The Research and Development Bulletin

Edited by Charlotte Desira

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Contents

Editors Comments

By Charlotte Desira, The Research Centre, City College Norwich

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Research and Development Bulletin. I would like to thank those who have made valuable contributions to this edition, which once again highlight the diverse research and development activities taking place at City College Norwich. We are keen to receive articles for Volume 2 Number 2 from staff and students, so if you have an article to contribute or would like to recommend a piece of your students work then please e-mail scrouch@ccn.ac.uk by 12th September 2003.

This first theme in this edition '*Empowerment and the voice of the learner*' is a very topical issue at the moment. Professor Rob Fiddy, the Head of Centre for Professional Development, has contributed the first article of this series, which debates the issue of effectively including and empowering learners. A summary of a research project that involves capturing learner views about part-time work whilst in full-time study in South Essex has been provided by Sandra Rowney. The last contribution in this series provides an overview of a literature review of national, regional and local learner feedback research over recent years, which was undertaken by The Research Centre on behalf of Norfolk LSC.

The second series of articles look at '*Philosophical and Historical Inquiries'*. Roy van den Brink-Budgen has contributed an insightful article that reflects on the effectiveness of using Philosophical Inquiry with young offenders in a prison environment, and particularly focuses on analysing anger and blame and the value of third person narrative within this technique. Michael Nash, a former member of the Business School has provided a light-hearted historical account of 'What it means to be English', focussing on various aspects of English life such as the monarchy, manners and behaviour and sport.

The final set of contributions explores '*Research Methods and Evaluation'*, and begins with an article by Dr John Cockburn and Angela Steward which presents an overview of an evaluation on focus group training which they conducted on behalf of the Norfolk Learning Partnership. Suzanne Crouch from the HE Faculty has contributed an article, which reviews relevant literature and reflects on some of the ethical and practical dilemmas of 'Insider Research'. Finally Tim Chapman, former Research and Development Co-ordinator in The Research Centre gives a summary of an independent evaluation undertaken on a City College Norwich project which aims to add value to current New Deal provision in order to improve beneficiaries employment prospects.

The Research Centre's Work in Progress section highlights the current and prospective research projects in the Centre. This includes research into student and employer needs in relation to HE, an evaluation of the Parents as Educators project at City College and modelling soft outcomes in teaching and learning in the voluntary sector.

Yours sincerely

Charlotte Desira
Research Fellow

Including and Empowering Learners

By Professor Rob Fiddy, Centre for Professional Development, City College Norwich

Some years ago, when I was a recently appointed lecturer in sociology, I attended a meeting of the Social Science Teachers Association to hear Professor Lawrence Stenhouse speak. Stenhouse was at that time directing the Humanities Curriculum Project, which was developing materials for the teaching of controversial issues in the curriculum. One of the areas included in the project was race relations and, as this was part of my sociology syllabus, I wanted to learn more about it and how to teach it.

Stenhouse sat at the front of a large room next to his host. He was formally introduced and everyone settled back to hear him speak. For some minutes Stenhouse said nothing. The silence did not last for long. However, given the nature and level of anticipation within the room, any gap in the proceedings was emphasised. After a while the silence began to become embarrassing. Finally the host cleared his throat and caught Stenhouse's eye with a 'shall we?' raised brow. Stenhouse looked at those waiting and said *'I'm reluctant to begin, in case you believe me.'*

Although I appreciated the dramatic effect, at the time much of the importance of this opening statement was lost on me. I had attended in order to learn, and for me then this meant listening - and maybe questioning later if I found the nerve. Stenhouse, however, aimed to avoid Friere's 'banking' concept of education 'in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor'. (1974:58) By disclaiming the authority that his audience had given him by virtue of his reputation and position, Stenhouse's opening remark was touching on the nub of an alternative mode of operating - wherein the locus of power is shifted from the teacher to the learner. My initial confusion was also part of this. Part of me resented the attempted shift of power. Part of me resisted the different form of learning I was presented with. Part of my reaction was a desire to confront the teacher and reject what was on offer.

So many years later, however, I wonder if I would have remembered that evening with such clarity had Stenhouse regarded those present as empty vessels into which to pour his wisdom. On reflection, for me the importance of that meeting was that it marked the starting point of a fundamental change in my view of the teaching and learning interface. Moreover, whereas the content of what was said has diminished in importance over time, the style of the event has stayed with me and grown in significance.

'Knowing is a process, not a product' says Jerome Bruner (1966:72). What he means by this is that the purpose of education is not to store and recall facts but to emphasise the skills of knowledge acquisition, and by so doing enable learning rather than give out information. There is a direct link between the enabling of learning and the re-distribution of power in the classroom.[1] This applies as much to adult learners as children. What is education about if it is not empowerment? Yet all too often learners have so little power in the learning situation. They are told what they are going to learn and how they are going to learn it - with little apparent consideration as to whether it's of any use to them, or how best it could be presented. The emphasis, in other words, is all too often on notions of transmission rather than reception.

[1] See Fiddy R (1996)

This theme of 'democratisation' of the learning process, recently re-emphasised within the ‘inclusive learning’ rhetoric, has been highlighted by many writers in their investigations of alternative forms of learning, among them Dewey (1938), Neill (1962), Rogers (1965), Knowles (1970), Illich (1973), Stenhouse (1975), Schon (1983), Kolb (1984), Warner Weil and McGill (1989) and Osterman and Kottkamp (1993). Of course, attempting to move the power base of the classroom is not without its problems. As in my initial reaction to Stenhouse, there will be resistance amongst learners. To a certain extent learners may want to reject the notion of their empowerment. To accept a shift of power in the classroom inevitably means that the learner has to become more active in his or her learning. Being passive in the classroom is easier. It's less revealing, it demands less effort, it releases less energy. It is also less effective in most circumstances, but learners may well only reflect on this latter element after the event.

Becoming more active also often involves learners interacting with each other in a way that they would not do in a passive situation. The group dynamic takes on a greater importance when power is shifted in the classroom. The teacher must be aware of the need to manage these elements with the inevitability that his/her role becomes complex and difficult with a number of in-built paradoxes. For example: the teacher needs to be aware of his/her presence and power in the classroom, but must also be able to focus on the needs and expectations of the learners; the teacher must provide structure and direction, but be open to alternatives emanating from the group; the teacher must challenge the learners, but also support them; the teacher must be aware of the group identity, but also remember that the group is composed of individuals; the teacher is responsible for managing the learning situation, but in a way that enables learners to take responsibility for themselves.

Baldwin and Williams talk of the teacher and the learner being in a state of flux with each other, continually moving backwards and forwards along a series of continua:

'The teacher moves from being:		
in the forefront	← to being →	in the background
the learner moves from being:		
passive	← to being →	active
the teacher moves from being:		
directive		non-directive
making decisions	← to being →	enabling decisions
taking the lead		following
the learner moves from being:		
dependent		planning
following	← to being →	self-programming
uncommitted		committed
the teacher moves from being:		
protective		challenging
sheltering	← to being →	exposing
controlling		releasing
the learner moves from being:		
cared for		experimental

secure cautious	← to being →	insecure creative
the teacher moves from being:		
energetic forcing the pace	← to being →	quiet reflective
the learner moves from being:		
observing the rules un-reflective distanced	← to being →	leading pace-setting involved
the teacher moves from being:		
judging assessing	← to being →	reviewing facilitating reflection
the learner moves from being:		
assessed passive dependent	← to being →	evaluating self-programming self-managing'

Baldwin and Williams (1988:68)

The skill of the teacher is to be able to move freely across the continua in response to learners' needs and expectations and to resist the temptation to become fixed at either end. Wherever the teacher is on the continua, however, he/she must remember that their behaviour has an effect on the behaviour of the learners e.g. if the teacher is being judgmental, then the learner is being assessed, if the teacher is in the forefront then the learner is being passive. Empowerment for the learner emanates from the growing understanding that the teacher will respond to them and their needs. However, the teacher must be wary of allowing the necessary elements of challenge and development to be eroded via negotiations with the learners.

There is a temptation for learners to avoid challenges in the classroom, to opt for 'the line of least resistance'. Indeed, processes of empowerment themselves can sometimes have a backlash effect. Newly empowered learners may try to use this power to re-direct the classroom experience back into less active, less demanding areas of operation. Argyris and Schon (1974) talk of the reluctance learners' experience in adopting new 'theories of action' in place of 'theories in use'. In other words, the problem people have with new ideas may be as much to do with the difficulty of letting go of operational techniques which have a proven track record, as far as the individual is concerned, in favour of moving into the unknown. Of course this is true for learners *and* teachers.

The theoretical position on empowering learners is well documented but is nevertheless just that, a theoretical position. As all teachers know, the practice of teaching can be different. Teaching is sometimes, not quite humorously, referred to as a 'front-line' activity and we may be able to gain some insight into its inherent tensions between theory and practice if we briefly compare a true front-line experience - that of the American GI. Stouffer's (1949) study of war zone experiences found that there were two reference groups vying for the soldiers' attention. The first was the veteran - who knew how to keep his head down, how to survive. The second was one that was no longer physically present - the training officers who, back at boot camp, had given the soldiers the theory of war. Stouffer's study found that there was a re-affiliation of significant reference groups, from the officers in the camp to the veterans. All teachers are familiar with theories of learning, in all probability including 'alternative' theories, that they have come across in their training. When teachers get to the 'front-line', however, their reference group affiliation may well transfer to the 'veteran' teachers. Theories of learning - perhaps particularly 'alternative' theories of learning - may become redundant in the face of the necessity to survive. Just as with the GIs, the culture of the war zone can define the reference to theory as irrelevant at best, dangerous at worst.

How, then, to create a situation wherein teachers can feel confident about empowering learners? Clearly support of colleagues and the institution is paramount, but even 'privately' within the confines of the classroom, teachers can begin to experiment with approaches, perhaps only in small ways at first, and monitor and evaluate changes.[2]

Within the on-going debate, most writers agree that the relationship between teachers and learners is affected by at least the following:

* Environmental concerns
* Power and authority in the classroom
* Group dynamics and individual needs
* Reflective processes

These elements are not necessarily in order of priority, nor are they discrete - in fact they impinge one upon the other in a number of ways. By paying attention to each, however, the teacher can begin to identify those factors which influence how learning takes place and having identified them make them subject to scrutiny and subsequent change. The ways in which the above elements overlap can readily be identified by monitoring the effects that relatively simple changes can have.

Although some environmental factors are beyond the control of the teacher, particularly if they involve levels of resourcing, certain fundamental issues can be addressed. For example, how are chairs - and possibly tables or desks - arranged in the room? Does the activity the group is to be involved in demand the taking of notes? If the answer to the latter of these questions is no, then are tables necessary? Simply moving tables to the back or periphery of the room and chairs to the forefront changes the learning environment in potentially useful ways. Tables can act as barriers in both the physical and the psychological sense. Removing the barriers can make learners feel exposed and even vulnerable, but can also encourage them to interact, particularly if the chairs are positioned in such a way as to allow all learners to make eye contact with each other, i.e. in a circle.

Such an environmental change also has its effects on the other elements mentioned above. The position of power that the teacher traditionally employs by being at the front of the class, with the learners' attention focused on him or her, is undermined by this new arrangement. As mentioned earlier, group dynamics are also obviously affected. In fact, if this arrangement is not the norm, such a change can provide the first opportunity for the

[2] Although this paper is not the place to give details, action research is an ideal way to investigate changes in approaches to teaching and learning. Carr and Kemmis (1986) give a valuable account of the theory and practice of action research technique

learners to perceive themselves as a group with specific needs separate from those they have as a collection of individuals.

Pens and paper can similarly provide the learner with opportunities to disengage with the action in the classroom. Removing them can threaten part of the learners' security, but, as with the removal of tables, can also promote interaction. Not allowing note taking helps to prevent a perception of learning as merely the collection of information. This in turn affects the teacher's authority. The message such an arrangement can send is that the learning that is to take place is not the kind that can be measured by counting the numbers of pages of notes at the end of a session.

Reflective processes are an essential component of the move to empowering learners. Although the term, and variations on the term, are interpreted differently by different writers, a general consensus promotes praxis as the goal - in other words action based on understanding. Osterman and Kottkamp define reflective practice as 'a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development.' (1993:19)

Including and empowering learners, then, is about enabling a culture where learners will ultimately take responsibility for their own development. Importantly, within this context, space must be allocated for reflective processes which need to be seen as a legitimate undertaking within the learning milieu - as much a part of the aims of the undertaking as anything else.[3] Creating space within teaching can demand a different mind-set from the traditional pedagogical stance.[4] One of the most significant things that teachers who wish to empower learners can do is to stand back from the action - not to absolve themselves of responsibility, but to recognise the positive and negative influences of their involvement.

This short paper began with an anecdote about Lawrence Stenhouse. In his writings, Stenhouse promotes the notion of the teacher as 'senior learner' (Stenhouse 1975) and marks the move towards empowering learners as being in the simultaneous development of curriculum and teachers. But Stenhouse also makes a distinction between areas of the curriculum where 'alternative' pedagogic forms are more appropriate than others. One of the first steps for teachers who wish to begin to experiment with empowering learners is to make that distinction for themselves.

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3 Space can be built into a programme via an evaluation process. See Fiddy R and Peeke G (1993)

4 Knowles (1970), refers to this as andragogy

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Full-time Students and Part-time Paid Employment in South Essex: learners' views

By Sandra Rowney, The Research Centre, City College Norwich

> "Today young people may be more independent and free-thinking than were their parents and grandparents. They demand more from their education and training and are quicker to reject what they do not like and what does not meet their immediate needs. At the same time, they can find their lives more complex and more confusing." (DfES, 2002:1)

Introduction

This article is an extract from the final report presented to the SELP 14 to 19 Advisory Group at their meeting in March 2003. This qualitative study samples the opinions of full-time students at colleges and schools in South Essex concerning part-time employment whilst studying. It was commissioned by the South Essex Learning Partnership (SELP) 14 to 19 Advisory Group. Prior research[5] began in 2002 with a quantitative study of 1400 student questionnaires. Results showed that the majority (85%) were juggling complex lifestyles that included 10 hours or more of paid work every week alongside full-time student timetables.

> *"There is an expectation that you are going to work at this age 'cos people say oh where do you work. It is not do you work it is where do you work."*

Impetus for these studies has come from the local schools and colleges in the South Essex Learning Partnership (SELP) who are concerned that retention problems might be attributed, in part, to the hours spent in paid employment during course programmes.

> *"…if you have worked and then you give up work… I gave up and then I couldn't stand it, I mean it was all right for a time, I was like relaxing but once you have had a taste of getting that money all the time and doing something it is hard."*

It is also appropriate to consider this research in the light of government targets for Higher Education, student funding measures and the policy for widening participation in both Further and Higher Education.

Literature Review

There is a significant body of local, national and international research concerning the combination of part-time work and full-time education. The research in the 1990's suggests that part-time work is now becoming the norm for 16 to 19 year olds. In the UK in the last ten years this increase in part-time working is to be seen against changing employment patterns, and the changing nature of post-16 full-time education.

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[5] This research is due to be made publicly available on the SELP website at:

http://www.selp.co.uk

UK research reports an increase in students' part-time working. Rikowski (1992) in the Epping Forest UK study, pointed out that these UK trends could be comparable to those experienced in the US that had already taken place in the 1980s. Hodgson and Spours (2001) suggested that by the late 1990's the number of British 16-19 year old school and college full-time students that were also working was in the region of 70% and 80%. Concerns about, or interest in, the extent of students part-time working is not restricted to the UK. Australian research, for example, Wooden (1998), Yap (1998) and Robinson (1999) show that numbers are increasing generally.

