University of Salford
A Greater Manchester University

ILIA
Innovative Learning in Action

Issue Two: Enhancing Student Diversity, Progression & Achievement

September 2004

Education Development Unit

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of the University of Salford's 'Innovative Learning in Action' (ILIA). The journal is published biannually and is intended to provide recognition for and to celebrate the good practice of staff who – across campus – strive to innovate in pursuit of the quality learning experience. The dissemination of good practice will provide positive encouragement to those considering new approaches to student learning and support and act as a springboard for collaboration, shared experience, mutual support and reflection within and across the faculties.

The theme of this edition is 'Enhancing Student Diversity, Progression and Achievement', reflecting the University's widely recognised strategic commitment to widen participation, and its expertise in curriculum innovation to meet the needs of our students.

Contributors deal with a range of challenges to practitioners at key stages in the student life-cycle and offer highly reflective insights of relevance across the University. The journal therefore provides a valuable opportunity to share and learn from the experiences of colleagues.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all authors for making this contribution to the discussion on diversity, and raising the profile of issues that can only enhance the effectiveness of our professional practices. In particular I would like to thank Dr. Viv Caruana in EDU, for her time and dedication in assembling this edition and for embracing the theme with such enthusiasm.

Mike Doyle

Head of Widening Participation

Contents

Notes for contributors

Submission details (for papers and 'snapshots')

We will be pleased to receive papers, case studies and 'snapshots' which demonstrate innovation in learning and teaching at the University of Salford. Potential contributors new to writing might find the following article 'Writing Academic Papers: the *Clinical Effectiveness in Nursing* experience' useful:

http://www.harcourt-international.com/journals/suppfile/flat/cein-writing.pdf

Length

Papers and case studies should be a maximum of 3,500-4,000 words without references.

'Snapshots' should be a maximum of 600 words without references.

For both papers and 'Snapshots' authors should include a full word count, (preferably with and without references) with submission.

Page size

All submissions should be left-right justified on an A4 page with 3.5cm margin on the left and 2.54 margins at the top, bottom and on the right

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Normal text: 11 point Arial font

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DO NOT include page numbers and headers/footers in your submission. These will be added when the publication is assembled. Footnotes should be in Arial 8 point.

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Figures or tables should be inserted at the appropriate point in your text and have a figure caption in normal Arial 11 point font, at the bottom and left justified.

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Include three or four key words to increase the likelihood of potential readers searching the literature accessing your article.

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Please make sure that your paper is in clear, readable and proper English. Please make consistent use of British dialect of English. Please write for a cross-disciplinary and international audience.

- Write in a straightforward style. Use simple sentence structure. Try to avoid long sentences and complex sentence structure
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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements should be included under a separate heading before the references at the end of the paper. For example,

We thank Dr. Joe Bloggs and Prof. Joanne Bloggs of the University of Salford for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. This project was made possible by funding from the University of Salford TLQIS.

References and Citations

Within the text, references should be indicated using (author, year). If several papers by the same author and from the same year are cited, a, b, c, etc. should be put after the year of publication.

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For Chapters: Walker, R. (1987) Techniques for Research, in: R.Murphy & H.Torrance (Eds) *Evaluating Education: Issues and Methods*

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The Personal, the Professional and the Political: Reflections on a Black and Asian Summer School

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'…the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, [including institutions of higher education], and knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships...'

(Freire, 1996)

Introduction

The impetus for producing this article is the experience of three Black women involved in a Black and Asian Summer School held in the School of Community, Health and Social Care in the Faculty of Health and Social Care. Our reflections are based in the context of an initiative of political positive action designed specifically to increase access by directly addressing societal barriers arising from racist tendencies in the institutional context. Essentially, our reflections bring sharply into focus the inherent tensions between the personal 'use of self' as applied to the professional context and oppressive or non supportive institutional structures. We hope that the reporting of our experiences in the form of critical narratives will prompt new thinking in offering up some suggestions as to the way forward at personal, professional and institutional levels.

Rationale for the Black and Asian Summer School in the Institutional and Policy Context

The initiative was borne out of the personal political drive of Chris Sheehy and Suryia Nayak who were admissions tutors and are currently admissions directors within The School of Community, Health Sciences and Social Care. During August 2003 and more recently, in May 2004 the school hosted a five-day summer school specifically for Black and Asian people that represented positive action in response to the widening participation agenda; the Race Relations Amendment Act; the CRE Framework for Race Equality Policy for Further or Higher Educational Institutions; the University of Salford's Policy on Race Relations; Widening Participation Strategy; Strategic Framework 2003/04; Monitoring of Equal Opportunities within the Student Population, (2002) University of Salford Paper and finally, the Faculty Strategic Planning and School Strategic Templates. The architects of the Summer School felt the initiative to be quite radical, far reaching and inspiring potentially offering a model of good practice that all departments within the University could adopt.

In relation to equality and diversity, the University of Salford's (UoS) Equal Opportunities Committee Report, (which incorporates the Framework for Race Equality Policy for Further or Higher Education Institutions) recommends that the University needs to address the following questions when developing targets:

How does the institution ensure that it attracts applicants from all racial groups within its 'catchment' area?

How does the institution publicly promote good personal and community relations - including relations between people from different religions - and openly oppose all forms of racism and discrimination?

How does the institution work in partnership with the community to develop positive attitudes towards diversity and to challenge racism that occurs within the institution or the local area? (Equal Opportunities Committee Report, UoS, 2003, part 3: 8-10)

Whilst addressing such issues, it is interesting to note that the University is also obliged to take notice of the Race Relations Amendment Act and Statutory Code of Practice on The Duty to Promote Race Relations which state explicitly that the institution should take proactive and positive steps to 'reach out' to and improve relations with Black, Asian and minority ethnic peoples.

Whilst cognizant of this broader context, marketing and publicity for the Summer School explicitly highlighted that a key objective of the course was to directly address barriers to equality of opportunity in professional and academic training in order to raise awareness and build confidence. In essence, the Black and Asian Summer School aimed to 'reach out' by deliberately utilising the 'use of self' or the 'personal' in several ways. The daily programme was designed to incorporate professional educational biographies delivered by Black and Asian lecturers, professionals and students which

provided concrete role models and personal witness and testimony thus bringing anti-racist thinking and rhetoric to life. These biographies were complemented by specimen lectures directly addressing the subject of race in theoretical terms, but deploying innovative modes of teaching and learning. For example, Suryia Nayak delivered a lecture on Racism which brought together knowledge and understanding of the mechanics of internalised racism and external racist constructs. All Black and Asian speakers directly addressed the impact of racism on a personal level whilst focussing on the wider socio-economic and political context. Interestingly, the student cohort emulated this approach by spontaneously drawing on their own personal narratives of racism and social exclusion in their contributions.

The Critical Narratives

Having briefly outlined the rationale for the Summer School in the wider institutional and policy context, this article will explore the perceived inherent tensions and dilemmas that positive action in response to social injustice may give rise to. The journey through this terrain will be conducted by means of individual critical narratives written by three Black lecturers who delivered lectures and professional educational biographies at the Summer School. The 'use of self' in these stories is quite deliberate as it reinforces the juxtaposition of the personal/professional with the wider institutional agenda.

Narrative 1

I am a full time Counselling Lecturer in the Directorate of Counselling and Psychotherapy. My political commitment and drive to participate in Equality and Diversity initiatives operates on two levels, each

inextricably linked, namely: the personal and the professional. On the personal level, as a Muslim woman of mixed race origin I have experienced racism, (including marginalisation in the education system) and I have faced barriers to equality of opportunity. The oppression I have experienced continues to fuel my passion for anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice in all forms and at all levels. Professionally, I know that counselling is a predominately white, middle-class profession, both in terms of practitioners and educators. Moreover, I have an acute awareness of my moral and legal responsibility as an educator - underscored by recent public tragedies such as that of Stephen Lawrence, Rocky Bennett and Zaid Mubarek- to challenge racism and social injustice wherever I may encounter them, including institutions of higher education. Furthermore, a powerful and enduring learning experience for me stems from a statement a minority ethnic student made about the impact on her of not seeing positive representations of minority ethnic groups. She said, it's like "seeing the world but not knowing where I fit into it". The conversation with her made me stop and analyse how I as an educator offer an inclusive curriculum that a diverse range of students can own and relate to. My own personal experience, engagement with the experience of others and my sense of professional, legal and moral obligation are all encapsulated in an overwhelming desire to act as a positive role model, firmly embedding the 'use of self' within my professional relationships and environment.

Within the Black and Asian Summer School I took responsibility for co-ordinating, designing and delivering the material for the Directorate of

Counselling and Psychotherapy. My main objective was to provide the student cohort with a diverse and comprehensive teaching and learning experience. This incorporated a power-point presentation, formal lecture input, experiential exercises and information about the admissions procedure.

This critical narrative seeks to highlight the process of being an Asian lecturer teaching a Black and Asian only cohort, within the context of an initiative that seeks to enhance student diversity. I want to voice my perception of the tensions and dilemmas that arise from the inherent contradiction of institutional initiatives designed to promote equality and diversity (such as the Black and Asian Summer School) which in themselves can be regarded as the necessary response to the notion that all manner of social injustice, including racism, is prevalent in or indeed endemic to, institutional forms of organisation in all walks of life, not least the HE sector.

My style of teaching and facilitation of experiential work in the Summer School was based on a model of shared power drawing on good practice in counselling. and incorporating the 3 "core conditions" of Person Centred Therapy – empathy, genuineness and unconditional positive regard. This personal approach was designed to achieve several objectives: firstly, the integration of theory and practice; secondly; provision of a template for exploring the balance of power within the room in terms of student/lecturer, class, gender, sexuality, age disability and other differences and the third and possibly most fundamental objective was to ensure that the Summer School fulfilled one of the most essential features of its remit, that is,

addressing the impact of power imbalance due to racism.

