt and Treglia:2000) – perhaps as ‘sessions’, and therefore as less prescriptive for both me and my students. The flipped classroom
frees a teaching space; thus students used to an emphasis on teacher-talk-time are encouraged to refocus on student-talk-time instead.

One of the problems I experienced with the feedback was whether or not to allow the students more control in the lecture, especially in terms of share of voice, which has led me to reflect on my role as a teacher. A difficulty I experienced in the lecture was the low response-rate from the students to the one-minute papers. Although I have found that students are less likely to speak in large numbers in a bigger group, I had had more success with this technique in the previous lecture I had delivered, with the same students, which suggests possible problems with the design of the tasks in the News from Nowhere session. Reflecting on this problem in terms of the question of control then exposed a further tension in my practice. I had appreciated Frank Furedi’s critique of learning outcomes in the THE, entitled ‘The Unhappiness Principle’, where he remarked: ‘The precision gained through the crystallisation of an academic enterprise into a few words is an illusory one that is likely to distract students from the clarity that comes from serious study and reflection’ (29 November 2012) – see also Hussey and Smith (2003 and 2008). However, I now considered my resistance to learning outcomes as actually inhibiting my wish to relinquish control to the students. So, without the clarity of my expectations – or desired outcomes – the students could not fully take responsibility for their own learning.

I considered different strategies for improving the response-rate to my one-minute papers, and indeed, other ways to engage students in large-groups. On reflection, for example, I thought it was right to question how spaced out the students were in the lecture theatre. Now I successfully encourage the students to both sit closer to the front and also next to each other, in order to create a physical and personal environment that more easily fosters exchange. Interestingly, I do not hesitate to move my students around into smaller or larger groups, as required, in seminar sessions; instead my inhibition was culturally and specifically related to lectures.

In an online lecture entitled ‘Don’t Lecture Me’ (2010), Donald Clark makes many points about the problems within and facing higher education, especially the recognition that a good researcher does not
necessarily make a good teacher,\textsuperscript{3} that delegates reading their papers at conferences is an extremely ineffective means of communicating ideas and that real blended learning does not simply mean chopped-up ‘blended’ delivery. However, his outright rejection of numerous established aspects of higher education pedagogy, such as, for example, having respect for a lecturer, as ‘criminal and stupid’ demonstrates a discursive poverty beneath which lurks an inappropriate level of dichotomous thinking (Clark, 2010). The lecture is not ‘one thing’, it is neither all good nor all bad; yet despite Clark’s open hostility to so-called ‘faith’ schools, he championed the unashamedly evangelical zeal of TED talks as a viable alternative to lectures – and as apparently delivered by people who ‘really’ know what they are doing. Semantically, and therefore actually, there is a big difference between a ‘talk’ and a ‘lecture’, both in terms of expectation, learning and delivery. But what lies beneath… is my immediate response to his critique, since a video that is easy to watch is not necessarily an effective learning tool – after all learning is not always easy. Moreover, watching a video is a passive activity, arguably even more passive than attending a lecture; for example, Clark makes a point of highlighting the inclusivity and reach of online videos, quickly establishing a connection between the number of ‘hits’ and the level of engagement - ‘Do the maths’, he demands (2010). However, as the contemporary age is one where screens with rolling news and/or daytime television are omnipresent in train stations, doctors’ surgeries and staff rooms around the world, so that what is happening on the screens becomes both auditory and visual background and wallpaper, is it wise to assume that the one million people who ‘hit’ your video have actually paid attention to all, or even most, of it? Furthermore, is it then sensible on the basis of this assumption to influence higher education policy and redirect even more content from offline into online? At least in a lecture theatre, the lecturer can gauge the level of the students’ attention and, in the words of the novelist Zadie Smith, remind them that ‘YOU ARE NOT WATCHING TV’ (cited Childs and Green, 2013:48).

The conclusion I have reached through reflecting on ‘Don’t Lecture Me’ – itself a lecture – is that the solution to the lack of engagement in lectures is not to embrace distance and go online, but to

\textsuperscript{3} Although this difficulty is discipline specific and Clark’s lecture primarily focuses on physics; however, this observation raises the question of how ‘discipline specific’ – to English Literature – my own work remains.
emphasise and develop the proximity that lectures facilitate. The Unique Selling Point (USP)\(^4\) of the lecture is that it involves actual real people in actual real time in an actual real space, which, despite the explosion of the online world, people still definitely want – think of packed arenas for stand-up comedians, filled football stadiums and sold out rock concerts. Many, many people, if not most, enjoy sitting right-next-to other people in a (very) large group in order to take part in a one-off event. You can watch the Cirque du Soleil on youtube, but it will never be the same as the experience of seeing it live, and there are ways of cultivating the excitement of the ‘live’ back into the lecture too.\(^5\)

Building on this notion of ‘the live’ and utilising the potential of the lecture as an event, comprised of real people in real time and space, means designing collaborative, rather than individual, tasks into the fabric of the lecture in order to boost the response-rate to questions, and therefore engagement. For example, using post-it notes to elicit anonymous responses that students could then swop with one another to feedback. This task offers a pertinent and effective alternative because it encourages less confident students, unlikely to share their own views, to speak in a large group. It is also a practical suggestion even for very large-group teaching of two hundred plus students because it is possible to affix a post-it note to each hand-out beforehand and therefore avoid wasting time giving out post-it notes mid-lecture. Furthermore, it is possible to change, or increase, the energy in the lecture theatre – it is after all a theatre – and thereby emphasise the ‘live’ qualities of delivery, through the use of paper aeroplanes, clickers, buzzers and/or airhorns as ways of receiving answers to questions. These techniques would require careful forethought and task design in order to avoid chaos in the session; however, continuing to use a humorous question to start the session – such as the one-minute paper detailed – thus, simultaneously gaining an understanding of the students’ level of knowledge and breaking the ice, is a tactic I still integrate into my practice.

\(^4\) Perhaps Clark’s ideology does not warrant serious critique, if it were not for the fact his views appear to influence HE policy.