All the students in this study reported that they were employed within the service sector in some way, including catering, insurance, retail, and cleaning. They demonstrated availability to work shifts that spanned a 24-hour day and a 7-day week. They also demonstrated the casual nature of the student labour force and their ability to move in and out of jobs at will. Previous studies in this area such as Dex and McCulloch (1995) had considered the consequences of the expansion of the service sector, increased labour market flexibility and casual working and Hakim (1996) began to look at the issue of part-time youth labour with concerns about labour substitution. The students' experience of employment is indicative of the youth labour market, as referred to by Johnston et al (2000).

There were very few students in this study who had made a significant link between their part-time work and either their current studies or their career aspirations. Many students however commented on the beneficial experiences that they were gathering from their work places, especially by expanding their communication skills in their largely service based work. Research into the skills and attributes gained by students from working life include Raffe *et al* (1998). Eight national UK projects were developed with the then Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) funding in the late 1990s to examine work experience and skills development. One of these projects (completed in 2000 and currently available) which was aimed at Higher Education students at the University of East Anglia (UEA), created a 20 credit, second level academic unit by accrediting reflective learning and key skills developed in casual, part-time or vacation work.[6]

Much of the literature on student-working revolves around whether it is a 'good thing' or a 'bad thing'. UK studies by Davies (1999) and Payne (2001) suggested that students working long hours were likely to obtain lower grades and be more likely to not complete their studies. Concerns were reported by the National Audit Office (2001), stating that some students find it hard to balance employment and coursework. These were followed by reports on the National UK press that raised similar concerns. In January 2001, a Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre study of 5000 students found that young people in full-time compulsory education who work more than 15 hours per week in part-time jobs perform worse in examinations than students without part-time jobs, or those working shorter hours.

Students in this study spoke of seeing themselves in a 'half way house' towards full independence. Many regarded their earning power and indeed their spending power as a significant measure of adulthood that they were prepared to risk keeping isolated and

[6] Information available from ;
http://www.uea.ac.uk/contedu/wblu/welcome.htm

undisclosed from teaching staff despite reported difficulties. They spoke of experiencing a background chorus of disapproval either about their time commitment to working part-time or the way they chose to spend their earnings from the part-time work; and sometimes both. The US studies of Greenberger and Steinburg (1986) had shown that because many teenagers have had paid employment before leaving school they have a smoother transition into the world of full-time work. Later UK studies of youth transitions against a background of increasing full-time participation in post-16 education have included Bynner *et al* (1997) and Ball *et al* (2000). Hodkinson *et al* (1996) looked at young people, markets and the transition from school to work. Hodkinson and Bloomer (2000) have pointed out the inherent conflict between the present education system and youth transitions. The audit based education system uses retention rates and educational achievement as the measure of the quality of educational provision. This is in potential conflict with students who are in transition between education and work, who are testing, challenging and developing their capabilities and making choices based on their life experiences.

This present study focussed on the attitudes and perceptions of the students. Students did not complain of exploitation in the workplace or of poor working practices. They were paid at or above the minimum wage. They appeared to exploit to the full the availability of flexible working hours and the casual nature of work, chopping and changing until they found a regime, which suited their needs. It was apparent that part-time working was the norm and that those who did not wish to work were in the minority. All of which is supported by the quoted literature above.

The one area of student perception and comment in this study that did not appear to sit comfortably with the literature was the value judgements that were apparently imposed by the family and educationalists as to whether substantial hours spent in part-time work were a "good" or a "bad" thing. Many of these judgements were based on previous research findings that sought to establish a connection between time spent in part-time work and retention and achievement figures. This current research highlights the transitional nature of the 16 to 19 year old student cohort and endorses the views of Hodkinson and Bloomer in their paper presented at SCUTREA, 30th annual Conference, July 2000 which quoted Stenhouses's (1975) attack on the earlier 'aims and objectives' movement in school education. He had argued that the outcomes of education *should* be partly unpredictable, as students changed and grew as people through their experiences of learning. What was needed, he claimed, were better *principles of procedure* whereby we could maximise the chances of stimulating and valuable learning taking place.

Methodology

During September and October of 2002 discussions were held with members of the SELP 14 to 19 Advisory Group (a sub-group of the SELP organisation) to decide upon the aims and objectives of the research. This sub-group was in the process of establishing a membership that reflected the diversity of educational provision for the entire range of 14 to 19 year age groups. They requested that the second year of research should reflect this by extending the sample to include a number of schools in the area. Contacts with three schools were established through SELP members representing the Careers Service and the Educational Action Zone, and two Further Education colleges represented by SELP members. It was agreed from the outset to restrict the age range to be between 16 and 19 years in order to include both schools and colleges within the sample and to enable suitable comparisons to be made with the previous research which addressed the same age group.

As the research progressed modifications were made with full knowledge and authority of the SELP 14 to 19 Advisory Group concerning the scope of the research. After interim discussion papers were considered by the SELP members in early 2003 it was decided to limit the extensive volume of research data that had been produced before the final analysis. It was agreed to restrict data to the three schools and two colleges in the South Essex area that had been originally selected and to primarily focus on the views, attitudes and perceptions of the students.

Prior to the visits to schools and colleges a number of informal talks were carried out with staff, students and colleagues together with desk research into previous related research. From this emerged a number of initial themes discussed with the SELP 14 to 19 Advisory Group in early 2002 and considered to be useful starting points in the focus groups. It was recognised that key themes would develop as the focus groups gave voice to their own concerns. In methodological terms this development in areas of questioning is known as 'progressive focussing' and is well documented and understood as a valuable approach;

> "…the process of analysis will systematically search for 'emergent themes' and will attempt to ensure that the agendas of the participants are addressed rather than pre-ordained questions of the researcher." (Parlett and Hamilton, 1977).

Focus groups are described as involving a group of people participating in a discussion on a particular subject area which is led by a moderator. This encourages interaction to improve the quality of the data in a non-threatening environment (Greenbaum, 2000). The group relies on interaction which is facilitated by the researcher who supplies the topics for discussion that are useful for familiarisation into a new area, allowing for emergent themes to arise (Morgan, 1988).

Groups ranging in size from 6 to 20 students were organised in a variety of ways in order to encourage a spread of motivational attitudes in attending the group in the first place. They were constructed by a variety of means including posters and leaflets placed on notice boards, requests by teaching staff in lessons or in corridors, students asking along their friends, requests by the researcher in communal areas at break times, requests by support staff, and requests for inclusion of students who were already in the allotted rooms. Light refreshments were provided as a way of thanking the students for their valued contribution to the research. No educational or support staff, employers or parents were present in the focus groups in order to allow the students to speak freely if they wished. Discussions were recorded with their full acknowledgement and permission.

Focus groups were held throughout the week of 25th to the 29th November 2002. There were nine groups containing in total over one hundred students from across the appointed school sixth forms and colleges. The groups varied in size depending on the availability of the students. Students were also able to access or leave the groups at any time depending on their timetables.

Recorded interviews with other smaller groups of stakeholders took place at this time including lecturing staff in college, teaching staff in school, support staff and careers advisors. Meetings were also held with senior education managers, and representatives of the educational action zone and university recruitment managers. Further focus groups were planned for the spring of 2003 with students. Towards the end of the year it became apparent that not enough time was available to process what was becoming a vast amount of data and after discussions with SELP members it was decided to restrict the research to the focus groups held in November 2002 and to concentrate on the views of the student.

Research Findings

Findings complement recent regional, national and international research work. The report is divided into sections that examine student perceptions. The sections include thematic exploration with respect to who is working, why they are working, how they are working and their perceptions of other stakeholders in their lives.

> *"I mean I was juggling two jobs, one, and the one I am doing at the moment, and I couldn't stand the job even though it was much better money. I couldn't stand it. The bosses were horrible, they just sat there, they didn't do anything. They shouted at you for the littlest things. I just couldn't handle it despite the fact that I am getting much poorer money where I am at the moment. I'd much rather enjoy it."*

Particular areas of interest include: the polarisation of staff and students views on paid employment and the resulting air of secrecy fostered by students; the extent of disposable incomes for students and the resulting changes in perception of "want" and "need"; and the pragmatic and dynamic choices made by students in their area of paid work.

> *"I really enjoy my work as well so sort of during the week I do my schoolwork and then at the weekend it is go to work which I actually enjoy. My boss is really great so we have a good laugh and then go out with friends so my weekend is just time to relax."*

This research in South Essex points to a need for an airing of the issue of paid work and study at school and college level. The research comes across examples of the hardening of attitudes on all sides leading to students trying to cope with complex issues without the support that could be made available. The principle recommendation is for the SELP 14 to 19 Advisory Group to lead the field in opening up discussion in schools and colleges in the area.

> *"I think some teachers just don't understand full stop about the idea of having a job. My [subject] teacher told me to ditch my job entirely and just not have a job so that I could spend more time learning [their subject] and I just thought 'well no'. It is not my whole life, it is not the only subject I do and I need to earn money and I am not going to drop that just so I can work a bit harder at her subject maybe. She also told me to ditch most of my social life and stop going out on a Friday and just work all weekend. I think I'd go completely insane."*

It is now the norm to be in paid work whilst studying. This research bears out this fact. Different students though have different tolerances and expectations and need to push their own boundaries in order to experiment and discover what they can achieve. The risk taking that is involved in finding out where those boundaries are can involve confrontation with educational staff.

A series of workshops is advocated involving students, educationalists, employers and parents that stem from a resolve to work towards institutionalising positive assistance with paid part–time work, rather than persisting with the present pervasive atmosphere of disapproval, in order to enable students to make more informed choices about their lifestyles.

The students in the focus groups were trying out different work patterns and ranges of working hours. They are individuals with different aspirations, tolerances and capabilities. These young 16 to 19 year olds are bravely testing the world of work and the world of study, trying out their tolerances, testing their capabilities and taking considered risks. The challenge for all the stakeholders; family, teachers, employers, colleges and schools, is whether to arbitrarily try and stop this process or whether to take part in the process and offer a forum for informed discussion, debate and exchange of information.

If you are interested in the full report or would like further information please contact Suzanne Crouch, HE Development Manager, Centre for Professional Development, City College Norwich, on 01603 773354 or scrouch@ccn.ac.uk.

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Norfolk LSC Learner Feedback Project Literature Review

By Charlotte Desira, The Research Centre City College Norwich

INTRODUCTION

In November 2002, Norfolk LSC commissioned The Research Centre to undertake a project on Learner Feedback in Norfolk, in collaboration with OPERA Primary Research Group. The Research Centre was given primary responsibility for a literature review that would inform and underpin the qualitative data gathering exercise proposed by OPERA. Both partners had an explicit responsibility to ensure that the different research components mutually supported one another and consequently, considerable discussion has taken place as to the nature and content of this review. The primary aim of the literature review element was:

> To review national, regional and local learner feedback research over the past few years in order to produce a comprehensive understanding of the research questions that will need to be addressed during in-depth interviews and focus groups.

The research methodology involved desk based research acquiring publicly available literature sources from the Internet, books, journals and other research contacts. Literature was predominantly reviewed from 1997 to date, although research before this date was taken into consideration where appropriate.

This article presents the development issues and points for consideration discussed in the literature review. The implicit aim of this review is to provide the reader with access to and an understanding of the current context and debate surrounding what government and agencies are beginning to refer to as the seamless web of post-16 education provision. In doing so, particular focus is given to where in this context, the voice of the learner fits in, and what motivates the direction of different studies. The result is that the full literature review provides an insight into the layers of policy and initiatives taking place at national, regional and sub-regional level with particular attention given to learner feedback approaches in Norfolk. The qualitative fieldwork component of this learner feedback project commenced in January 2003 and similarly will disseminate its findings in a written report.

NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

The Government have prioritised two main issues, learning and skills. It is recognised that there is both a skills shortage and gap in the UK's workforce, and a learning divide in the community between those who do and do not participate in post-16 education and training, which affects economic performance and also leads to wider social consequences. This drives the need to place the learner at the centre of the system, and therefore acquire learner feedback on methods to improve access and the standard of provision in order to inform the development of future policy and practice. This in turn will subsequently improve the skills of the nation and its workforce and thereby improve productivity and global competitiveness. The learning and skills agendas incorporate a number of key issues such as widening participation, lifelong learning, equal opportunities and outreach, which shape the underlying principles and priorities of national, regional and local agencies and organisations.

The development of the LSC aims to maximise social inclusion, participation and attainment of education and training which is of a high quality, that "*puts the learners first"* (LSC, 2001a:1) and places them at the *"heart of the system"* (LSC, 2001b:10). The LSC propose that national learning targets should be delivered which reflect the local needs in order to build local engagement and ownership. Local LSC's co-ordinate the delivery of national priorities and targets on a local level. The LSC monitors quality and standards of post-16 education and training and management of resources through three main independent inspectorates that encourage improvement through identifying strengths and weaknesses of current provision and provide models of good practice. Inspections evaluate the experiences and expectations of individual learners and promote equal opportunities and self-assessment" (LSC, 2001b).

Learning Partnerships aim to develop a coherent approach to provision for lifelong learning and post-16 education to achieve the government's goals of social cohesion and prosperity. Learning Partnerships also aim to listen to the voice of both the learner and potential learner. The LSDA and the LSRC work towards providing knowledge and ideas to inform future post-16 policy development and practice.

Regional development by EEDA and GO-EAST aims to promote lifelong learning, improve employability and work towards overcoming social exclusion and promoting social inclusion. The Associations of Colleges and Universities work towards the objective of widening participation in FE and HE as well as share information and best practice.

Norfolk has a high proportion of the population over pension age, a low ethnic minority community and, has pockets of deprivation (GO-East 2002, Census 2001). The rates for educational attainment at levels 2, 3 and 4, overall participation of 16-69 year olds and average earning are all lower in comparison to the East of England averages (DfES, 2001). Barriers to participating in education and training in Norfolk include lack of time, family commitments and cost of training, childcare and transport (Norfolk LSC, 2000).

The Shaping the Future Partnership aims to improve Norfolk's economic performance, which includes creating a culture of lifelong learning and skills development (Shaping the Future, 2001). The Norfolk Learning Partnership also works towards this aim and has set priorities to hear the learner's voice and increase demand for learning (Norfolk Learning Partnership, 2001). The Norwich City Learning Group aims to create a culture of lifelong learning in Norwich, and recognise the importance of local involvement and ownership of the community for initiatives to be effective.

INITIATIVES, AGENDAS AND RESEARCH INTO THE LEARNER EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION

Widening participation was brought to the fore as it was recognised that there are certain parts of the community that are less likely to engage in learning. This includes early school leavers, older adults, ex-offenders, people who have not been successful in education, those with a lower socio-economic and occupational status, women with dependent children and people who live in rural areas (McGivney, 2001; Hillage et al, 2000; McGivney, 1990).

Widening participation is essential for social cohesion and prosperity and can help to *"create a self-perpetuating learning society"* (Kennedy, 1997:15). The Government has established a target to increase participation in HE for people aged 18-30, by 50% by 2010, in order to alleviate social exclusion. This involves raising attainment and participation in groups currently underrepresented in HE such as those in socio-economic groups III to V (Skilled, partly skilled and unskilled occupations), specific ethnic minority groups and people with disabilities (Dearing, 1997). The role of FE is pivotal for this objective to be realised, as it can both provide and support learners progression to HE. An investment of an additional £1.2 billion and tough reform of the FE sector aims to raise standards, increase participation and improve outcomes in post-16 learning. Equal Opportunities and Basic Skills play an important role in the Governments agendas, as the disparities in participation and achievement in post-16 learning are also due to factors such as ethnicity, disability, age and gender.

