ESCalate welcomes David Sadler as the incoming Director of Networks for the Higher Education Academy. Crucially, an increasing part of the work of subject centres is to create discipline specific responses to national agendas. Supporting and guiding the network’s collaborative approaches to the national scene is just one part of the director’s role. David’s previous experience as a subject centre Director and as a Dean of Faculty in a thriving university is invaluable in helping ESCalate staff develop and deliver our annual programme of activity.

For ESCalate, the development of efficient and cost effective resources for colleagues in the discipline means careful planning of networking activities both with Academy staff in York and with cognate subject centres. For colleagues in education to benefit from ESCalate’s work we need a collaborative approach to much of our activity. Our engagement with the children’s workforce agenda, widening participation, employability, sustainability and the development of e-Learning for example, all benefit from greater coordination and the pooling of resources and expertise.

In this edition you will find news of recent developments to the ESCalate web site. Quite a few people have been using the External Examiner contact base, which provides opportunities for institutions to search for prospective examiners and for those who wish to advertise the fact that they are available for examining work.

We have developed an Expertise Exchange. Already many people have registered their interest in offering advice to members of the education community. If you want to ask a question and get advice, or register your own interests in the field of education, then register and login.

Articles in this editorial include advice from TechDis staff on technology and disability, a piece on social justice in the workplace, a paper on communities of practice and routes into teacher education which has developed out of work on a FDTL5 project, the use of videopapers in professional learning, and a report of the Higher Education Academy’s involvement with Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

We are fortunate to receive a wide selection of writing from colleagues in the education community, and we publish as many pieces as we can. Thanks are due to the contributors in this issue, and to all members of the education community who have worked with ESCalate during the past year. We wish you a very successful 2007.

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The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the editor nor of the partner organisations. The editors reserve the right to edit, amend or abbreviate copy without notice.

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An electronic version of this newsletter is available on the ESCAlate website.

This newsletter is available free of charge. If you do not currently receive a copy and wish to do so in the future please contact heacademy-escalate@bristol.ac.uk. Your details will only be used for keeping you informed of ESCAlate activity and will not be made available to outside organisations.

If you have any ideas or copy that you would like to see included in a future newsletter please get in touch.

We are especially interested in items which:
- Show innovative practice in your Education Department;
- Celebrate National Teaching Fellows and other awards for teaching and learning;
- Showcase student achievement.
Don’t be scared:  
TechDis - Making documents more accessible!

TechDis provides advice and guidance on technology and disability to promote an accessible and inclusive experience for students and staff. TechDis is a JISC-funded advisory service. For more information go to www.techdis.ac.uk

In each edition of the ESCalate newsletter from now on, TechDis will be providing practical advice on how to improve an aspect of your practice to benefit all learners.

For example, possibly the most important small change you can make to your practice is to utilise the Styles and Formatting Toolbar when using Microsoft® Word to create appropriate headings and structure your document.

Performing these tasks brings a number of inclusion benefits to your documentation:

1. The Document Map: Word has an inbuilt navigation system that can enable users to navigate a long document that has been appropriately styled.

2. Table of Contents: If a document has been created using the styles and headings options as noted above an automatic table of contents can be created.

The Document Map

From the menu select View>Document Map. A dynamic navigation menu will appear on the left of the screen.

Clicking the Document Map will allow the user to expand and contract headings or jump to the relevant section of a large document. It is also navigable by Screen Reading software.

The table of contents has been inserted as a field, and as such can be automatically updated. This can be useful if additional pages or headings have been inserted into a document as the update will incorporate any changes to headings and page numbers.

More hints and tips on making electronic documents can be found in two downloadable TechDis publications:

TechDis Accessibility Essentials 1: Making Electronic Documents More Readable

TechDis Accessibility Essentials 2: Writing Accessible Electronic Documents with Microsoft® Word
The sights, sounds and smells of education conferences rarely change; smart clothes, clutches of headed paper, microphones that don’t work and stewed tea, but the Castle conference was different. Greeted by immaculate lawns, acres of woodland walks, formal gardens and water-lilied lakes the International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices at Herstmonceux Castle boasted five days of discourse and ducks that come to supper when called by name.

Professor Morwenna Griffiths, Joseph Windle and I were involved in a visual presentation of our work lives at the Castle two years ago. We found visual representation was powerful in illuminating aspects of our work which had previously remained unnoticed, unquestioned and uncriticised. Moreover, the visual presentation also appeared to have a powerful effect on the audience. The study ‘That’s what I am here for’ lives on as a chapter in a book called Self-Study and Diversity which came out of the conference. The research generated an interest in the spaces in which we work and, joined by Dr. Dina Poursanidou of University of Central Lancashire, we collaborated on a new study ‘Defining workspaces; defining ourselves’.