\(^5\) I have written on these ideas elsewhere, most notably in the *Times Higher Education*, ‘Stage fright can be good for you’ (Pollard, 2014) and also, as a result, in an editorial for a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Academic Development and Education* (August 2015) published by the University of Keele.
These cultural, historical and experiential factors all led to my study – ‘what is a lecture?’ – the results of which are detailed below. I asked seven students and three teachers two open-ended questions to try and work out what the component parts of a lecture – namely, the students and the teacher – actually think we are doing when we are all in a lecture situation. I want to scale-up this research to make it much more representative of teaching in my discipline and also totally anonymise it, as I feel the students in particular would have been less guarded in their responses, if they had not been emailing me directly – as their teacher – with their answers. However, as a pilot study I think it is helpful and I decided to present my findings as Wordles (see appendix). This software makes words bigger or smaller depending on how frequently or infrequently they occur as answers. Consequently, for students the three largest words were ‘information-lecture-knowledge’ and for teachers ‘information-students-thought’, which indicates overlap in terms of content but that teachers see lectures as the start of a process of thinking, rather than as ‘crystallised’ knowledge. The word ‘lecture’ also appeared frequently in the answering sentence, although not always, which perhaps suggests a student need to include it to aid definition.

In terms of testing the implications of these concepts in new situations, I will communicate the findings of this sample to future students when I initially meet them and I am establishing our verbal contract of mutual expectations. Such a conversation might include my expectation that they attend, or inform me of their absence, as well as their expectation that I deliver constructive feedback on their work, which is often the first point raised by students. As I am now entering my third year as a university teacher, I feel I have the confidence, and the required authority, to initiate a student/teacher contract with a new group. In fact, I began to implement this change as part of the summer term teaching I undertook in the English department at the University of Chester. I returned to my reflections on this observation when I was preparing for my first lecture there on ‘Approaches to Research’, which was my first opportunity to use the post-it note method of gathering feedback. As Norman Jackson has noted, regarding teacher concepts of creativity, the key is to continue to allow creativity to inform practice through ‘experimenting and taking risks’ (2005:16).
Appendix

What is a lecture?

1. In one sentence, answer the question - What is a lecture?

2. What three key words spring to mind when you think of a lecture?

STUDENTS

1. A lecture is a gathering of the speakers research and knowledge on the intended topic of discussion.

2. Critics, specific, crucial.

1. A Lecture is a way of transferring academic information to a student.

2. Condensed, important, information.

1. A lecture is when an academic/specialist discusses a specific subject to an audience in order to pass on their knowledge or understanding.

2. Long, boring, death-by-powerpoint.

1. A lecture is when your lecturer/tutor teaches you new information using visual aids.

2. Note-taking, listening, information.

1. A method of teaching where a teacher/lecturer speaks to a large group of students and educates them on a chosen subject.

2. Informative, Overload, Concentration.

1. A tree trunk. If the soil is the historical context, the text is the roots, the weather is the modern context, then the lecture is the trunk and the branches are the ideas of the students and perhaps the sun is some vague hope of a platonnic form of the good.

2. Ideas, notes, theorists.

1. A Lecture is an opportunity for students to gain specialist knowledge.

2. Engaging, interesting, specific.

TEACHERS

1. A mode of learning in which a lecturer provides relevant historical, cultural and critical information to a large body of students about a given topic.

2. Stimulating, informative, listening.
1. A lecture is a taught session where information on a given topic is imparted and discussed by students.

2. Informative, educational, professional.

1. A(n English) lecture is the opportunity for an academic to model a way of thinking about a text or series of texts, in a way which allows students and other seminar leaders to draw on particular information or movements of thought, which in turn provoke discussion and more thought.

2. Long-reading-momentum.
Student Wordle: Information-lecture-knowledge
Teacher Wordle: Information-students-thought
References


Biography

Eileen Pollard is an Associate Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University and a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Chester.
Programme quality documentation and Education for Sustainable Development: an overview across MMU.

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**Introduction**

At Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), there is an institutional culture of environmental sustainability. The institution's Environment Team promotes policies and activities that contribute to this through student and staff engagement and other developments. One result of this is that MMU won the title of greenest university in the UK (People & Planet Green League) in 2013. In parallel, MMU undertook a Higher Education Academy-funded project entitled Global Citizens, Global Futures. This involved a research phase surveying students and staff and the second phase (ongoing) which includes a global citizenship Award offered through the "MMU Futures" extracurricular framework. In addition, the Sustainability Literacy survey at MMU (Mork, 2014) suggested that students think that their courses do not address sustainability literacy as much as they might expect.

A number of MMU strategies include elements of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (UNESCO, 2006) including the Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CELT, 2014), and the Internationalisation Strategy (MMU, 2014). The publication in 2014 of the Quality Assurance Agency and Higher Education Academy's guidance on ESD (QAA, 2014) also served to advance the Education for Sustainable Development and global citizenship (GC) agendas.

In terms of academic activity, two cross-institutional groups of staff, namely, the MMU Sustainability Research Network and the Sustainable and Ethical Enterprise Group (SEEG) have relevant
expertise and work on issues related to sustainability. SEEG has a particular interest in curriculum development.

With all these developments, ESD in the curriculum in MMU needed further exploration to see whether the programme quality documentation accurately reflected the elements of ESD within curricula. Although substantial work has been done by academics within each faculty, department or school, a study of curricula across the whole institution with respect to ESD has not been done before. The author, (ESD Co-ordinator at MMU currently co-funded by the Faculty of Science and Engineering and The Environment Team), has been leading a whole institution approach to embed sustainability into the curriculum through different initiatives. The document survey presented in this paper and the follow up activity are part of this endeavour.

ESD has the potential of leading to useful and practical developments. For instance, initiatives that explore and use transdiciplinarity in order to “react and contribute to social development” (UE4SD, 2014:52) approaches Some subjects may seem unrelated to ESD, however, due to its nature, thinking about it can be a really powerful way to find directions of travel towards a value-based transformational change. This is needed due to the following main reasons: humans are facing social, environmental and economic challenges globally (UNESCO, 2016), recent European funded mapping exercise suggests that university educators across the continent need ESD competences (UE4SD, 2014) and that several groups and individuals are demanding holistic approaches that engage more actively with social and environmental issues.