Having outlined my objectives and given consideration to the process, I will now reflect on the outcomes, that is, the quality of the interaction between myself and the student group and the impact of this interaction on my perception of self in the professional context.. I feel that as a group we were able to create a space which cultivated freedom of expression. The students seemed to be able to reflect critically on the teaching and learning methods they had experienced, demonstrating how an inclusive model of interaction served to increase confidence, enable appropriate self disclosure and raise aspirations. Furthermore, I believe that my own use of self as a fundamental teaching aid was instrumental in removing barriers to inclusion. Thus a lecturer /student relationship evolved within a short space of time where issues of power, mistrust, and difference did not hinder personal growth.

How has this experience influenced my own sense of identity, professionalism and accountability? What tensions have emerged within the context of the institution of which I am a part, discharging multiple roles - sometimes sequentially and /or simultaneously - educator, advocate, facilitator, and team player within the Directorate, School and Faculty? As suggested earlier, my personal and professional identity and sense of self has evolved out of my knowledge and understanding of injustice, oppression and exclusion and it could be argued that my approach to the multiple professional roles identified is essentially informed by my constant aspiration to be a positive role model as a mixed race, female Asian, Muslim, professional counselling lecturer practitioner. As the personal,

professional and political are juxtaposed fuelling tension I find myself pondering what seem to be two crucial dilemmas:

If social injustice is endemic to institutions like the University of Salford, who by their very existence may struggle with issues of equality and diversity, how can I develop a sense of belonging…and more, become an ambassador for the institution without experiencing incongruence with my core sense of self? At the same time, in my everyday working life and encounters how can I maintain personal and professional clarity of role, boundaries and accountability in the face of what is sometimes an overwhelming sense of empathy, identification and shared common experience of racism and other forms of social injustice?

Narrative 2

I was invited to contribute to the Summer School to deliver a short talk on the development of my education and career and to speak about issues of race in mental health. As a Black woman I viewed my contribution as both personal and political.

My story went like this:

My life began in Calcutta, India. My parents were both born and brought up in India. My paternal grandparents came from the Caribbean and settled in Calcutta. My maternal grandfather came from Rochdale and his wife was a Goan from India, their life experience being dominated and shaped by the experience of colonialism and the British Empire. I see myself very much a product - biologically and psychologically - of Empire. In many ways, now I see myself as a survivor of Empire.

In India my upbringing was very much based on some notion of British culture – a British Raj culture. My

boarding school education was dominated by reading Janet and John, English literature (including Little Black Sambo) and English History. Our mathematics teaching included learning about pounds, shillings and pence! We danced round the Maypole on sports day, played ring games (many I now know originating in Lancashire), and learned nursery rhymes which would be familiar to nursery school children in Britain even today.

I came to England at the age of fifteen with my family. We arrived here at a time of strong anti-immigration feelings culminating in Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech. When I came to England I attended a secondary modern school and at the age of sixteen went out to work as an office junior. I came to higher education as a mature student as soon as my youngest children began full-time education. After gaining my first degree I completed a post graduate course qualifying as a Psychiatric Social Worker. I continued to do further postgraduate study as a mature student.

My current post in the Faculty of Health and Social Care is that of Director of Mental Health. The role encompasses responsibilities for Mental Health in the core strategic areas of Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Enterprise.

In my personal biography what I wanted to convey to the audience in the Summer School was a feel for the diversity of my background; trying to make connections with the range of their apparent differences. I discussed with the audience the different 'positions' that my story included. That of female, Black/mixed 'race', mature student, mother. My particular history included that of 'colonial' education. By the non-verbal communication, this experience was

familiar to some in the audience – if not for them directly, certainly for their parents. I highlighted particular issues of confusion for those of us who had learned to read with the help of the Radiant Reader (Janet and John) and had been obliged to recite Keats and Wordsworth for pleasure and 'punishment'. I explained that as an 'immigrant' my life experience tended to be nullified by a relative ignorance of my 'personal history' and the overwhelming influence of images of Empire and colonialism. I wanted here by analogy, to alert the audience to the impact of assumptions that social systems make about particular aspects of difference.

For example, some students whose first language is not English are very effective in the written word, but are seen to struggle with verbal communication or at the very least, experience some form of discrimination deriving from their accent. Ironically, their written skills are good due to the sound teaching of English in their country of origin. For other students their experience might be of struggling to write in a second language where assessment strategies fail to take sufficient account of such difficulties. In both cases we view 'the problem' as stemming from the individual, rather than the oppressive systems and institutional structures with which such individuals are confronted.

The succeeding session I delivered on Race and Mental Health was set in the context of the day focussing on social policy. In speaking about the effects of racism in mental health service delivery to Black and Minority ethnic communities, I referred to policy making which has racist origins, or certainly policy making which ignores aspects of difference with reference to 'race', thus demonstrating the connections

between the personal and political. I tried through the use of humour to get the group to think politically. I wanted these prospective students to be alerted to the facts of institutional racism – to understand that the academic community will mirror the wider community and to be aware that in this sense, Salford University like any other institution in the community might be hard put to produce incontrovertible evidence to support their total exclusion from any 'list of offenders'. Primarily I wanted to stress that despite them being 'invited in' as a Black and Asian group they were entering an organisation where people could experience discrimination on the grounds of race and other social differences. I felt that in being alerted to these processes and issues, they as a student body would be better equipped to develop strategies for survival and change. Further, through networking, they could be part of changing and challenging discrimination. Working together would be of overriding importance, in the context of knowing and acknowledging their differences (origin, religion, gender) and commonalities (their exposure to racism).

I shared my experiences, as a Black member of staff, having to give support to Black and Minority students beyond my tutorial responsibilities yet, taking some delight in the positive response from students in seeing a Black academic having some position of responsibility. My keenness for involvement with the day arose out of wanting to bring to a particular group (Black and Minority ethnic students) the hope that despite racism and its attendant discriminations, they could make it. Yet I felt duty bound to 'warn' them of the realities.

Narrative 3

I am a full time lecturer, Director of Admissions, Accreditation of Prior Learning Co-ordinator and teach pre- and post- qualifying social work students across a broad range of subject areas including social inequality and mental health. In addition, I have facilitated a student support group for Black and Asian students for the past five years. Each of these responsibilities, individually and collectively, has given me an enhanced insight into the difficulties Black and Asian students encounter from admission and retention through to progression and ultimately achievement. I welcome the imperative from the Race Relations Amendment Act which now places a duty on public bodies including institutions of higher education to monitor and evaluate the situation concerning Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority people. We must collate and use statistical data in more effective and coherent ways in order to monitor, evaluate and ultimately improve standards. This relates to admissions, examination boards, student records, assessment and curriculum design and delivery.

As one of the Summer School organisers I had the task of opening and introducing the event and followed this with a specimen lecture on Racism. Whilst heartened and indeed very comfortable to be addressing a Black and Asian only audience from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds, I was acutely aware of certain specific dynamics. For example,bridging the gap between the candidates' life experience of barriers to participation, inequality of opportunity and exclusion and the University's agenda of widening participation, equality of opportunity and social inclusion and maintaining clarity of distinction

between positive discrimination and positive action[1]. Quite a complex tension to grasp was the potential for any group formed on a single issue or specific point of identity to assume homogeneity and in turn, replicate unconsciously and subtly the marginalisation of anyone or anything which does not identify with the group. In other words, to replicate the very same attitudes, language and actions of assumed superiority which causes racism and social exclusion in the first place.

The specimen lecture on racism incorporated the following key concepts; examination of the notion of difference as a mechanism for a value-laden social stratification; exposition of the inherent flaws in the arguments for a meritocracy; the notion of a hierarchy of oppression and examination of the relationship between internalised oppression and external social constructions of oppression. Throughout the lecture two primary themes were central: firstly, the inextricable link between the internal world and the external world and secondly, the problem of 'difference' on an individual, institutional and societal basis. Both themes were brought together in the juxtaposition of 'self' in relation to wider social, economic, institutional and political arenas.

I introduced the lecture on racism with the following quote,

'Institutionalised rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs

[1]My understanding is that positive discrimination is illegal whereas positive action represents action which acknowledges and redresses the unequal 'playing field' that exists due to inequality of opportunity created by social structures and stratifications. I feel it is a commonly held belief that equal opportunities means treating everyone the same but differences between people have to be taken into account in order to redress the imbalances inherent in society and ultimately experienced by people.

outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways; ignore it and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals.'

(Lorde:, 1980)

In order to personalise the point that Audre Lorde was making in these words I substituted the pronoun 'we' for 'I' 'me' and 'you' and made deliberate eye contact with the audience whilst doing so. The objective was to reiterate the 'use of self' thereby preventing the reading of the text as if it applied to others outside the room. In this way the idea that Black and Asian people can experience difficulties relating across human differences as equals, just as white people can in terms of race was introduced. The 'use of self' here allowed me to engage the audience in a self critical and somewhat uncomfortable examination of the internalised racism that may lead Black and Asian people to replicate the very same strategies of marginalisation that they themselves have experienced. Thus the issue of racism became an issue that each person in the room, including myself as the lecturer, had to take responsibility for. The use of the concept of individual and collective accountability for racism within the context of a Black and Asian only audience facilitated by an Asian lecturer, prohibited any unconscious or subtle collusion with the idea that the problem of racism was 'outside', 'external' or simply rested with Black and Asian peoples' experience of oppression caused by racism. This

proved to be a complicated dynamic and analysis to grapple with since it asked the audience and myself to critically and non-defensively look at our own individual internalised rejection of difference. Furthermore, the strategy in effect required the audience to assume two positions simultaneously: potential 'victim' and potential 'offender'. The underlying rationale for the Summer School and its target audience was based on the premise that racism can present a barrier to progression through denial of equality of access and opportunity. Thus the audience were encouraged to give testimony to their personal experiences of discrimination but at the same time they were prompted to examine how they as individuals can replicate discriminatory attitudes and behaviour because of their own internalised discrimination. This can be an uncomfortable and painful process given that we have 'no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals' (Lorde: 1980).