The broad focus for this research was on everyday social justice in the workplace – or lack of it. The particular focus was on our own work spaces in the academy. Our aims were to explore our own workspaces visually, to explore agency and structure at work as individuals and in relation to social position. We sought to illuminate the significance of work space in higher education and to encourage others to reflect on their own workspaces, and on the workspaces of their colleagues (especially where they are in authority over those colleagues).

The research investigated how we act on, within, in spite of, and because of, the spaces in which we work. The approach involved taking and analysing photographs of our core work spaces and work-related spaces which we headed Convivial Spaces, Expressive Spaces, Mulching Spaces and ‘Switch-off’ Spaces. We did not assume that these would be the only spaces we would consider. The analysis of the research used categories such as: public and private; home and work; impersonal and personal; status.

We knew that our diaries and our distant places of work would allow very little opportunity for face-to-face collaboration so when we did get together we had plenty to discuss:

An example of a minute of one of our meetings:

Hello everyone,

It has only taken me a week to get round to sending this email - sorry.

As agreed we will:
March - end of April
Continue to take photos of our work spaces and email them to each other (well done Dina).
For ease of access I've organised mine into Dina, Mo, Joe, Margo folders in 'My Pictures.' I will look at them from time to time and comment on them in my journal (Yeah! Yeah!)

Early May:
Meet to discuss our photos and impressions of our own and each others workspaces.
Choose photos for our posters. Do we want a poster each or 4 themed posters showing our equivalent spaces? For example one poster might be themed on Quiet Workspaces of Joe, Mo, Dina, Margo
Record audio/video? If we meet in a workspace and video our discussions this would add an extra dimension to the presentation.
Dina would you like to give us some options of when to meet?

During May
Complete posters (consider using a poster template so that the style matches across the whole presentation)

End May
Meet again to admire and review posters.
Make an audio recording or video recording to put on DVD to complete the presentation.
Hope this meets with your approvals.

We presented the research in an interactive exhibition in the magnificent Board Room at Herstmonceux Castle. There was no formal spoken presentation. Rather the audience was invited to respond to the exhibition verbally and by writing on the exhibition boards. A group of deeply interested people pulled up plush seats and continued the discussions long after the exhibition was over. All evening workspaces were being viewed with enlightened eyes and people were talking about how they are defined by university. As an encore and to allow opportunity for people who had missed the exhibition to get along and interact with it we set up again the following day.


Gloucestershire and Aspire at Harper Adams.

Amongst other things, in its Invitation to Bid HEFCE 
recommended that CETLs work 
with the Academy as they develop 
their strategies for dissemination. 
Indeed the Academy would wish 
this to happen; it can facilitate a 
synergy between CETLs in 
research, dissemination and 
evaluation amongst other areas. 
Effort and encouragement is being 
put into this networking. As well 
as the subject based networks 
being facilitated by the subject 
centres, the Academy encourages 
regional and thematic networks. 
For example there is a strong 
regional network based in the East 
Midlands. This network was 
launched recently in Nottingham at 
an event that was attended by a 
number of Vice Chancellors as 
well as Bryan Jackson, Chairman 
of the East Midlands Development 
Agency. Two different ways of 
working on thematic issues are 
illustrated by elearning and 
employability. The CETLs with an 
elearning theme are networking 
together and are inviting in other 
projects (FDTL etc) when there are 
links. Whereas CETLs with links 
to employability are being 
couraged to join in with existing 
networks in the community (the 
Burlington Group for example).

The Academy wants to work to 
develop capacity in the CETL 
community. Next year it is holding 
two further events in England to 
develop pedagogic research 
capacity building on this year’s 
activity; it will be using case 
studies drawn from CETL research 
activity as master class exemplars. 
Through network events and other 
activities, it is supporting CETLs to 
break out of their core subject 
areas and work with other subject 
centres. It is continuing to support the 
CETL collaboration on 
dissemination through its networks 
and national events.

In September 2007, the Academy 
is launching an email Newsletter 
and Digest that will be circulated 
within the CETL community. This 
will contain sections on news of 
activity, dissemination, research 
and so on within the CETL 
community; HE Academy support 
for the community and articles on 
topics of common CETL interest. 
It is hoped that the digest will 
become a primary means for 
CETLs to circulate information on 
their activities.

