



**Forum for the Advancement of Continuing Education
The Organisation for Lifelong Learning**

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FACE 2003 Conference Report Back

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Editorial

This time last year we eagerly awaited the publication of the government's white paper on higher education. After almost a year of debate on top-up fees, student grants and student debt, both the government and opponents of its white paper are bracing themselves for a long and bitter campaign. Battle will commence on Nov 26th with the Queen's speech, announcing a higher education bill - followed by the bill's first and second readings in the House of Commons - after which time it goes before a standing committee to discuss proposed amendments.

NUS President Mandy Telford is looking to rebellious Labour MPs to support the argument that poor students will shoulder the debt for higher education. This view is supported by Claire Callender, Professor of Social Policy at London South Bank University, whose research suggests that students who are poor before going into higher education are more likely to leave university with larger debts than their middle class peers (THES, 21/11/03).

Secretary of State for Education Charles Clarke will be pushing Alan Johnson, the new higher education minister, and former trade union negotiator, into the ring to present the case for the government. The claim being used by the minister at present, that students enjoy a higher standard of living than ever before, and spend more on entertainment than past students, will do nothing to endear government proposals to students and critics of the white paper. The main supporters of the government appear to be vice chancellors who are attracted by the prospect of more cash for universities. The question is whether rebellious Labour MPs can be brought into line with government policy by ministers making some minor concessions.

As for poorer students, the widening participation lobby and those interested in social equity, Claire Callender's recent pronouncement has an ironic ring '...the main beneficiaries of the abolition of grants and larger student loans will be wealthy students'. It looks as though the very people the government aimed to attract to post-compulsory education may prove to be further alienated and excluded.

Carmel Dennison, Managing Editor

FACE's response to the Schwartz enquiry



Professor Steven Schwartz, who is heading an inquiry into entry into higher education, says that universities might look at more than an applicant's academic ability - encouraging a wider range of students to apply.

He rejected accusations that an admissions system which would allow the government's target for 50% of young people to go to university meant lowering standards.

The Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group, set up by the government, wants to start a national debate about how entry to higher education could be "fair and unbiased". So far the admissions task force is presenting options and inviting responses, rather than making recommendations - with the final report to be delivered next year.

John Storan, Chair of FACE responded on behalf of FACE members:

FACE shares and supports the government's objective of widening and increasing participation in HE. It is vitally important that in both reaching out to and developing the arrangements for admission that a wide range of factors are taken into account. Without this, not only will the sector be unlikely to achieve the participation target set by government, it will also remain severely under-representative of all the communities it aims to provide HE to.

FACE recognises that providers of HE are operating in different ways in relation to admission. For some providers it is a process governed by the need to select out applicants. For other providers the emphasis is on recruiting into programmes. Very often institutions have admissions staff who are doing both selecting and recruiting depending on the demand that exists.

To see FACE's full response to the Schwartz enquiry, please go to our website: <http://www.f-a-c-e.org.uk>

FACE National Issues

Lifelong Learning in the Knowledge Society: Threats and Opportunities



Below we publish Professor Peter Scott's keynote speech, delivered on the second day of the 2003 FACE annual conference. The speech aroused great interest and debate at the conference, particularly as delegates wrestled with the idea of the need to invent a new paradigm of lifelong learning. Because of this interest we are publishing Peter's speech in full and inviting readers to respond by forwarding their thoughts and ideas to the editor - to be published in the next edition of the newsletter.

The title I have chosen for my speech is 'Lifelong Learning in the Knowledge Society: Threats and Opportunities'. A curious title some of you may think, because 'lifelong learning' and the 'knowledge society' should go hand-in-glove. After all a society suffused by knowledge, a society in which knowledge is the prime resource, is also a society in which knowledge will have to be constantly refreshed and renewed, a society that places the highest possible value on lifelong learning. In general that may be true – but there are two important caveats (which is why I have introduced the idea of 'threats' as well as 'opportunities' into my title):

i) The first is that the knowledge society is not necessarily a society that values knowledge – in the sense of culture and science, which we

instinctively associate with the word 'knowledge'. It is also a society dominated by massive data-flows controlled by sophisticated knowledge-management systems on a global basis. Although such a society will generate increasing demand for lifelong learning, this may take the form predominantly of training within the knowledge industries – think 'call centres'.

ii) The second caveat follows on from the first one. It may be that our existing paradigm of lifelong learning will have to radically change in order to adapt to the needs of the knowledge society. After all, that paradigm (or paradigms) is / are still associated with self-improvement

(even individual enlightenment) within an adult liberal education context, or community improvement within a radical political (even oppositional) context, or continuing professional development within the context of élite (or semi-élite) professions. We may need to develop a new paradigm of lifelong learning linked much more to work-based learning, to the skills agenda, to the mass media and (even) home entertainment.

So my argument will be that we need to invent a new paradigm of lifelong learning – or, rather, that we need to work to extend the present paradigm so that our existing emphases on adult liberal education, community radicalism and professional up-dating are not lost but that we can engage the new forms of lifelong learning that are now emerging. Otherwise there is a risk that we, the continuing education community, get by-passed by new lifelong learning communities with different, and perhaps uncongenial, values. I would like, therefore, to cover three main topics:

- the first is to offer you a brief sketch of the knowledge society – which, as I have already said, is far from being a straightforward, predictable, linear phenomenon (or formation);
- the second is to discuss the lifelong learning needs that arise from the emergence of the knowledge society – or, perhaps better, the intensification of the knowledge society because all human societies are ‘knowledge’ societies;
- the third is to speculate on how our existing conceptions of lifelong learning may need to be adapted to satisfy these new needs – but without abandoning our core values.