Within the specimen lecture we explored the notion of a 'hierarchy of oppression', that is the idea which is prevalent throughout society that some people are more oppressed than others. This idea creates a hierarchy of the 'worst' down to the 'least' in terms of oppression. It is a technique which is widely used in assessment, provision and purchasing of health and social care services. Although the Summer School was aimed at a target audience who were Black and Asian only, an audience who would have some identification with the barriers racism presents, I wanted to ensure that the complexity of the issue of racism was firmly on the agenda. In other words, no one sitting in the room experienced racism in a vacuum. The notion of 'multiple discrimination' where, for example, a Black lesbian may face sexism, racism and homophobia in the context of

being working class, helps to provide a more coherent understanding of the multi-faceted experience of discrimination. McDonald and Coleman put it very succinctly:

'…If it can be argued that all forms of oppression are dehumanizing and therefore unacceptable, it then becomes as meaningless to speculate who is either more or less oppressed, as it would be to give consideration to concepts as being 'a bit pregnant' or 'very dead'. Any speculation of 'how much?', in relation to another individual or group, becomes a fatuous notion in all instances. People are either pregnant or not, dead or not dead, oppressed or not oppressed, and it is oppression itself in all forms that must be challenged.'

(McDonald and Coleman: 1999)

Relating my experience of the Summer School back to widening participation I would argue that on a personal, institutional and societal level there must be a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between different forms of discrimination. Furthermore, it is absolutely crucial to appreciate the impact and complexity of multiple oppression and the concept of a hierarchy of oppression Why? Because our understanding must relate to people's experience and people do not live single issue lives.

Conclusions

The three reflective critical narratives provided in this article have described the landscape of working as Black and Minority Ethnic female academics with students from a similar community. We have identified some of the tensions for the individual arising out of the intense and exposing use of self in learning and teaching in the Black and Asian

Summer School. We have also intimated what we feel are some of the positive effects for students and academics alike.

Through mapping the contours of this landscape we offer here some suggestions to enhance the learning experience and developmental journey of the Black and Minority ethnic student at the University of Salford. Firstly, we contend that the widening participation agenda encompasses more than just debates about retention. Whilst retention clearly is an issue, what, for us, is more important is the creation of an atmosphere and environment which will maximize progression and enhance the experience of all students no matter what their social positioning, ultimately leading them towards achievement. It is our view that this atmosphere and environment of social inclusion and support will only emerge and be sustainable if rooted in a policy of positive action firmly embedded in institutional structures and systems and informed by anti racist/anti-oppressive principles. In other words, positive action based on the subjective and arbitrary personal commitment, energy and politics of individual members of university staff is insufficient in itself to call forth the cultural change required by widening participation.

It is apparent that the following equation emerges from the individual critical narratives provided here: the more committed the individual professional is to notions of social inclusion and social justice the greater the tension that they are likely to experience at both personal and professional levels. Conversely, the less committed the institution is to positive action the greater the tension is likely to be in relation to individual members of staff and ultimately, in

relation to enhancing student diversity. Applying this equation to the widening participation agenda, we argue that enhancing student diversity at the University of Salford will not be achieved by rhetoric alone, but requires a proactive, wholesale re-examination of university structures, identity and culture. Further, it is clear that encouraging diversity in the student group has implications for staff who directly share that aspect of diversity and indeed, for those who - irrespective of ethnicity or other social positioning - work diligently in the cause of social inclusion. In this context the University needs to consider the appropriate resources and support required to galvanise these individual efforts and ensure that students who choose to study at Salford become students who succeed at Salford.

Finally, the words of Burke and Harrison (2000) encapsulate the way forward –engaging in *"…more than merely a response to race and racism…provid[ing] a framework for developing an alternative to practice that is based on taken for granted assumptions about black people, culture, needs and identities. This framework … underpinned by a critical understanding of the varying nature of power and powerlessness… has the potential to analyse the complexities of the experience of oppression. It is important to understand that the experience of racism is mediated by class position, gender, sexuality, disability, age, health status, and so any black perspective must include the total experience of marginalized groups."*

(Burke and Harrison in Davies, 2000)

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Can Student Retention and Progression be Improved by Active Participation in Learning?

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Abstract

In this paper we briefly review the impact of changes in higher education on factors which might influence student achievement and then go on to consider whether a change in emphasis from teaching to learning could be of value. We note that there is a good theoretical rationale for promoting active participation in learning and that there is some encouraging evidence that techniques such as cooperative learning can improve achievement and retention. We also appreciate that it is more difficult to establish the impact of collaborative, enquiry-based learning but the available evidence does indicate that this could have value, particularly where the intent is to promote and support independent learning.

Introduction

Over the past 15 years changes in the policy of successive governments has resulted in a major expansion of the higher education sector. Within universities this has resulted in a change of character of provision from an elite to a mass higher education system. In recent years there has also been considerable emphasis on widening participation resulting in an increase in the number of mature students and students from ethnic minorities or lower socio-economic groups. As the number of students increase, emphasis is now changing from recruitment to retention (House of Commons, 2001; NAO, 2002).

According to the National Audit Office (NAO, 2002) retention rates in the UK compare well with higher education in other countries. However, this masks the fact that about one in eight undergraduate student entering UK Universities is likely to leave without achieving a qualification (HEFCE, 2001; 2002; 2003). This relatively high level of non completion represents a significant cost to the taxpayer of between £91 million and £200 million (House of Commons, 2001). It also creates financial problems for universities as a result of lost fee income and the time and other resources devoted to students who subsequently withdraw.

Research has indicated that undergraduate students leave university for a variety of reasons. These include financial difficulties and changes to personal circumstances (National Audit Office, 2001) but there also appears to be a link with the standard of teaching (Davies, 2000; Martinez, 2001) and the effectiveness of academic and social support networks (Tinto, 1993; Roberts et al, 2003). The decision to withdraw can be voluntary (i.e. dropout) or involuntary (i.e. academic failure) but even in the former situation there appears to be a link with poor academic performance which moderates the decision to withdraw for other personal reasons (Bennett, 2003). This finding is consistent with the observation that non-completion is more closely correlated with qualifications on entry than ethnic or socio-economic class (NAO, 2002) and suggests that steps taken to support and enhance academic performance could have a positive impact on retention.

In this paper we consider some of the factors which may have an impact on the academic performance of undergraduate students and consider whether performance could be improved by changing the approach to curriculum delivery.

Factors Limiting Academic Performance

According to the National Audit Office (2001) one of the main reasons that students fail to complete their programme is lack of preparedness for study in Higher Education. The nature of study at university requires that students develop a level of independence from their teachers. This is essential if they are to develop the skills involved in critical evaluation which is an important outcome of an honours degree graduate (QAA, 2001). Academic staff complain frequently that many students entering university today do so without an awareness of the need to develop this type of behaviour. This is frequently expressed as a concern about the standard of post-16 education coupled with a reduction in entry standards as a consequence of pressure to increase student numbers. However, we argue that this is an over-simplistic analysis of the situation. An alternative way of looking at the problem of student non completion due to academic failure is to accept that the nature of the student body has changed and to consider why students fail to succeed in the current university environment. Possible reasons for this may include lack of support, unclear expectations or the absence of appropriate learning skills.

Current methods of teaching in university have not changed significantly over the past 50 years. For many tutors, lecturing is still the main method of curriculum delivery even though research has shown that

this is a relatively inefficient method of knowledge transmission (McKeachie et al, 1990). In the past this was not so much of a problem as the selection process for entry tended to identify and recruit students who were already aware of the need to review notes to check for understanding, to read around the subject and to evaluate the knowledge they had acquired. In comparison it would appear that the process of learning for many students today is represented by the passive absorption of facts presented to them in lectures, the lecture substituting for reading. This problem has been exacerbated by the significant reduction in staff to student ratio which has reduced personal contact and the opportunity to provide formative feedback to students in order to clarify understanding and correct misconceptions. Given this situation it may come as no surprise that less able students can feel overwhelmed by the volume of new material they are expected to know and find it difficult to demonstrate sufficient understanding to pass the end of semester examination.

Rather than approach retention issues from a 'student deficit' perspective an alternative scenario is the failure to communicate expectations to students in an effective manner. In this context, academic staff are under increasing pressure to develop learning outcome statements and assessment criteria which emphasise the need to understand, apply and evaluate theory (Otter, 1992; Race, 2000). However, the production of these documents alone is unlikely to have any significant impact unless the learning environment and the assessment strategy employed are consistent with the achievement of these outcomes (Tang, 1994) and in any case it is unlikely to change the surface approach to learning adopted by weaker students who are often

influenced by lack of confidence and fear of failure (Entwistle, 1988).

A third source of difficulty could be the lack of appropriate cognitive skills. It may be argued that independent learning requires skills such as information literacy and the ability to reflect on knowledge and experience. Information literacy is essential if students are to make effective use of published information to develop and support their understanding. This involves more than simply the ability to locate information within the library or to conduct an Internet search and is related to the process of knowledge creation. Thus the term covers a range of activities starting with the ability to recognise that information is needed and includes the ability to evaluate sources to establish their relevance to the task as well as the ability to organise and communicate resulting knowledge clearly (SCONUL, 2003).