It is important to mention that this work is the starting point of an exploration of the potential link between curricula and the other activities in MMU related to ESD. In addition, it will be used in the National Union of Students (NUS) Responsible Futures accreditation pilot, in which MMU is participating alongside fifteen other FE and HE institutions in England and Scotland. The aim of the NUS Responsible Futures project is to develop a desirable, externally assessed accreditation mark for environmental sustainability and social responsibility, spanning the formal and informal curriculum, applicable to both further and higher education (NUS, 2014). In partnership with the students’ Union, MMU is working in this project
to shape criteria provided by the NUS, test the approach and feedback to the NUS. The defined mandatory and optional criteria provides a framework from which we can pick and mix commitments, actions and interventions that suit us. Each criterion will be scored and we will need to attain or exceed a threshold score to receive the accreditation mark. MMU and the Student’s Union will be audited in May and June 2015. The pilot is running from September 2014 to July 2015 and the author¹ is the key contact for the project for MMU.

Methodology

After considering structured approaches in the sector such as STAUNCH® (Lozano & Peattie, 2011) and E4SD Audit (Desha & Hargroves, 2007), which assess systemically to what extent and how curricula addresses ESD through collecting and grading data against set criteria, it was decided that a survey of programme specifications for their ESD content should be carried out. This was in order to have baseline information to start conversations with academic staff and move forward in the ESD agenda in MMU.

In order to explore the ESD content of programme specifications, the entire population of 477 MMU UG and PG programme specifications was accessed and searched. This represents 100% of the latest version of programme documentation publicly available for all faculties in the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement’s (CASQE) website. The keywords used in the search were: Global*, Global Citi*, Sustain* Environment* and Green*.

The keywords used in the current study were selected from a list produced by Dr. Konstantinos Tzoulas and Dr. Rachel Dunk (Geography & Environmental Management, MMU) through an unpublished review of policy documents and published audit tools. These relate to embedding sustainable development in Higher Education curricula. ²

The keywords for the current study were selected from Dunk and Tzoulas’s list following two criteria. The words that are higher in the hierarchy and that relate to the ESD mainly addressed in MMU to

¹ Valeria Vargas, v.vargas@mmu.ac.uk
² Publications reviewed include: Sterling, 2012; Dawe et al., 2005; Cade, 2008; Drayson et al., 2013; HEFCE, 2009; QAA, 2012; UNESCO, 2010; Lozano, 2010.
date, namely, environmental sustainability and global citizenship. The first set environment*, sustain* and green* represent the former and global citizen* and global* represent the latter. Other terms that could be searched in future and more rigorous studies would include equity, equality, impact, resources, health amongst others.

Because of the theory underpinning ESD and its systemic scope it is crucial to acknowledge that other themes including social justice, ethics and wellbeing outlined in the QAA Guidance (QAA, 2014) are as important as the themes mostly developed in MMU and this study aims to support further development of all the areas outlined by the guidance.

The context in which the keywords were found was checked and occurrences unrelated to actual ESD activity were not counted, for instance: “sustained research” or “learning environment”. The programme specifications in MMU include a section titled “Employability and Sustainability Outcomes” which makes reference to a choice of learning outcomes provided centrally to all faculties. The occurrence of the term sustainability was not counted for the title(s) of this section. Even if all the Employability and Sustainability Outcomes (CASQE, 2012) in MMU refer to employability some do not relate to sustainability necessarily, so the heading might appear in a context unrelated to sustainability specifically. For example, in reference to an outcome such as “Communicate effectively using a range of media”. For the same reason the word ‘sustainability’ when it refers back to tables that map against Employability and Sustainability Outcomes was not counted. When a term could be potentially used in the context of ESD such as in the “patient’s environment” (Health, Psychology and Social Care) and “sustainable development” (Education) the term was counted. The word search was undertaken in all the sections of the programme specifications.

Some programmes from each faculty were selected on the basis of highest numbers of occurrences of one or more words depending on the average numbers in that faculty. This will be the starting point of a further study were some case studies will be discussed in detail.
In this section the data on occurrences of ESD keywords in programme documentation across MMU is summarised and presented in forms of total numbers of each keyword across MMU (Table 1), times in average a keyword appears per programme specification (Figure 1), and a list of programmes with high frequencies of keywords in relation to Faculty averages (Table 2).

By far the commonest term related to ESD is ‘environment’, with ‘sustain’ and ‘global’ occurring about half as frequently (Table 1). Global Citizens, or Global Citizenship as a term is very unusual, but this is perhaps not surprising as this manifests in many different ways, and the term ‘global’ may encompass many of these manifestations. Similarly, ‘green’ is a term that is only relatively rarely found in MMU programmes. Arguably, this may not be a very academic word. Derivatives of the term ‘Sustain’ such as sustainable and sustainability are also seen in many of the programme specifications.
The Faculty of Business and Law has the highest average per programme specification in MMU of occurrences of ‘global’ and its derivatives (Figure 1). Bearing in mind that several occurrences of ‘Environment’ appear referring to a course such as ‘environmental sciences’ or the ‘School of Science and the Environment’ instead of actual content of the course/programme, the Faculty of Sciences and Engineering has both the highest number of ‘sustain’ and ‘environment’ on average per programme specification.

Although the results (Figure 1, Table1) presented above give an overview of ESD content in the programme quality documentation, they do not give in depth information about how programmes address ESD. In order to explore this, the next phase of this work will

**Table 1. Occurrence of key ESD/GC words in Programme specifications across MMU – Summer 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Global Citi*</th>
<th>Global*</th>
<th>Sustain*</th>
<th>Environment*</th>
<th>Green*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>9.72</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science and Engineering</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>34.77</td>
<td>106.87</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire Campus</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>9.08</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, Psychology and Social Care</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Law</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>27.27</td>
<td>16.62</td>
<td>9.36</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollings</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>7.83</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester School of Art</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Faculty of Business and Law has the highest average per programme specification in MMU of occurrences of ‘global’ and its derivatives (Figure 1). Bearing in mind that several occurrences of ‘Environment’ appear referring to a course such as ‘environmental sciences’ or the ‘School of Science and the Environment’ instead of actual content of the course/programme, the Faculty of Sciences and Engineering has both the highest number of ‘sustain’ and ‘environment’ on average per programme specification.