The idea of a knowledge society is not new. All human societies have been ‘knowledge’ societies –

although the ‘knowledge’ in question may have been religious, symbolic, tacit rather than codified or scientific. So the question we have to ask is – what’s new? Clearly something is new. There are almost too many ‘societies’ to choose from – post-industrial, post-Fordist, informational, network, risk, audit – and so it goes on. But I would highlight just three very broad trends, or characteristics – acceleration, uncertainty and new patterns of knowledge production.

The first is the acceleration of all those trends, many well-established for several decades, associated with the idea of a ‘knowledge society’ – which itself has been progressively redefined. Daniel Bell’s essentially technocratic vision of a society that had grown out of ideological conflict has been superseded by darker visions of exclusion and risk. The regular rhythms of the mechanical age, dominated by the forces of production (and, also, of classical Weberian bureaucracy, whether state or corporate) are being replaced by the irregular (even chaotic) rhythms of the electronic age, dominated by the forces of consumption. The results are all around – round-the-clock round-the-globe financial and other markets are only the most obvious. But there are four particular dimensions of this general acceleration that are worth noting:

- i) the first is technological, the remorseless rise of information and communication technologies. This has made an enormous impact on every aspects of our lives – from leisure (such as computer games), through management systems (which allow us to manipulate massive data-sets) to the overall configuration of production and consumption. Both time and space have been, in a sense, ‘abolished’. We now live in an ‘extended present’ without such a strong sense of either the past or the future, and our ‘neighbours’ are no longer the people next door but are now distributed around the

network society (to borrow Manuel Castells' phrase);

ii) but this technological revolution has been accompanied by a cultural revolution – which itself has many dimensions. One is new patterns of social interaction (of which the mobile phone is the most ubiquitous example, but equally significant is the rise of 'virtuality' and highly sophisticated visualisation techniques); another is the dominance of global brands – such as Nike or Coca Cola. How are communities created, and sustained, in such an environment;

iii) the third dimension of acceleration, of course, is the wider dominance of the 'market' – and the application of 'market' discourse to non-commercial domains. Ten years ago Francis Fukuyama heralded the 'End of History'. More recently Philip Bobbitt has developed the idea of a 'market state' as the successor to the nation (and welfare) state. Some dismiss this worship of the 'market' as a temporary aberration. Others fear it runs deeper, that there may be a more fundamental incompatibility between acceleration, combining increasing volatility with more intense innovation, and the regularity (rationality?) principles on which the welfare state is based;

iv) a fourth, and final, dimension of acceleration follows from the third. The modern world is (perhaps was, because we now moving into a late-modern, or post-modern, phase) a structured kind of place – both conceptually in terms of grand categories like the state, the market, culture, science and so on; and organisationally in the sense that there were recognisable and relatively stable systems and institutions – health-care, education, political parties, companies and so on. All this seems to be changing. The boundaries between these

grand categories are becoming much more fuzzy; systems are becoming more volatile; organisations are being 'hollowed out'. Things are moving too fast to be able to settle down.

The second trend can be summed up in a single word – uncertainty. Alongside the 'knowledge society' has grown up the 'risk society'. Contemporary society is a remorseless producer of uncertainties – about individual identity, about social affinities, about gender

roles and, of course, about jobs and careers. And these

uncertainties cannot be reduced, still less eradicated, because they are derived from the processes of acceleration and innovation. Instead they must be accommodated and internalised – either by accepting, as I said before, that we live for the moment, in a kind of 'extended present' or through elaborate protocols designed to 'manage' risk which are characteristic of the so-called 'audit society' with all its 'rituals of verification' (like the RAE or quality assurance!).

The third trend is changes in the way that knowledge is produced. This has been described in terms of a shift from so-called 'Mode 1' research, traditional forms of scientific research, to 'Mode 2' knowledge production – which is characterised by the multiplication of research sites (and 'knowledgeable' actors), by the growth of trans-disciplinary research and by an increasing emphasis on application. But now perhaps even more radical changes are under way:

- one is a shift beyond reliable knowledge, the kind that produced by empirical research and experimental science, to socially robust knowledge, which is able to accommodate multiple perspectives and withstand often violent controversies (genetic modifications of plants, animals and – ultimately – ourselves is a good example);

We need to invent a new paradigm of lifelong learning

- a second is a shift beyond contexts-of-application, which can to some extent be planned (and are the staple of most science, technology and innovations policies with their 'foresight' exercises and other 'bets on the future'), to contexts-of-implication, which can only be cloudily envisioned. Science has become a reflexive domain;
- a final shift is from cognitively-grounded disciplines policed by scientific communities to 'transaction spaces' within a wider public arena in which new knowledge is formed.

I apologise for offering such a brief, and relatively theoretical, sketch of the knowledge society. But I wanted to get away from the technology-driven, and rather limited, accounts of the knowledge society that tend to dominate public discussion. In my view the knowledge society is much more complex – and much more interesting. It is fractured, contradictory, contested – and, above all, volatile and unstable. It challenges many of our existing assumptions about, for example, the effectiveness of state action (but also of the market); about what constitutes communities, professions, institutions; about social (and individual) identities; and so on.

It follows that the needs for lifelong learning generated within the knowledge society are likely to be very different from those which we have been used to in the past:

- for example, liberal adult education is rooted in a particular culture, of an unequal but aspirational society with a clear sense of direction, of progress towards self-realisation and social emancipation. But the knowledge society, at any rate as I have sketched it, feels very different. It has radically foreshortened time horizons, which makes the slow aspirational build-up of

educational opportunities a much more problematical project, and it also lacks a clear sense of historically-determined direction;

- or, take more radical community-based forms of lifelong learning. Again, it is assumed that unproblematical definitions of 'community' with clear boundaries are available; and also that there are relatively stable structures (political parties, trade unions and so on) through which these communities can work. But, again, the knowledge society with its different patterns of inclusion and exclusion, its multiple and overlapping communities and its deconstruction of institutions calls into question many of these assumptions;
- finally, take more conventional forms of continuing professional development. Again, it is assumed that professional expertise, which is being refreshed and renewed, can be taken for granted; that careers are 'continuing' and capable of 'development'. But in the knowledge society expertise is contested (as a social status not, of course, in terms of detailed technical knowledge) and linear careers, even for social élites, are no longer the norm.