According to Dewey (1910) reflective thinking, which seeks to establish the grounds or basis for a belief, is the only type of thought which is 'truly educative'. Reflection is essential if students are to test the extent to which they understand a situation or concept and if they are to modify this understanding in response to conclusions drawn from this activity (Argyris and Schon, 1978, Boud et al, 1985).

In our experience many students who enter university do not demonstrate these skills despite changes made to the post 16 curriculum which were intended to improve lifelong learning skills and higher order cognitive skills (e.g QCA, 2004). The reason for this discrepancy is not fully understood. New entrants will have been required to analyse situations and collect information as part of the process of studying for AS and A2 qualifications but seem unwilling or unable to

utilise such skills as part of their undergraduate studies. One possible explanation is that there has been little real change to the relatively passive learning environment within schools and colleges because the current environment of league tables discourages risk taking on the part of their teachers (NAO, 2002). Thus schools and colleges remain an environment where higher authority (the teacher) imparts information that the pupil dutifully absorbs.

In this respect there is reason to believe that new students carry these expectations into higher education and fail to appreciate the distinction between being taught (a passive experience) and learning (which requires a search for understanding). The passive response to study, which results from these misconceptions is clearly supported by the emphasis which is still placed on the lecture as the predominant teaching strategy and may even be reinforced by perceptions of the student as a consumer and customer, which has been engendered by the introduction of student fees.

The Impact of Active Learning

There is a good theoretical case to be made for the value of active learning as a way of improving student performance. This is grounded in cognitive psychology and in particular in the work of Dewey, Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky.

According to von Glaserfeld (1998) 'knowledge is the product of reflection'. He argues that we construct knowledge by seeking to make sense of our personal experiences and that 'making sense … means finding a way of fitting available conceptual elements into a [coherent] pattern'. He suggests that once we believe that we have

grasped the meaning, we say that we understand. This constructivist view of learning builds on cognitive-interactionist theories which regard learning as an active process in which the learner fits new knowledge into a framework of existing knowledge and identifies patterns which can be inferred as principles or rules (Bigge and Shermis, 1992).

In addition the concepts embodied in social constructivism suggest that we learn as a consequence of interacting with our environment so that understanding is developed not only as a result the content considered, but also the context, activity and goals of the learner. These theories emphasise the social aspect of learning and in particular the importance of discussion which enables the individual to test their personal understanding against the views of others and to use alternative points of view to challenge and expand this understanding (Savery and Duffy, 1995).

From this theoretical basis it is reasonable to predict that learning and the ability to understand and use knowledge is likely to be greater if students are actively involved in the learning process and if such learning activities involve the opportunity for group discussion but is there any evidence to support this point of view?

Indirect evidence for the importance of encouraging students to construct knowledge and understanding is provided by the observation that deep approaches to learning are related to higher quality learning outcomes (Marton and Saljo, 1997; Ramsden, 1992). Such an approach is characterised by a student's active search for meaning and is often associated with intrinsic motivation to find out more about a subject. However under appropriate circumstances, which reward this type of behaviour it can also be

demonstrated by students who are extrinsically motivated by the need to achieve high grades (Marton and Saljo, 1997). It therefore follows that the learning and assessment environment has an important impact on student behaviour. These conclusions were substantiated by the Improving Student Learning project, sponsored by CNAA which clearly demonstrated that the development of teaching strategies which actively involved students in learning tended to decrease the extent to which students adopted a reproducing approach to study and in four of the eight cases studied the tutors involved noted a positive correlation between deeper approaches and student grades (Gibbs, 1992).

Research carried out on a range of teaching and learning strategies known collectively as Cooperative Learning (Johnson et al, 2000) also provides convincing evidence of the importance of active learning environments. These approaches range from paired tutoring activities within a more traditional teacher-led environment (e.g. Think-Pair-Share), to situations where individuals work together in groups to complete a task (e.g. Learning Together, or Group Investigation) or to investigate and then to teach aspects of the curriculum to the other members of their group (e.g. Jigsaw Procedure). Much of this research has focused on the use of cooperative learning in schools where the emphasis has tended to focus on learning factual knowledge. This does raise some questions about its relevance to higher education but there have been a number of studies which demonstrate positive effects of such strategies in this environment as well (e.g. Cooper and Mueck, 1990; George, 1994; Springer et al, 1998).

Cooperative learning can take place

in formal groups (which are set up to complete a specific task or project and may exist for several weeks), informal groups (used in lectures to ensure that students cognitively process material being taught) and base groups (long term groups with stable membership and the principle role of providing its members with support, encouragement and academic assistance). However it is not enough to simply create the groups, the critical element is to create a learning environment which ensures positive interdependence and a need to support the learning of the other members of the group (Johnson et al, 1992; Slavin, 1995). Under these conditions a number of positive effects have been reported including increases in student achievement and student retention (Johnson et al, 2000) and the observation that these approaches are of value to all learners including low achievers (Slavin, 1995).

Although the explicit use of cooperative learning activities may be relatively limited in UK universities, many of the features of these approaches are evident in the range of collaborative teaching and learning strategies which are more frequently used. Such techniques include a number of enquiry based learning approaches such as problem based learning, research based learning and project based learning (Crabtree, 2003). In each of these situations the intention is to encourage students to engage with a problem or dilemma which creates an authentic starting point for learning, a degree of choice in process and/or outcomes and the motivation to search out and apply additional information relevant to the task in hand.

Evidence to support the value of many of these approaches tends to be limited and is often based on case studies rather than properly controlled

investigations. Nonetheless, these show that student led discussion and independent study in small groups can have a beneficial effect on student learning and achievement (McKeachie, 1990) and can have a positive impact on self esteem and student retention (Springer et al, 1998). Slavin (1995) notes that there is evidence that well-implemented, project-based learning can be more effective than traditional instruction but notes that more research is needed to understand the conditions required for its success.

In the specific case of problem based learning there is a considerable body of evidence on its use in medical education. In this situation although a rigorous review of published evidence shows little effect on student achievement (Colliver, 2000), there are indications that participants may retain knowledge for longer and may be more able to apply knowledge to practical scenarios (Dochy et al, 2003). In addition reviews carried out by Albanese and Mitchell (1993) and Vernon and Blake (1993) indicated that this approach has a positive impact on student motivation, encouraging a deeper (meaning orientated) approach to study and in turn an increase in self-directed learning. These are all outcomes which could help new undergraduates develop the skills required for study in higher education.

Uses of enquiry-based learning, including project-based and problem-based approaches, within the School of Management at the University of Salford, have resulted in routinely positive feedback from students although more rigorous evidence of the benefits of these approaches on student performance is not available. In all cases the majority of students commented favourably on the module and the collaborative learning

environment. Project work in small groups provides new students with the opportunity to meet new people and to develop some of the lifelong learning skills which are required for success on the programme. It seems quite reasonable to assume that such opportunities early in the programme of study will help to prepare new entrants for the challenges of student-centred learning in higher education and to enhance student retention by providing opportunities for social integration and peer support. In other modules where the teaching strategy requires students to carry out literature reviews and provides opportunities to share and discuss findings, feedback indicates this opportunity for discussion is usually the most liked aspect of the module. Indeed students have commented specifically on the extent to which understanding has been improved as a result of these discussions (Crabtree, 2003).

Conclusions

Changes in the UK educational system and the drive for increased participation has meant that new students entering university are often less well prepared for the demands made on them and they may require more support if they are to succeed and complete their programme of study. However, the increase in student numbers and reduction in funding of universities has meant that staff time is constrained and in any case increased emphasis on direct instruction will not help students develop the higher order conceptual skills required for success, so how can this be achieved?

There is sound evidence to suggest that student behaviour and the quality of learning achieved is affected by the learning context.

Reliance on lecturing and large class teaching which place the lecturer in a position of power and authority and the student as the recipient of wisdom, tends to reinforce expectations about education as a passive activity. Under these circumstances learning frequently involves recourse to memory and recall alone in finding 'the right answer', with little attempt to integrate and make sense of what is provided. For weaker students this superficial approach to knowledge acquisition is further confounded by the lack of opportunity for personal contact and formative feedback to correct misconceptions and this is likely to increase the chance of poor academic performance. What is needed is support designed to improve the student's ability to learn independently; to encourage them to construct knowledge and understanding by making more effective use of all available resources.

A review of the literature indicates that there are many techniques and strategies available to promote active learning. These tend to fall into two categories, those involving peer tutoring (which help participants to master knowledge or relatively simple skills and are often integrated into formal tutor-led classes) and more flexible student-centred activities where students have more flexibility and choice in the process and the knowledge pursued (i.e. enquiry-based approaches). What all of these have in common is the emphasis on collaborative learning, where there is an opportunity to share personal knowledge and understanding, encouraging students to learn from each other as well as from more formal sources.

Evidence on the direct benefits of collaborative activities in higher education is difficult to find partially

because of the problems associated with quantifying the higher level thinking which we seek to develop as a part and consequence of undergraduate education but also because there are relatively few opportunities to develop adequately controlled experiments which would permit reliable comparison between different teaching strategies. Nevertheless, research into one approach (problem-based learning) does indicate improvements in areas such as motivation and the extent of self directed learning which are important outcomes if student retention is to be improved. In addition there is good reason to believe that such methods will provide an opportunity to enhance peer support and social integration which appears to be an important element to encourage persistence when an individual is having problems.