Many CETLs are employing 
students as advocates, mentors 
and researchers. They (the 
students) have asked the 
Academy for its support in 
developing a student network. As 
their web site 
(www.heacademy.ac.uk/CETLstud 
entnet.htm) shows: “The National 
Student Network is a great 
opportunity for students and 
student representatives working 
within Higher Education. It is a 
network created by students, for 
students”. The aim of a network is 
to provide a forum for these 
essential staff members to discuss 
their ideas and their problems and 
to share valuable advice and 
insight into the opportunities 
available to students within other 
HE institutions. The network has 
met several times and it is hoped 
to continue to build on the success 
in conjunction their respective 
institutions.

And finally CETLs will be 
conducting their mid programme 
review and evaluation this year, 
reporting to HEFCE (or DEL in 
Northern Ireland) by July 2007. 
Whilst the Academy is at pains to 
note that it has no role in the 
evaluation exercise beyond an 
advisory one, it is working with 
HEFCE and DEL to encourage 
links between the regulatory 
evaluation and the formative 
evaluation and between the 
individual CETL evaluation and the 
meta-evaluation of the programme. 
The Academy is supporting a 
network of external and internal 
evaluators and has organised 
meetings between this network 
and HEFCE and DEL. It is hoped 
that the needs of HEFCE will 
become clear in early 2006/7 and 
the Academy is currently planning 
a programme of support for the 
evaluation exercise during the next 
year.
Moderate levels of stress are a normal part of everyday life for everyone. In fact, it can be argued that short term exposure to stressful episodes are good for us, in that they briefly challenge us and thus prepare us for difficult periods in future life.

However, this article is not about these transient stressors but rather touches on the psychological and physical impacts that chronic exposure to stress can result in.

I am trained as an academic psychologist and have always had a professional and personal interest in mental health. Imagine my surprise then, when I woke one morning to the realisation that not only had I been quite badly stressed at work for quite some time, but that my stress had now triggered depression. I did not realise it at the time, but that depression was to leave me without the motivation to perform anything but the most basic of tasks for several months.

Possibly you are wondering, how could someone who is fully aware of the symptoms of stress not identify the symptoms when they acquire them? The answer is quite simple in that that the psychological and physical symptoms of stress do not generally all appear together. Rather they develop slowly over months or years in such a way that very often the individual ascribes them to other causes, such as the ageing process for example. I hope that my personal experience will illustrate how stress can creep up on one and the consequences that it can have.

Like many academics, I am driven. Aside from the normal demands of my job, I took on many research and other career building tasks which I believed would improve my standing within my Department and also the larger academic community. I enjoyed every day at work and every evening and weekend I spent building this capacity. Most weeks, I’d work for sixty hours and occasionally for seventy. I even used to take work on holiday with me, persuading myself that if I did not I’d be bored. As my partner is also driven by work, we never felt the need to question each others’ working patterns; we simply viewed ourselves as achievers.

Certainly my work load was high and indeed a proportion of it was self-inflicted. However, I am convinced to this day though that I could have maintained this pace of work for many years, as I had done so for many years previously.

However, the tipping point came when my line managers made a series of decisions which caused me to feel undervalued, undermined and unsupported. I started loosing sleep and in retrospect became anxious. This triggered a range of non-specific physical ailments such as headaches, nausea and minor physical ailments, none of which I had ever suffered from before. I also, as I was told later, became irritable and anti social.

One morning I woke up and could not face getting out of bed. The thought of going to work and dealing with the various issues that had caused my problems was simply too much. I called in sick and thought a few days sleeping would solve everything. However, as the days went on I felt progressively worse, to the point that I was missing meals and couldn’t even concentrate on reading a newspaper. By the time I reached the halfway point of an item, I’d forgotten what that article was about. Frankly it was this which made me realise that I had a serious illness and it persuaded me to visit my GP. Within minutes of discussion, GP diagnosed me...
as having stress and depression and started me on a course of medication.

Several months of medication and copious hours of talking therapies have me back to pretty much where I was before all this happened. I had expected support from my employers but sadly this was not forthcoming. During discussions of what had caused my illness, institutional representatives went into denial. My University and College Union advisors explained this as, “if they admitted that they had in any way been responsible in causing your illness, they could be viewed as lacking in their duty of care towards you and this could leave them open for all sorts of litigation”.

So, my only option was to leave the institution and move on. However, this episode has left me with a large period of sickness history and a sense of unresolved issues. I suppose I’ll survive.

This whole experience has changed my view of the world and my view of work. I have learned to achieve that clichéd work-life balance and no longer feel that work is core to my identity. That doesn’t mean that I’ll drift through work for the rest of my life. Rather, it means that I no longer view my career as one of the most important elements of my life, it is just a part.