Policy measures have been found to significantly impact on participation patterns (McGivney, 2001). It has been argued that the emphasis on developing a coherent phase of 14-19 education and improving workforce skills may unintentionally narrow learning opportunities available for adults, which will affect widening participation and the achievement of a culture of lifelong learning (ibid). Adults have a multitude of learning needs that include learning for capacity-building, citizenship and community regeneration, parenting and family learning, as well as for basic, immediate and key skills (Hillage et al, 2000). Although some of their needs may be similar to younger learners the context of learning, type of study and purpose has a greater complexity (NIACE, 1999).

In recent years extensive research has taken place into barriers, motivation and learning transitions as well as retention and achievement. Barriers to learning are often multidimensional and include structural or institutional barriers, practical, situational or material barriers; and attitudinal or dispositional barriers (McGivney, 2001; McGivney, 1990). The other factors that can influence participation include economic and labour market conditions such as levels of local unemployment and the nature of the provider (McGivney, 2001; (Clark, 2002). Motivations for learning are complex and there are a multitude of factors that can affect an individuals decision to participate such as social class, age, gender, race, occupation, family background, residence, external pressures and influences. The motivations identified that encourage people to participate in learning include career development, furthering of knowledge, social factors, transitions and life changes as well as an aspiration to help their children (NIACE, 2002; McGivney, 2001; Hillage et al, 2000). The factors that have been found to influence post-16 educational choices include gender and ethnicity, Year 11, home background and GCSE results (Payne, 2001a; Helmsley-Brown and Foskett, 2001; Payne, 1998). The reasons for dropping out are multiple, inter-related and complex, which involve an assessment of costs and benefits of the course both before and during the course, and students will drop-out if at any time the costs outweigh the benefits (Martinez and Munday, 1998).

Financial hardship has a significant affect on drop-out, attainment, future plans and full participation (Callender, 1999). A large number of full-time students, are engaged in part-time work, from a wide variety of backgrounds, socio-economic groups and catchment areas. The major motivation for working is to maintain their lifestyle for financial reasons and it has been found that although part-time working was not linked to drop-out, working in excess of 10 hours a week has a major effect on attainment (Davies, 1999). The provision of financial support has been found to decrease drop-out and widen participation for people from low-income backgrounds (Herbert and Callender, 1997). The LSC funding system and learner support funds aim to be flexible and coherent, to increase access to education and training and support the learner. The Government is currently conducting a review of student funding in FE and there is a wide debate on the implications this will have on widening participation. Transport provision also has an impact on participation, as post-16 education decisions are restricted in areas with limited public transport (Grindrod, 2001).

The LSC are conducting a large scale National Learner Satisfaction Survey over the next five years to build an in-depth picture of the perception of learners, by measuring the level of learner satisfaction in order to respond to their needs. Satisfaction has been found to be influenced by factors such as students perceptions that they are on the appropriate course, support in the transition, motivation of the learner, the quality of teaching/training and type and length of course/programme (NOP World, 2002). Research has found that older, part-time students report higher satisfaction levels than full-time younger students (ibid).

People who engage in learning often experience a variety of benefits that may motivate them to continue and progress to other opportunities. These include wider benefits such as improved health, well-being, self-esteem, satisfaction, social cohesion and confidence (Callaghan et al, 2001; DfES, 2002, Hillage et al, 2000; McGivney, 2001). It is recognised that when people are engaged in learning that relates to their knowledge, interests and experience it can result in wider benefits, which can help to create a more cohesive community. However, it has been argued that the current system of learning provision is not congruent with this, and that social or economic aims may conflict with the types of learning that produce wider benefits (Brassett-Grundy, Hammond and Preston, 2002).
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DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES AND POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Research into the learner experience have highlighted a multitude of considerations of how to effectively widen participation, achieve a culture of lifelong learning and what constitutes effective provision. These include that:

- Demand for learning can be stimulated through publicity, information, advice and guidance;
- Local involvement and ownership of the community is an important aspect of effective provision;
- Potential learners can be attracted through basing practice on existing knowledge and skills through consultation and collaborative planning to ensure that it is responsive to their interests and needs;
- People who act as intermediaries in learning, an outreach and responsive group approach, as well as peer and family support can encourage under-represented people to access learning;
- Provision that is short, affordable, local, informal, supportive and perceived to be relevant, useful and provide benefits can attract potential learners;
- Informal learning and non-formal learning that takes place in different, often unconventional settings, in organisations that have a broad agenda, are flexible and have minimal infrastructure is seen as a potential method for engaging hard-to-reach members of the community;

- ICT should provide 'first-rung' and 'bite-size' opportunities, an availability of a multitude of technologies, accessibility to assistive technologies for learners with disabilities, and integration of community development with personal, social and learning development to improve social inclusion and participation.
- Educational institutions that are family friendly with locally based facilities, flexible assessment, adequate support that offers opportunities for family learning, will help to encourage parents to participate in education that meets their needs, expectations and aspirations;
- Childcare provision should be accessible, adequate, affordable and flexible.
- Methods should to be sensitive and relevant to the needs of the learners and may entail *"bringing learning to learners*" (Kennedy, 1997:8) with impartial and up-to-date information, advice and guidance
- Provision should be supportive and responsive to the learners needs, for example by being culturally relevant and accessible to disabled people, and self-esteem and confidence of the learners should be developed;
- Practical support is important such as short courses that are free or at a low cost, support with travel costs and arrangements, meal allowances, incentives for participation and attendance, provision of childcare facilities or help with costs of childcare, attention to cultural traditions and dietary patterns for some ethnic minority groups as well as special access arrangements and equipment for disabled people;
- Peer support is useful such as the availability of peer mentors to inform and advise people in the community of opportunities for learning;
- Learning support is essential such as small group work, regular feedback, individual and group guidance, direction to support for literacy, numeracy and English skills, informal approaches targeted at specific groups needs, recognition of incremental achievements, pacing of content and adapting of course dependent on learners feedback in order to increase confidence and success;
- Recognition of achievements through a flexible accreditation system that allows for reflection and development of a portfolio can improve learner's self-esteem.

Listening to learners is a complex, creative and active process as learners are from diverse groups with different motivations and backgrounds (DfES, 2000). The LSC and other organisations play an important role in listening to the views of learners and potential learners, and should engage these groups to ensure that learning agendas are relevant in their delivery methods, quality and outcomes (Duffen and Merton, 2001). There are benefits to consultation for agencies as informed planning through an increased understanding of learners, can impact on improved retention and achievement. Potential learners can also benefit from consultation as it can improve their motivation, confidence, achievement and feelings of value (Jackson, 2002).

The main recommendations for consideration in the acquisition of learner feedback are:

- The process should be clearly targeted and involve the community in the planning and development to ensure they have ownership and commitment, so that their needs are established before delivery.
- Effective engagement requires the skills, time and commitment of allocated staff.
- Guidance should be provided to key stakeholders in consultation on the

purpose, language and methods used, as well as the approaches required to action findings.

- Feedback could be gained from people who have an impact on the decision-making processes of learners.
- Participants may need incentives and their views need to be represented including their complaints.
- Members of the community could be recruited to undertake research to engage non-traditional learners, given that appropriate training and support is provided, as they are more likely to be trusted and accepted.
- It is important that trust and rapport is developed with the community and learners, and it is held in a location that they feel comfortable in.
- Multiple methodologies should be used in consultation such as surveys, focus groups, learners' forums, questionnaires and one-off conferences, ensuring the approach used is appropriate to the group and circumstances.
- Consultation, which takes place in a group setting that allows the development of reflective, and analytical skills, peer support and the use of a common language has been found to be effective.
- Feedback must be given to learners on the action that will be taken as a result of consultation, and if action can not be taken, reasons should be explained for this.

If you are interested in the full report or would like further information please contact Suzanne Crouch, HE Development Manager, Centre for Professional Development, City College Norwich, on 01603 773354 or scrouch@ccn.ac.uk.
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The use of Philosophical Inquiry (PI) in a prison environment

By Roy van den Brink-Budgen, HMP Hollesley Bay and Warren Hill, City College Norwich

'This really does my head in' summed up Richard's feelings at the end of a community of enquiry. The content of the enquiry had ranged across problems of the definition of a 'table' and the nature of space and time. But Richard said that he had enjoyed having his head done in, even though the painful look on his face expressed the discomfort that can accompany thinking about and around concepts and definitions.

Richard is one of a small group of juvenile offenders (aged between 15 and 18) that I have been working with for over a year in a unit for those young men who have committed what the law describes as 'grave' crimes. These are crimes in which serious violence is used, very often resulting in the young men being convicted of murder. They normally have a history of poor educational achievement, which will include exclusion from school for disruption and violence against teachers.

The English Prison Service core educational curriculum centres upon the skills of literacy, numeracy, IT, and an umbrella term 'Social and Life Skills' covering such subjects as 'Citizenship' and 'Family Relationships'. Offenders are also expected to take courses such as 'Offending Behaviour' and 'Anger Management' in order to look at the causes of their previous criminal behaviour. It is clear then that using Philosophical Inquiry (PI) in a prison environment can explicitly serve at least two major purposes. It can develop intellectual abilities as well as foster behavioural change.

There is a constraint under which any part of the educational programme has to operate: we must always work towards nationally accredited qualifications. Any passing inspector's eye will look to see how any session that is being taught fits into this accreditation framework. Thus, I decided to develop a programme of Philosophical Inquiry largely within the Critical Thinking classes that lead to the Advanced Subsidiary (AS)[7] qualification offered by the OCR examination board.[8]

Analysing anger through Philosophical Investigation

Though the novels which Matthew Lipman has produced for PI have been criticised for their lack of literary sparkle, I have found both *Mark*[9] and *Lisa* useful for generating significant philosophical discussion. The passage in *Mark* where Mark gets angry in the school library has led to some significant dialogues. An example from our sessions will illustrate this significance.

[7] The AS-level is normally taken by 17 year-olds who are following a course of advanced studies between the ages of 16-18.
[8] OCR is the acronym of the Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts examinations board. OCR is one of the main British examination boards.

[9] *Mark* is concerned with what Lipman has called 'Social Enquiry'. The characters in the book engage in various dialogues on (and get into situations which illustrate) social themes including the nature of democracy, government, justice, freedom, and community. Philosophical questions such as 'What is human nature?' are also considered.

The first is a small sample from a discussion of the notion of 'anger'. Michael had come up with the question "Where does anger come from?"

RvdBB Do you want to clarify what sort of thing you're thinking about with that question?

Michael It's just that anger sort of comes from in your head but it comes from outside as well when people make you angry.

John But it's only in your head because of what other people have done.

Michael But you can't say that the anger's come from the other people. The anger's still coming from inside your head.

RvdBB So can anger come from inside your head without other people being involved?

After some discussion of what this might mean, Tony put the question concisely.

Tony Like being angry with yourself?

John But that still could be because of what other people have done.

Richard No, you could be angry with yourself even if nobody else's involved. Like when I was giving up burn [smoking/tobacco], and I still had one. That was just me, and I was still angry.

RvdBB That's an interesting example, Richard. Are there any other examples where we might be angry with ourselves when nobody else is involved?

Tony When you've said something to somebody and it's made them upset. Like when I shout at my Mum and she gets upset, and it's not her fault, and then I'm angry with myself.

Steven But you were angry to start with when you shouted at her.

Tony Yes, but the second anger wasn't anything to do with anybody except me. It was in my head.

Richard So anger in the end always comes from in your head.

RvdBB Why do you say that, Richard?

Richard Because even if it's other people that make you angry, it's still you that's got to be angry. It's still up to you if you're angry or not.

RvdBB So we can choose whether or not to be angry?

Michael Only sometimes. I mean, if somebody does something that's really bad, like hurting your sister, then you'd have to be angry with them.

RvdBB You'd *have* to be angry?

Michael Of course you would. You'd have no choice. Nobody would.

Tony Unless you're stupid.

RvdBB So with other types of anger, can we choose whether or not to be angry?

Michael You could still be angry but not show it.

Tony Or not do anything about it?

Richard But you'd still be angry. What Roy's asking is can we choose whether or not we're angry. Can we switch it on and off?

John I don't know. I suppose people can. But it might be easier to switch it off than not to switch it on. Like I'll get angry in the gym when I get fouled. But I stop being angry because I'll end up being banged up if I get into a fight about it. So I wouldn't switch it on but I can switch it off.

Richard Only sometimes...

As can be seen, this discussion covers many points, which can be described as philosophical. The point about being able to control one's anger because of the unwelcome consequences of expressing it is one that Plato examined in *The Republic*. In essence, John's point about being able to control his anger in the gym is similar to the example that Socrates gives about the self-controlling Odysseus.[10] (Plato: 440-441) Similarly Richard's example about being angry with himself over his giving in to smoking is also examined by Socrates:

> "*And don't we often see a man whose desires are trying to force him to do something his reason disapproves of cursing himself and getting indignant with them?"* (Plato: 440)

In a subsequent discussion in which the example of Leontion giving in to his curiosity about looking at the executed corpses was mentioned to them, they were impressed by the mocking tones that Leontion used against himself

> "*There you are, curse you - a lovely sight! Have a real good look!"* (Plato: 440)

Richard thought that Leontion had caught the flavour of self-directed anger particularly well.

> "*It's just like when you've had your burn and you think "Well done you stupid bastard. Now you've got to start again*.""

10 Plato commends the example of Odysseus in his calling 'his heart to order'. In the passage from *The Odyssey* referred to by Plato, Odysseus tries to control his anger and emotions when he sees what has been happening in his palace during his long absence. The desire for instant revenge is rejected by calling 'his heart to order'. This phrase illustrates well for Plato the important distinction between 'the power to reflect about good and evil' and 'unreasoning passion.'

In this small sample of dialogue, it can be noted that other philosophical points appear. There is, for example, the case presented by Michael concerning justified anger, which is given as a sort of rational anger by Tony's point. There is also Richard's conceptual clarification of the point about whether or not we can choose to be angry.

This sample of dialogue is therefore a good example of how easily a group of young men can engage in philosophical inquiry, by identifying philosophical problems and by a process of example, counter-example, and conceptual clarification seeking to arrive at a better understanding.

The dialogue continued towards an answer to the original question of "Where does anger come from?" The session produced the conclusion that 'because anger comes from your brain, sometimes it can be controlled and sometimes it can't, just like you can't always control whether or not you're happy or sad.' (On the way, we had met the question as to whether some people are 'naturally' more angry than others just as some people are 'naturally' more happy or sad than others.) Philosophy and psychology met in a fruitful dialogue.

The subsequent use of the Leontion example (which, because it deals with corpses and execution, was particularly interesting for my boys) highlights the considerable potential of sometimes using material from original philosophical texts within the PI sessions (and, of course, in others). A few thousand years might separate Socrates from Richard but both understand something of the nature of self-directed anger. They could have a useful dialogue about it.

Analysing blame through dialogue

Another sample of a dialogue inspired by *Mark* deals with the problems of blame and responsibility. When Mark is taken before Judge Bertoia[11], the question of responsibility for actions is very relevantly (for my boys) highlighted. When Mark seems to be retreating into a defence that he is a 'victim of society', the judge thunders back at the teacher (Ms Williams) who tries to defuse the situation.

