

Part of our remit is to work with outside agencies, to help disseminate, support and develop their resources to benefit our community. The following articles are from two such groups

Jill Anderson

writes about what happens when a well-established subject centre supports the work of an interdisciplinary project to achieve remarkable results. ►



New Horizons: ESCalate and the Mental Health in Higher Education project

The observation that *'a small increase in levels of wellbeing can produce a large decrease in mental health problems across people of all ages'* (Foresight, 2008) is embedded in the thinking behind the Government's *New Horizons* policy (DoH, 2009). The links between mental wellbeing and learning are increasingly recognised, with a plethora of reports on the role of schools in supporting pupils' mental health and an interest in the wellbeing – across FE and HE contexts – of both students and lecturers.

The Mental Health in Higher Education project (mhhe) was established in 2003 with the aim of enhancing networking and the sharing of approaches to learning and teaching about mental health across the disciplines in UK higher education. ESCalate became a partner of the project in 2007, joining four other Higher Education Academy Subject Centres: Social Policy and Social Work, Psychology, Health Sciences & Practice and Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine.

What happens when you bring together an established subject centre with a sound grasp of its constituency, and the issues that affect it, and a small interdisciplinary project with a focus on a particular cross-cutting issue? Through its link with ESCalate, mhhe has been able to refine and develop its work in three ways:

Initial Teacher Education.

Workshops on wellbeing and Initial Teacher Education have been run at ESCalate and TEAN conferences, in conjunction with the national CAMHS support service. This has served to raise awareness amongst teacher educators of the range of resources available to support the integration of wellbeing issues within programmes (*Everybody's Business* for example); and amongst policy makers of the context within which Initial Teacher Education is delivered¹.

Student mental health and wellbeing.

The primary focus of mhhe has been on mental health as a content area of curricula. It is through our relationship with ESCalate that we have been able to bring issues around the mental health and wellbeing of students more to centre stage. We supported the ESCalate-themed funding call on wellbeing, and were involved in reviewing applications. Two ESCalate-funded projects have a focus on this area².

Threshold concepts, troublesome knowledge and mental health. The ESCalate-themed funding bid took as one starting point the work by Meyer and Land (2003) on threshold concepts and 'troublesome knowledge'. In parallel, the Mental Health in Higher Education project has been exploring the notion of mental wellbeing as a 'threshold concept', across a range of disciplines in higher education. This was one theme of our recent conference: Living and Learning, Learning and Teaching: mental health in higher education³.

In summary, the partnership between ESCalate and mhhe has functioned to increase the emphasis of the mhhe project on the mental health of children and adolescents (through our exploration of the place given to mental wellbeing in the education of school teachers). It has fed into our growing interest in the mental health of learners and of teachers and how this links with the ways in which mental health is taught. Finally, it has grounded the work of the project more thoroughly in recent bodies of thinking within educational research. We have been extremely grateful for the support of ESCalate and look forward to a continued and developing relationship.

¹ www.mhhe.heacademy.ac.uk/ite

² www.mhhe.heacademy.ac.uk/studentmentalhealth

³ www.mhhe.heacademy.ac.uk/thresholdconcepts

References

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- Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (2003), *Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge (1): linkages to ways of thinking and practising in the disciplines*, Edinburgh: ETL Occasional Report 4



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