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Teaching Cycle Two: The Challenges of Large Group Teaching

One of the main changes in higher education over the last few years has been the increase in the number of students with the commensurate increase in the size of student classes. This has significant implications for those who work in the sector.\(^{30}\) Many academics assume that the increase in the number of students in any given class size and the change in the staff-student ratio has a negative impact, although as Graham Gibbs and Alan Jenkins show, evidence of this is hard to come by.\(^{31}\) Yet it is clear that both students and teachers have to adapt to these changes in their attitudes to teaching and learning, but that it can also be advantageous; more people in a classroom can enrich discussions and lead to a fuller exchange of ideas.

This cycle attempts to elucidate some of the challenges and opportunities of large group teaching by engaging with the educational literature and applying it to my own experiences. I will discuss the broad context, examine my own experiences and in particular the challenges in the lecture theatre and seminar room, and the way I have tried to deal with them.

Issues relating to large groups

As stated in the 'Present Context and Constraints' section, above, one of the most striking features of my teaching experiences at Aberystwyth has been dealing with large groups of students. It is unusual for me to teach a course with fewer than 50 students and sometime groups have been larger than 100! This can be a problem as it is generally recognised that students tend to find small groups much easier to deal with and fulfilling than large ones.\(^{32}\) Engaging with each and every student, especially those weaker students who might need some extra help, is essential, but it is also a considerable challenge. Many educationalists have noted the importance of interaction and initiating activities to the process of learning. Cowan, for example, quotes the

\(^{30}\) Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, p. 2.
'Education for Capability' manifesto which stated the importance of getting on with others and initiating co-operative activity for learning.\textsuperscript{33} Similarly for Brockbank: and McGill, building on work by Abercrombie, critically reflective learning is facilitated nurtured by relationships between all members of the group.\textsuperscript{34}

Yet motivating students can be difficult when they are in large groups and can therefore 'hide away' avoiding the tutor's eye and not engaging with the material. Race notes that the expansion of British higher education and changing sets of expectation of students can lead to low motivation.\textsuperscript{35} These two problems see to go hand-in-hand and it is easy to see how a student who is on a course with many others allows their motivation to drop because by definition the tutor is able to spend less time focusing on their needs. Of course it is impossible to make all unmotivated students into highly motivated ones; ultimately, if a student is totally unmotivated they will vote with their feet and not attend at all. There are steps that can be taken to make sure that this does not lead to permanent exclusion through early intervention, but my purpose in this cycle is to discuss the techniques that can be used to motivate, actively engage and participate once the students are in the classroom. This will lead them to take a more active interest in the subject material and lead to better results. This will also mean that they are more likely to be intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated and see value in attending the class, participating and reflecting for their own sake rather than because they have to.\textsuperscript{36}

The main challenge here is to deal effectively with student demands in relation to what Maggi Savin-Baden calls 'problem-based learning'. Savin-Baden argues that the issues surrounding problem-based learning are taken as a given in higher education and that problems associated with levels of support, the role of facilitators in improving student learning, team-work and assessment are not given sufficient attention.\textsuperscript{37} This is essential if we are to become what Donald A. Schö\textsuperscript{n} called

\textsuperscript{33} Cowan, \textit{On Becoming an Innovative University Teacher}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{37} Maggi Savin-Baden, \textit{Facilitating Problem-Based Learning: Illuminating Perspectives} (Maidenhead: SRHE and Open University Press, 2003), pp. 4-5.
'Reflective Practitioners'. Only by reflecting and encouraging students to reflect can we help to give them the skills they need to complete assessment tasks successfully and hopefully very well, rather than simply encouraging them to meet simple assessment criteria.

As one would expect, I will engage with some of the literature on the nature and difficulties of large group teaching in this section. Yet it is also important for me to consider small group teaching in the large group context. Many of the most successful teaching and learning sessions I have been involved with have allowed students the freedom to discuss and reflect among themselves in groups of two, three or four, often then bringing the points that they have discussed back into a large group setting later on in the session. Despite, or even because of, the growth in student numbers in higher education over the last few years, the importance of small group learning in a large group context therefore remains crucial.