> ""*Practically every young person who comes in here tells me the same story. They all claim to be 'victims of society.' But what does that mean? That society has attacked them? How can that be?...There's something else that bothers me. Muggings! Vandalism! They make no sense! I can understand their robbing someone, but why beat them up? I can understand stealing property, but why should anyone just want to destroy it?"*
>
> *"I'm sure there are resentments " Ms Williams began.*
>
> "*Of course there are resentments!' the judge snorted. 'But what causes them? Why do these young people feel outside society - as if they're not part of it? Why do they think*

[11] The *post hoc* argument is one in which because one thing follows another, it is assumed that the latter caused the former. The full version would be *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after this, therefore because of this). Begging the question is a fallacious argument in which the conclusion is a restatement of what is given as a reason for it. Richard's argument is rather harshly judged here by Michael as an example of this type of fallacy.

society's laws don't apply to them? Are they in any way different from the rest of us?"" (Lipman, 1980: 12-13)

It's pretty clear that my boys would have both questions and answers to a passage like this. Some of the questions that came up were:

- Is a victim never guilty?
- If you don't agree with the law, should you have to obey it?
- Why shouldn't rich people have some of their property taken off them?
- Does society give everybody the same chances?
- Can Mark be seen as not being to blame for what he is accused of because of the things that had happened to him?

Each of these questions had considerable potential. The first was something that had a particular resonance for some of them, in that the person they had committed the crime against might well have been active in the process that lead to the crime. They were also very intrigued by the possibility of a person being mugged being at least in part responsible for allowing themselves to be mugged (Yalom, 1980: 256-257). The second has a particular relevance to the perception of the use of drugs which some of them have. But they decided to look at the last of these questions partly because it was very much the theme of the story at this point and also because it raised so many other questions.

Mark had been through a difficult time prior to the allegation that he had smashed things up at his school. He had heard that his mother's company was going to relocate, necessitating a move for the family and provoking Mark to complain about 'This stupid society!'; his girlfriend had told him that she was going out on a date with another boy; he had had an argument in the school library.

The dialogue went off in interesting directions.

RvdBB — So the question we're going to look at is whether, because various things had happened to Mark, he wasn't to blame for what he did at the school. Richard, do you want to say anything more about your question?

Richard — Well, it's just that if these things hadn't happened, then he wouldn't have smashed things up in the school. He'd have been watching the game instead.

Michael — You don't know that. He could -

Richard — Of course you know that. That's the point. He was angry, so he smashed things up. He wasn't normally like that.

Michael — OK, but you've just done a *post hoc* and you can't do that. [It need to be stressed, in case this sounds artificial, that my young men love the technical language of Critical Thinking and use it whenever they can.] He was angry, *so* he smashed things up. You've just begged the question [ditto].[12]

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[12] The *post hoc* argument is one in which because one thing follows another, it is assumed that the latter caused the former. The full version would be *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after this, therefore because of this). Begging the

Richard	But there must be some sort of link. I mean, it's obvious.
RvdBB	If you think that Mark's behaviour can be explained by the things that had happened to him, is that the same as saying that Mark wasn't to blame for what he did?
Richard	I'm not sure...I don't know.
Tony	Mark had a choice. He *could* have just watched the game. He could have just gone home. He was feeling pissed off, but he still didn't have to do it.
John	But he would have watched the game if he hadn't felt pissed off.
Tony	It's not like he was out of his head. He hadn't had anything.[13] He was just angry.
John	And we've already talked about being able to control your anger.
Tony	So, just because these things had happened, doesn't mean that he had no choice.
Steven	Did he have less choice though? You know, he was angry so he couldn't choose in the same way.
Tony	That's shit. You've either got choice or you haven't. Like I've either got a burn or I haven't.
Steven	You could have half a burn. Or ten. Or a quarter of one.
RvdBB	That's an interesting point. Can we have what we could call degrees of choice?
Tony	Like what?
RvdBB	Well, is it right to say that someone from Peckham has got the same choice about crime as someone from, say, Suffolk?
Tony	They've got the same choice. There's no difference.
Richard	No they haven't. Not if you think about crap schools and no jobs and no money.
Steven	So somebody in Suffolk's got a full packet, and somebody in Peckham's got only half a burn.

question is a fallacious argument in which the conclusion is a restatement of what is given as a reason for it. Richard's argument is rather harshly judged here by Michael as an example of this type of fallacy.

13 In other words, he hadn't taken any drugs which might have affected his behaviour.

This analogy was pursued with some vigour, and a tentative conclusion was reached that choice (and thus responsibility) was in part determined by the context in which the choice was made. Roman Frister's choice to steal a cap to save his life in Auschwitz (which they were intrigued by) was a different sort of choice to steal than stealing a purse from an old lady. The events preceding what seemed to be Mark's choice to smash up the school were in this way relevant to his actions. But, to a man, they all saw Mark as responsible for what he did, as someone who could be blamed for what he did. They liked Judge Bertoia's scathing clarification of the term 'victims of society' as 'That society has *attacked* them?'

One of the interesting aspects of this sample of dialogue is the way in which the participants seek to clarify what is being said in order to arrive at a better understanding of the issues. The *post hoc* explanation, which Michael identified usefully, cut through the vagueness of the social determinism argument. The distinction between identifying precedents and locating responsibility for choice made by Tony continued this. The notion of quantities of choice was also a fruitful one.

The value of third-person narrative in Philosophical Inquiry

What these small samples of dialogue also illustrate is that using third-person narratives creates what I would see as 'safe' explorations of potentially difficult areas of analysis. The difficulty is not just in the sense of their complexity, but also in terms of their personal implications. Courses that deal with what is called 'Offending Behaviour' require that the individual addresses his own behaviour, that he seeks to explain it, and that he is critical of it. One of the techniques that is used is to get the prisoner to tell the story of his crime in cartoon form, and then ask them to go through the narrative. This has some potential, but it runs the risk of distortion of the narrative through deliberate misrepresentation of their, and others', role in the narrative.

Third person narratives on the other hand do not have this risk. Things are happening to other people, and there is little or no threat to reputation or previous accounts of oneself by taking up a position in relation to these things and people. An example from one of our sessions illustrates the point well. We were using the story 'The Fight' from Philip Cam's *Thinking Stories 3*.[14] This provides scope for discussion of when fighting is justified (although the fight that the characters Neil and Josh get into is a very mild affair).

It was Richard who showed that this sort of narrative approach enables my young men to step back and to take up a philosophical position.

> *"Neil shouldn't have got into the fight. He should've just walked away. It didn't do any good. It wasn't worth having a fight for. I would've, but he shouldn't."*

This highlights a very significant point. The Lipman and Cam material enable my young men to give reasons for actions, to justify decisions, without there being a threat to their image or status. Richard's distinction between Neil who 'shouldn't have got into the fight' and himself 'I would've' preserves the image but still makes the point.

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[14] In *The Fight*, two boys Neil and Josh have a fight with an Aboriginal boy, and the short story centres upon moral and social issues arising from this incident. Such questions as 'Was it worse to have fought an Aborigine?' (as Josh's mother suggests it was), 'Is it right for two boys to fight one?', and 'Can we justify fighting on the basis of provocation?' arise in and from the narrative.

All of this, of course, raises the central question of transfer. Are my PI sessions no more than brief flashes of interesting thinking which have no significance for either intellectual or moral development? I am happy to admit that more work needs to be done in order to answer this question, and I have plans to do this work. With regard to intellectual development, I can report that all of the boys except one passed their AS in Critical Thinking. Given their previous educational background, this was very impressive, especially in that it was for nearly all of them the first examination they had ever taken. In addition, when Steven asked me to look at some work that he'd done without being asked, and he handed over a page of inductive and deductive arguments that he'd been coming up with 'just so that he's sure of the difference', then something interesting is happening. The transfer to moral development is something that needs further investigation.[15] However, there is already interesting research showing the value of third-person narrative material with juvenile offenders. The Citizenship Foundation has recently carried out some evaluation of their 'Smart Thinking' programme, which shows promising results.

There is also the point about the value of including a PI component in a Critical Thinking course. I have described elsewhere how my boys took to Critical Thinking with enormous enthusiasm (van den Brink-Budgen, 2001). What I hope is also obvious is that they took to 'doing' philosophy with a similar excitement. They saw the two activities as largely the same thing, except that Critical Thinking had more unequivocally right or wrong answers, for such argument-structure questions as "What is the conclusion of this argument?" and "What is the flaw in the argument?" But the biggest pay-off in having PI within Critical Thinking was the confidence the boys developed in evaluating arguments. They could happily construct alternative explanations and scenarios; they could ask 'What if...?' about anything; they could look for consistency or the lack of it by filling in the content of 'if...then'; they could unpack definitions; they could examine criteria. They could therefore bring an imaginative richness to their Critical Thinking, by *wanting* to be philosophical.

The example of Steven with his inductive/deductive argument shows an important feature of PI with my juvenile offenders. This is the lack of self-consciousness about thinking and talking about philosophical matters. Even the word 'philosophy' gives them pleasure. They will take delight in worrying about the definition of a table, the nature of time and space, whether or not we are 'real', the dilemmas of moral choices, the nature of friendship, and so on. And they can be alarmingly dismissive of false dilemmas. Faced with the classic prisoner's dilemma, they solved it in a few seconds by pointing out that 'you never grass'. Whatever the circumstances, you don't do it. In this age of relative morality, it is comforting to find a moral absolute.

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[15] There is a growing range of evaluative literature on the use of discussions of third-person scenarios and dilemmas in order to promote the growth of moral development with offenders, especially coming from psychologists. Examples include Arbuthnot and Gordon 1986, Donnelly et al 2001, and Gibbs et al 1984. There is a useful discussion of the difficulties of evaluation and assessment of PI in Splitter and Sharp pp 147-155.

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What does it mean to be English?

By Michael Nash, Business School, City College Norwich

> *"Remember that you are an Englishman, and have consequently won first prize in the lottery of life"*

Dare I use this phrase? I thought as I pondered what I was going to say. The scenario was the Polytechnic of Hame in Finland, near to the second capital of Tampere. I had been waiting in my casual travelling clothes, waiting for the bus, when, at 0845 a lecturer came into the staff room, and enquired, without batting an eyelid, if I would talk for an hour on "What does it mean to be English?" I had only a moment's hesitation. The Finns in many ways are like the English, or how the English were perceived in times past. One must indeed, never bat an eyelid.

It was not so long after all since I was invited to join the Polar Bear Club. This exclusive club has one entry criterion: you must enter the water in a lake through a hole which has been cut in the ice, either naked or wearing your swimming trunks! When faced with this, I thought to myself: I am English, I am not a wimp, and jumped into the water. Mind you, I did think also to myself, as I walked over the ice clad only in my swimming trunks: 'What am I doing?!' I remained in the water, swimming in a hyperactive manner, for seven seconds, before I got out and rushed into the sauna! I was then told that I must not remain in the water for more than thirty seconds, otherwise I would have hypothermia, and, also, what was my heart-rate like!! Anywhere, I earned membership of the Polar Bear Club!

So what would I talk about now? What I managed has since been rationalised and delivered at other colleges, most recently at the Business School of Roskilde in Denmark. Do "foreigners" or "aliens" think of the English as they did in the time of Cecil Rhodes [responsible for the quote above] or as they did fifty years ago? Indeed, the whole tenor of my talk would be on how the English themselves had changed since 1952. I could think of at least thirteen different headings, which would tell my audience something about the English during the last half century.

Firstly, the ideas of Loyalty, Patriotism and Nationhood, whatever it implies. Fifty years ago, there was still a British Empire. I had been born a child of empire as well as of war, in 1939. One of my earliest memories at school was seeing a map, of which a good deal was coloured red, red for British. We, the English [or the British] ruled a third of the world and a fifth of its population. In our own time this idea, looking back, has been linked always with the Establishment, [but what was that?] and to a lesser extent, with the Conservative Party. Again, in our own time, the last Conservative Prime Minister, John Major, gave his ideas of Englishness as "warm beer, cricket on the green, and spinster ladies cycling to early morning Communion through the mist". How nostalgic was this? What age did it relate to? What would it convey to a Finnish or Danish audience?!

The comparison, in 2002, is that the whole idea of "nationhood" is under question, or, perhaps more precisely, the nation state. It does not, after all, have an enviable history. The idea of a nation is really post-Westphalian, and it has not done anyone any favours. As for the British empire, it does not exist any longer, and has not existed for quite a long time, despite Gibraltar and the Falklands.

Did the English really think c.1900 that "God was an Englishman"? The quote from Cecil Rhodes can be set against two others he uttered about the same time. About the time he was Prime Minister of Cape Colony, [1890-96] he said:

> *"Ask any man what nationality he would prefer to be, and ninety-nine out of a hundred will tell you that they would prefer to be Englishmen".*

Then, Rhodes chose this time, [in December 1896] to waken his friend Albert Grey from his sleep one night in Bulawayo to ask him whether he had ever considered how fortunate he was to be alive and in good health and to have been born an Englishman, when so many millions of other human beings had no such luck".

So what do we have now in place of these sentiments? Colonial skirmishes continue, [perhaps that is what Afghanistan is partly about]; we have the energies of war channelled into sport; do we still think of ourselves as superior?

Fifty years ago, there was deference to the Royal Family, of course looked upon as the apex of the Establishment. Now this has all changed due mainly to the three "Ds": Diana, Divorce and Devolution. There is no doubt that Diana Spencer traumatised herself and the family she married into for good and for ill. It could never be the same again. Her legacy is still being digested, to mix metaphors. Divorce has permeated the Royal Family as it has the whole of English society. Devolution has meant that again the idea of a nation state has been weakened, but perhaps for the better, for giving regional autonomy back again must be a good thing. The Queen seems, within the space of her Silver and Golden Jubilees, to have adapted to it. We have to consider whether the Monarchy is an integral part of being English; certainly it represents much tradition and continuity.

Associated with both the Establishment and the Monarchy is the Church of England, always a curiosity to those who are not English. Is it now irrelevant? Should it be dis-established, as the Church of Ireland was in 1869 and the Church of Wales in 1913? They still survive, and have produced two candidates in the last decade for the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Perhaps it is the worldwide Anglican Communion which is now more important: does this transport "Englishness" overseas?

Fifty years ago Education was looked upon as the flagship of everything which was best about being English, and a good deal about what made you English. What has happened to it now? As one who has been in education for forty years, a plea could be put forward for a moratorium on change, and shifting sands, but it is probably too late. Now many overseas students go to the United States, France, Germany and Switzerland. Who needs change and expense all the time? However, one thing that remains fixed, in a sense, in England, is of course the English language. Where better to learn it than in England? It is the lingua franca of the world, replacing French after l945, which in turn had replaced Latin. The French cannot forgive the English for this. Yet the rise and rise of English was, like so many English things, one almost of serendipity. In the reign of the first Elizabeth, no-one, but no-one, learned English outside of England. Even Turkish was more of an option!

Linked with Education has to be manners or behaviour. I would tell my audiences that when I was a child I had to stand up straight for the National Anthem with my hands by my sides. I did not speak when my elders and betters were speaking. I turned the meat on my plate towards me. I had my glass on my right and my sideplate on my left. I paused every so often when I was eating. I did not say "I'm full", I said "I have had sufficient, thank you". I did not get down from the table until I was told I could or if I asked. I did not remove my jacket at the table! It sounds worse than the 613 rules of ancient Judaism. But England fifty years ago was governed by a minutia of rules.