What would I have done differently in hindsight? First of all, I would have sought support much earlier than I did. Early intervention in stress is critical to ensure that the condition does not spiral downwards. Secondly, I would have informed my line managers, in writing, that their actions were causing me distress and also that I needed help in reducing my workload. Thirdly, and equally important, I should probably have been more self-reflecting and have listened to colleagues who hinted that my behaviour was different from previously. Either of these last two points would have given me a clue that something was going awry.

So, what about you? Have you been stressed at work for long periods? Are you having relationship problems with colleagues or your line managers that cause you anxiety? How can you avoid reaching that point where you feel you cannot cope?

There are many people and organisations that can help you and this is only a sample:

- Friends, Family Members or Trusted Colleagues – you’d be surprised how helpful and supportive they can be

- Disability Rights Commission www.drc-gb.org - If you have an identified disability or think you have a disability contact the DRC – they will refer you on for appropriate support and advice

- Trades Unions – if you belong to one, they should provide you with advice on counselling support networks

- Your Employer – most colleges and universities have an Employee Assistance Programme and/or Counselling service (sometimes found “hidden” within Student Support services)

- Your General Practitioner – even though he/she might not be trained in Counselling or Stress Management, you should be directed to appropriate help

- Teacher (and now Lecturer, too) Support Network (TSN) www.teachersupport.info – a voluntary organisation which provides comprehensive support including telephone counselling/advice, fact sheets and so on. TSN also provides an online, confidential and very thorough stress screening questionnaire which can be found at: www.teachersupport.info/index.cfm?p=714

(NB this only works in Internet Explorer).

A final word. If you are feeling constantly stressed as a result of work and this is affecting your performance at work or your life outside of it, please do something now. My personal experience and that of many others is that if you ignore the problem for too long, you reach a point where these feelings of being slightly unwell could result in a long term illness. Do seek support as early as possible.
Communities of practice and routes into teacher education: research findings from the University of Huddersfield Consortium for PCET

Penny Noel, a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Huddersfield Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training, is currently completing a one-year research project which focuses upon teacher educators in the learning and skills sector. References are available online at www.escalate.ac.uk/publications

Introduction
A one-year research project undertaken during 2005-06 for the University of Huddersfield Consortium for PCET has examined routes into teacher education and the place of communities of practice. An aim of the research was to identify and promote equality and diversity of practice. Consortium teacher educators, the subject of the research, work across the North of England within a network of over 30 initial teacher education providers, primarily, although not exclusively, involving colleges of FE and including the university that provides the accreditation. The awards of Certificate in Education and Post-Graduate Certificate in Education were developed specifically for in-service teachers and trainers working in the post-16 sector. The consortium represents the largest network in England of in-service teacher education for PCET, involving over 2,000 trainees and around 130 teacher educators. Teacher education in the learning and skills sector differs significantly from schoolteacher education. Upon appointment to their new role, schoolteacher educators will leave the schools in which they have taught to join an HEI. However, new teacher educators in the learning and skills sector will typically remain in an FE college, delivering HE within FE, and very often continuing to teach their original specialist subject – in addition to undertaking their part-time teacher education role. Because consortium provision involves in-service teacher education, many teacher educators will be teaching colleagues from their own colleges.

The project brief for the research states that ‘the development of and engagement in communities of practice is seen as pivotal to the ongoing improvement of learning and teaching within PCET. The uniqueness of post-compulsory education and training derives in part from the diversity of its provision and from the varied trajectories followed by its teaching staff. The project sought to identify the characteristics of consortium teacher educators, as well as their disciplinary origins. It sought to consider issues arising from an examination of their routes into teacher education, and thereby to provide a basis for subsequent work focusing on the CPD of teacher educators, an important aspect of the reform of ITT in the learning and skills sector (DfES, 2004). The project also sought to identify and to explore consortium based communities of practice. Research methods have included an analysis of documentary evidence, an initial eight semi-structured interviews, case studies involving the members of four teacher education teams (n=24) and a questionnaire survey of consortium teacher educators. Valid questionnaires have been returned by 62% of them (n=81). Research data includes reference to experience of teacher education outside the consortium network.

Research findings
The post-compulsory education and training workforce is, in the main, female, white and ageing. The consortium teacher educator workforce has been found to be even less diverse. It is yet more female, more white and older, with a concentration of certain subject backgrounds – specifically business and management studies, and social science and humanities. Teacher educator representation in a number of subjects is much greater – or much less, than related trainee representation. This is particularly marked in connection with ICT, the subject area with the most learners in FE and yet with relatively few teacher educators.