It is clear that traditional forms of adult education have now been subordinated to the info-tainment industry. You watch the TV programme – Simon Schama or David Starkey – and then you click on the BBC web-site to find out more; you no longer study Shakespeare in an adult education class and then go to see plays at Stratford. In other words education – and, in particular, continuing education – is now an element within a much wider set of creative industries.

Community education is struggling to come to terms with the realities of the knowledge society – like political parties and trade unions (and, I was almost going to add, voluntary organisations of all kinds – until I remembered that today's mass movements are voluntary organisations like the National Trust not political movements like the Trades Union Congress!). But even that is misleading, because we live in an age

of unparalleled political activism (for example, world-wide environmental pressure-groups or the global resistances to World Bank / G8-style globalisation). But these new forms of activism reflect the nodes and networks characteristic of the knowledge society. They are both highly organised and self-organising.

The appetite for lifelong learning is greater than ever. But it, too, flows through new and unfamiliar channels. For example, there is a pronounced drive towards corporate and/or technological 'badging' ('Investors in People'-style initiatives are good examples of the former, and Microsoft or Cisco-badged courses are good examples of the latter). There has also been a proliferation of what I will call compliance-oriented short courses (for example, in health and safety), which are clearly linked to the demands of the risk and/or audit society. These kinds of activities have become much more important than traditional forms of CPD aimed, predominantly, at professional workers.

We all know these things are happening. Many of us are actively promoting, or supporting, these developments – particularly perhaps in those institutions where the organisational boundaries between reach-out activities, community links and continuing education are (deliberately) fuzzy. These new forms of lifelong learning need not be seen as undermining more traditional forms of continuing education – but rather as extensions and adaptations of these traditional forms. But I still think we lack a proper language to re-integrate these different forms – and, as a result, continuing education as a sector is not always given the credit for the innovations which, in detail, it is actually delivering. I know that some of you will say that I am being inconsistent in talking of the need for a new language, a new paradigm, because you will say – quite reasonably – that my account of the knowledge society with its emphasis on incoherence

and inconsistency consigns all meta-discourses, languages, paradigms to the dustbin of history.

I would like now to consider whether it is possible to construct a new paradigm of continuing education that, without doing too much violence to our core values, nevertheless embraces the novelty and innovation represented by the knowledge society. I think this is important for a number of reasons:

i) first, the policy debate (certainly in England; this is less true in Scotland and Wales) has tended to marginalise continuing education. Partly this has been because of the English 50-per-cent participation target by the end of the decade, which applies only to 30-year-olds and younger. So adult learners have been left out in the cold. But I think this goes deeper than simply a slip of the pen in drafting the Labour Party manifesto for the last election. The 50-per-cent target, we should remember, is really a workforce target, based on projections of demand for graduates and the split between graduate and non-graduate jobs. So it's as much about employability as social justice. So it's remarkable that meeting demand is seen almost exclusively in terms of young graduate entrants to the workforce, and that the contribution of older learners is ignored. What makes it more remarkable is that the trend towards earlier retirements has been thrown into reverse and compulsory retirement ages are about to be abolished. There seems to be an almost complete dislocation between the skills agenda, the modernisation of Britain's workforce, and lifelong learning. There is a remorseless concentration on young adults. Even widening participation is regarded as almost exclusively concerned with young people. How has this happened? Maybe it is –

at least partly – our fault that continuing education is not at the heart of this debate;

ii) secondly (and probably linked), the conceptual framework of the recent English white paper on higher education (to the extent that it had a conceptual framework) seems to have almost nothing in common with earlier Government documents such as *The Learning Age*. I know that things are better in Scotland – but we still cannot ignore the great weight inevitably attached to policy developments in England. Again there seems to be a dislocation between the kind of thinking that went on during the first term of the Labour Government, in which lifelong learning had a central role, and today's thinking, which seems to be obsessed by global competitiveness in research and the need to re-invent the binary system. Why has this happened? One reason is that New Labour has lost its radical cutting-edge since 1997 – and has almost got mired by the day-to-day responsibilities of government (school improvement, hospital waiting lists and so on). To the extent that lifelong learning was (and is) a radical project – and is also not an immediate policy preoccupation – it has tended to drift out of the political picture. But that can't be the whole story. To some extent it must be seen as a comment on what continuing education can deliver.

So – is it possible to construct a new paradigm of lifelong learning that puts it back at the heart of the policy debate? Not so long ago, after all, people (including myself) argued that just as university had been swallowed up into something much bigger, higher education, in the last quarter of the 20th century, so higher education would be incorporated into something

bigger still, lifelong learning. Instead of continuing education being a sub-set of higher education, it would be the other way round. I still believe that, ultimately, this happen. But it will require a revolution in how continuing education is regarded, and in how we conceive our own role. In my view there are two ways such a revolution can be accomplished.

The first is to move over from the defensive to the offensive. We should reinforce the radicalism of lifelong learning rather than trying to reduce – and I mean radicalism in a straightforward political sense as well as more generally. Lifelong learning is – or should be – concerned with transformation, the transformation of individuals, communities and whole societies. It is about the assertion of democratic rights and equal opportunities (and, I would add although it is unpopular today, more equal outcomes too). This will inevitably bring it into conflict with the established forces of privilege – which the present government has perhaps been too ready to placate. Lifelong learning is not a project; it is a campaign.