Then there was the question of women. Women must be treated honourably. Doors must be opened for them. They must be allowed to go first, unless they wished otherwise. When walking on the pavement, the man must be on the side of the traffic, in case the woman or girl might be splashed by passing motorists! There was a finer side to chivalry. It might be wondered whether, in this age of pseudo and quasi-equality, whether it has done women any favours. Are women now acting like men? Why should they? Is it so good to be masculine? [Yes, it is, but not to be slavishly imitated]. Don't women want to act as women? Equality is not sameness. The sexes are not the same, in case we need to be reminded. What has come out of this is the notion of "male" styles and "female" styles. It has been suggested that Margaret Thatcher's type of government was quintessentially masculine, whereas that of Tony Blair is a feminine type of government: softer, more caring? How does this go down in Finland, which has a woman President, and Denmark, which, like Britain, has a Queen of indelible character?

So, in 2002, what really does move the English? It must be sport! An article by the incisive Deborah Orr in The Independent entitled 'The religious significance of Mr. Beckham's toe' underlined how far this has gone. Everyone knows Bill Shankley's famous aphorism "Football is not a matter of life and death. It is much more important than that," but in the last twenty years football particularly has replaced much of what was cultural and religious observance in the English people, or a large section of them. David Beckham in particular has become "the icon of icons". Deborah Orr was suggesting that Beckham had become, "with glorious swiftness" the concern and darling of the nation, "as a worthy replacement for the Queen Mother". Gary Linneker was often spoken of in the same way as the Queen Mother, squeaky clean. However, David Beckham is in many ways very different from Gary Linneker. Both of these footballing icons have been proper images for young fans, eschewing drink, drugs and sexual licence. They were not the bad boys of football, such as George Best and Eric Cantona, who undoubtedly had a wide sexual appeal, both erotic and homo-erotic. Because he is such a fashion icon and also extremely good-looking, David Beckham has also succeeded to the mantle of Cantona. Good husband and father he may be, but he is, and he knows he is, an icon over a wide swathe of the population for all kinds of reasons. "I'm a gay icon. I'm a gay icon", he taunted his wife, waltzing around the kitchen of their stately home!

What does this tell us about the present appeal of sport. It tells us of course that, while it is a very acceptable channel for the aggression which might lead to war, it also has a strong sexual element. And not only that. "Whether Beckham is playing or not", says Deborah Orr, "that little bone in his foot will hold all the significance of a religious relic. This religious element is repeated in surprising places at times. When the charismatic jockey, Frankie Dettori, beloved of the racing public for exactly the same reasons as David Beckham, being fashionable, sexy and supremely successful, as well as speaking "Milanese Cockney", as opposed to Beckham's high-pitched South London twang, was injured in a plane crash, the Bishop of Norwich, the Rev. James, visited Fakenham racecourse the following Sunday to ask for prayers for the recovery of "Frankie": "Let us pray for Frankie". This was certainly an exercise in religious populism and opportunism, but was accepted without demur by the crowds present.

These elements have also permeated other sports, for example, international swimming, as emphasised by such writers as P.P. Hartnett, himself an international swimmer turned writer.

"Last week", wrote Deborah Orr, referring to another aspect of being English, "we learned how much the Monarchy was worth to this country"[referring to the lying-in-state and funeral of the Queen Mother] This week comes the revelation that a second metatarsal bone is every bit as valuable. At the end of the day, as the footballing fraternity is so fond of saying, it's a funny old game."

Sport has become the be-all and end-all of many Englishmen's lives. The old, Corinthian tradition so aptly outlined by Edward Grayson in Sport and the Law. Has been replaced by Professionalism, highly paid players, the will to win, and the involvement of big business. Football began as a sport with an element of business, and to paraphrase, has now become a business with an element of sport! Of course, due to Globalisation and Universalism, this no longer is exclusively English, but it is an element of what it means to be English today. It also, interestingly, calls into question the existence of three cultures in one: the High-brow, the Middle-brow, and the Low-brow. Football now seems to permeate all three, although to quote again:

> "*Football is a game for gentlemen played by louts, and Rugby is a game for louts played by gentlemen*".

Why did this come about? As has been observed, there are no lager louts or hooligans following Rugby. Has football then been hijacked by yet another element, that of a criminal underclass?

All, but all of this, is covered in every way by the Media, especially the Press. As Englishmen, the influence of the Press cannot be underestimated. We read more newspapers than any nation in the world. Newspaper circulation in England is remarkable. The Sun has a daily circulation of 3,440,285. This is followed by the Daily Mail, a right-wing newspaper, with a circulation of 2,349,454 and the Daily Mirror, with 2,112,331. These newspapers are all tabloids. The biggest-selling of the broadsheets is the right-wing Daily Telegraph, arguably, in terms of presentation and news coverage the best newspaper in the world, but which has to be seen through the prism of its political orientation. Its circulation is almost one million daily, being 952,443. Newspapers, or rather their owners and editors, can win or lose elections, make or break Prime Ministers and indeed, any leading personality of the day. They can elevate the trivial, and trivialise the elevated. They are not, under any circumstances, to be discounted by any Englishman.

So, what does the average Englishman make of his Government. Is it true also in this instance that a country gets the government it deserves? Did we deserve eleven years of Margaret Thatcher and eighteen years of Tory rule? Do we deserve the Presidential style of Tony Blair? When the writer was in the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons a few years ago now, it seemed tired and tawdry, and as if the centre of power had moved elsewhere. So where has it moved? The answer seems to be to Downing Street and to Brussels, but interestingly, and importantly, also to the Committees of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, which are increasingly assuming the importance and the high profile nature of Congressional Committees in the United States.

As a nation, it behoves the English to remember that "One man, one vote" was only achieved in the United Kingdom in 1948, that polarisation of the parties has ceased to matter, has become a blur, and that vote apathy is one of the major issues of our time. Devolution and increasing prosperity have made the nation think of other things as being more effective. As the great showman Mike Todd once said famously:

"Money is only important when you haven't got any".

As affluence increases, the nation does not look to Parliament, to voting, or to elections, to obtain a greater share of it.

We are, we are told, what we eat. Here indeed, for Englishmen, there has been a revolution since 1952. The traditional fare of England was cooked very well at home and very badly in most restaurants, giving the English an undeserved reputation. Now, in 2002, Cookery programmes have to vie only with gardening and DIY programmes to be the most popular shows on TV. So what has happened to roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, Fish & Chips, and all those puddings we loved so well as children? Or did we love them all. There are vivid memories of milk puddings: rice, tapioca, semolina, bread & butter pudding. Perhaps we loved them by association: they were made by our mothers. Then we went to university and we discovered Indian, Chinese and Italian cooking, and we loved it. Not only that, but the Indian immigrants and Chinese immigrants began making dishes of their own, which became peculiarly English or British, and unknown in their native India: Balti, for example, was invented in Sparbrook in Birmingham. Now the typical English dish is curry, and in 1945, believe it or not, there were hardly any Indian restaurants, only those in London. But for two hundred years Englishmen had been to India, and their servants had made up their own curries and associated dishes, dahl and onion bahji and all those other delights.

Now, we cook at home and we go out a good deal to restaurants: the whole social milieu has altered. The English do not eat in 2002 what they ate in 1952. Many have become vegetarians and vegans, although this has not made much inroad in other parts of Europe. There is only one exclusively vegetarian restaurant in Copenhagen, for example.

Is an Englishman how he dresses? It was thought so, at one time. The Englishman wore a Savile row suit and a shirt from Thresher & Glenny. He carried a briefcase and an umbrella and wore a bowler hat. Where is this Englishman now? Even in the City on Fridays, workers are allowed to "dress down", and bankers appear in shirtsleeves and even shorts. Is this the influence of Australia or of hotter summers or of simply a more relaxed attitude to clothing? High-born Englishmen and women were always fashionable, always set the trend. But now the fashionable Englishmen and women are also footballers and pop stars, although highborn English still carry themselves well, are still capable of that "patrician disdain" born of having a certain elan and elegance. So there is a class element in all this. You either have it or you don't. But what is "it"? A clue lies in Hardy Amies' famous quote about the clothes of the Queen, when asked, "Why isn't your Queen more with it?" The courturier replied [with patrician disdain]: "The Queen does not need to be with it, she is it". To this there is no reply! Very recently an American journalist commented [see Royalty Digest July 2002].

This is not new. From the Middle Ages onwards, there were Sumptuary laws, dictating what could and what could not be worn by different classes of persons. These regulations were reinforced and re-emphasised by those concerning the ownership of animals and birds and their exercise, and in the etiquette of birth, marriage, death, and all associated rituals and rites of passage. Some rites and regulations disappeared only for others to take their place. Man, particularly the Englishman, is a ritualistic creature, from brushing his teeth in the morning to choosing co-ordinating socks. Interestingly, the "fashionable" person who set the trends has become younger and younger. In 1910 the fashionable woman was forty years old; in 1960 this person had become seventeen. Now youth is extended as far as possible into age. You can wear jeans even if you are sixty, but should you wear combat trousers? Almost certainly not. The reason there was a dip in the jeans market in the late 1990s was that the young perceived that their fathers were wearing them. Tony Blair fell into this trap, young looking though he is. "No, Dad, not the jeans", was the heading of a heartfelt sentiment expressed in one article. Abroad and at home, British designers have a large part of the action, and so do fashion writers. Armani and Gucci retain their importance, but they take notice of Alexander McQueen and Stella McCartney.

Inevitably, this brings one to Entertainment. In 1952 this revolved around the cinema, and to a lesser extent radio, declining music halls and pier entertainment, and amateur dramatics. In 2002 the cinema has undergone a revival, perhaps against all the odds; perhaps the young again perceived it as something their parents no longer went out to. Ballroom dancing has been replaced, though not entirely, by nightclubs and pop concerts. Closely associated with entertainment is of course the leisure industry and the holiday trade; interesting how these words, 'industry' and 'trade' are used. In 1952 most Britons or Englishmen holidayed at home; at Brighton, Bournemouth and Blackpool, and in the new holiday concepts of Butlins and Pontins. In 2002, due to greater affluence and marketing, holidays are now taken in Tenerife and Benidorm and Corfu, and it is no longer the perquisite of an elite to travel. But is it the lineal successor of he who went to Butlins now goes to Tenerife? Is there essentially a difference in horizon here? The debt, or curse, which is owed to Coco Chanel cannot be emphasised too much. In the 1920s she scandalised society by sunburning her skin, her face [though not, her hands]. She "invented" sunbathing. This was indeed a revolution. Apart from letting the sun bleach their hair, ladies had never let the sun touch their complexions, knowing full well the result! Was there some kind of amnesia in the 1920s, or was it simply a breakdown in traditional attitudes? Didn't people look wonderful and well if they were suntanned? Well, Yes, for a while, and then, as a lady confided to me once, "they had more lines than Clapham junction"! Ah, but here was another marketing opportunity for the cosmetics makers: anti-wrinkle cream! First, the sun-tan lotion, and then, when that had worked its deleterious effect, the anti-ageing and anti-wrinkle cream! Venetian ladies of the eighteenth century had no such problems. They did not get suntanned or expose themselves [except in private] in the first place. Nature is sometimes unfair. Only the very young or the very beautiful should expose themselves at all.

Let the last words on being English belong to an Englishman who became President of the European Parliament, Mr. Plumb. He had been President of the National Farmers' Union in the U.K. He raised some interesting questions about Englishmen. If you were born in Yorkshire, for example, were you a Yorkshireman first or an Englishman first? And as for being anything beyond England... Mr. Plumb made an important speech as President. He saw the changes and the benefits and the wider picture. He was, perhaps, in his way, a prophet. He had the "vision" thing. "I was born an Englishman", he said, "but I hope to die a European".

An Evaluation of the Norfolk Learning Partnership Focus Group Training Initiative

By Dr John Cockburn and Angela Steward, The Research Centre, City College Norwich

This article is based on an evaluation of a training initiative designed to equip community educational practitioners with the skills necessary to run focus groups. This research technique appears particularly apposite when the main purpose of training practitioners in research methods is so they can respond to its contemporary agenda and "hear the learners voice" especially when the groups to be heard are the disadvantaged, marginalised and socially excluded. The paper describes and evaluates the programme and hopefully illuminates some of the substantive findings. The work was located in the action research paradigm, and some case studies add richness to the experience.

Background

During June of 2002, the Norfolk Learning Partnership (NLP) approached The Research Centre at City College Norwich (CCN) with a view to commissioning research training for a range of Norfolk community groups but particularly the Norfolk Learning Communities. The agenda of the Partnership – and commensurate with current Governmental policies and initiatives - was to explore, and find ways to overcome barriers to participation in learning. Central to the Partnership's concerns was that a way be found to access the perceptions and attitudes of non-participating groups in order that their 'voices' be heard. Following preliminary talks with the Research and Development Co-ordinator of The Research Centre, it was agreed that a training programme specifically addressing the use of focus groups as a data gathering tool would be highly beneficial to the Partnerships annual research effort. Thus a training programme designed to upgrade the methodological skills of Norfolk's community based workers was commissioned. Following the training, community staff would be better equipped to carry out focus group work effectively; analyse and reflect on qualitative data; develop future plans in the light of the research; and be aware of the technical and ethical issues involved. Additionally the training was to emphasise and locate work in the 'action research cycle' thereby encouraging the application of the research findings and fostering an attitude of ongoing inquiry. In addition, by deploying the workshops within such a supportive paradigm, it was hoped that a new and self-sustaining community of practitioner researchers would emerge.

The Training Programme

A training programme was negotiated and designed by members of staff from NLP and CCN and the Partnership took responsibility for widely publicising the opportunity to organisations and communities within its field of influence. It was decided that:

- the training programme span 3 months in order that preparation, implementation and reflection could occur within the boundaries of the supported training and be shared with other participants
- two groups would meet and run in parallel on the same day; one morning and one afternoon; this would increase the flexibility and opportunity for attendance by busy community practitioners

- two members of staff from The Research Centre with specific expertise in qualitative research methods and group facilitation, take responsibility for the delivery of the programme which would be held in the Conference Centre at Easton College

Following dissemination of the course details by NLP to a wide and diverse range of community based organisations (both public sector and voluntary sector), forty individuals expressed an intention to participate; by good fortune the split into the two morning and afternoon groups fell roughly equally.

Workshop 1: Monday 7th October 2002

This first session was introductory to the training and the scene was set regarding the aims, objectives and format of the forthcoming work. The following topics then became central and were addressed fully on the day:

- the concept of 'action research'
- focus groups as a method of eliciting qualitative data
- focus groups: the skills and issues of facilitation
- negotiating informed consent and other ethical and methodological issues such as data protection, venue considerations, recording data

The session consisted of structured small group discussions led by a staff member; focus group simulation; the identification of local priorities; and plenary sessions to bring together participants experiences, ideas and insights.

The intention was that following the first session, participants would possess the skills, energy and confidence to prepare for their first focus group activity. Appendix B contains a sample of the materials used during this session.

Workshop 2: Monday 25th November 2002

It was hoped participants would return to this workshop having completed a focus group activity. Some had done this while others had made preparations to do so. The focus of this session was to share experience to date but in particular to:

- consider ways in which the qualitative data generated by focus groups could be analysed
- reflect on the issues involved in conducting the focus group research

It was found in this session that one major approach to the analysis of qualitative data (Grounded Theory) required too high a level of research experience and expertise; the trainers therefore made an adjustment to the plan and explored a more straightforward way of analysing the data. Using thematic analysis on some illustrative case material it quickly became evident that focus group inquiry combined with effective data analysis technique is an excellent strategy to 'hear the learner's voice'. Appendix C contains a sample of the materials used during this session.