A key research finding concerning routes into teacher education has been the identification of a failure within some colleges to employ formal and transparent recruitment and selection procedures when appointing new teacher educators, often with the role neither advertised nor subject to interview. This may happen because roles are often part time and filled by existing full time members of college staff who retain other roles. There is no reason to suppose that this is unique within the consortium network and it is likely that a similar informality would be found in relation to other teacher educator populations. Further research would be needed to confirm this. However, failure to employ appropriate procedures has been identified as problematic for the achievement of a more diverse workforce (Commission for Black Staff in FE, 2002).

Analysis of research data also reveals that across the consortium:
• Teacher educators who occupy a dual role, i.e. that of teacher educator and specialist subject teacher (41%) usually identify the teacher education role as their primary role, and also, although to a slightly lesser extent, identify the teacher education team as the one in which they feel most ‘at home’.
• There is very much satisfaction...
with initial and ongoing support provided by consortium centres and the university. The initial support needs most identified by teacher educators are – joint moderation of trainees’ work, detailed guidance in relation to the curriculum and an induction.

- The ongoing support needs most identified by teacher educators are – joint moderation of trainees’ work, regular team meetings and shared teaching resources.
- Teacher educators describe both their their specialist subject and teacher educator teams as having features indicative of communities of practice, and particularly so in relation to their teacher educator teams.
- Teacher education is experienced as an interesting and desirable area of work, and is much sought after.

Case studies involved interviews with 24 consortium teacher educators. Interviews included the question ‘How would you describe the role of the teacher educator?’ The following aspects of the role were highlighted the most frequently:

- To help people initially to do the job and function in the classroom, to provide a survival toolkit.
- To provide support, to be a facilitator and a mentor.
- To model good practice, to be a role model.
- To encourage creative thinking.
- To enable the development of reflective practitioners, who are able to challenge – both self and others.
- To ensure that links are made between practice and theory.

An interesting perspective was provided by the interviewee who described the role as ‘the gateway for good teaching’ and continued ‘I think there are some people who will never make teachers – and I think it’s as much about that and not … carrying on with this notion that just anybody can teach’.

Analysis of case study data involved an attempt to discern the operation of communities of practice. Use was made of the following indicators, based upon the work of Wenger:

- i) a strong commitment to a shared domain of interest;
- ii) a community clearly engaged in joint activities that enable them to learn from each other, and;
- iii) the effective development of a shared practitioner repertoire.

Research findings indicate:

- There is significant commitment to the domain of teacher education, on occasion expressed with some passion.
- Geographical location – a shared staff-room or regular use of an informal meeting place, is of significance in enhancing a real sense of membership of a team.
- Numerous teacher educators have dual roles – for example, as noted, a number continue to teach their original specialist subject, and yet others have cross-college management responsibilities. Clearly, this can have an impact upon the potential for engagement in joint teacher education activity.
- A majority of teacher educators place a high value upon initial specialist mentor support, as shown above (figure 1). However, research findings draw attention to some unmet need here, although this type of support is often provided informally.

- There is an insufficient time to meet the demands of the role of teacher educator effectively. This was highlighted by all case study interviewees and indicates, perhaps, an incomplete understanding of the role of the teacher educator within colleges.

- The consortium network overall operates to some considerable extent as a community of practice, in relation to a number of the community of practice indicators noted by Wenger (Wenger, 1998, pp.125-6) and membership was consistently highly valued by teacher educators.

A key purpose of the consortium, in commissioning the research, was to improve equality and diversity practice. The revelation of the extent of informal recruitment procedures, and of their effect, means that it is now an important and urgent item on the agenda to be addressed in 2006-07.
The University of Manchester launched a new and, some would say, innovative and unique undergraduate degree programme in September 2001. The programme offers students the opportunity to combine both academic study and practical experience of working alongside people with learning difficulties. At first glance, there is little new about a degree programme that provides its students with ‘hands-on’ experience of working with groups or individuals. For example, Nursing, Social Work and Teaching degrees have been doing this for many years. However, where the BA (Hons) Learning Disability Studies programme differs is it is not just by working with people with learning difficulties that students learn, it is through being formally taught by people with learning difficulties that learning is taking place.