On balance we believe that there is a good case for a change in teaching practice within the university sector with the need to develop more opportunities to promote the active engagement of students in the learning process. However it should be noted that success is not guaranteed. Supporting student learning is a complex process and the development of learning environments which provide the correct balance between support and independence can be difficult to achieve. In addition there is evidence that collaborative learning does not work for all students and there can be problems if the groups fail to develop the required level of mutual support and interdependence.

Finally we recognise the age-old problem of engagement whereby notwithstanding the best endeavours of the tutor it can be difficult to get weaker students to engage with activities designed to support their learning since 'students with a surface or a reproducing approach to study tend to be pragmatic and will seek to get by with minimum effort' (Norton and Crowley, 1995). In the event that this has been caused by fear of failure and lack of self confidence, it is possible that a well structured classroom environment will reduce perceived risk and therefore encourage engagement but there is nonetheless clear evidence of the need to provide coherence between teaching and assessment strategies in order to ensure that the implicit and explicit curriculum are aligned.

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What Works and in What Ways?
The Contributions of Mentoring Towards
Diversity, Progression and Achievement

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Abstract

In this paper I use three case studies to illustrate how peer mentoring has been developed and organised at the University. and, in turn, how these specific examples of practice have contributed to diversity, progression and achievement. However, I also use these case studies to raise questions about the impact of developments in peer mentoring on the learning of the mentors and mentees, and of the organisation, and the implications of learning through mentoring for the development of policy on widening participation. I want to suggest that whist these specific examples have 'worked' in their contributions towards diversity, progression and achievement – the intended policy outcomes- there is another no less interesting dimension of ' what works' and that is the role of the mentors and mentees as policy actors. In the final section of the paper I will reflect on this and the extent to which the learners engaged in mentoring – whether as mentors or mentees – are policy actors helping to shape policy rather than the passive objects of that policy.

Dimensions and Uses of Mentoring

Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2003) review the literature on mentoring and provide a case study on the uses of mentoring in business management and a variety of its uses in mentoring with young people. Whereas Roberts (2000a, 2000b) emphasises the personal relationship between mentor and mentee, Colley et al (2003) also review the inter-relationship between the formal and informal styles of mentoring in various institutional settings and locations and within government education policies.

In contrast with Colley et al (2003) the case studies of mentoring within the University are examples of peer mentoring. Their stated purpose was either to enhance diversity and progression into the University (Case Study 1: Citizens And Learners As Mentors, 2001-03, and Case Study 2: Mentoring On Line In Europe, 2003-05) or to support progression and achievement within the University (Case Study 3: Information Systems Institute, 2003-04). The following section of the paper will initially describe how these specific examples of practice have been developed and organised and their relationship with notions of diversity, progression and achievement. I then follow Colley et al (2003), in reviewing the impact of peer mentoring on the learning of the mentors and mentees, exploring the relationship between these specific examples of mentoring and their institutional settings within the University and the implications of learning through mentoring for the development of policy on widening participation.

Case Study 1: Citizens and Learners As Mentors: CALAM 2001-03 European Commission Socrates Grundtvig European Co-operation Project

Diversity and Progression into the University

1. Aims and Objectives

a. To develop, implement and evaluate an innovative programme of information, advice and guidance for adult learners through a partnership between four Universities (UK, Czech Republic, Lithuania and Sweden) and networks with informal education and voluntary and community sectors within these respective countries.

b. To build on the experience of adult learners who acted as mentors and role models to other adult learners returning to learning and evaluate the impact of mentoring on the academic achievement and personal development of the mentor and mentee.

c. To compare and contrast partnerships between formal and informal education providers and the value of mentoring in working with adult learners in different European settings.

2. Target Groups

The project was designed to benefit economically or socially disadvantaged groups of unemployed adults within specific locations in each partner country. Although the target groups varied between partner countries the outputs were intended to be transferable between the different target groups. In Sweden, the general target group were adults aged 25+ with little formal education; in Lithuania, the target group were adult learners in rural areas, but also women returning to learning, specifically unemployed adults who lived in distant regions of Lithuania and finally, in the UK and the Czech Republic, the project addressed the needs of women and men, over 25, who were returning to education, training, and work.

3. Processes of Mentoring

The mentors in the UK were 2nd year students on the Foundation Degree in

Community Governance. They were mentoring 1st year students on the same Foundation Degree. All students are part time and they work for either local authorities or the voluntary and community sector in the North West of England.

An initial mentoring training programme and a training pack were developed, implemented and evaluated. Mentors planned and delivered combinations of individual and group mentoring sessions supported by paper and web-based learning materials, Further training and support sessions were provided by a Development Officer in each respective country.

2003-05 European Commission Socrates Grundtvig 1 European Co-operation Project

Mentoring On-Line In Europe: MOLIE
Diversity and Progression into the University/ 2

1. Aims and Objectives
The project will develop new forms of mentoring and promote and facilitate access to learning across the existing partnership (2001-03 CALAM project) and through the inclusion of new partners, from two new countries, both involved in other Grundtvig 2001-03 European Co-operation projects.

a. To develop, evaluate, and disseminate specific forms of e-mentoring through synchronous email and discussion lists on the Project intranet.

b. To develop a project website to disseminate the findings from the Project.

c. To organise a workshop in each partner country for all mentors participating in the Project to evaluate their experiences as adult learners.

d. To organise a conference, led by mentors, using a Participatory Evaluation Model that emphasises mentors' voices and experiences, and to disseminate their experiences through case studies to local, regional, and national networks.

2 Target Groups
Refugees whose existing qualifications are not recognised.

Women returning to learning who are community activists but whose knowledge and skills have not been formally accredited.

Young people in the 16-25 age group who are at risk of social marginalisation.

3. Processes of Mentoring to be Used
The mentors in the UK are adult learners who are studying in higher or further education at either the University or a College in Greater Manchester.

The other European partners in the project are from higher, further, and adult education, in the formal and non-formal sectors, and aim to share their knowledge of being involved in improving access to learning through co-operation in local networks. They will do this by developing, evaluating, and disseminating shared trans-European outputs using existing and new forms of mentoring underpinned by a participatory evaluation model.

Four mentors, from each of the six partner countries, will each work with four mentees from these target

groups. Their direct experiences of mentoring will be disseminated to a project network in each country based on a core membership of three other organisations per country and then extended through workshops, conferences and a project website.

2003-04 Widening Participation Funded Project in Information Systems Institute:
Mentoring for Progression and Achievement within the University

1. Aims and Objectives
In the bid submitted for institutional widening participation funding retention was presented as the motive in the application by the Information Systems Institute (ISI). The stated aim was to reduce the problem of dropout and contribute towards retention by introducing a paid mentoring system.

Specific Benefits

a. If the schemes result in five less students dropping out in Year 1, they will have paid for themselves in terms of increased LEA and tuition fees in following years.

b. Reductions in the dropout rate will improve the University's showing in various league tables etc and attract government approbation of the University's policies and practice

c. Reductions in the dropout rate will smooth the delivery of first year modules, particularly those involving teamwork

d. Given that a disproportionate number of students that fail in the first year are from poor backgrounds, an increase in the retention rate will have a direct impact on widening participation.

2. Target Groups

7 Information Systems Institute graduates (or final year undergraduates) assist first year students in adapting to a higher education environment and the demands of an undergraduate programme of study. Each mentor to work with approximately 20 Year 1 undergraduates during each semester in 2003-04.

3. Processes of Mentoring Used

a. Students will have a supplementary point of contact and informed advice in the case of problems.

b. The students will receive the benefits of advice from mentors who have already experienced the same undergraduate programme.

Mentoring and Diversity, Progression and Achievement

The three case studies of mentoring within the University are all examples of peer mentoring. Their stated purpose is either to enhance diversity and progression into the University (Case Study 1: Citizens And Learners As Mentors, 2001-03, and Case Study 2: Mentoring On Line In Europe, 2003-05) or to support progression and achievement within the University (Case Study 3: Information Systems Institute, 2003-04). The following section of the paper describes how these specific examples of practice relate to notions of diversity, progression and achievement.

The purpose of the funding received from the European Commission and the Grundtvig 1 stream of Socrates funding for CALAM was to develop resources that could be disseminated and then used by other adult educators in Europe. As such the priority was to develop resource material to support mentoring in different European settings. The CALAM final report (2004) listed what the partners in the two-year project had produced:

- Accredited training programme
- Mentoring training pack
- Comparative analysis of mentoring methods: notes and minutes of trans-national meetings
- Comparative analysis of mentoring methods: formative evaluation methods and examples of findings
- Comparative analysis of mentoring methods: examples of articles by mentors
- Meetings and seminars: examples of summative evaluations
- Examples of papers on mentoring given by project members at European conferences on Lifelong Learning
- Report by external evaluator of CALAM.

In the UK, the mentors and mentees were students on the Foundation Degree in Community Governance at the University of Salford. The specific pilot Foundation Degree is a partnership between the University, local and sub-regional Colleges of Further Education, and local authorities in the North West. Within the University, two Schools and the Education Development Unit, have contributed to the development of the pilot. Foundation Degrees are of particular interest for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they can be read as an example of the tensions within lifelong learning policy and practice in the UK. Secondly, an emphasis on employability is coupled with attempts to define and conceptualise the wider benefits of learning (Griffin, 2000; Preece and Houghton, 2000;

and Schuller, 2000). Thirdly, the rhetorical emphasis on how the Foundation Degree is 'new', 'innovative', and based on 'partnership' can also be read as one, in a series of developments, that are presented in terms of the ' discourse of modernisation' (Clarke et al 2000; Newman, 2000).