The second way (and I hope this will not sound too paradoxical) is for lifelong learning to break through the bounds of continuing education departments. It should never be treated as an add-on, still less as in its earliest incarnation 'outside the walls'. Lifelong learning should permeate all aspects of higher education (and further education, schools, whole communities and society at large – because that is another, and perhaps nobler, meaning of the 'knowledge society'). Widening participation, work-based learning, foundation degrees, part-time degrees, postgraduate and post-experience courses, research (especially 'Mode 2' research), reach-out – all should be treated as aspects of lifelong learning. Perhaps we no longer need continuing education departments because they tend to institutionalise the compartmentalisation of lifelong learning. continuing education, lifelong learning should permeate the whole institution.

Peter Scott

Vice-Chancellor, Kingston University

July 2003

FACE International Insights

The Study Circle – A Method for Learning, A Tool for Democracy

At the 2003 FACE annual conference in Stirling, Sturla Bjerkaker from Norway presented a paper on the Nordic Study Circle tradition. We publish an edited version of that paper below. To read the complete paper and other papers presented at the conference go to <http://www.face.stir.ac.uk/Papers.htm>

As a Nordic traditional method of liberal adult education, the study circle has been active for more than 100 years. From the beginning, it was seen as a democratic and emancipatory method and arena for learning, particularly among adults.

The so-called founder of the study circle, the Swede Oscar Olsson, expressed the view that “The emancipation of the working class should be a task for the workers themselves, for the people, by the people” (Johansson, 1994) and this became the political slogan that influenced the study circle and the adult education system in Scandinavia for years.

The study circle is a human, easy and fearless way to learning for adults with low self-esteem

and self-confidence. But it is also demanding. It claims activity and dialogue between its participants (members), and just occasionally you can rely on a teacher or an expert joining in.



Normally the circle is a group of equals, the leader the ‘primus inter pares’. The pedagogical idea may – in my words - be summarised by ‘learning by sharing’, relying on each member’s experience.

The most distinctive features of circle studies, as Oscar Olsson (Brattset, 1982, p8) described them are:

- people study in small groups, often at home;
- study material is rare;
- teachers are not considered a necessary prerequisite of study. The leader of the group is an organiser and he or she possess no

theoretical qualifications;

- people supplement their group studies by attending lectures or meetings;
- circle members have no previous theoretical qualifications, but a good deal of practical experience;
- members learn to discuss, argue, show consideration for others, accept defeat and share responsibility;
- they experience a sense of community and identity;
- the knowledge members acquire could be directly related to their everyday lives;
- studies begin at the initial cognitive level of the members and are guided by their needs.



Historically, study circles and popular movements are inseparable concepts. Adult education has always been strongly associated with the voluntary sector in Scandinavia. The aim of their educational activities was to promote changes in society, according to their values. Therefore adult education can be described as instrumental to reach their goals, and the study circle their tool to do so.

The study circle offers a flexible method of informal learning experiences.

Several terms are therefore in use, such as: circles with or without a teacher, circles combined with lectures, circles based on plans produced in advance, correspondence circles, combined

circles; members taking correspondence courses individually, supported by circle studies with teachers, multi-media courses, studies integrated in a pre-produced scheme, including usage of media and – finally and most recently, ‘E-circles’, where the members communicate via the Internet.

According to Oscar Olsson, the most important features of the study circle is that they operate independently of teachers, are based on the reading of fiction, and use conversation and discussion as method. His definition of a study circle is ‘a circle of friends who come together to discuss problems or subjects of common interest’ (Quoted in Brattset, 1982)).

From this definition it follows that the leader should be more a guide to the members than a traditional teacher. A practical consequence of this is the terms applied: circle members or participants, not pupils or students, circle leaders, not teachers, circles or groups and meetings, not classes or lessons. This use of terminology has been considered quite important, because the participants should not associate the studies with former unpleasant experiences from school.

Research into study circles is rare. Most of the research being done in recent years is from Sweden and the University of Linköping. The most comprehensive study was conducted by Jan Bystrom (Bystrom, 1976). The aim of Bystrom’s study was to investigate and discuss the reasons why study circles develop differently, and to pay special attention to the situation and function of the circle leader. The starting point of the study was the observation that in practice many circles do not correspond to the ideal.

According to Bystrom there are three main deviations. First, they might develop into a

”school class”, with recipient pupils and an instructing teacher. Secondly, they might develop into a “coffee party”, with discussions that have nothing to do with the objectives. And thirdly, they might develop into a “therapeutic group”, in which activities concentrate upon individual mental or social problems.

The (idealistic) principle of circle members shaping their own studies is practised to a limited extent. This may be due to uncertainty among members as to how and when they should put forward their viewpoints. The leader has a central position in their concept of studies; the circle members show little tendency to link their studies with everyday learning and communal learning. They have little confidence in their own resources.

Jan Bystrom’s conclusion is that circle studies can be much improved, if, firstly, guidance is given to potential circle members during the recruitment period; secondly, if training is given to circle leaders; and thirdly, if attention is paid to designing appropriate study material, with a view to making all members active in the learning process.

In her study, Brattset (1982) used a survey consisting of fifty-one study circles, drawn from ten voluntary organisations in Norway. The findings of the survey confirm the pre-supposition that study work is characterised by diversity. Among her findings was that most circles were initiated by the organisation, mainly in the local community. Circle members and leaders had little direct influence on this. To the question of why they took part, the main reasons for enrolling were, in order of priority:

interest in the subject, need for social contact, and importance to their work.

Today we will find study and discussion groups in organisations, at the work places, in neighbourhoods and among people chairing common values organised much like study circles. These are recognised methods, and are used in both organised and informal adult learning in many countries. Is the study circle then unique? What might be the unique Scandinavian touch, is the way the study circle is linked with the philosophy of the providers of adult education, the long tradition, the general acceptance of the method and the outspoken importance of the study circle method as a tool for learning and active democracy. For those reasons, the method has hardly been questioned. It is only recently that the study circle has been subject to research, and the studies mentioned (Brattset, 1982; Bystrom, 1976) legitimate our right to question the method critically.