Active engagement in the student lecture

I have always regarded lecturing as being important. I believe Phil Race is correct when he states that despite the development of information technology and other innovations, lecturing remains central to teaching and learning. I am employed as a lecturer, students still expect to attend lectures and therefore to derive benefits from them. Yet in his book, Race also suggests that the reason he puts a chapter on assessment before one on lecturing is that 'students can survive bad lectures, but they may be damaged by bad assessment'. This may certainly be true, but I think it is important to be positive about lecturing. I remember the best lectures I attended as an undergraduate very clearly and some of the ideas the particular lecturers imparted continue to influence the way I approach lecturing today in terms of both style and content. There are therefore many good and important reasons for conducting

38 Donald A. Schöen, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). For brief discussions of Schön’s work and its applications, see Biggs, Teaching for Quality Learning at University, pp. 6-8; Brockbank and McGill, Facilitating Reflective Learning, pp. 71-2; Cowan, On Becoming an Innovative University Teacher, pp. 36-7.
39 See Biggs, Teaching for Quality Learning at University, pp. 35-6.
40 Phil Race, The Lecturer’s Toolkit, pp. 140-2.
41 Phil Race, The Lecturer’s Toolkit, pp.104-6.
lectures, but as John Biggs points out there are disadvantages as well as advantages to them and they need to go beyond the textbook and offer them something new. We also need to encourage active learning, as in what Gibbs and Jenkins calls the 'conventional lecture' the only active person in the lecture is the lecturer. While I believe that some aspects of 'conventional lecturing' are important, I am also very sympathetic to pedagogic processes of Biggs, Gibbs and Jenkins and others.

When I begin a lecture, I attempt to make it especially clear at the beginning. In the lecture slides in this portfolio (appendix L), the common theme is that I hope to give students a reasonable idea of what they can expect in the lecture, both in terms of content and specific learning outcomes. As always, I am not slavish about this; occasionally I am slightly more 'free flowing' and introduce elements in a different way so that the lectures do not become formulaic, but I think that the beginning of the lecture is the most crucial part because it is when the students are most eager. I also always try to be clear about exactly how this lecture fits into the overall structure of the course and where it will lead, both in taking the student towards the next lecture and, more importantly, how they can take it into a broader discussion, usually in the seminar.

Actively engaging with students in large lectures is more of a challenge. My first experience of this, and it is one I continue to employ, is to ask for questions and/or comments at an appropriate point in the lecture. This gives the students a chance both to reflect and some time to catch their breath (as well as allowing me to catch mine). Sometimes this can yield very positive results, whether it is a comment on a particular idea, a clarification question or one that is more substantive. The problem with this technique, however, is that it is often the more vocal, confident and able students who engage in this way. This is fine, but it can have the effect of intimidating the other students who probably need more help than the ones who are participating. If only one or two students engage in this kind of activity in a large group, it also might not provide enough variation from the rest of the lecture format to engage many of the students (see comments in Teaching Observation, 9 November 2006, appendix B).
have also therefore tried splitting these groups into pairs and threes to consider a particular issue or factor in the lecture. This can also work well, but I have often found that it is the same type of student who will respond well to this kind of active learning.

At the end of lectures I often try to engage students by drawing on material discussed and asking them to address questions directly. I am particularly keen on this approach because a) it does not close down the potential for debate in the seminar group by suggesting that I or they have already reached ‘conclusions’; b) it could (and should) challenge them to consider the material in a different light; c) it might lead them to formulate questions of their own, which they can either ask at the end of the lecture itself or develop in time for the seminar to follow. (For an example of these questions, see ‘The Nuclear Relationship in appendix L’). This is particularly important in seeing the lecture and seminar as being part of the same process. Although I do not have a seminar directly corresponding to a particular lecture, I make it clear to the students that it is important to consider these issues because they will be followed up and developed in the lectures. It is important here to ensure that they know where they can find further literature so that they can follow up, so part of this process can done in relation to their textbooks or the main course books, easy-to-find journal articles and other sources. In relation to the first teaching cycle, this can be done in the context of a discussion of the main areas of contention and the developing literature in the field. In the example used above on the Spanish-American War of 1898 extracts from the sources discussed in the lecture (appendix L) are a key part of the discussion in the seminar. Students can therefore reflect on them between the two sessions and bring their questions and comments to the seminar room. These differing approaches form the central question (in this case ‘What were the most important factors that caused the United States to declare war against Spain in 1898?’), which then leads directly into the seminar.