Although the results (Figure 1, Table1) presented above give an overview of ESD content in the programme quality documentation, they do not give in depth information about how programmes address ESD. In order to explore this, the next phase of this work will

**Table 2. Programmes with high frequencies of key ESD/GC by Programme – Summer 2014 (see Table 1 for Faculty colour coding)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Global Citi*</th>
<th>Global*</th>
<th>Sustain*</th>
<th>Environment*</th>
<th>Green*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) History</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) Social Work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) Film and Media Studies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) Landscape Architecture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA / MSc Product Design</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) Arts and Humanities Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA Education Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) Business Management (Network)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
look in more depth at curricula in terms of the faculty overall activity through a case study approach of some of the programme specifications (Table 2).

The programmes chosen for this future study have higher keyword frequencies than the other programmes in their faculties. For instance, the 17 occurrences of ‘environment’ and its derivatives in the BA History is higher than most, if not all of the other programmes in the Faculty of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences and considerably higher than the average (4.44) for these terms in the Faculty (Figure 1). Similarly, the BA Landscape Architecture has 44 occurrences of ‘sustain’ and its derivatives compared with 1.87 on average per programme specification for the whole Art School.

Another interesting group of case studies might be: the BA Social Work (Health, Psychology and Social Care); the BA Film and Media Studies, the MA / MSc Product Design (Art School); the BA Arts and Humanities Education and the MA Education Studies (Education); and the BA Business Management Network (Cheshire Campus). In most cases, these programmes have high frequencies of both environment* and global* in relation to the most of the other programmes in their faculties. Overall, the programmes chosen for the case studies have higher than faculty average occurrences of at least two of the key words searched for this review generally ‘global’ and ‘environment’.

**Limitations**

The programme specifications represent a superficial indication of curricula and cannot capture the whole student experience or areas of interest of academics that may shape or influence their teaching practice. For instance, academics with expertise or interest in ecology may use examples from this topic to illustrate issues in any area. This is not necessarily reflected in the written documentation but is as important for the curriculum as any other part of it.

It should be noted that, although the documents were analysed on the basis of frequency of occurrence of specific key words, on occasions the analysis required subjective judgments to be made as to the intended application of the word in a particular context.
The team is aware of the many limitations of doing a word search for content in written documents. (Leech et al., 2001). One of the most relevant limitations in this search is the fact that ESD content is very diverse and in order to map all areas of it in programme specifications, a long list of terms would need to be searched. The Art School (Shuttlewood & Vargas, 2014), the Management Department (Walley, 2013) and the School of Science and the Environment have undertaken thorough curriculum reviews that are more appropriate in showing the broad spectrum of ESD activity. The only review of all faculty curricula in MMU has been done in the Art School. Their Unit Specification search confirms the apparent trends in this study. Most programmes in the Art School could take advantage of ESD theory to enrich their programmes mainly in terms of social responsibility and environmental sustainability. In addition, both studies suggest that the programmes with highest content of ESD are Architecture and Landscape Architecture degrees (Shuttlewood & Vargas, 2014 : 6). The review of curricula in the Management Department also shows similarities to the results in the current study.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to prompt conversations around ESD content in MMU’s curricula. For that reason, this paper does not present explicit recommendations. Readers who are interested in discussing the results or help shaping future conclusions, are invited to get in touch with the author. More specific conclusions will be presented in a following paper from the case studies suggested in Table 2. Also, it is important to emphasize that programme specifications are only outline documents and they do not represent all the aspects of a course or network of courses. As stated before, the words may or may not portray the programme team’s intentions in relationship to ESD. In the future, these conclusions would be formed by the analysis of the case studies (Table 2).

Overall, there is some very valuable work going on in Manchester Metropolitan University in relationship to ESD but there is a lot of room for improvement as well. The extent to which ESD is present in programmes, courses or units is covered more appropriately by local reviews such as The Art School (Shuttlewood & Vargas, 2014), the Management Department (Walley, 2013) and the School of Science
and the Environment. However, low frequencies may suggest that ESD content is addressed in the programme but might not be explicit in the documentation. In addition, further discussions with academic staff have already shown that ESD content is present in their teaching but sometimes not acknowledged as such or not explicit in Unit Specifications, Programme Specifications or in the classroom with students. These two issues may suggest that there is a case for a review of programme specification templates in order to address ESD more explicitly.

As discussed previously, the words chosen for this search are very limited in terms of the scope they cover and other words might be more appropriate for different subject areas. For instance, although green may not seem a very academic word, it is frequently used in the MA English Studies specifications (12) and in the BA Sports Management (“green business”).

This preliminary analysis has already shown that there are some interesting pointers for further activity. For instance, beyond the raw data in Figure 1, the exploration of the sense and context of words in the programme specifications from the Faculty of Health Psychology and Social Care has shown that ‘environment’ is often used to delineate the environment of the health practitioner and their patients, that does not extend beyond a certain point. This could be further investigated with programmes in the faculty and through the case studies. Perhaps the focus of programmes is such that wider environmental concerns are not always seen in relation to specific professional training, or that the curriculum would need to challenge professional body requirements in order to take a broader view. Another example is the fact that the Faculty of Education uses the term ‘environmental sustainability’ and ‘Sustainable Development’ consistently across their postgraduate documentation. It would be interesting to know the details about how they interpret and apply these terms as this may be an example of good practice to share with other faculties.