Workshop 3: Monday 27th January 2003

This session was the third and final session of the training and although there were a few participants yet to engage in research, by far the majority had held their first focus groups. We were able to connect the objectives of this session authentically to the experience of the participants and considered:

- the qualities of good research
- ways to disseminate the findings
- the structure and format of a good report
- key findings
- building on the research and the findings

The action research cycle was revisited and thoughts and strategies about future possibilities were explored. This session was also used as an opportunity to evaluate the success of the training initiative with participants encouraged to share their opinions openly and complete evaluation forms critiquing the exercise. Appendix D contains a sample of the materials used during this session.

Training Outcomes

An examination of the outcomes of the training will be provided in two main ways. Firstly a description of the range of research undertaken through the process of arranging and running focus groups will be provided; secondly interspersed through this section are illustrative case studies of particular examples of new practice arising directly from the focus group training.

Reaching potential learners

Participants reported on the groups they had tried focus group work with, in order to elicit attitudes and perceptions for non-participation:

- disaffected year 11 students
- unemployed men
- 18-30 year olds with basic skill needs who are *not* involved in basic skills courses
- retired older people (art and craft)
- retired people (reminiscence therapy)
- non-learners: people who had not engaged in learning for over 5 years
- rural dwellers
- carers
- mothers with young children

Other participants used focus groups to understand particular issues:

- factors attracting learners to a course
- factors keeping learners on a course
- the match between pre-enrolment information and the actual course

Clearly, the main concern was with those issues pertaining to participation and the resistancies to policies of inclusivity; those featuring most highly being unemployment and disaffection. Interestingly two participants felt they had been too ambitious in trying to access the voices of those on the extreme peripheries of society and had been unable to gather a focus group together. They reported they would be less ambitious in their next attempt.

CASE STUDY: REACHING POTENTIAL LEARNERS

Jill is a Learning Community Co-ordinator and used to working with diverse groups of people in her locality. However, without experience as a researcher she felt that she would like to try out her skills as a focus group facilitator in a non-threatening setting before attempting to reach non-learners.

Her innovative approach was to use a Student Union Executive Committee Meeting in her local college as a ready-made group. She negotiated access to this group through a college tutor and it was agreed that she would go along to a meeting to speak about work-related issues.

Using the guidelines from Session 1 she devised suitable questions, which she e-mailed to the tutor prior to the practice focus group. The questions centred on issues about learning, e.g. the messages the students received at home about learning and who supported them in making decisions about their future. They were, therefore, relevant not just to the focus of Jill's own training, but also to the group, and the tutor was happy for Jill to use them.

Jill's idea paid off. The real experience of running the practice focus group enabled her to reflect on the processes involved and brought to life the content and discussions in the training sessions. Her first realisation was that she asked too many questions. Her view now would be that she would certainly only aim at 4 in a 2-hour session. She felt she had handled the discussions within the group well: letting some comments go but probing others. She found the recording and writing up of the data easy and felt that she had made accurate field notes. To achieve this she had employed techniques discussed in the training sessions such as 'summarising' and 'reflecting back'. Jill sent her record to the tutor to disseminate the findings to the group.

Jill had successfully negotiated to use a ready-made group as a forum to practice her focus group skills and found that piloting the process in this way invaluable. The main advantages of it were that she felt that she went to the group in their familiar surroundings, they knew each other and were at ease: a factor which obviously made the learning experience for Jill less stressful. She felt that practising the process in this way has helped her confidence and was an important step, which will enable her to reach potential learners in the future.

Running a Focus Group

Course participants met with difficulties and mixed degrees of success in creating the focus groups and it was established that working with already existing groups was a valuable strategy. The ethics and propriety of paying for participation was considered in the training and a consensus emerged that it was perfectly appropriate to pay a nominal fee for peoples' time.

During the final workshop, trainees discussed some of the practicalities they considered vital to the smooth running of the focus groups.

- venues used should be welcoming and compatible with the learner's culture; it should not have negative associations
- refreshments should be provided
- meeting with already existing groups
- payment offered: some groups were paid £15 others were asked to 'talk for a tenner'.
- Buffet provided as an incentive, as was a £15 learning voucher

CASE STUDY: RUNNING A FOCUS GROUP

Eileen works in Community Education and is based in a local high school. She used an existing group to recruit members for her focus group. Ten invitations were accepted by members of a 'Mums and Tots' group. Eileen invited those who were not currently in the workplace or in formal learning. She felt they fitted the bill as 'potential learners' as their children would soon be progressing to school and they would probably have time to enter the workforce or undertake new learning opportunities.

Eileen's questions were designed to find out what they identified as their barriers to learning, what their attitudes to learning were, and what would make them become involved in learning again. Eileen offered £15 vouchers towards fees for Adult Education classes and made sure that she put the Learning Partnership logo on all materials.

Seven people turned up for the focus group session. The group was very quiet at the start and Eileen found it was difficult getting them to open up. Many of their responses were 'only a word or two, not deep contributions'. A novel way of overcoming communication barriers was to ask the group to put ideas and responses on 'Post-It Notes' and these were gradually built into a spider chart.

During a discussion in one training session she become aware of the difficulties in recording data and so she paid a person to scribe for her. This person was known to her and was experienced at taking notes and familiar with the topics that were being discussed. In fact she 'chipped into the conversation at one point - I don't know if that should really have happened'! Eileen felt that support was important. At one point she had a problem and rang a contact number that she had been given on the course and talked it through and sorted it out.

Eileen thought the data from the focus group did not produce any really new findings but that she had learnt a lot and had a lot of good ideas that she willingly shared with other members of the training course. She gained confidence and experience in running her focus group and has since organised another completely different group which involves men as participants. The venue is to be a pub: 'I've said to them that they can have a £15 voucher or I'll buy them a drink on the night of the focus group. It'll being interesting to see which one they'll choose'!

Her advice to potential facilitators after running her own focus group is: 'Be realistic. There is a reluctance to get involved in anything different or new. It is a real challenge trying to get groups together'.

Hearing the Learner's Voice

The substantive findings of each focus group are relative to the agendas and situations of the individual course participants and the reports written for each project will identify the barriers to participation as perceived and experienced by their focus group volunteers. The following however are some general findings discussed at the final course session:

- financial support is hugely important
- the role of the employer in supporting learning is significant
- tutorial staff attitudes must be supportive
- there should be a single point for acquiring information about learning opportunities
- there is embarrassment about not being able to ‘keep up’

- formal learning situations are often seen as intimidating
- low confidence and poor self-esteem play a crucial role in non-participation
- learning and course attendance have strong associations with a negative experience of childhood schooling
- other family members may not support or sabotage learning opportunities

CASE STUDY: HEARING THE LEARNER'S VOICE

Kate is a Student Liaison Adviser in a college and part of her job is evaluating students' experience of their courses. Two events in the Focus Group Training sessions prompted Kate to consider having someone to help her with recording the data when she ran her own focus groups.

First, as part of a role play exercise in the first session, course participants were involved in running a focus group. Kate realised during this exercise that there was "a lot going on" and she started to wonder how she would be able to record all the information. One of the factors that concerned her was how difficult it would be to record the data with a large group of participants, and decided then that group size was important to the potential success of the focus group. To hear the learner's voice she felt that a group of six would be ample.

During the second session, another participant was sharing his experiences about running a focus group and revealed that he had not recorded the data as the group progressed - he was too busy hosting the session, thinking about his questions and keeping track of the answers. He reported that he had relied on memory and written up notes on the session afterwards. Kate was unhappy about doing this as she would be using the information from her focus group to feed into the quality assurance system of the college. She needed to be sure of the validity of her findings.

These two events made Kate think seriously about how she would record the information during her session and she discussed her dilemma with a colleague who was also on the Focus Group Training course. They agreed that they would act as 'scribes' for each other.

Kate prepared her questions for the focus group but also prepared a written introductory statement, which included issues that she felt she might forget - such as confidentiality. However, she also included an explanation of her scribe's role and told the group that as facilitator she might have to stop the discussion so that she could check if the data was being recorded successfully. The group were therefore fully aware of what was going on. The scribe had no difficulty in taking verbatim notes and transcribed them as they were written.

The value of these notes to Kate was that when she read them she realised that she had forgotten some of the points that had been raised "if you are only looking for want you want you forget other stuff". Kate also found that she had to refer back to her notes later on to continue her research project and it proved very helpful to have an accurate record of the proceedings.

As a beginner in research, Kate felt she was not competent to facilitate, reflect on what was going on and record information all at the same time. When acting as scribe herself she learnt a great deal about the research process within the focus group and would feel more confident about facilitating a focus group again and would definitely use a scribe to record the learner's voice.

Dissemination Activities

The outcomes of the focus group training will consist of reports which will be written and disseminated by the participants who attended the course. The audience of these reports will be made as extensive as possible including where appropriate the focus group participants. At the time of writing this report that process is ongoing.

Course participants expressed a keen interest to disseminate the findings they gained from the focus group work and the course supported this objective by facilitating discussion of dissemination strategies. The following ways in which the findings will be publicised include the media, feedback events, reports, personal communications with local curriculum developers, publish on local learning web-sites, presentations and by increasing self-awareness and improvement of own practice

Conclusions and recommendations

The focus group training initiative commissioned by the NLP and delivered by The Research Centre of City College Norwich has clearly proved successful in helping local practitioners – from a diverse range of backgrounds - develop their research skills. These skills have in turn helped the trainees to 'hear the voice' of a range of marginalised groups who tend to resist inclusivity and conventional attempts to reach them. The full effectiveness of the initiative will be mirrored in the reports of the course participants and how these will be translated into good educational practice in the field. The action research cycle has supported this process and the seeds of a community of practice may have been sown.

With all such new communities of practice, there is the ongoing need for advice and support. Discussions during the final training session as to how this might be best implemented, were fruitful and the following recommendations could perhaps be considered by NLP as possibilities for future funding:

- Regular e-mail updates of participant progress.
- An electronic forum (perhaps a secure web-based bulletin board) for the exchange of development ideas and practical concerns regarding the running of focus groups.
- A physical forum for participants to discuss at regular intervals their changing research priorities.
- Support in planning joint collaborative projects between learning communities.
- The offer of inter-community assistance in the actual running of events.

Suggested further reading

Greenbaum, T. L. (2000). *Moderating Focus Groups A Practical Guide for Group Facilitation.* Sage: London.

Morgan, D.L. (1988). *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research.* Qualitative Research Methods Series, Volume 16. Sage: London.

Steward, A. (2002). The Value of Focus Groups. In C. Desira (Ed) *Research and Development Bulletin*, Volume 1, Number 2, 11-13.

Stewart, D. W. and Shamdasani, P. M. (1990). *Focus Groups Theory and Practice*. Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 20. Sage: London.

Some thoughts on 'insider' research

By Suzanne Crouch, HE Faculty, City College Norwich

> *"Full time research is not a job; it is a way of life and so one's life becomes woven into the research just as much as research becomes part of ones life."(*Moore, 1997: 87)

Insider research is firmly founded in the post-modernism school of research, which rejects the modernist view that there is a determinate world that can be definitely known and explained. Objectivity and value neutrality were seen as necessary in the modernist school to minimise the influence of particular interests in research, these interests or 'values' being regarded as sources of bias. Today, however, there are few defenders of the principle of value neutrality and the concept of objectivity has been challenged by many (Eisner, 1992; Harding, 1992). Post-modernism argues that social events, processes and phenomena are indeterminate and open ended and hence social sciences are sciences of indeterminacy and where theories do not succeed by predicting unique and determinate outcomes (Usher, 1999: 63). Post-modernism is a way of recognising the status of our knowledge not as truth, which in the modernist school was very often taken to imply it was undertaken in an objective and value neutral environment (Hammersly, 1999: 7), but as "claims" (Usher, 1999: 59). Claims which are socially formed and historically located cultural constructs and thus partial and specific to particular discourses. Post-modernism accepts the plurality of 'voices' (Winter, 1986) in these claims and rather than attempting to synthesis these voices into prescriptive logical unity, organises them into a montage, to bring out their ironies, contradictions, discrepancies, as opposed to the modernist stance that seeks unique determinate outcomes and the predicting of generalisations which require closure.

It is interesting to note that in the last couple of decades much insider research, and the rejection of objectivity within this post-modern framework, has been taken to new extremes where it is argued that researchers will not only have subjective views but that in many cases that they should explicitly align themselves with some particular group or category of actor. This way they carry out research in such a way as to serve that groups interests, described by Hammersly (1999: 7) as "partisanship" research. Among the most explicit declarations of partisanship are feminists who define the goal of their work to promote the emancipation of women (Mies, 1991); anti-racist researchers who see their task as to participate in the struggle against white racism (Back and Solomers, 1993) and disability researchers who formulate their goal as empowering the disabled to emancipate themselves from the conditions imposed by able bodied society (Oliver, 1992; Zarb, 1992).

Advocates of insider research applaud the approach as producing data that is richer and more direct than other methodologies and thereby a means of real study of social processes and complex inter-dependencies in social systems. Whilst critics deride it as:

> *"a romantic attempt to get close to the data which attempt gives rise to a host of ethical problems concerning the human rights and interests of subjects in relation to the study."* (McCall and Simmons, 1969: 4)

So what is insider research? It can at its simplest be regarded operationally as a blend of methods and techniques - i.e. some amount of social interaction in the field with subjects of the study, some direct and some participant observation of relevant events, some formal and a great deal of informal interviewing, some systematic counting, some collection of documents and artefacts and an open endness in the direction the study takes. Most of the methods and techniques it shares in common with the 'participant as observer' classification established by Gold (1958) in Murdoch (1980). However, in my opinion, there are some fundamental differences between insider research and participation observation.

The first is brought to light by the practice of partisan research that demonstrates the sharing of a cultural milieu at its most extreme. This shared background is seen by some as crucial in facilitating the trust to gain access to the data. Finch (1984) in her 'feminist' research, for example, points out that in her study of clergyman's wives the easy flow of information between researcher and researched was made possible by shared cultural position based on gender. Moreover, a further resource on which Finch was able to draw was her then position as a clergyman's wife; it was this revelation rather than her credentials as a sociologist that eased discussion with the women in her research. Bulmer (1988) makes the point that language is also important in defining the shared 'cultural milieu' and the art of fitting into a setting.

Ram (1996) highlights that the practice of insider research extends beyond this shared cultural understanding and encompasses the sharing of physical space and experiences.

> *"the value of the intimacy of the research site…it was an aid rather than an impediment to critical understanding serving as it did to deepen understanding of the internal processes of the workplace."*

Oakley takes this further and claims that in order to unravel complex issues emerging from the data it is necessary as "to be inside the culture".

Beyond culture and place, when reviewing the literature on participant observation another feature emerges. That is one of its temporary nature of the involvement of the researcher in the observed phenomena. Writers describe how in participant observation the organisation/social phenomenon has been in existence for some time before the researcher undertakes their study, the researcher seeks to become some kind of member of the observed group (Robson, 1993: 194), and how:

> "*the critical hypotheses do not reach full maturity until after the researcher has left the field*".