References

- Johansson, I. (1994) *For folket, genom folket*, ABF, Stockholm
- Brattset, H. (1982) *What are the characteristics of the Study Circle? (English Summary)*, Norwegian Institute of adult education, Trondheim
- Bystrom, J. (1976) *Alla studiecirklar blir inte studiecirklar – Studiecirkeln som pedagogisk situation (English summary)*, Stockholm

The logo for infed.org, featuring the text "infed.org" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letter "g" is partially obscured by a purple square.

Readers may be interested in the website

<http://www.infed.org>

which provides a space for people to explore the theory and practice of informal education. The site is part of the UK National Grid for Learning.

Conference



The 2003 FACE annual conference was held from 2-4 July at the University of Stirling in the University's Management Centre, with delegates accommodated in the Stirling Management Centre and also in the Andrew Stewart Hall. The conference attracted a total of

158 delegates, both residential and non-residential. Delegates came from all parts of the UK and also from Australia, Botswana, Canada, Ireland, Malaysia, Norway, South Africa, Sweden and the USA.

Peter Scott, Vice-chancellor of Kingston University delivered his keynote speech on "Lifelong Learning in the Knowledge Society: Threats and Opportunities" (printed in full in this newsletter), while Thursday afternoon saw Melodye Shore of the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) USA address the conference with "Down the Rabbit Hole and into Oz: Mixed Metaphors with a Common Theme". Linda McKay, Principal of Falkirk College of Further and Higher Education concluded the keynotes on Friday with a talk on "Beyond Access".

A large number of high quality parallel paper sessions were offered, and all of those papers are available on the conference website (<http://www.face.stir.ac.uk/Papers.htm>).

There were three IT Workshops (WebCT, Teknical and a University of Stirling X4L project), and programme space was also given to a FACE Research Workshop offered by two members of FACE Executive (a full report of this appears on page 18).

Poster sessions were offered throughout the conference



Report Back

LEARNING TRANSFORMATIONS

- changing learners
- changing organisations
- changing communities

(University of Glasgow GOALS Project and Learning Link Scotland (the intermediary body for voluntary organisations engaged in adult education in Scotland). Further exhibition space was given to the Open College for the Arts for the duration of the conference.



15 presenters were invited to work up their papers for a publication, and were given a deadline of early September to bring forward proposals.



The social programme included a buffet reception (sponsored by ESCALATE) with the Perth College Big Band, a conference dinner and ceilidh with the Blackford Ceilidh Band and a campus nature walk.

Supporting Non-traditional Students



Professor Sally Brown, Director of Membership Services, Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) provides an overview of how tutors and lecturers support diverse and under-represented groups in the classroom.

The growth in the proportion of diverse students in our classrooms is seen by some as problematic, but I would argue that what we need to do is to find ways to celebrate and make best use of this diversity, rather than regard this as a problem. Non-traditional students can be one of our richest classroom resources, not only because many students with work and life experiences can bring current thinking and perceptions to their studies, but also because they tend to have attitudes which focus on engaging with and solving problems rather than learning at its most superficial. This article will explore some of the adjustments we may need to make in our thinking about teaching and learning practices to support non-traditional students but also argues that these kinds of practices tend to be good for all students, not just those with special needs.

Mature students coming into higher education with a range of life experiences, often bringing with them knowledge that can well be applied to their current studies. The learning they have undertaken in work and social contexts tends to be deep learning, and therefore provides a sound foundation for what they learn at university. For example, a social work practice tutor talked recently to her students about working with clients to foster their budgeting skills to enable them to live on extremely constrained budgets. Unsurprisingly she found that they had little to learn from her, but she herself was able to adopt some of their practices in her teaching. Similarly students on social work courses who have been through the

mill in their own lives are likely to have plenty to contribute to the courses they study, not just in terms of life skills, but in terms of their understanding of the health, benefits and employment systems which they may well know at first hand.

If we move away from thinking about diverse students as problematic, and concentrate instead on how to utilise them as class resources for peer-learning, this can be beneficial to all. A Surveying lecturer was embarrassed to be advised at the end of a class on surveying methods to be quietly and tactfully informed by a student who had just come off 'the tools' to explain that it wasn't done like that

on site any more, but that people nowadays used electronic equipment that the lecturer had never encountered. Pragmatically, the lecturer got the student to borrow and bring in the relevant kit, and demonstrate it to the class the following week.

As a callow young literature teacher, I too worried that my mature students who included actors, clerics, and carers of the long term sick, might find my teaching of texts like Shaw's 'St Joan' and 'A day in the life of Joe Egg' perhaps superficial until I engaged them in helping to interpret the texts. At a summer school I had worried about how to involve a student who was prone on a mobile bed to take part in group work, but found she had great insights that were hugely beneficial when studying Kafka's 'Metamorphosis'. The students themselves found ways to ensure that she was able to fully participate in activities. The main problems were those associated with the physical location of the class, most particularly doorways.

So what can we as staff do to support students with diverse backgrounds to learn to their maximum potential? I will concentrate here on how we can best support students with disabilities when we lecture, and when we assess them. Moreover, I maintain that these practices are likely to benefit the majority of students, and not just those with special needs.

Even with many developments in moving towards more student-centred learning, lecturing continues to be the principal means

by which we deliver the curriculum. How then can we ensure inclusivity in lectures? I would argue that lecturers need to recognise the potential for students with a wide range of disabilities (observable and non-observable) to be present when they are lecturing. These are likely to include physical and mobility difficulties, hearing impairments, visual impairments, speech impairments, specific learning difficulties including dyslexia, medical conditions and mental health problems.