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Screencasting as a means of Enhancing the Student Learning Experience

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Abstract
This project has harnessed recent advances in communication to enhance the student learning experience. The objective was to use technology to complement and make better use of the valuable lecturer-student contact time. There is strong evidence from this pilot study in BSc (Hons) degree chemistry teaching at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) that screencasting technology can lead to significant educational gains in this area. Screencasting involves recording a short video clip of a computer screen with narration and the resulting video files made available for students through a virtual learning environment (VLE). Pre-lecture screencasts were recorded and students viewed them prior to the lectures in an effort to prime them for classes. The aim was to release the contact time for more interactive learning using the flipped teaching model.

Keywords: Screencasts, eLearning, Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs), Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), Flipped Teaching Model, Blended learning.

Introduction
There is currently great interest in using technology to improve student learning; increasingly this is driven by the importance attached to outputs from the National Student Survey (NSS). With the introduction of student fees, expectations will inevitably increase in the future and universities need to adapt their teaching practices to take advantage of the most up to date technology. A recent online survey within the faculty of science and engineering at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) showed that 95% of students carry smartphones whilst 55% own a tablet PC (McAllister-Gibson, 2014).
and the aim was to investigate how these mobile devices can be best utilised to facilitate access to valuable learning resources.

In the chemistry courses at MMU the traditional lecture format is still favoured, whereby the spoken word is the primary means of relaying information to a large body of students. However, none of these lectures are recorded and made available for later use; the majority are delivered once and not repeated until the following academic year. The strength of the spoken word is that the power and intonations of the voice help to convey the emotion of the tutor. This can be important in emphasising key messages to the student, as well as being more personal and supportive than just written text. The effectiveness of the voice in providing formative audio feedback, for example, has been demonstrated by Brearley and Cullen (2013).

Electronic projection, in the form of Power Point slides, while the teacher discusses the topic, is often used as the primary means of communication during lectures. There is evidence of a backlash against its use, since it may not lead to sufficient learning and can turn into a simple slide show (Felder and Brent, 2005). Recent studies have shown that brain activity whilst attending lectures is comparable to that registered when watching television and the ability of most people to absorb new concepts by attending a single lecture is limited (Poh et al. 2010). Also, there can be a tendency for students to base their impressions of a lecture largely on the performance of the lecturer rather than how effectively they may have learned during the class (Carpenter et al. 2013). However, feedback from the staff-student committee meetings in chemistry have revealed that students still highly value face-to-face contact with their tutors and increasingly expect a modern learning experience.

**Screencasting in Learning and Teaching**

Screencasts are a digital video recording of computer screen activity which include a synchronised audio commentary. Screencasts should be distinguished from podcasts, which generally refer to audio only files. Essentially they are equivalent to letting somebody look over your shoulder to view your on-screen activity while you provide a description of the material. The resulting video files are available through a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) giving the students access to the material. Screencasting is currently attracting
increased attention with a number of studies in the literature examining their implementation and effectiveness (Bates and Galloway, 2012, Read and Lancaster, 2012). The production of screencasts allows for the generation of a variety of reusable learning objects (RLOs): once generated, they can be recycled annually and/or by others in the same discipline. Screencasts are a versatile learning and teaching tool that can be used to enhance a variety of activities (Salmon 2002, McGarr 2009, McKinne et al. 2009) and a list of examples is given below:

- Record a whole lecture/tutorial.
- Provide a pre/post-lecture/tutorial/lab supplement.
- Provide personalised/generic feedback/model answers for assessments.
- Use to illustrate worked examples.
- Provide revision sessions for students in the build up to exams.
- Provide a useful form of e-teaching for distance or online learning modules.

Ultimately, screencasts offer a convenient way for capturing the much-valued spoken word of the teacher for use by the students. A list of possible advantages to screencasts, which can be extremely beneficial to the student learning experience, are highlighted below:

- They can be viewed repeatedly allowing students to study in their own time and at their own pace, helping them to digest complex topics.
- They can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection.
- Students can listen to the whole or part of the lecture again.
- The Screencasts allow students who have to miss a lecture to catch up on the material missed.
- They are helpful for students with learning difficulties since they can listen to and view the explanations for the material rather than read a series of notes that may use complicated language.
- Students who find a large, sometimes noisy lecture theatre distracting and not conducive to concentration can view the material in a more suitable environment.
Some students find that they concentrate better at different times of the day and hence value the opportunity to be able to listen to a lecture at any particular time.

Students find screencasts a helpful revision tool for preparing for exams and class tests.

Screencasts made available in advance provide an excellent mechanism for promoting pre-lecture engagement that help to prime students for classes.

This can free-up valuable lecture/contact time to use for more student-centred higher-level activities.

Pre-lecture screencasts provide a good opportunity for staff to prepare for the class.

**Implementation of Screencasting for Level 6 Chemistry Undergraduates**

The early use of VLEs largely involved “shovel-ware” where course materials are uploaded in bulk for students to access. This approach can overload students with too much information, since it requires skill to sift through the content to find the relevant materials and can result in a largely non-interactive learning space. However, the development of regular pre-lecture/class screencasts provides a mechanism to integrate the VLE content with the in-class work. The plan was to use screencasts to add value to the VLE space and increase the routine usage of the e-resources by the students.

Chemistry is a visual subject and in many instances, the required skill cannot be easily evaluated through a keypad or in a short passage of text. The illustration of complex molecular structures, reaction mechanisms and the derivation of equations play a significant part in the teaching of chemistry. The combined audiovisual aspect of screencasts means they are ideally suited to the subject (Read and Lancaster, 2012, O’Malley 2010, Lancaster 2013).

With the potential advantages offered by screencasting specific to teaching chemistry in mind, a pilot study into the impact of screencasts was carried out with the level 6 core chemistry unit, Advanced Chemical Concepts 1, during the 2013/14 academic year within the Division of Chemistry and Environmental Science at MMU. This unit contained the largest group within the programme with 100 students (61 male and 39 female) and had a significant theory
component bridging between inorganic and organic chemistry disciplines. The class met once a week for two 60 minute lectures and once a week for a 60 minute tutorial.