This is in juxtaposition with the experience of an insider researcher where the researcher will often have a long-term involvement with the phenomena beyond the life of the research, both before and after,

> *"One crucial view is that although the institute is newly established the relationships have long been established."* (Boyden, 1996: 10)

It would seem fundamental to the notion of insider research that the researcher does not assume a 'role' for the purposes of fieldwork but is involved above and beyond the aims and objectives of the research.

> *“An insider is involved in all the processes of the school and school community"* (Murdoch, 1980)

These factors of insider research bring with them issues, some of which are shared with other methodologies and some of which are intensified or unique to this methodology, that need to be examined in terms of their impact on the research, the research participants and the researcher themselves.

The role of a traditional naturalistic or 'outsider' researcher is overt. They are there to gather data and so 'the researched' one could assume are to some degree conscious of the research process alerted by the presence of the unusual and as a consequence reasonably careful in their behaviour and in expressing their opinions. In participant observation the researcher is making those relationships in order to facilitate the research, insider researcher takes this one step further and utilises existing and (hopefully) continuing relationships to gather information for the research. By comparison and in juxtaposition the insider researcher is by definition already in the field. This seems to me to pose a number of potential difficulties. To explore the phenomena which is being researched must mean to include to some extent a description of the group that is driving the phenomena, including making some assessment of the role that personalities play and the tensions that are brought with these personalities, roles and external influences and agendas. To portray the complexities of the situation it will be necessary to seek information from various sources to attempt to present its multi-faceted nature. This will undoubtedly present some challenges. Not the least of these will be encouraging people to speak of the detail of the group dynamics and the personalities involved in both a positive and negative light. Then as a researcher there will be the debate on the level of responsibility one has to the researched, and to ones self as a researcher, to ensure that no one is damaged by the process whilst balancing this with the desire to present a realistic portrayal of the process. Punch (1986) suggests that “as fieldworkers we need to exercise common sense and moral responsibility to our subjects first, to the study next and to ourselves last.” As a researcher I want to make use of established relationships but seek not to abuse them.

Despite having a protocol for the formal data collection, as an insider researcher, the opportunities for covert research are endless and this again raises further ethical and practical dilemmas. Within the context of ones work that also forms the fieldwork for ones data I am dealing with people who are my friends, colleagues and students who see me in this role and talk to me accordingly. If these snippets of chat and confidences become data, through for instance the recordings in one's research diary and the thoughts that are consequently provoked and recorded, to what extent should the voluntary contributors be informed? And if they are informed each time of something they've said or written may be used in research will I lose the open confidence which characterises these close working relationships. It is also clear that although access has been given overall and each formal interview is negotiated, this:

> *"negotiation of access is patently not a once and for all agreement but a continuous process of winning people's trust"* (Edwards, 1992)

As continued access will rely on how people feel subsequent to each data collection experience or encounter that they associate with the research.

It is not practical or most probably desirable to follow up on every source of data, however to lose this data detracts from the richness that supports the use of insider research. My solution in the end is to withdraw this contentious area from the research protocol in case it raises more questions that it answers and jeopardises my access to the research informants. In the end I am to rely upon “common sense and moral responsibility” (Punch, 1986: 45) but it does beg the question of where it leaves the good practice of developing a protocol if it can only address the areas where there are easy questions and clear solutions.

The protocol has, none the less, provided a vehicle for discussing the issues of confidentiality and anonymity with informants in the study, crucial to the democratic model of research (MacDonald, 1977). Rather than assuring total anonymity it has been important to be honest about the degree of anonymity in light of the small numbers likely to be in the study. This may well affect the responses that are given, so by offering initial confidentiality and the right to veto public dissemination it is hoped to encourage people to speak more openly. Although in the interests of gathering rich and varied data I hope this is power that my informants will not use or as Graef (1980: 172) puts it:

> *"It is like sending back wine at a smart French restaurant, where they challenge you to do it as they pour the first taste, but how often is that challenge taken up?"*

Ultimately research is not about maintaining a blanket of confidentiality but making information public and the protocol can be seen as a means offering:

> *"protection to the powerless and reassurance to the powerful"* (Fiddy, 1982.)

Although as an insider researcher there may be times that I will not be able to record data with the same care and regularity of an outside observer this is counter balanced by my tacit knowledge which runs much deeper than someone who is 'visiting' the events. However, this also presents another major challenge, that of “rendering the obvious problematic” (Stenhouse, 1976) or as Trafford, (2001:47), puts it:

> *"stripping away the unexamined theoretical baggage that surrounds practice and making the familiar seem strange and then to explain it."*

To achieve this Trafford (2001: 48) suggests that the researcher spends:

> *"some time searching through data in order to see connections between activities and events….It is not always easy though when sometimes we carry so much research information in our heads, as we seek to unravel it, this process intrudes on our everyday life."*

This highlights the blurred line between work and research and, whilst there are many advantages of being an insider researcher, one of the biggest challenges is balancing the research activities alongside a full-time job. There are tensions between wanting to carry out the development work, which is exciting, authentic, relevant and of immediate practical value, and wanting to satisfy academic requirements and last but not least balancing family life. These oppositional forces can lead to ethical decisions such as how much time one can and one should spend in each area. Equally problematic, focusing on the research, is the issue of how much time can be spent on each research activity. The decisions made will influence the scope and quality of the study and will influence my portrayal of the development and impact of the phenomenon. The dangers of undue specificity and/or partiality need to be highlighted here. Whilst qualitative research allows the researcher to acknowledge that their account may only be a 'snapshot in time' rather than a total 'true' picture of activities it is useful to take heed of the danger cited by Torrence (1989: 177), that is:

> *"exposing routine practice to potentially unfair criticism."*

Where a partial picture is used as an exemplar of bad practice.

Reflecting on the areas that will need balancing, I ask myself what will it feel like and mean as I cross the frontiers between my researcher self, occupational self and social self? As my work and the research increasingly overlap there are already some internal conflicts which are occurring. Dadds (1993: 301) identifies that as daily work and enquiry become intertwined, insider researchers often begin to feel a sense of professional and personal risk. She tells, for example, of tracing two teacher projects on their own teaching and shows how both became uncomfortably self-judgmental and deeply vulnerable. In this she makes the point that such risk cannot be divorced from the biography of researchers and the context in which their research is carried out. Interestingly she notes how we should be tentative in our predictions of where processes started by self-study should lead. Food for thought about how much of this discomfort is necessary to open one up to the new learning and becoming a sensitised researcher and when this self-criticism becomes destructive and self-defeating.

Part of this learning must be about how to balance role demands, striving to be both “stranger and friend” (Powdermaker, 1966: 34). In an ideal world I would be striving for:

> *"a divided consciousness that obliges one to enter into full acceptance of the game while one watches oneself accept this state".* (Thiner, 1985: 157)

However, in terms of self-preservation, which I believe to be important over a prolonged piece of research, I feel that these roles are more divided and that one slips from one to the other. At times, the sub-ordinating self demands in the interests of the researchers role and at other times waiving the researcher role in the interests of self, determined by the judgement one makes in terms of priorities or threats.

One of the major differences between outsider research and insider research is that it may be assumed that in outsider research, the researcher will leave the field and draw their conclusions in the relative freedom and haven of seclusion. Consequently they may have fewer concerns about the effects of their study and conversely, their informants and participants, as a consequence to no ongoing involvement, may be able to dismiss the research account and findings, if they so wish. This compares very differently to the insider researcher who will be aware that they and their informants and participants will have to live with the consequences of recounting the research process and its resultant findings. Aware that the study could affect:

> *" the delicate credibility structures amongst one's own colleagues"* (Griffiths, 1985: 127)

Some have argued that insider research should take no account of *'practical values'* (Hammersley, 1999: 15) that is the factors that impact on research beyond the actual boundaries of the research. That the researcher should solely be concerned with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. I think that it would be naïve to believe that in insider researcher, where relationships extend well beyond the research, that 'practical values', such as the impact of divulgence and publication, can be ignored and that this would be at odds with the notion of "common sense and moral responsibility" (Punch, 1986). In my opinion practical values can and should play a part in the selection of both problems for investigation and approaches to writing up and publication. These values may have a direct impact on whether the research becomes a tool or book in a dusty book cover on a shelf. Relating this to "research as praxis" (Lather, 1986: 272) the validity of the research can be considered as having 'catalytic validity' that is the

> *"The degree to which the research process re-orients, focuses and energises participants towards knowing a reality in order to transform it."*(Lather, 1986: 272)

The key between this concept of validity and practical values lies in the word 'energises'. If no attention is paid to the consequences of the research and handling the data without thought to how the research may be taken, the risk is the participants may be enervated and therefore the research loses its catalytic validity.

One of the ways of dealing with the challenges and hurdles of this insider research is to make visible the researcher's background and position in the field. In this way my story will contribute to the reader's vicarious experience and give them a background for the judgements and decisions they may make based on the reading. In this way the overall validation of the research will be shared with the reader, who will still be dependent on what I tell them about the context and methods but will have:

> *"intuit as to the integrity of the service"* (Stake, 1985: 34*)*

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An Independent Evaluation of the ESF 'Extending New Deal' (END) Project

By Tim Chapman, The Research Centre, City College Norwich

The following is an extract taken from the final evaluation report delivered in February 2003.

Evaluation Rationale

Why evaluate?

Experience shows that multi-partner initiatives such as the European Social Fund (ESF) Extending New Deal (END) project benefit from the inclusion of an independent evaluation exercise. This is an exercise that can explore notions of accountability and continuous improvement, which are watchwords in the public sector and in the delivery of their services (Robson, 1993). An independent evaluation is a tool that can provide critical understanding of the functioning of services, innovations and project work. Moreover, if the evaluation is qualitative in orientation, then it can portray the complexity of activities undertaken and convey holistic impressions of the experiences of people involved with the project to as wide a constituency of interested parties as possible. If the evaluation has a formative component then it will facilitate the understanding of strengths, weaknesses and issues within the project, which can be utilised as part of a complex set of influences on the future development of activities. If the evaluation results in a summative report, then this can elicit the indicators and effects of good practice within the innovation, as well as providing an overview. If data gathered is in the form of direct personal experience, the analysis contained within the end report can be used to create a comprehensive understanding of the project and its effects on participants and other stakeholders in a language that is comprehensible and in this way fulfil an important role in disseminating project results and products.

Evaluation Aims

The Evaluation proposal was an integral part of the ESF Objective Three funding application. It explained that The Research Centre would supply the independent element of the project monitoring systems. The Research Centre is an independent research centre of Anglia Polytechnic University (APU) and a part of City College Norwich’s (CCN) Centre for Professional Development. The New Deal in Norfolk evaluation policy required the project to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from participants and as such it was agreed that the focus of the independent evaluation should be to primarily provide an in-depth qualitative picture of the projects development to compliment the ongoing monitoring of CCN's New Business Funding Services.

A longitudinal process was proposed for this complimentary evaluation consisting of three phases of activity: ongoing monitoring, periodic formative evaluation and, final analysis and reporting. Although independent and formative, implicit in the design of the evaluation was a responsibility to report issues to the Project Steering Group on a routine basis in order to ensure that, “the project will be able to remain responsive to changing client needs as well as be reflective of its own practice”.

Ultimately, the evaluation team felt the overriding aim of the study to be to illuminate issues surrounding the best practice of the project with a view to impacting upon the continued development of project working at CCN and the wider partnership working involved in the consortium.

The study was commissioned by the END project in May 2001 to run parallel with the project timescale, terminating in December 2002. The research methodology was designed to be as efficient in this time period as possible.

Evaluation Methodology

The methodology utilised in the course of this evaluation has been essentially qualitative. The study has been exploratory and inductive in order to elicit the attitudes and perceptions of as wide a sample of participants as possible. The primary form of data collection has been formal semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of project participants including regular interviews with the Project Manager and END project team. The study has been inductive in the sense that END is a project in development with ever shifting dynamics, the sample has been purposive (Robson, 1993) because in order to capture this shifting dynamic, the nature of the relevant sample was constantly changing. The end result was a data mountain that took a considerable amount of time to decipher, the explanation given for the delivery of this report later than first expected. In total, the evaluation team conducted ninety separate in-depth interviews with over one hundred interviewees, over the eighteen-month timescale.

In addition to regular interviews with the Project Manager and END project team, interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of New Deal Advisers (NDAs) and Jobcentre Plus Managers, training providers and a broadly representative sample of New Deal clients that had accessed the project services.

In addition to interviews with the above stakeholders, the evaluation undertook direct observation of the project environment. That is to say that the evaluation sought to be present at most of the significant events during the project, including promotional events, Steering Group meetings, project team meetings and dissemination events. By observing the activities of the project it was expected that a deep understanding of the depth of the projects integration into the diverse contexts of the partnership would be felt by the evaluators, in order to feed the interpretation of all collected data.

As the project progressed and data was analysed, the understanding of the evaluation team developed and questioning around emergent themes became more directed. Thereby, the study was subject to a ‘progressive focussing’ (Parlett and Hamilton, 1977) where the build up of information directly informs future investigation. This forms part of the underpinning philosophy of the study, namely ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1973), the idea that the evaluator is able to account for their presence in the context.

All interviews were transcribed in full and subjected to rigorous analysis. In conjunction with other sources of data, field notes both reflective and of direct observation, formal minutes of meetings and a range of other project-related documentation, these transcripts were triangulated against each other in order to arrive at a fair and balanced understanding of participants’ attitudes and perceptions towards the END project (Silverman, 2000).

In qualitative studies there are varying degrees of democracy (MacDonald, 1977). At the outset of all interviews it was explicitly explained that the study was independent of the project and that for the purpose of a full understanding of the dynamics of the situation it would be valuable if the interviewee could be open and candid. Within this it was explained that every effort would be made in reporting to make data anonymous in both name and context, if this were not possible, consent would be sought for the context in which the data was to be used. In this respect, all New Deal clients interviewed were asked to complete a Research Protocol Form outlining their understanding of these conditions of participation and the protection they were afforded under the Data Protection Act 1998. Within evaluations of multi-partner projects such as END it is understood that the consequent diplomacy needed in such an analysis may be tested and therefore the study enters the true democratic process at this first draft stage. At this point, this evaluation report is a restricted document with circulation restricted to the project Steering Group and a limited number of other key stakeholders in their own organisations. As such it is a working document and subject to change. Further amendment or dissemination will be at the subsequent request of the Steering Group.

At the proposal writing stage of the project it was originally envisaged that a summative questionnaire would be distributed to all Beneficiaries in order to gauge their satisfaction with the project as a service. It soon became apparent as data was collected that given the abundance of interview material and the sheer geographical scope of this data gathering exercise, that a supplementary questionnaire was beyond the capacity of the evaluation team. The decision to restrain the evaluation to one primary form of data was reinforced in the light of the fact that the final ESF closure report of the END project that this document compliments will report of levels of user satisfaction in a more quantitative sense.

In November 2002, CCN received confirmation from the Government Office for the Eastern Region (Go-East) that sufficient funds had been secured to enable the project to continue until March 2003. Thus effectively bridging any gap between the current project and a subsequent reincarnation (proposed for to Jobcentre Plus as a recognised Co-financing Organisation). It must be highlighted here that this evaluation seeks only to explore the projects development as it occurred within the original timescale of the proposal (January 2001 – December 2002).

The fundamental purpose of this document then, is to assist the END project by ‘illuminating’ (Parlett and Hamilton, 1977) the attitudes and perceptions of participants as to its development thus far and to their ultimate aspirations for its future. It is constrained by the nature and depth of its methodology, it seeks to arrive at one possible interpretation of the projects effectiveness. Ultimately it accepts that from the perspective of the reader there may be omissions or oversights of detail; it hopes however that what it provides is a fair and balanced portrait of the initiative that may have longer-term impact.