The programme employs, in addition to three lecturers who themselves do not have learning difficulties, a number of visiting lecturers who have learning difficulties. Many of these visiting lecturers have spent many years receiving services (including living in long-stay institutions, attending special schools and day centres etc...) and therefore are able to reflect upon their past and current experiences. Through this unique partnership approach the course aims to provide clear connections between the lived experiences and knowledges of people with learning difficulties and the academic theory relating to the area of disability studies and special and inclusive education.

Unlike other courses that provide learning opportunities to people working in learning disability and educational services this programme does not teach about any specific syndrome or condition; you won’t find a lecture on Down’s Syndrome or Autism or even Dyslexia however hard you look. What you will find is an array of lectures and course units that explore the intersection between society and disability from a ‘social model of disability’ perspective (Boxall et al, 2004). For example, students are encouraged to consider if impairments cause disability or whether it is how society, social policy and institutional structures respond to people with impairments that causes the disability! Similar approaches are taken in relation to the educational system whereby students are encouraged to take a critical overview of the current system and ask questions such as, what is wrong with the education system; as opposed to what is wrong with a child with special educational needs? (Boxall et al, 2004)

In addition to the teaching on the course, people with learning difficulties, through membership on a partnership steering group, take an active role in the development and direction of the course. The partnership steering group meet every six weeks and provide guidance and advice to the programme director and the course team in relation to how the programme is both delivered and developed. This group is always chaired by a person with learning difficulties and a set of established ground rules ensure that members of the full-time course team do not control these meetings.

An additional, but highly significant, aspect of the work that the partnership steering group undertakes centres on research and publications. Many of the steering group members undertake partnership research alongside full-time academic staff. Steering group members are equal partners in this research and are not viewed as participants but as co-researchers. Many of the publications arising from a variety of projects are co-authored by full-time academics and people with learning difficulties (see Boxall et al, 2002; Boxall et al, 2004; Carson and Docherty, 2002; Docherty et al, 2005).

Whilst the programme welcomes and is committed to the government’s widening participation agenda, in respect of higher education, the steering group believe that to date this has not gone far enough. For example, it is perfectly legal for universities to give less favourable treatment to people with learning difficulties if the university can justify this in relation to maintaining academic standards (DRC, 2002). In response to what we believe is an unfair and disadvantageous situation, in relation to the involvement that people with learning difficulties have in higher education, the steering group decided that they wanted to further develop their work on the programme. This led to an application to ESCalate and the subsequent funding of a project that seeks to explore how people with learning difficulties can become even more involved in the delivery of teaching and in the management and development of the programme. In addition, it is hoped that one of the outcomes of the project will be the dissemination of ‘best practice’ in relation to involving people with...
learning difficulties in both the teaching of relevant programmes (for example, social work, learning disability nursing, PGCE) but also in relation to knowledge production.

If you would like more information about the project or if you are interested in attending a conference relating to the outcomes of the project in the spring of 2007 please email craig.blyth@manchester.ac.uk.

References


Elisabeth Lazarus

The use of ‘Videopapers’ in professional learning and assessment

Elisabeth Lazarus, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol

Elisabeth has worked as a language teacher, head of department, Advanced Skills Teacher and teacher educator over the last 25 years. She has been both a university and school-based researcher. She is currently the PGCE Course Director at the Graduate School of Education.

PGCE student teachers (or for that matter new university tutors engaged in professional education in HE) often find it difficult to “see” what is going on in their classrooms. They can further experience difficulties in linking theory with observations of experienced teachers and tutors and their own practice. Assessment in the past has often entailed traditional submissions such as essays, observation tasks, portfolios and analogue video recordings. ESCalate support allowed me to investigate the use of “videopapers” as a novel professional development and assessment tool. Videopapers can be created via free software (http://vpb.concord.org) and stored on disks. Videopapers enable the developing professional to select sequences and “moments” in his or her teaching (video clips), link these to outcomes (slides), a personal analysis (text), underpinned by research (text) – all in one place and in one “environment”, thereby creating a potentially very powerful digital element of a professional development portfolio.

I was first struck by the potentiality of using videopapers with my PGCE students during a demonstration session by Dr. Federica Olivero. Federica had explored the use of videopapers as a way of disseminating research to practitioners (Olivero et al., 2004). I discussed how I wanted to research this with Federica and she mentioned that the creators of videopapers at the “Bridging Research and Practice Project” at TERC (part of Tufts University) in Boston were developing mentoring case studies. The ESCalate support allowed me to employ Federica as research assistant and general technical whiz person. Two groups of volunteer Modern Foreign Language PGCE students (one group in the first term and
one group in the last term of their course) attended workshops which introduced them to what videopapers looked like, their affordances, how one read them differently from other forms of text etc. In further workshops we taught the students to edit videoclips and to use videopapers builder to create their own papers. The students chose different focal points which interested them such as the use of games in lessons; target language use; active engagement etc. Before videoing of lessons could go ahead permission was sought from head teachers, pupils and parents. Videoing was carried out by a tutor, a class teacher or a fellow student.