There are a number of software products on the market which allow the recording of screencasts, and a weekly pre-lecture screencast was recorded for the bioinorganic chemistry material using Blueberry BB FlashBack pro 3 recorder (see Figure 1 for example). The resulting videos were saved as a Windows Media Video files (see Figure 2 for example) and made available seven days prior to the lecture via the unit Moodle VLE area. This software is readily available in the Blueberry software folder on the standard platform of all staff computers at MMU and a quick guide to making video screen capture recordings with BB FlashBack is available in the staff resource area of the E-Learning at MMU website (http://www.elearning.mmu.ac.uk/).

Figure 1. An example of a screencast using BB FlashBack pro 3 recorder.
Each screencast generally lasted around five mins covering a key concept to be discussed in the lecture. In general full screen recordings were used so that all activity on the screen during the screencast was recorded. A key aspect in their design was to keep them self-contained and logically structured, which students could use in any context (just before/after lectures, just before exams, etc.). Obviously, for the screencasts, the associated screen-component (usually PowerPoint slides) was prepared in advance of recording the audio.

In addition, some of the screencasts generated during this pilot study have been used to deliver materials for the online is Foundation Chemical Science (FdSc) chemistry course involving part-time students who work in industry. Illustrating how these e-resources can help provided effective support for distance learners.

The Learning and Teaching Design
The flipped classroom/lecture is philosophically a place where the student, and not the lecturer, is at the centre of the learning process. Flipped teaching is a relatively new teaching practice that has been prevalent in HE disciplines with a tradition of few but intense contact hours. In chemistry, which has a large body of content, lecture flipping is an opportunity for a change in the student-lecturer interaction, providing a chance to get beyond simply exposing
students to information so that the contact hours can be spent ensuring understanding and application of knowledge. There is no one-way to flip teaching, however, the common thread is that students are required to prepare in advance by reading of textbooks or viewing of pre-recorded lectures to facilitate informed use of the contact time (Bergmann et al. 2012). The lecture now becomes less about the transmission of information and includes more student participation, which can promote active learning. The class can now be guided by student comprehension and the lecturer has the opportunity to change a particular strategy of instruction at any time introducing enhanced flexibility of delivery. As part of the flipped lecture model, the students in this study were encouraged to prepare for class by watching the screencast recordings via the unit VLE in their own time and at their own pace before attending the teaching session.

A common problem with large classes is that answers to the questions from the lecturer are often restricted to a small group of confident students who regularly raise their hands and volunteer answers. For a successfully flipped lecture, the objective is to engage all the students and mass polling has proved useful in promoting audience participation (Bruff 2009). Audience participation was improved by using smartphones combined with a game-based learning and classroom response system such as Kahoot (see https://getkahoot.com/) and three short quizzes each containing up to five questions were prepared for each lecture.

With the transfer of information occurring out of class, via the screencasts, the in-class time could focus on the assimilation of this knowledge using the mass polling quizzes. The questions used were generally conceptual in nature, which probed students' ability to apply their understanding to solve conceptual problems. The strategy for the lectures involved asking the question, giving the students time to think and polling the answers. The aim being to engage students during class through a sequence of questioning and discussion. Students were asked to respond again to the same question after a short discussion with someone in the class who had responded with a different answer to themselves. They were then given 1-2 mins to convince each other who had been correct, a second polling of the same question was then carried out and the differences between the
two responses was compared followed by an explanation of the correct answer.

These types of quizzes are called “Concep Tests” and this approach has provided a fertile environment for peer instruction as well as being extremely useful in engaging the majority of class during the flipped lectures. In most cases, an increase in the percentage of correct answers was recorded between the two rounds after the peer discussion. Current work is examining the preliminary results from this study to explore what educational gains are possible using this student-centred teaching method. Further examples of flipped classrooms and useful insights into the use of peer instruction can be found at the ‘turn to your neighbour’ website (Schell, undated).

**Results and Discussion**

The tracking of engagement with the screencasts on the unit Moodle VLE is highlighted in the figure 1. This shows the average uptake for the weekly pre-lecture screencasts, which commonly showed between 36-52 views per week. These results at first sight appeared disappointingly low compared to the overall size of the class but this teaching style is part of a cultural shift in the way students approach lectures and may take time to be embraced fully by a larger section of the class. However, uptake of the screencasts increased during weeks 9 and 10 to 67 and 83 views respectively, which coincided with the end of term class test. In addition, a significant increase in the usage of the screencasts by the students was recorded in the weeks preceding the summer term exam, where some individual screencasts received over 150 views.

These results suggest that e-resources such as screencasts are regarded by the students as valuable study tools and whilst some students do not engage with them during the year they still find them useful for revision. Further work is continuing to monitor the usage of current screencasts by the students via the engagement tracker facility in the latest version of Moodle.
A comparison of the average coursework and exam marks relevant to this topic over the past 5 years is summarized in figure 2 below, where results show an average increase of about 6% during 2013/14 compared to the previous academic years. However, it is difficult to draw too many conclusion from this data since there are a number of other factors that can influence these results such as the EQAL review process, which has changed the assessment format of the new 30 credit units. In addition, each student cohort has its’ own relative strengths and weaknesses, and more data from future years is required for a better-informed view about the potential impact of screencasts on assessment marks.
Student feedback from the pilot study was obtained from a questionnaire, which contained the following eight questions and students were invited to respond to each question with either Strongly Agree, Agree, Ambivalent, Disagree or Strongly Disagree and asked to add any further comments. 57 students participated in the feedback showing a response rate of above 50%, which corresponds to approximately the proportion of the group that regularly engaged with the weekly screencasts. The percentage of the class that circled each response along with a selection of their comments from the questionnaire is highlighted below:

**Figure 3**
“Excellent learning tool as students can learn material on the move by viewing whilst on the train going to university.”
“Brilliant introduction to a hard topic before you go to the lecture.”
“Good on the bus on the way to university.”

**Figure 4**
“It gives understanding to the topic before attending the lecture.”
“Easily accessible and allows questions to be raised in lectures.”
“I believe that an introduction is vital and helps students develop a deeper understanding of the topic.”