The ESF Extending New Deal (END) project

The END project is the direct development of a previous ESF funded project also led by CCN. The Additional New Deal (AND)[16] project ran from February 2000 until June of the

[16] ESF project reference number 991146EA3

same year. Although also with the specific aim of increasing the employability of beneficiaries by providing funding for additional training not available within New Deal, it differed from the END project in the respect that it specifically targeted only the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and was tied closely to those NDYP clients currently undertaking a New Deal Option. The project provided a wide range of training in the short timescale to 223 beneficiaries, amounting to 31.4% of the total start figures for the New Deal target group. In a summative evaluation written by the Project Manager it was recommended that the project approach should be taken forward given the high level of need for additional support within the NDYP target group and the perceived successful outcomes of the project.

As a consequence, the New Business Funding Services Unit of CCN, in consultation with AND partners and the Employment Service revisited the objectives of the AND project and formulated a new joint bid for submission to the ESF Objective 3 bidding round in October 2000. Confirmation of funding came early in 2001 and the project was initiated in May of that year with match funding being secured from the Employment Service. A launch event was held at Easton College Conference Centre on 16 May 2001 to disseminate the key objectives of the project and answer any immediate questions from delegates representing the partnership and other interested organisations.

The END project aims to give added value to existing provision of the Government's New Deal for Norfolk beneficiaries of the NDYP and the New Deal for the Long Term Unemployed (NDLTU). The project administers funding for additional training and grants for equipment and tools that are not available under New Deal, the proposal stated that END would also encompass advice, counselling and one-to-one support through a team of dedicated Development Project Officers (DPOs). The primary aim of the project is to remove barriers to employment, as well as to improve and sustain employability. The key barriers it seeks to address include:

- Lack of access to opportunities for employment, education and training
- Lack of money for necessary tools and equipment to access employment
- Lack of access to ICT, social, vocational and key skills

The proposal stated that END would add value to New Deal by extending the training hours on the programme's current provision to enable beneficiaries to complete specialist vocational training and additional and higher NVQ units, whilst on New Deal Options. Employability would be increased as beneficiaries could choose to complete additional training such as driving lessons and forklift lessons, gaining necessary skills essential for the local labour market. The project also aimed to extend the specialist help offered on the Gateway to beneficiaries on their New Deal Options to enable them to increase the sustainability of their employment.

The project is led by CCN but includes the support and participation of twelve different partners:

- Jobcentre Plus
- Great Yarmouth College
- Easton College
- Norfolk Adult Education
- Norfolk Careers Service

- Norwich YMCA Services
- Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services
- Broadland Council Training Services
- Norfolk County Council Training Services
- Mancroft Advice Project
- Matthew Project
- NORCI[17]

At the same time as funding was acknowledged for the END project, City College also heard that funding for a second project with the same time-scale would be forthcoming. The ESF Pathways to Employment project (P2E), often described as the 'sister project' of END operates within the same consortium but aims to provide services to the unemployed from day one of unemployment. It is specifically targeted at unemployed people not eligible for New Deal and aims to add value by supporting employability through a one-to-one individually tailored programme of additional training provision.

Originally due for completion in December 2002, the END project has now been given continuation funding to extend its activities until the end of March 2003. A subsequent bid for the funding of a further END project (END II) has been submitted to Jobcentre Plus as an ESF Co-financing organisation and is being considered for funding with a proposed start date in April of this year.

Development issues and considerations for the future

It is the purpose of this section to provide a brief overarching analysis of the areas of good practice, areas for further consideration and issues for future development that gives equal weight to the different perspectives that emerged from the evaluation.

> *"This is invaluable what they get here. It is totally outside of what we have to offer our clients it is completely different to anything else we have had. It enhances everything else we have."* (New Deal Adviser)

It must be stressed that this evaluation has been formative in nature and as such has already informed the development of the project on an ongoing basis. The primary mechanism for this reporting has been through attendance and active participation in the project Steering Group, the initial conclusions of the final analysis having been reported to the group in December 2002. Moreover, the evaluation process has already directly affected the development of the successor bid to END through active collaboration with CCN's New Business Funding Services and summative feedback to the New Business Funding Co-ordinator during the bid-writing period.

It is therefore below, important to view the issues as live problems to be born in mind in the deployment and development of the son / daughter of END or other similar multi-partner projects that seek to enhance New Deal programmes.

What has worked well

[17] Now known as Meridian East.

> "Employability is the ability to secure and keep a job. This ability relies upon an individual's skills, motivation and, to some degree, luck" (Wells, 2001)

It has been widely reported that the project has been, despite some operational hiccups, a great success. Focussed upon increasing the employability of the long-term unemployed it offers an additional intervention that has been universally welcomed as motivational. As the above quote rightly recognises, motivation is an essential factor in the employability of any individual. Recently, Hertfordshire University has conducted extensive research (Wiseman, 2003) funded by The Leverhulme Trust into the subject of luck, that is more than pertinent to fully understanding the potential success of the END project. Dr Richard Wiseman who heads the Perrott-Warrick research unit at Hertfordshire University, argues that luck is ultimately connected to the positive outlook of an individual and that this stems from being receptive to chance interventions with potentially positive outcomes. Lucky people, putting it simply have 'half-full glasses', and are consequently persistent in the face of difficulties or failures. In many instances it has been the experience of the evaluation team that even the smallest motivating intervention with New Deal clients and END beneficiaries has positively affected their outlook and consequently, perhaps their luck.

> *"The things I have heard has been very positive, everybody has been very, very appreciative, and can't believe their luck that they really can have all those things. It does actually provide the things they need." (New Deal Training provider)*

Central to the success of the END project is the establishment of the role of the Development Project Officers (DPOs), a highly demanding role that requires a complex mix of counselling, assessment and inter-personal skills. Individual beneficiary success relied heavily on the ability of DPOs to form close working relationships with NDAs and training providers based on transparency of information and ultimately also, trust. The independence of the assessment of New Deal clients and the independent administration of additional resources for beneficiaries was highly valued by New Deal staff and many training providers, whose own systems and resources were unable to provide this flexibility.

The flexibility and range of provision offered by the project was fully appreciated by both partners and beneficiaries. In most cases the provision was viewed as client-led and individually tailored to compliment career aspirations and long-term goals. The END provision was initially viewed by some beneficiaries with suspicion, or even disbelief. This may arise from long-standing misconceptions and stereotypes or previous negative experiences of the welfare system generally. However, it is the conclusion of the evaluation team that the END project has been highly effective in dovetailing its provision to that of New Deal and has by default, increased beneficiary confidence in the system as a whole.

Perhaps one of the key areas of success implicit in all the development of the project partnership and consequent systems was the effective normalisation of, and acceptability of, soft outcomes. The issue of whether, driving lessons in particular, could be effectively correlated to outcomes was the subject of some considerable discussion amongst interviewees. Although some felt that criteria needed to be tightened in terms of the level and extent of provision, generally speaking, the term 'soft outcome' was widely used with respect to the change in attitude of beneficiaries accessing project services. Clearly, many of the partners equated noticeable increases in beneficiaries' self-esteem and focus with a justifiable outcome against the expenditure. This is to be celebrated, especially given that it is a widely held belief that this client group is by no means homogenous and that many of the long-term unemployed have considerable distance to travel and individual barriers to overcome, in order to reach satisfaction with their own ‘employability’.

What has worked not so well

Upon reflection certain issues arising during the evaluation process stand out as having had on balance a negative impact upon the project teams ability to deliver in the seamless way they had hoped. Firstly, it is clear that the project as a whole would have greatly benefited from an adequate lead-in period prior to the marketing of the objectives to partners and definitely prior to the commencement of interviewing beneficiaries. A lead in period, of for instance three months from the project commencement date, would have allowed the lead partner sufficient time for robust dialogue with all partners on issues of match funding, eligibility, beneficiary targets and partner roles and responsibility. These issues having to be resolved over the course of the project had a significant impact upon the consistency of delivery, which was seen as regrettable by all partners.

Again in retrospect, the decision to manage and administer two ESF Objective 3 projects in parallel was viewed by many interviewed to have had negative repercussions. The immense level of need for the END project significantly overshadowed the development of the P2E project in the first six months of delivery. Often, development projects of this type although appearing at first quite similar, require considerable effort to be placed behind strengthening existing partnerships and building new ones. In future projects, considerable thought should be given to ensuring adequate staffing solutions are designed for specific beneficiaries needs to be satiated.

Eligibility for the END project was continually subject to considerations regarding suitability of provision. Systems to efficiently marry the objectives of the provision of END to the objectives of New Deal provision on a case-by-case basis have developed over the course of the project and have been most effective where consistent and transparent communication has existed between the DPOs, NDAs and training providers. There was some emergent evidence regarding the barriers to sharing beneficiary progress information on the project, relating particularly to accessing DPOs on the phone for updates.

All partners recognised the difficulties associated with operating a countywide project of this nature. Although every effort was made by the END project team to ensure a fair and even spread of provision from the Norwich base, there was a perception amongst some of the partners that at times the project was overly demand led, with more interviews taking places in larger areas of unemployment. With the project exceeding its original targets, interviews were suspended, creating concerns amongst some partners eager to refer deserving cases to the project. The understaffing of the END project team for a prolonged period, exacerbated concerns regarding an equitable rationing of services.

Given the importance of the effective communications systems to the smooth running of the project, it was felt by some partners that the Steering Group did not live up to its potential as a forum for exchange of information and, more over, for providing the project with constructive feedback at times of difficulty.

What of the future?

A joint partnership proposal of the same consortium members for a continuation project to follow END is currently being considered for funding from the first round of Co-Financing funding to be administered through Jobcentre Plus. Extending New Deal 2 (END2) has further resources to enhance the provision of New Deal to the same client groups as END. Consortium backing for the continuation of this project concept is in itself recognition that the overarching aims of the project are timely and needed. It also represents legitimisation of the approach taken to implement this provision.

There are recommendations implicit throughout the evaluation report in the individual testimony of the many different people interviewed. They essentially represent the multitude of different perspectives that would be expected in a partnership as diverse as the END project. Of key importance to the ongoing success of this project is that in any future project there are effective mechanisms for ensuring that this multitude of perspectives is heard and that the project find forums in which to establish an ongoing dialogue about the issues of eligibility of New Deal clients, the suitability of New Deal clients and provision, manageable county-wide targets, monitoring systems and all the other issues that emerged as the project progresses. Given the candour and openness of all project participants to the independent evaluation process, it is expected that this should not be an impossible task.

It is the conclusion of the evaluation team that the project has more than succeeded in fulfilling its original objectives and has established a strong and energetic partnership for delivering critical interventions for the long-term unemployed. It may not be unique as an ESF project having exceeded its original targets, however, any such future project should be mindful that given the experience of END, clear and realistic targets should be firmly set at the outset. A key recommendation to END2 therefore would be that it establishes an immediate period from the start date of funding in which it seeks full consultation on the extent of the client group need, before it commences operation. Consultation should also consider what are the most appropriate staffing solutions for the project in order that it might best service these commonly understood targets.

If you are interested in the full report or would like further information please contact Suzanne Crouch, HE Development Manager, Centre for Professional Development, City College Norwich, on 01603 773354 or scrouch@ccn.ac.uk.

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THE RESEARCH CENTRE

CITY COLLEGE NORWICH

Work in Progress

An Independent Evaluation of the LSC Level 2 Local Initiative Fund Parents as Educators Project

The Parents to Educators Project is funded by the LSC Local Initiative Fund until the end of August 2003. The aim of the project is to encourage young parents (under 26) to return to education through offering an OCN accredited level 2 qualification which will enable them to understand and support their own children's learning at Key Stage One. This project also has a further aim of encouraging these parents to start to consider Higher Education for themselves and their children. The project will also be offering an additional module on CLAIT PLUS in June 2003 to young people between the age of 17 and 21 years old who do not hold a Level 2 qualification.

The Research Centre has been commissioned to undertake an independent formative evaluation of the effectiveness of this initiative. The evaluation aims to provide an in-depth qualitative picture of the projects development in the interim stages and the impact this has had on participants, to compliment the ongoing monitoring by the appointed Project Co-ordinator at City College. This will inform the progression of the project and future project activity at City College Norwich. Data gathering began in April and will be completed by June 2003. This involves conducting semi-structured interviews and a focus group with a selection of participants on both courses to provide an in-depth exploration of their background, views on the project and how this has impacted on their aspirations for the future. Key internal stakeholders will also be interviewed to provide an overview of the development of the project in the initial stages. Interim feedback was presented to the project steering group in May 2003, and the final evaluation report will be delivered in July 2003.

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LSDA – R&D Toolkit Co-ordinator

To co-ordinate the delivery and development of the Learning and Skills Development Agency's (LSDA) Research and Development (R&D) Toolkit scheme. Working closely with the R&D Toolkit Administrator and the LSDA Research Manager, the responsibilities include:

- Overseeing the organisation of Toolkit sessions
- Managing the update of all Toolkit materials
- Developing new topics
- Developing the website

- Managing the induction of new facilitators

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Phoenix Project (AHERO): Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace: An Action Research

The project aims to facilitate through action research within public sector organisations a better understanding and consequently better informed support mechanisms for the issue of mental illness in the workplace. Earlier this year the project was brought to Norwich, we were able to work with Social Services to further the investigation. Since that time a group involved in the project will be presenting a paper at the NIMHE Showcase Conference (University of Essex, Colchester) 23rd June, 2003. A paper will also be published in Community Care Magazine, June the 5th this year. Further developments will follow as a result of this project.

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Primary Research into Student and Employer Needs in Relation to HE courses and Delivery at City College Norwich

The Higher Education Faculty at City College has recently commenced some research into student and employer needs in relation to HE courses and delivery at City College Norwich. The research seeks to gain qualitative information from the two main target groups on perceived barriers and needs in relation to Higher Education delivered in Further Education, and particularly at City College. The research started in January, and involves interviews with a selection of participants in the two target groups, employers and students. This data gathering exercise will be completed in March 2003 and will be analysed to produce a final written synthesis of the findings. The final report was delivered in April 2003. The findings of the research will be disseminated at the HE staff conference at Easton College on Tuesday July 8th 2003.

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Soft Outcomes, Universal Learning (S.O.U.L)

The Research Centre working with a consortium led by Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services, has secured over £190,000 of funding from the Community Fund Research Grants Programme to undertake a two and a half year research project modelling the soft outcomes of teaching and learning in the voluntary sector. Monitoring systems for training and development initiatives have traditionally focused on 'hard' or quantitative outcomes. Many voluntary organisations have felt that these 'hard' outcomes fail to adequately capture the progression of their clients. There is also a growing recognition by funders that 'hard' measures do not give a complete picture of the client's progress and, therefore, of the success of the project or programme.

The S.O.U.L. research will undertake an action research approach to examine the impact of informal learning on the progress towards social inclusion for these service users. Further to this, it will investigate the development of a model or a process of mapping progression and soft outcomes through the use of soft indicators. As much of the work of voluntary organisations is with communities, volunteers and voluntary organisations, there will be ample opportunity to adapt or use this resulting model / process nationally and in a multitude of settings, both within the not-for-profit sector and in other educational settings. It is anticipated that the S.O.U.L project will begin in the next few months and The Research Centre will be recruiting two Research Fellows for the project. These posts will be advertised nationally and internally, offering the possibility for potential secondments for City College staff.

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