What were the benefits for the student teachers?
The opportunity to be participants in a research project and to belong to a particular “community of practice”, gaining and giving support to others. They learnt how to edit video clips and how to use this free software. They saw the potentiality of videopapers for use in schools; showed their videopapers to other students (and parents!) and received feedback. Students ran seminars for fellow students on the experience of being videoed and creating the papers. They reflected and researched an area of interest in depth.

What did we learn from the experience?
The videopapers allowed the student teachers to select particular video clips and to link these to analysis, reflection and theory on teaching and learning by creating personal case studies. They felt that the videopapers allowed them to create a much richer assignment although a great deal of time was spent on selecting the clips. They mentioned that they needed to be more honest about their reflection and writing as the reader or assessor would be gaining glimpse into their classroom as part of the process. They further liked the non-linear form of the papers as the reader can choose at which point they enter the paper and whether they want to watch the clips, look at lesson plans, read the text or view slides or hyperlinks first.

Difficulties?
The first group of students used videopapers builder 2 and by the time the latter group came to create their papers VPbuilder3 was ready for use. This later version is so much easier to use and allows the writer greater freedom. I was very conscious of the extra time required for understanding the software, learning how to edit the clips and creating the final paper. As incentives we gave students free memory sticks, food and drink!

Spin offs for us researchers?
Federica and I have shared our experiences with colleagues within our institution and further afield and have found other disciplines, like counselling and medicine are interested in exploring videopapers further. Colleagues from the University of Bergen, who were visiting Bristol, have taken the concept of videopapers for professional learning and assessment back home with them and are piloting these with their student teachers. One masters’ student used an example of a videopaper created by one of the PGCE students, together with her own videopaper to research this as a tool for use in Cyprus.

We are busy writing up our findings and I have presented some of these at the University of Gothenburg in November 2006 at a conference entitled ICT and teacher training in change: Conditions, visions and realities. We have run a workshop and seminar organised by ESCalate in early 2007 and will hold a joint videopapers symposium with colleagues from Boston and Bergen at EARLi in August 2007.

And for the PGCE tutor?
I have had a unique opportunity to trial with students, at different stages of their professional learning, a new method of assessment which combines
elements of previous assignments in a novel and easily accessible form. I hope to build on this work with future cohorts of students.

References:

http://vpb.concord.org – here you can download videopaper builder 3 for free.

Websites of interest
TERC website - www.terc.edu

For further information, please contact: Elisabeth.lazarus@bristol.ac.uk

In Conversation with...
Chris Bryan, College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth

Chris Bryan, Senior Lecturer, College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth talks about her research into teacher development in a rural school in South Africa with Derry Corey, College of St Mark & St John.

I have listened with great interest to seminars you have given at the college concerning the research you have carried out in a school in rural South Africa. How did you first make contact with the school?

In 1999, I responded to a request from Link Africa, now Link Community Development, to work for 5 weeks as a volunteer teacher at a school in South Africa. They were looking for qualified teachers to work alongside their African counterparts in rural schools across South Africa. I was sent to Tshimbiluni Senior Primary school in the village of Tshakhuma, living with an African family for the duration of my stay.

That must have a very different experience for you compared to the large comprehensive school in Plymouth you were Director of Staff Development for?

Tshakhuma is a semi-rural village situated in the Limpopo Province and is home to the Venda tribe. The spoken language is TshiVenda; however teachers are expected to teach in English with explanations given in TshiVenda. The region is rich in agriculture with local labour (mostly women) being employed on farms owned principally by white farmers. Unemployment, particularly for men, is high with many men having to find employment in the bigger cities of Pretoria and Johannesburg.
At the time Tshimbiluni SP school had 420 children on roll and 12 teachers. It operated from two separate sites thus the principal, Mr Albert Tshaumbea, had to travel between two schools. The campus I worked at was in generally poor repair, had one water standpipe, no electricity and the pit loos were collapsing. However, for me the most significant concern was the low morale of the teaching staff. Many recognised the need to develop their teaching skills but were given little professional development. This low morale and low self-esteem was compounded by lack of teaching resources.

This must have had a profound effect on you. What did you decide to do on your return to the UK?