**Figure 5**
“Screencasts are much better than just reading notes on their own and they are very useful for understanding some of the more complex material”.
“If the material isn’t clicking hearing his perspective and emphasis has a direct impact on my knowledge.”
“After can help reinforce the lecture combined with the notes.”
Q4. I used the screencasts as a revision tool for the end of term test.

Figure 6

“Listening to them whilst revising is more interesting than reading.”

“They proved to be very concise and really helped with revision, making it easier to get to the point.”

“Excellent revision tool, always there if needed.”

Q5. The screencasts have helped me understand the topics after the lecture.

Figure 7

“I have come away with an increased knowledge of a topic and understand the content more when in class.”

“Helps me go through it again if I don’t understand.”

Q6. I plan to use the screencasts during my revision for the summer exams.

Figure 8

“Quick easy way to go over topics again.”

“Very helpful to have the lecturer repeat an explanation of a tricky subject in my own time.”

Q7. I would like to see screencasts in other units.

Figure 9

“Screencasts provide core basis of understanding which are built on in lectures/tutorials/study time.”

“Very good for factual heavy units”.

“I wish other lecturers would provide them.”
These results demonstrate the positive impact that screencasting can have on enhancing the student learning experience. It is clear that there is a rich synergy to be exploited between the human face of teaching and modern technology, where screencasts offer an accessible and convenient mechanism to promote pre-lecture engagement in a flipped teaching approach.

A focus group with the students who took part in this pilot study revealed a number of key criteria to consider for the production of future screencasts in this area. The overwhelming consensus seemed to be that students do not fully interact with longer resources. It was suggested that it is best to develop a screencast for one concept or learning outcome, or a series of closely related learning outcomes. A recording of about five minutes plus interaction time was considered suitable for most purposes, with an absolute limit of ten minutes in special cases. In addition, students welcomed the opportunity to view screencasts of tutorial problems or worked examples and this was cited as an important area for further development.

Recommendations
It is worthwhile preparing a script beforehand since the time spent doing this will be offset by reducing the number of ‘takes’ required. A potential problem with screencasts is that they can replicate the didactic elements of a lecture, which can lead to a lack of interactivity. This can be addressed with questions, which can be inserted into the videos during the editing process and allows for the introduction of an element of learner interaction with the e-resource.
For audio, the recording environment has to be quiet with minimum background noise. A good quality microphone is important, preferably with a USB connection, which allows quality recording direct to your computer and in this case, a Logitech dual headset was used with microphone attached to the side. The microphone input is best positioned below the mouth, rather than in front of the mouth, since this minimised air bumping and heavy breathing noises. Talking into a microphone can feel strange at first, but the more you do it, the easier it becomes, sometimes standing while recording can feel more natural and try not to talk too quickly. Listening back to yourself can be a painful exercise, but it is important to do this so you can improve quality of future screencasts.

Where possible avoid mentioning dates or even class groups to keep the recording as generic as possible, so to enhance its reusability. An extremely useful resource is provided by Seery (2010), which gives a detailed account of the use of both podcasting and screencasting for supporting lectures.

Conclusions
This study has shown that flipped classes supported by pre-lecture screencasts provide an opportunity for innovative blended learning. They are not an easy option for both staff and students, and the development of the resources is time-consuming, which can feel like a bold commitment. This model does not involve any reduction in contact hours but the primary focus is on how this time is used. I plan to continue to introduce more screencasts and flipped classes into my teaching, but at present, I am not in the position to completely phase out lectures. Ultimately, student reaction has been very positive and the integration of screencasting technology in this way can lead to significant educational gains, which give rise to valuable outputs that can enhance the learning experience.

Previous studies at MMU have investigated the use podcasting in computing (Waraich 2008) and the business school (Maguire 2008). However, there remains scope for further user guides for screencasting from the perspective of the practitioner that highlight the key pedagogical considerations in relation to the flipped teaching model. Current work has been using more versatile software such as Camtasia studio (http://www.techsmith.com/tutorial-camtasia.html),
which can dramatically improve the quality of the videos and a selection of examples of screencasts used during this study are available at https://mmutube.mmu.ac.uk/search/searchkeyword/PaulSmith.

An area that has yet to be investigated fully is the adaptation of this technology for students with hearing difficulties who are obviously disadvantaged. Further work will aim to expand the inclusiveness of screencasts by investigating the possibility of adding subtitles or sign language and any lessons learned would have potential applications beyond the discipline of chemistry.

Finally, I would be happy to hear from any colleagues who might be interested in collaborating to further explore the use of screencasting technology and potentially establish cross faculty links in this field.

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MMU Flotilla – What would being in the top 50 universities for teaching look like?

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Introduction

With the next Teaching and Learning Conference coming up on 15th July 2015, it seems timely to reflect back upon last year’s conference and remind ourselves of some of the themes that came out of it.

The Teaching and Learning Conference, hosted by CELT in July 2014, sought to encourage general discussion around the Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment and the Academic Vision: “becoming a top 50 UK university for teaching and research [T50 and R50] by 2020”\(^1\). Throughout the day, delegates were asked to contribute their ideas to the various activities, one of which was the ‘MMU Flotilla’. After hearing from six colleagues talking about their teaching practice, delegates went to their workshop rooms and were asked to discuss what they thought being in the top 50 in teaching would look like and write their thoughts on a paper origami boat. Gathered up, the resulting flotilla of individual boats formed a

\(^1\) http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/financial-statement/academic-vision/
colourful installation in the North Atrium for people to pick up, read and comment on.

**Context and data collection**

Presented with this future scenario, several questions arose. What would the institution look like or be doing differently in order to reach this “Top 50” status? As teaching staff or supporters of learning, what will we be doing differently? On what issues or challenges will we need to focus, and how will we have addressed and overcome some of them? Delegates discussed their ideas and wrote their thoughts onto the boats for the installation. Responses and new comments were also encouraged once the installation was set up during the conference lunch break. Consequently, some of the comments resulted from the initial discussion and some were added at the installation phase.