If we think in terms of what students are likely to be looking at in lectures, included may be the lecturer, blackboards, whiteboards, OHPs, PowerPoint slides, picture transparencies, posters, postcards, display items and demonstrations. Lecturers aiming for inclusivity need to think carefully about how they can make all these focuses of presentation visible not only to those with a registered visual impairment but also to dyslexics and mature students whose eyesight isn't what it was when they were eighteen. Additionally, now that we frequently use PowerPoint presentations in darkened rooms, we have to be aware of the needs of those who might be lip reading or using signers and who therefore need the presenter's face to be clearly lit.

In terms of what students hear, it is important that lecturers always use microphones when these are available, even if they have good voice projection, because there could be people in the audience who are relying on induction loops to help them hear - which can only be used in conjunction with amplification equipment. Lecturers need also to think carefully about the implications of allowing the



use of tape recorders not only by students with visual impairments but also for those with Attention Deficit Disorder and perhaps even Dyslexia. However, counselling may be needed to advise students who regard audio tapes as a magic bullet to solve all their problems. They may forget that it may be much harder and more time consuming to listen to a tape the same length as a lecture than it may be to look through a well-annotated handout.

In terms of students with a variety of disabilities, it is important to consider comfort requirements, attention spans and seating in lectures for students who find it hard for physical or mental reasons to sit still on uncomfortable benches for a long time. These students may find it particularly problematic if double classes run into each other without a permitted comfort break. Certain kinds of lighting can be problematic for students with epilepsy (particularly faulty flickering strip lights). Students with anxiety problems may need to be allowed to sit at the ends of rows or by the exits, so that they are not worrying throughout the lecture about the embarrassment it would otherwise cause if they had an anxiety attack and felt faint, and needed to disturb a whole row of students so they could leave the lecture. For students with behavioural problems there may be classroom management issues about recognising the needs, for example, of students with Asperger's syndrome without disadvantaging the rest of the cohort in the lecture. For some students, for example diet controlled diabetics, it may be unwise to enforce strict rules forbidding eating in lectures.

How can we go about making assessment inclusive? I argue that we need to design assessment strategies that involve a diverse range

of methods of assessment, as all forms of assessment disadvantage some students. It is therefore important to ensure that students who are disadvantaged by one particular kind of assessment (whether it be exams, essays or any other assessment format) are not *repeatedly* disadvantaged by the predominance of that assessment format. We also need to consider when designing assessment tasks how any students might be disadvantaged or marginalized, and undertake training ourselves on issues associated with widening participation to raise our own awareness.

When using case studies or examples, we should select materials that include students from a variety of nations and cultures, not just Anglo-centric ones, and we need to be sensitive about cultural norms and expectations. For example, we should not expect all students making oral presentations to make eye contact and be very forceful, since in some countries this might be regarded as inappropriately bold and unseemly behaviour, particularly for women.

In order to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities that prevent them participating in some forms of assessment, we need to ensure that all students being assessed can have an equivalent (if not identical) experience. We must aim to maximise the opportunities for each student to achieve at their highest possible level; and devise fair systems that provide support to diverse students, so as to minimize dropout and loss of confidence. It is unfair for us to recruit students to HE courses and then leave them to struggle against the odds to succeed in a context where the odds are stacked against them. Nevertheless we must ensure the

maintenance of appropriate standards for all students, since we do them no favours if we don't evaluate academic achievement to equally high standards.

In this short article, I have concentrated on how best to support students from diverse backgrounds and with particular needs, but there is an argument to be made that many of the strategies I suggest here as being supportive of such students are actually just very good practice for all students. We need to take account of the best practice in all aspects of learning and teaching as demonstrated in current research, and devise coherent strategies for curriculum design, delivery assessment and evaluation which provide opportunities for students from all backgrounds to achieve their potential. Perhaps if we do this consistently, then the need for special provision for supporting diverse students becomes unnecessary.

References

Brown S and Race P (2002) 'Inclusive lecturing; encompassing diverse students' in 'Lecturing: a practical guide', London, Kogan Page.

QAA Code of practice on students with disabilities <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/COP/COPswd/contents.htm>

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 <http://www.hms.gov.uk/acts/acts2001/20010010.htm>

<http://www.techdis.ac.uk/>

INTERNATIONAL INSIGHTS INTO WIDENING PARTICIPATION: SUPPORTING THE SUCCESS OF UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

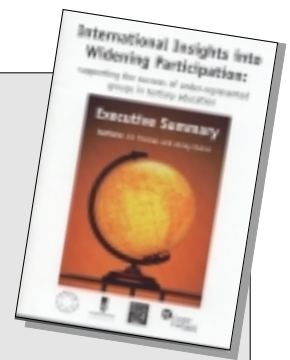
by Liz Thomas and Jocey Quinn

This is an international analytical report drawing on the work of a research team from ten countries: Australia, Canada, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the UK and the USA.

The focus of the research is on students from under-represented groups in tertiary education. The groups examined are: low income or low socio-economic status groups; first generation entrants; minorities and refugees; students with disabilities and mature students. The aim of the report is to develop understanding about the access and retention in tertiary education of these groups, in order to assist national systems and educational institutions to support them to succeed. By using cross-national analysis and challenging assumptions about problems, solutions, systems and structures, and deconstructing the assumptions which surround such target groups, the report enables us to think differently about the vital global issue of widening participation to higher education.

The executive summary booklet is available free of charge from the Institute for Access Studies at Staffordshire University. To receive a copy please e-mail carmel.dennison@staffs.ac.uk.