Whereas the focus of the CALAM project was diversity and progression into the University the prime emphasis of the ISI peer mentoring project was on retention of 1st year undergraduate students within the University. The interim report on the scheme (2004) summarised the activities that were designed to meet the stated outcomes of:

- Students to benefit from having a first point of contact and in the case of problems, informed advice.
- Students to benefit from advice and guidance provided by peers who have experienced the same undergraduate programme.
- Identification of students whose non-attendance is becoming a cause for concern.
- Once non-attendance has been identified, mentors can take action, personal tutors and year tutor to improve the situation.

The targets and planned activities for Semester 1 (2003-04) were:

- All students to have a one-to-one meeting with their Mentor within Semester 1 period (early October – early February).
- Any student requiring further advice/guidance/assistance to meet with their Mentor for a second time
- Attendance tracked of all Year 1 students.
- Problems arising from non-attendance to be forwarded to Year Tutor and Personal Tutor for further action.

The interim report summarised progress against these targets. By the end of January 2004, 98 student mentees out of a possible 132 had engaged in a 'one-to-one meeting' with their chosen mentor. Of the 34 students not seen, approximately 10 had a meeting scheduled for early February. The remaining 24 had either to confirm a date/time for a meeting with their mentor or choose a mentor and arrange a date/time for a meeting.

The findings in the final report from ISI (2004) summarised the processes of mentoring that had been developed and made recommendations on possible improvements. The Project Co-ordinator held a final mentor evaluation meeting in June 2004 and the following extract from her report summarises the issues raised:

- The Year 1 Student Reps speaking on behalf of all Year 1 felt that the scheme was highly beneficial and should continue. They made two formal recommendations: (i) that the scheme be embedded in the teaching timetable and have dedicated date/time slots for meetings; (ii) that Year 3 students act as mentors only in Semester 1 and that Year 2 take over in Semester 2. It was felt that this would relieve Year 3 student mentors of additional workloads during the dissertation writing-up period.

- With regard to item (i) above, the Mentors agreed that this was needed and that should a new bid be accepted, the scheme be embedded in the weekly teaching timetable.

- With regard to item (ii) above, Year 3 Mentors were strongly against the suggestion of using Year 2 as mentors in Semester 2. They felt that Year 2 would not have the appropriate experience or relevant skills to act as mentors.

They also indicated that if Mentor-Mentee meetings were timetabled (as recommended), then this would relieve a lot of stress and reduce time emailing/telephoning students.

- The Mentors felt the scheme should be mandatory and not optional as it is now.

- The Mentors made a formal recommendation that the maximum number of mentees any one mentor should have is 10.

- The Mentor team recommended that the number of meetings per semester with the Scheme Co-ordinator be increased from one to two.

- Mentors firmly believed that formal training should be given prior to conducting any mentoring work. This should be supplemented by supporting documentation.

This is one way of looking at how these specific peer mentoring projects have contributed towards diversity, progression and achievement. If I were to analyse the outcomes of the mentoring projects in terms of quantifiable measures, for example, who is recruited or how many students are retained, or simplistic qualitative measures of satisfaction of mentors and mentees (important as these are from the point of view of evaluation) my research would only relate to institutional concerns and intended policy outcomes.

However, I am also interested in placing the specific mentoring projects within a critical setting. I want to question the social and institutional power relationships within which mentoring is developed. An emphasis on research on policy as opposed to research for policy (Ozga, 2000) has enabled me to construct a larger policy picture and locate the

specific policy development within a wider theoretical context.

Individual and Group Learning through Mentoring

I want to build on the description of the case studies and raise questions about the impact of developments in peer mentoring on the learning of the mentors who worked on the CALAM project.

In two sets of focus groups the six mentors who worked on the CALAM project collectively traced the inter-relationships between their learning on the Foundation Degree in Community Governance, learning in their workplaces, and learning through their engagements in community action. Focus groups are appropriate to research on policy (as opposed to research for policy) because they 'enable researchers to examine people's different perspectives as they operate within a social network' (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999:5, see also Merrill, 2002).

The learners as mentors engaged in each stage of the development of the CALAM project; recruitment, training, activity, and shared their learning through national and trans-national meetings. They worked to support and signpost the next cohort of learners who progressed onto the Foundation Degree.

When the mentors reflected on their experiences of CALAM they referred to the contrast between their work role within the local authority and being a mentor:

I might go to a lot of meetings, but I tend to be there minuting meetings and not actually making a contribution so from that point of view, you know, it's developing my skills, and my confidence, as well as coming here (mentor review meeting).

Another learner reflected on her role as a mentor and what she was learning from others within the mentoring project:

I think that by being a mentor and being on even something like this where you meet as a group I think that we pick up a lot of skills, we share skills and exchange.

When they reflected on their participation in the CALAM project, mentors referred to a wider perception of policy through firstly, understanding the expectations and needs of learners who were active in the voluntary sector and secondly, understanding what other learners which they had mentored were saying to them:

I listen to people and I'm working on the surface level of what they are telling me, but I think that with this you will find people are telling you something deeper of their own.

The mentors are developing an understanding of the complexities of the policy process and of their roles within it. If their reflection on their knowledge of this social world started with what Schutz (1932) called a 'stream of experience' then through processes of 'typification' they have built up meaning. Through the focus groups a series of individual experiences have been shared and participants have collectively constructed "classes of experience through similarity" (Craib, 1984:85). They have begun the process of building up what Schutz called 'meaning contexts' and these form part of their 'stocks of knowledge'.

Interpreting a Policy in Which They are Participants

Participation in socio-institutional and cultural processes is complex and the attributes have been developed by these adult learners through their experiences at a specific point in their learning careers. By reflecting on their own shared experiences of learning within the focus groups they have engaged in their *own conscious identification of the activity as significant learning or training (and) the retrospective recognition of both (1) a new significant form of knowledge, understanding or skill, and (2) the process of acquisition (Livingstone, 2001: 4, my emphasis).*

I want to suggest that whist these specific examples of peer mentoring have 'worked' in their contributions towards diversity, progression and achievement – the intended policy outcomes- there is another no less interesting dimension of ' what works' and that is the role of the mentors and mentees as policy actors. In the final section of the paper I have reflected on this and the extent to which the learners engaged in mentoring – whether as mentors or mentees – are policy actors helping to shape policy rather than the passive objects of that policy.

My research findings reflect Merrifield's work (2001) that summarised several assumptions about the nature of learning. Firstly, that 'Learning is social even though it occurs within an individual. It takes place in specific social contexts that shape what is learned, by whom and in what ways' (2001:8). Secondly, learning is shaped by external factors but also by factors that are intrinsic to a particular group- what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as engagement with and in communities of practice. Thirdly, the notion of 'apprenticeship' emphasises for Lave and Wenger the process of developing participation through communities of practice. Merrifield concludes 'research on socially situated learning suggests we must view learning as a developmental process, a process not just of proficiency at a skill but of engagement in a community' (2001:12)

Conclusions

In this paper, I have used case studies of peer mentoring at the University to describe relationships between these practices and diversity, progression and achievement. However, I have also argued that research on policy, rather than research for policy, should explore why understanding learners' experiences, and their reflections on them, are essential in being able to understand other dimensions of their roles as learners. By extending the notions of voice to a conception of adult learners as active agents research can seek to understand the capacity of learners to shape policy compared with another notion of them as empty vessels who are passive objects of a policy.

I want to conclude by emphasising one aspect of the implications of the iterative process of evaluation, evidence and policy. Ozga (2000:42) argues that

If policy is understood as the closed preserve of the formal government apparatus of policy making, then it follows that the social science project will make little impact. If, however, we understand policy as involving negotiation, contestation and a struggle between competing groups, as a process rather than output, then we can see that the social science project may indeed act as a resource

The challenge she poses is to ensure that if educational policy is a focus of research, practitioners should be encouraged to engage with policy research and, in turn, develop or enhance their critical and reflexive approach (2000:8). The multiple meanings of policy inform the

horizontal dimension with its emphasis on negotiation and ambiguity. In developing a critical and reflexive approach to policy analysis and evaluation, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers may wish to re-evaluate their conception of what constitutes ' informed opinion'.

Acknowledgements

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Enhancing the Early Student Experience

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The University of Salford whilst driving initiatives to promote recruitment and widen participation seems acutely aware that without a corresponding change in how the institution operates, there is a danger that widening participation might simply result in more students experiencing failure rather than progression and achievement. The literature seems to suggest that the first year is the most critical in shaping persistence decisions thus in pursuing research into the impact of its Widening Participation Strategy the University has sought to focus its attention initially, on the 'early student experience'. "Enhancing the Early Student Experience" is a project which I undertook on behalf of the Teaching & Learning Development Sub-Committee. I was seconded for one semester to work on the project, the objective of which was to identify areas of good practice within the University which appear to support new students and lead to improved retention. Internal investigations were supplemented by reference to the available research in this area in order to identify developments which could form the basis of specific recommendations to improve the first year student experience and thereby, improve retention and achievement rates. Whilst the research does not prove causation it provides some strong signals of what practices appear to correlate with improved retention. A summary of the report is provided here and the full text of the report can be accessed at

http://www.edu.salford.ac.uk/scd/documents/docs/enhancing_student_exp.rtf

Factors that influence retention are many and, due to time constraints, it was decided to concentrate this research on identifying activities within programmes that may influence retention. An over-arching research question was identified:

Are there common features in programmes where retention rates are good or have improved that may positively influence student retention and achievement?