The flotilla represented the many individual efforts and perspectives which are all aiming towards a shared goal (in this case making MMU a top 50 teaching institution by 2020). Of course, there was a risk that the metaphor would appear facile. However, the number and
quality of the comments demonstrate that it was received in the spirit that was intended: with playfulness and novelty.

As a research method, it was informal, but in many ways was similar to a survey or analysing Tweets. “Twitter has emerged as a valuable resource for tapping into the zeitgeist of the internet” (Zimmer and Proferes 2014, 250). So too, we thought, with these paper boats at the Learning and Teaching Conference. This being so, it is reasonable to take the comments as an indicator of the mood of the day and it is the aim of this article to extract a few themes that stand out.

**Digital Literacy**

The use of technology in learning and teaching and ‘digital literacy’ for staff was a recurring theme; keeping up with new technologies and their use in teaching, as well as more familiar technologies such as Moodle.

**Professionalism**

Nearly 15% of the comments mentioned student employability and professionalism; both in terms of everyday student behaviours such as punctuality or email etiquette, and work based learning. Most indicated that the curriculum would be crucial in generating greater professionalism.

*Comment reads 'Improve student professionalism, especially punctuality/attendance'.*
Linked to this were calls for time and resources to be given to staff developing links with industry. Industry level tests, industry input, industry placements, live projects with industry partners, and SMEs were all mentioned, but staff being able to keep a 'foot in' featured prominently.

Inspiring professional respect

Amongst those comments that defined what a lecturer might be, many suggested that a T50 university would be more “research active”, which might be expected coming from academics. Also in this section, there were many that mentioned staff professionalism and the need to generate respect for teaching as a profession.

Feedback

Comment reads “Consider how to establish feedback that students really value within constraints of 4 week turnaround, group size, tutor allocation time”.

Nearly 9% of the responses referred to assessment and feedback. Two main themes emerge, one relating to personalised feedback, and the other to quality. Large group teaching and time constraints do pose their problems for staff, as does finding a method that students value. Audio feedback, formative and peer assessment and reduced group sizes were all suggested answers.
The NSS

Strikingly few comments mentioned the NSS survey. Those who did seemed to stress the need to target NSS score improvement and one stated “to improve NSS we must instil in students that they must take responsibility for their own learning”, indicating a pedagogic shift to change expectations of our students where learning is no longer a function of teaching so much as of the students themselves. Several responses did mention the need to improve ways of obtaining feedback from students about what they wanted from their learning experiences.

All singing, all dancing

There was a strong thread running through the comments about teaching needing to become more “interactive” and “creative”: lecturers having “new ways to deliver” and new ways to engage. In fact, student engagement was a factor in nearly 25% of the responses, suggesting a common frustration amongst many teaching staff. Certainly, finding ways to engage our classes involves thinking creatively about our teaching methods. Problem-based learning, live projects, seminar activities, innovative use of technologies, and design briefs that inspire students were all cited as possible means to achieve this.

Creating a personal experience for students featured highly here, too: “Students feel like they are getting a personal experience even when they might have 500 in their year”, “provide a personal and accessible learning experience that takes account of the individual context and needs and aspiration” and “make students believe they are an individual [sic] and that they have a personal relationship with their lecturer”. On this particular topic, the lecturers seemed to place the responsibility upon themselves for achieving this personal learning experience, though many comments were posed more as apprehensive questions rather than confident statements. How does one help all 500 students in a large year group feel that they are being treated as individuals?
Because we’re worth it

A sense of pride, and a belief that we deserve the status of being in the top 50, within staff and students, featured many times among the boats. “Our students will be proud to tell everyone they know how great their teaching has been.”

Conclusions

So, what will we be doing differently in 2020? Here is one possible vision:

Staff

Teaching staff will find themselves with a greater balance between teaching, administration and research. As a result, the prestige of the university will have risen (conducive to R50 of the Academic Vision) but staff links to relevant industries will also be strong. For the Good Practice Exchange, I documented the induction event held by BA (Hons) Events Management at which over 50 charities, all professional contacts of the staff on the course, attended, presented and went onto be industry mentors for level 5 students completing their assessment2. A number of other programmes have similar professional connections, and for staff whose research revolves

2 MMU Good Practice Exchange: Bespoke Induction Level 5, found at http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/good_practice/gpentry.php?id=47
around professional and industry engagement, integration of this kind could increasingly become a feature of many of our courses: the professional identities of researcher and educator becoming more and more closely combined.

Staff will be working in interdisciplinary manner across faculties and disciplines, and alongside support staff to achieve engaging projects, digital literacy and study skills for students. Enhanced digital literacy amongst staff will lead to innovation in Technology Enhanced Learning, one mechanism that would boost the interactivity and creativity of teaching and learning. Large and small courses alike will be pioneering ways to create personalised learning experiences for their students as well as ways to deliver and act upon feedback. There will be active dialogue between the student body and staff.

Students

Our students will be professional, both in general and discipline specific terms. Their curriculum will provide them with many opportunities to develop academic and work relevant skills. They will contribute significantly to the design and development of their courses and their learning experiences. As a result, they will feel greater responsibility for their own learning, impacting on their perception of MMU as a whole and reflecting this onto survey data. They will believe that MMU is a great place to study.

References

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</table>
Contents

Editorial
Learning and Teaching in Action - Spring 2015
Charles Neame

Articles
Exploring the role of the Expert
Sam Illingworth

Introducing ALF
Joe McCullagh

Managing complexity through effective pre-entry and transition support: The Benefits of Peer Mentoring for Disabled Students
Gill Rice, Samuel Parker, Nahida Shabbir and Alexandra Galbraith

‘People will never forget how you made them feel’
Eileen Pollard

Programme quality documentation and Education for Sustainable Development: an overview across MMU.
Valeria Vargas

Screencasting as a means of Enhancing the Student Learning Experience
Paul Smith

MMU Flotilla – What would being in the top 50 universities for teaching look like?
Eleanor Livermore

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