The full report is a 264 page book and a valuable new resource to developing an understanding of access and widening participation to higher education in the international context. The cost of this publication is £15. For more information on both publications e-mail carmel.dennison@staffs.ac.uk





News Update

Viewers to Learners: FACE Seminar Report

The Independent Television Commission played host to the first of our 2003/04 seminar programme on the 22nd October, 2003. With the intriguing title of “Do Adults Learn from Television?” the seminar attracted a wide range of participants from the worlds of broadcasting and education. The three key speakers each provided excellent presentations on a wide set of issues and questions commented to the seminar question. Cary Bazalgette, Head of Education Projects at the British Film Institute, emphasised the importance that media literacy skills play in society. Referring to research which explored the relationship between media literacy and text based literacy she invited us to challenge conventional wisdom that usually portrays television viewing as being inferior in some way to text based reading. However, given the amount of time spent viewing compared to text reading the significance of media reading skills becomes something that is a key part of most peoples’ daily experience. ‘What’ Cary asks ‘would be the role of schools, colleges and universities in the development of media literacy?’

The second speaker at the seminar, also from the British Film Institute where she is Development Officer for Lifelong Learning was Marysia Lachowicz. Marysia described the work she had been undertaking with older learners using favourite films as a means to explore their personal and social histories. Eight film clubs had been established throughout London with support from the British Film Institute. Two clubs were based in residential homes for the elderly and had provided the residents with an opportunity not only to view favourite films from different times in their lives but also a chance to talk about what had been going in their lives when they had first seen the film. Marysia’s presentation reminded us of the ways in which the experience of viewing films and television can be a powerful means of viewers situating themselves in different times and places. Marysias’s work also illustrated how, through the unearthing of memories, the use of films can be critically explored and more deeply understood.

Heather Rabbatts, Managing Director for 4Learning at Channel 4, gave the final presentation and illustrated through clips from a number of Channel 4 productions something of the relationship between entertainment and education. It was Channel 4’s role to find a balance between these two,

and at its best she believed that some of the most popular productions were those that were able to succeed in entertainment terms as well as educational terms. It is precisely this powerful combination that has resulted in a number of Channel 4 programmes achieving the success that they have, Heather argued.

The interface between broadcasting and formal educational provision is critical to the development of a strategic approach to widening participation. All three presenters in different way illustrated the importance of partnerships between programme producers and educational providers. This seminar enabled such partnerships to be explored and highlighted the issues that are critical to gain an understanding of how to develop this partnership more in the future. The Independent Television Commission worked in partnership with FACE on this seminar and we are most grateful to them for their support.

John Storan

European Networking Meeting

The European Universities Continuing Education Network (EUCEN) recently hosted a special meeting for representatives of national continuing education and lifelong learning associations and networks throughout Europe. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss how EUCEN and the national networks can further develop links and work together more effectively in the future. FACE was represented by Chair John Storan and the other networks attending were drawn from France, Spain, Portugal, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy and Ireland. EUCEN president Manuel Assancao chaired the meeting and in his introduction highlighted the importance EUCEN attaches to working closely with the networks, both those formerly established as well as those still being set up, for the latter group EUCEN could have an important role to play in supporting the development of new national networks.

The meeting was very much a first step in fostering collaboration between networks and also a chance for each of the networks present to share information, identify issues from the national context and share ideas for further development. FACE as a highly established and active network with a large membership base was totally committed to finding ways in which it and EUCEN and the other networks can work together. For example, EUCEN's role in influencing policy and funding opportunities in relation to lifelong learning at a European level with both the Commission and the Parliament is clearly a role that would be developed.

The meeting was very productive, enabling a wide range of issues to be discussed. Amongst the specific concrete actions agreed to be taken forward was work in relation to study visits in which small groups (6-8) of network members would undertake a programme of visits to a host country to learn about an identified theme or set of issues. The meeting also agreed on the need to work together to identify resources to take co-operation forward, including funding streams within EU funding programmes that could be used to provide support for travel and associated expenses for meetings.

A follow up meeting to further develop proposals will take place hosted in Germany on the 3rd of March, 2004. If you are interested in the study visits development or have some thoughts and suggestions for collaboration please forward them to John Storan at j.storan@uel.ac.uk

Research

Interfacing: FACE(ing) Up To Widening Participation Research

The FACE Executive is committed to representing its members and supporting research into their key areas of interest.

Widening participation is an activity crucial to all members and one where the Higher Educational Funding Council for England (HEFCE) wishes to support and encourage research activity. However, many FACE members' primary work role includes either project or policy-related research, which often has a focus on evaluation, and feeds back into project and policy enhancement. FACE is working with the funding bodies to promote an inclusive approach to research which can add value to both policy and practice.

Currently FACE supports research in a number of ways including:

- the showcase 'Annual Conference' and annual seminar programme;
- the regular FACE to FACE newsletter;
- publication of 'Occasional Papers' and Reports (e.g. following seminars);

- provision of an annual 'Compendium Database' for members to disseminate their research interests with one another.

Three roles have been identified for facilitating a more representative and greater engagement with research, focusing on widening participation for FACE.

1. Developing and extending research capacity and building.
2. Acting as broker between funders and widening participation projects (for example TRANSFINE).
3. Supporting in partnership the commissioning of research projects.

The role and contribution that research can make to both the quality of policy and the ongoing development of practice in widening participation is vitally important. Understanding what works in terms of the kinds of interventions made through widening participation partnership can contribute significantly towards recognising the effect that such interventions have and what else might be needed. This is highly familiar territory to FACE members and there is enormous expertise to be shared here.

The FACE Executive is concerned to identify ways forward. Discussions have taken place between the Executive and HEFCE and a consultative seminar took place during this year's annual conference. The debate now needs to be broadened and members are encouraged to provide comments to feed into the FACE response to the HEFCE consultation.

The HEFCE consultation paper identifies a number of key questions. These are:

- Research capacity – what is there and where is it located?
- Quality of research – how good is it and how it can be improved?
- Nature of research – its multi-disciplinary nature and the challenges that it poses.
- Gaps – where are they?
- Priorities – what should they be?

As already mentioned, a consultation took place with interested members during the Annual Conference held at the University of Stirling in July 2003. Summarised, discussion points covered the following areas:

Is there research capacity?