Programmes with good or improving retention rates were compared with those with poor retention rates, classified as Groups A and B respectively. The purpose was to identify activities prevalent on those programmes with good or improved student retention and achievement that do not feature as strongly or are not present in those programmes with poor student retention and achievement. Differences were found in the operations of Group A and Group B as follows:

- *Pre-entry:* The information provided to prospective students in Group A was more comprehensive than that in Group B and was targeted to reach the appropriate audience.
- *Induction:* A much greater effort was made in Group A to help students to settle in, make friends and get to know other students on their programme.
- *Personal Tutor Support:* There was a much stronger tutor support and monitoring system in Group A than in Group B.
- *The Impact of Undertaking Paid Employment and Other Commitments:* Group A was more likely to provide a timetable which facilitated part-time employment and allowed for other commitments.
- *Attendance:* Group A emphasised

the importance of attendance more and were more strict in monitoring attendance.

- *Teaching and Learning Activities:* Group A utilised more active teaching and learning techniques, while Group B tended to favour the more traditional lecture/seminar model.
- *Assessment:* Group A made less use of purely formative assessment, preferring to grade all work submitted.

These results suggested that there are differences in the operation of programmes with good and poor retention rates and whilst the study did not seek to provide evidence of causality, it established a clear correlation between recognised activities and programmes with good retention rates. On the basis of these results a list of recommendations was drawn up and organised into suggestions for action at programme level and at University level as follows:

Programme Level

Pre-entry

- Be involved in effective and appropriate marketing of the programme including the provision of correct and up to date prospectus entry, web page, leaflets.
- Have open days, ensuring the target market is informed and invited.
- Develop links with schools and colleges.
- Be involved in the higher education enrichment programme.
- Ensure applicants through clearing are provided with appropriate information and time to inform their decision.

Induction

- Organise induction around

activities aimed at helping students to get to know one another.

- Link part of induction with what students will be involved in later on in the course.

- Use induction week to get to know the students and to identify and attempt to remedy possible initial problems students may have.

Personal Tutor Support

- Timetable personal tutor meetings regularly in the first semester reverting to at least once per semester after this.

- Provide an agenda for personal tutor meetings with an academic link e.g. personal development planning, study skills, review and reflection on assessment results.

The Impact of Undertaking Paid Employment and Other Commitments

- Request a timetable which facilitates part-time employment and time for other commitments.

Attendance

- Encourage an ethos of attendance being a requirement.

- Monitor attendance and have procedures for contacting absentees.

Teaching and Learning Activities

- Employ teaching and learning strategies that involve students actively in class.

Assessment

- Restructure assessments to incorporate an element of continuous summative assessment.

University Level

- Expand the higher education enrichment programme to involve all schools within the university.

- Encourage, co-ordinate and

facilitate development of links with local schools and colleges at programme level.

- Provide staff development workshop on induction with particular emphasis on activities designed to help students integrate.

- Review the personal tutorial system to consider how best student personal support should be provided. Suggestions include:

- dedicated member of staff per programme to provide personal tutorial support

- member of academic staff in each school to co-ordinate personal tutorial support

- Develop an agenda / course of activities that can be followed in personal tutor meetings.

- Structure timetables so that at least one day free of timetabled classes is provided on all programmes.

- Provide timetables before the start of semester.

- Provide staff development workshops on teaching and learning strategies that encourage active learning in (large) classes

Promoting Student Progression and Achievement Through Intra-partnership Working – A Model of Best Practice

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Preparing students for the world of work and engaging with our local communities are two core parts of this University's mission. This paper illustrates one project, which combined these two crucial aims of the University in a collaborative effort between the Careers Service, The Education Development Unit and ESPaCH.

Volunteering @ Salford, funded by The Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) part of the Government's Active Community initiative, is designed to enhance links between the University and the wider communities through students and staff participating in voluntary work. At Salford, volunteers provide expertise and labour for the benefit of local voluntary, public and not-for–profit organisations and in return improve their skills portfolio whilst gaining valuable experience of a workplace environment.

Based in the Education Development Unit, Volunteering @ Salford focuses on the generation, co-ordination and evaluation of volunteering activity and works towards increased collaboration with established volunteering organisations. Over the first two years of the project we have created links with over three hundred voluntary organisations, worked with over one hundred volunteers, both students and staff, and part funded five voluntary projects that were led by volunteers from the University community. Projects have ranged from one off events to projects requiring considerable weekly commitment for the volunteer. We have also been involved in national and international volunteering projects. The students have, for the most part, desired and been allocated opportunities that related to their course or future employment aspirations.

The Network Project, based in the Careers Office, is a multi-partnership project that aims to develop employability, to raise awareness of career options and provide access to quality work experience opportunities. Established for over 3 years, one aspect of the project's activities is to address the skills gap identified between labour market requirements and outputs from the education system. Within the current climate, employers demand more than academic knowledge and expect a high level of skill, ability and experience. Students are entering into a competitive and fast moving job market. Furthermore, the introduction of The Excellence Challenge by the Government in 2000 highlighted the desire to increase participation in higher education and ensure students entering higher education were representative of the population as a whole. Therefore, competition for jobs at the point of graduation will inevitably intensify and the nature of that competition will change.

The impact on student life as a whole has never been more intense. It is vital that the University acts to enable students to make the most of their experience at University. Through providing a range of work experience opportunities to promote the development of employability skills (reflection, team working, problem solving) we will ensure that Salford students are able to experience a more holistic education, promoting the successful progression through higher education and into full time employment.

It is with this in mind that the Network Project came together with Volunteering @ Salford to offer students the opportunity to develop employability skills through volunteering opportunities. The two projects have been operating in partnership for the past year, piloting the Network Work Experience Award (WEA) with students undertaking volunteering projects as part of the elective Independent Learning Module in ESPaCH, facilitated by Elaine Baldwin (Sociology), Andy Kay (Careers Service) and Rory Daly (Education Development Unit). The students worked with a wide range of organisations including Partners of Prisoners, Barnardos, Age Concern and Fairbridge.

The outcome has been extremely positive, with students demonstrating learning and development through the unification of theory and practice, and being rewarded for their achievements. This also served to meet one of the needs of the Volunteering @ Salford project; that of offering our volunteers some form of certification whilst similarly allowing the Network Project to pilot the WEA and ensure its applicability in a range of voluntary and community settings. The need for certification had proved difficult to fulfil as the HEACF funding stipulated that Volunteering @ Salford could not work with students on compulsory placements that led to a degree.

We intend to offer the WEA to all our volunteers in the future and to increase the links between the Volunteering @ Salford, the Careers Service and schools and faculties. This will ensure that students and staff can continue having a positive impact on the local community, whilst developing a range of employability

skills to enable successful progression into the employment market.

If you would like to learn more about Volunteering @ Salford or the Network Project please contact;

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Promoting Equality and Diversity in Health and Social Care Curricula: Report on a Widening Participation Project

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This Project is being developed within the Faculty of Health and Social Care and reflects a commitment to providing and delivering a curriculum within a learning environment that is free from discrimination and discriminatory practices. At the beginning of the Project we met as a team and acknowledged that we need to develop inclusive curricula that recognise and respond to the diversity of our students and those with whom they work, and with whom they will work as qualified professionals in the future. To date we are unaware of any systematic analysis of our current curricula to determine how equality and diversity issues are being addressed, nor whether the strategies adopted are effective.

To this end we have commenced a 2 stage project and obtained support and funding from the University Widening Participation Committee. During the first stage of the Project we are developing a tool to analyse curricula for equality and diversity content. When developed, the tool will be tested on a small sample of existing curricula within the Faculty, before dissemination to a wider audience. To date we have been unable to uncover any existing tool which would provide the level of

analysis that we are seeking. We are therefore in the process of developing our own tool which we hope to test in the autumn Semester of the next academic year. The areas covered by the curricula analysis tool will be:

- Planning and Development
- Documentation
- Modular Content
- Delivery
- Assessment
- Evaluation
- Management

There will be a small number of questions within each of these sections/areas. Our intention is to develop a tool that is relatively simple to use but will still produce information that is relevant and will enable change to curricula to be introduced if necessary. It is also the intention that the tool will be made available to other Faculties within the University to use and indeed to adapt to their own purposes and subject areas. The tool will be developed by August this year and be the subject of a poster presentation at the Salford University Education in a Changing Environment Conference in September, 2004.

Following development, testing of the tool and sample analysis of curricula it is intended to move into Stage 2 of the Project. This will involve research from the student perspective. Our aim will be to determine whether the current curricula is capable of meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and if they (students) feel adequately prepared to meet the needs of, and respect, diverse communities with whom they will work.

In this Stage of the research student experiences within each of the 2 Schools will be explored in an attempt to capture their perspectives

of how equality and diversity issues impact on themselves, their attitudes and in turn, their practice. Methods used to capture the perspectives of individuals may involve reflective accounts, attitudinal scales, purposive interviews and/or focus groups. Essentially this is a pilot project upon which to build tools, confirm and test approaches and develop a greater understanding of the issues involved.

At the beginning of the Project we identified a number of potential benefits to be gained from our work. These include patients/service users receiving better care; students receiving a more open and transparent learning experience and the Faculty (University) agenda for promoting equality and diversity will benefit from extension into curricula audit and development. We remain optimistic that these benefits will accrue. In the meantime we have already discovered that this is a complex arena in which to research and work and that our own understanding of the issues is improving as the research progresses. We also feel that the team has quickly established a productive working relationship and is a good example of a cross Faculty initiative which promotes understanding of the role and work of staff from different Schools and professional backgrounds. In many ways this mirrors the workforce development currently taking place in the area of health and social care provision.