With huge support from friends and family, over £10,000 was raised which provided funding for two new classrooms, improved toilet facilities, books and a photocopier. Of greater significance however, was the change of culture within both the school and the village of Tshakhumra. Chief Madzivhandila, the head of the village, recognised the importance of a good education for the personal development of his people. He helped to find a path through the red-tape which surrounded local bureaucracy to allow the school to operate on a single site. Many men and women were involved in the building of the new classrooms, some gaining new skills in building and electrical installation. When I went back in 2001 and 2003, I detected an improvement in teacher morale, but I also became increasingly aware that providing resources for the school was not sufficient; progress had been made, but it was simply not enough to embed sustainable development.

In 2006 you returned to Tshimbiluni SP school to carry out research into teacher development. How were you able to do this?

In 2004 I moved into higher education here in, Plymouth and in 2005, gained a College Fellowship which provided funding for me to carry out research at the school. My focus was to identify the key issues surrounding teacher development within the context of the school. In February 2006 I carried out my research at the school and in April 2006 I arranged, through separate funding, for the Principal to come to the UK. During this time he undertook a personal development programme, including ICT training at the college.

How did you carry out your research at Tshimbiluni School and what were the main findings?

My research involved lesson observations and semi-structured interviews with all the teachers at the school and an in-depth interview with the principal. My findings highlighted three strands:- Resourcing and upskilling, particularly in the area of ICT. Many staff recognised the importance of ICT, but lacked the resources and skills. Teaching and learning. Staff recognised the need to develop the thinking skills of their pupils, however classroom observation indicated little evidence of this taking place.

Pedagogic culture. All teachers interviewed were concerned about poor pupil motivation. Teachers were often didactic in their approach with limited pupil/teacher interaction, and even less peer interaction. This observation may not be surprising as African culture has a strong oral tradition of the ‘speaker’ and the ‘listener’. It may also explain why the text books which had been bought for the school were little used.

Do you have any plans for further research at the school?

In February 2007 I am returning to the school to repeat my initial research. A very exciting recent development in the area of ICT at the school is that the principal has obtained funding for 10 new computers together with technical backup. I am now in e-mail contact with Mr Tshaumbea at the school.

What benefits has the College of St Mark & St John gained from your research?

My work brings an applied connection to the School of International Education at the College, which has a high reputation in many parts of the world. Also, my own personal research skills and understanding have developed and are now being transferred to undergraduates, postgraduates and practising teachers in my own context of higher education. I firmly believe that research of this kind contributes to a store of knowledge which makes us all better able to objectify our own context. This provides a nice illustration of Nelson Mandela’s belief that education is indeed ‘the great engine of personal development’. Nelson Mandela (1994) Long Walk to Freedom

Chris Bryan would welcome any comments you may have on this article. She can be contacted at cbryan@marjon.ac.uk.

ESCalate contributes to the Higher Education Academy initiative on Education for Sustainable Development.

In addition to funding development projects in Education, we are offering two research grants of up to £10k each, deadline April 2007. See www.escalate.ac.uk/projects for more information.
ESCalate Events

CPD seminars in 2007

ESCalate are actively working with the CPD community throughout 2007 to arrange a series of events: one in Northern Ireland and two in Wales, with a linked event taking place in Scotland.

These events are an opportunity to hear first hand how the four countries of the UK are approaching the issue of CPD with teachers.

The nature of the events is regional, but you are very welcome to attend the event that is most convenient for you. Depending on where the event is being hosted, this country will focus the discussion on their approach, but of course this will include a comparative element.

At the moment we have fixed dates for the Northern Ireland event which is on 28th February, and North Wales event which is on 14th March; however we will keep the web updated with developments for the South Wales event, which is likely to be in May.

If you would like to express an interest in any of these events being arranged through ESCalate Bristol, please contact Jane.Tuffill@bris.ac.uk

3rd Annual ESCalate ITE Conference

Friday 18 May 2007, at St Martin’s College, Lancaster.

More details to be confirmed, keep up to date by looking at: http://escalate.ac.uk/2858

Enhancing the student experience in lifelong learning: research and practice

Thursday 24-Friday 25 May 2007 at NCSL Learning and Conference Centre, Nottingham

Joint event with ESCalate@Stirling and University of Nottingham. More information is available at http://escalate.ac.uk/3129

The times they are a-changin’: researching transitions in lifelong learning.
CRL 4th Biennial International Conference 2007
Friday 22-Sunday 24 June 2007 at University of Stirling

Conference organised ESCalate@stirling and The Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRLL). More information is available at http://escalate.ac.uk/2853

More events are advertised online at www.escalate.ac.uk/events