Yes, but often located within individual university schools and with no commitment or financial incentive towards a joined up approach. Is this a presentational issue, a 'Blairite' agenda? Many interest groups could participate in developing widening participation research, for example

administrators could make available data sets which could be used to generate research questions. What potential is there? Where are the organisational blocks? Research often responds to policy and is conceptualised as evaluation, rather than 'theoretical' research.

What is the quality of widening participation research?

There appears to be a plethora of small scale research of varying quality. The focus is often local initiatives and results are fed back into the relevant university's strategy/policy. Few of these 'small scale research' findings are published and there is little longitudinal work or work beyond this local focus.

Is widening participation research multi-disciplinary?

The essence of widening participation research tends to be multi-disciplinary, spanning for example, Education, Psychology and Sociology. Colleagues working outside of this area often fail to see the relevance of current research, since there is no link to the RAE and widening participation is not considered a worthy field of study. It was suggested that many studies are viewed as 'reportage'; growing out of the continuing education departments, and seen as a policy reaction.

Where are the gaps?

The research issue needs to be embedded before slipping from the political and university agenda. At present, it is part of target-met

activity and informed by equality of opportunity. Further requirements were identified, including:

- an audit of widening participation research activity
- identifying what works
- longitudinal work, both quantitative and qualitative
- an examination of decision-making by the universities: (e.g. issues around the access to a knowledge driven society, who is permitted access, and instigating a cultural shift within universities - could ethnographic work support this?)
- identifying good practice within centres of excellence
- improved communications between stakeholders.

What are the priorities?

These need to be seen within a national and international context and their relevance to the current political, sociological and psychological agendas. Many of the issues outlined above need to be addressed on an urgent basis, as this is difficult to prioritise and there may be strength in taking both a 'top down' and 'bottom up' approach.

Please forward any comments on these and other widening participation research issues to the FACE secretary:

Michael Hill
e-mail: m.hill@kingston.ac.uk

Events

Executive Committee Meetings

Provisional dates for FACE

Executive meetings:

January 26th, March 22nd, and May 17th, 2004, at the London Open College Network, unless informed otherwise.

Seminars 2004

WORKING WITH REFUGEES

4 February 2004, London

THE USE OF DATA IN WIDENING PARTICIPATION

3 March 2004, Manchester

ACCESS TO MEDICINE

12 or 19 May 2004, Southampton

The seminars cost £75 for FACE members and £100 for non-FACE members. Lunch and refreshments are included

Further details are available from:

Jackie Leach
Tel: 0208 223 4936, Fax: 0208 223 4927
Email J.Leach@uel.ac.uk

or go to the FACE website.

The Eurydice Network has just published *Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2003/4*, a new booklet describing the structure of higher education in 29 of the countries which are working towards the establishment of the European Higher Education Area by 2010. The document covers the 2003/04 academic year and reviews arrangements already implemented as part of the 'Bologna Process'. This process stems from the declaration made by European higher education ministers in June 1999 which stated the intention to: adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees; adopt a system with two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate); establish a system of credits (such as European Credit Transfer System); promote mobility by overcoming obstacles; promote European co-operation in quality assurance; and promote European dimensions in higher education..

Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2003/4 is available to download from:

http://www.eurydice.org/Doc_intermediaires/analysis/en/enseignement_sup.html

More information on the 'Bologna Process' is available from

<http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/en/basic/index.htm>

To find out more about the Eurydice, the Information Network on Education in Europe, visit <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/eurydice>

or contact eurydice@nfer.ac.uk.



Membership

Detail of FACE membership can be obtained from: Jackie Leach,
(T) 0208 223 4936 and the FACE website: <http://www.f-a-c-e.org.uk>

Events

Contact Val Spargo for information on FACE events
Valspargo@tinyonline.co.uk

Newsletter

Items for the Spring/Summer 2004 edition of FACE to FACE should be sent to the editor at
Staffordshire University by
14th May 2004
e.a.m.thomas@staffs.ac.uk

Website

Visit the FACE website:
<http://www.f-a-c-e.org.uk>
for up-to-date information on events and news, and to access articles and reports.
Contact the webmaster at
webmaster@f-a-c-e.org.uk

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Recent Publications

Mentoring for Social Inclusion: A Critical Approach to Nurturing Mentor Relationships by Helen Colley (2003)

RoutledgeFalmer, ISBN: 0415311101, Price: £22.50.

What does mentoring really mean? What can be achieved through mentor relationships? This book examines one of the fastest growing social movements of our time. As millions of volunteers worldwide continue to add to the mentoring phenomenon, the need for this authoritative text becomes increasingly evident. It traces the history of mentoring, unravelling the many myths that surround it, with a combination of intellectual rigour, insight and lucid discussions.

Learning Journeys: A handbook for tutors and managers in adult education working with people with mental health difficulties

by Joy Mather and Sue Atkinson, 2003, ISBN 1 86201 168 0, £12.95.

This handbook provides a learner-centred approach for those who work with students with mental health difficulties. Tracking the journey from mental health services into learning opportunities, it explores: how mental health difficulties can affect people in their learning and barriers to learning; how learning providers can assist access and support learning; what people with mental health difficulties gain from accessing learning.

Non-Traditional Entrants to higher Education: 'They talk about people like me' by Marion Bowl, 2003, Trentham Books, ISBN 1 85856 298 8, £16.99.

This book explores the reality of access to higher education for working class and ethnic minority adults. Thirty-two people here reflect on what held them back from engaging with further and higher education for so long, what eventually motivated them to aim for university and how they experienced life and study when they got there. The findings of Marion Bowl's four year action research project reveal paradoxes in current national policy and institutional practice on widening participation and indicate what needs to change if the chances of mature students from non-traditional backgrounds are to improve.