Developing Independent Language Learning (DILL): Reflections on Progress

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Background

When we decided to call a programme "DILL" it was inevitable in a School of Languages that the name would become a recipe for word play. In fact this "play" reaches into the core of DILL. What does "Developing Independent Language Learning" mean? How important is it in the learning process? The essence is to encourage a learner-centred approach and autonomous learning. Once you have digested this piece you may wish to engage in the discussion by returning to the culinary analogy provided in the table below to consider the meaning of the words or phrases and decide which expresses the most appropriate engagement in a programme of this nature.

Table 1: DILL's role is…?

What are we doing?	How does it relate to the feast?	What is it?
dipping into	an appetizer	the meat
flavouring	a picnic	the icing on the cake
garnishing	a sandwich	making a meal of it
adding spice	a smorgasbord	one man's meat
adding taste	a snack	you say potato …

Aims and Development

DILL aims to encourage study beyond set activities by providing language students with a progressive programme for individual task-based learning of strategies for independent planning and learning, including a framework for learner reflection, and pointers for more effective use of language resources. DILL develops awareness of the different learning styles and needs of an increasingly diverse student body. In addition, it is hoped DILL will strengthen tutorial support and aid retention and progression.

International students on pre- and in-sessional English as a Foreign Language programmes follow DILL. Also, DILL has been adopted as the Level One stage for Languages students for their Personal Development Planning (PDP) as it incorporates most aspects of PDP as described in the Dearing Report, including:

■ Integrating personal development with academic activity. DILL is valued at 10% of Level One Language modules. Personal and Academic Tutors provide guidance and monitoring throughout the first year for these students. The assessment is based on a portfolio of work, especially reflection on the learning process.

■ Self assessment, reflection and action planning for lifelong learning are key elements. Students are required to complete Needs Analyses, make Action Plans and keep a Progress Record and reflective journal.

■ Enabling learners to take control of their own learning through the development of critical self awareness as evidenced in the setting of realistic goals and shown in the journal.

The DILL materials are situated on a Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) site. In addition, the VLE Discussion Boards are used as a vehicle for student interaction about learning, and also, with staff moderation, they are used for general language advising. Use of the VLE means DILL is easily accessible wherever and whenever users are internet-connected.

Changes

The emphasis on learner autonomy has meant a culture change for many staff and students. To prepare for the different approach, there was an extensive staff development programme which gave the opportunity for much open discussion which has challenged many staff. In the end-of-year review this year, staff felt that on the whole DILL has been successful and personal tutoring is stronger as a result of the programme. DILL has drawn attention to needs and facilities and has helped the formation of good study habits. Students' independent learning has increased and committed students have worked particularly well. Generally staff felt that they now had a clear understanding of expectations and would approach DILL confidently next year.

However, some staff are still moving from a more directed approach and need to value independent analytical reflection in addition to description and industry. Also a minority of students did not participate in DILL. It is hoped to address these issues through preparation of an analysis of this year's students' marks and staff feedback together with illustration from portfolio entries especially of the reflective journal.

To conclude as one student ended her journal, "I would recommend self-analysis to any language learner… If you know the best way of learning for you, it's obviously going to be more effective."

Conceptualising Student Support in the Faculty of Health and Social Care

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Notions of diversity, progression and achievement have particular meaning in a faculty which - by the nature of the professions it serves - recruits large numbers of mature, female students. The Faculty of Health and Social Care has recently embarked upon a project to investigate the support needs of this group of students. The project is in its early stages, and as with any piece of research, part of the process involves thinking through key concepts. This short piece is presented as a reflective piece on the meaning of 'support', which in everyday practice and discussions about educational policies can be taken for granted.

One way of thinking about this concept is to look at different locations for support. Support could come from within a University or from outside. It can be provided at different levels and different locales within a university, including the 'virtual' context. Support can also come from outside the institutional environment, for example, via students' own social networks, or through media aimed at supporting students. Modes of delivery will vary and could be formal or informal, on a face-to-face basis, by written means, the telephone, or increasingly, via the web. In addition support can be provided by groups or by individuals– either formally or informally – including students' support networks within the institution.

It is also helpful to consider the different motivations for offering support to students. The overt aim of support services for students is to meet student needs. However, at times the provision of support for students will also meet staff needs. For example, if staff know that they can refer students to counselling services, this takes the pressure off them. Beyond this, support services are also driven by the political and policy agendas dominating the HE sector, and hence are also there to serve institutional and political needs. Currently these are linked to widening participation and equality and diversity. Universities are expected to encourage and facilitate access from 'non-traditional' students, and avoid creating barriers that would prevent students from attending University. This means that the context in which 'support' is provided becomes increasingly complex as universities endeavour to acknowledge a wide range of needs, both in terms of access to education, and in ensuring that in the teaching and learning context students are both enabled and not disadvantaged in any way. The result is that universities sometimes in partnership with or parallel to the NUS offer an increasingly diverse array of support services intended to meet student needs across a wide range of areas. These include, for example: academic support, key skills, support for disabled students, mature students, female students, students from minority ethnic groups, as well as financial support/advice, mentoring, personal tutoring and counselling. While this is a long list, it is not intended to be a complete list in what seems to be an ever-expanding area, creating new 'needs' in terms of personnel, staff development and resources.

This short piece has discussed 'support' and 'need'. Any discussion of need raises fundamental issues which include: how needs are defined; who defines need; and whose needs are being prioritized, by whom. This should place the exploration of both concepts firmly on the current political and policy agenda within the HE sector. There is a danger that policy becomes a top-down process, rather than a bottom-up process, with institutional determination of what constitutes effective support. Process assumes significance also when considering 'quality'. It is the contention here that the quality of support on offer to students is best assessed by students themselves. As we work in an environment in which we constantly ask students to evaluate, perhaps it could be considered that this is already the case. However, evaluations tend to be designed by staff, rather than students. Moreover, more opportunities could be available for students to take a lead in identifying what support they would find helpful, so that policy and practice can evolve upwards, rather than be devolved.

Notes

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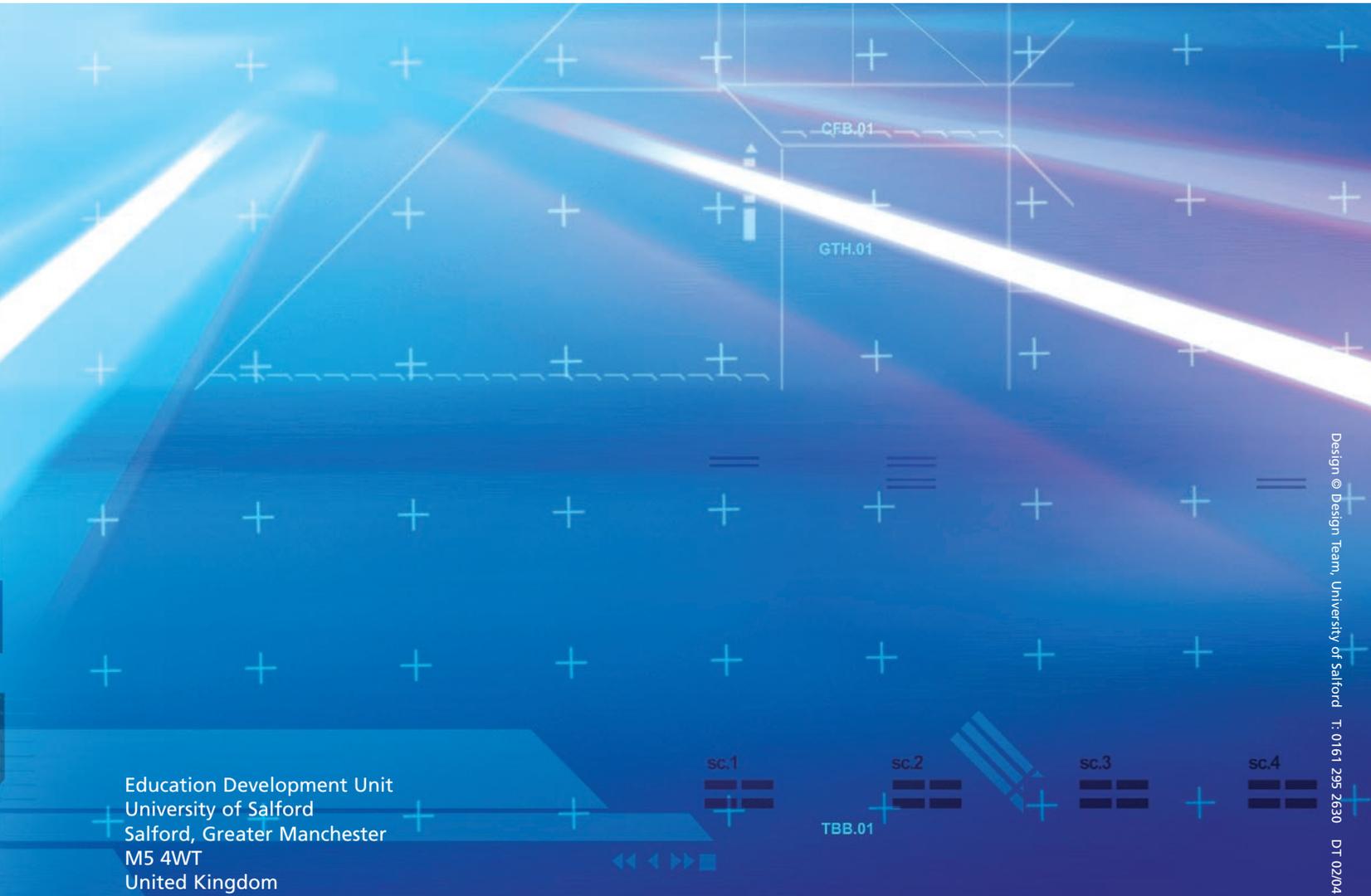
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