Reflecting and engaging in the student seminar

While the lecture retains its importance, the seminar (which is also sometimes called the tutorial) is vital. David Jacques defines a seminar as being a group of more than
eight and less than 20 students and this has almost always been my experience.\textsuperscript{46} If we return to Cowan’s model of innovative and reflective learning (Figure 3 above), we can see an obvious connection to the ideal trajectory of seminar and group work. Building upon work by M.L.J. Abercrombie, Charles Anderson notes:

Advocates of university discussion groups have claimed that they provide an arena where ‘active’ learning can take place and where critical thinking and the development of communication skills can be encouraged. It has also been claimed that ‘democratically’ run discussion groups can encourage students to think more independently and gain confidence in their own abilities.\textsuperscript{47}

I would support these claims. I therefore see the lecture and the seminar/tutorial as being complementary components of a single unit where ideas and questions are introduced, explored, developed, conclusions are reached, perhaps a consensus is formed and (hopefully) more questions are asked in the way that Cowan’s model suggests. It is crucial therefore that, in David Jacques’ words, students do not come to regard seminars ‘as little more than an extension to the lecture’ where the lecturer continues to talk to them.\textsuperscript{48} Moreover, it is in seminars where the process of deep as opposed to surface learning occurs. Anne Brockbank and Ian McGill develop work by Ference Marton to argue that deep learning occurs when students engage with a text or set of ideas in an active way to draw conclusions and make broader points. In this way, they argue, learners ‘internalize their learning, making it part of themselves, and relate it to their real life’.\textsuperscript{49} This is exactly what I would like students to achieve.

Yet the problem of how to achieve this with increasingly large seminar and tutorial groups is a challenge to all lecturers in higher education today. It was an area of great concern to me when I began teaching at Aberystwyth and I was given useful insights into approaches during the tHE induction course (see ‘Improving Seminars Through Innovation’ and responses, appendix A). Groups over a certain number become increasingly difficult to engage without some members of the group beginning to dominate and others who feel shy or overwhelmed by the material to remain quiet.

\textsuperscript{46} Jacques, \textit{Learning in Groups}, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{48} Jacques, \textit{Learning in Groups}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{49} Brockbank and McGill, \textit{Facilitating Reflective Learning}, p. 36. See also, Biggs, \textit{Teaching for Quality Learning at University} pp. 14-17.
The dominant ones may then get a great deal out of the seminar, but they may not necessarily engage productively with the others.50 As a result, the quieter and possibly slightly weaker students, lacking active engagement with the material and with their peers in the way that Anderson suggests, might lapse into silence with the result that their ability to reflect critically on the material under consideration, and ultimately to learn, is impaired.

When I first began to teach, the way I approached this problem was to encourage students actively to engage with the material under consideration through presentations (for examples, see appendix M). This meant that every student was assigned a topic, issue or question (sometimes combinations of all three) and asked to go away, research it and bring back their findings to the class. This would then follow Cowan’s model, particularly in consolidating their findings and then leading on (‘further’) to group discussion and others engaging with the findings. The first large course I taught on was America in the World for which I took weekly seminars usually with 15 to 17 students in each group. This approach worked reasonably well, although because of the large size of some of the classes, certain topics had to be divided up which felt slightly artificial. Moreover, the format was subject to a number of variables that could effect it, most obviously the quality of the presentation - too good and the other students might feel intimidated, not so good and there might not be enough discussion points to develop - but also whether the student turned up and whether the other non-presenting students had done adequate reading, engagement and reflection themselves. So the result could be that the exercise tended to create one or two ‘experts’ on any particular topic. Although others students might benefit from this expertise, some might not and the whole group might not necessarily engage in the intended way. There were some hugely successful seminars conducted in this way, many of the students reacted positively and feedback was often very good (particularly at Masters level where groups were smaller. See appendix 0), yet, as Biggs suggests, this kind of approach can lead to surface rather than deep learning,51 and ultimately I was left feeling that there were better ways to actively engage students in the seminar experience and allow them to reflect on the material.

50 For an exploration of the problems of group member domination, see Race, *The Lecturer’s Toolkit*, pp. 162-3.
51 Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, p. 89.
I was, and continue to be, open to suggestions from colleagues about ways to improve my teaching. One particular innovation that my mentor introduced me to was the use of ‘syndicates’ within the large group.\textsuperscript{52} I split the groups of about 16 students into four groups of four. Students remained in these groups throughout the semester and worked through issues and problems outside of the classroom. What allowed this to work was that instead of weekly one-hour long seminars, these were fortnightly and lasted for two hours. This gave the students sufficient time to read, reflect, contact each other and produce a short report. The agreement was that each group would email a one page summary of their discussion points to me a minimum of 24 hours before the class began, so that I could send it to the rest of the group and, if necessary, produce paper copies. Emphasis was placed on group work and I encouraged anyone who was experiencing difficulties contacting and engaging fellow group members to contact me urgently. In the seminar room each group was asked to present a very brief summary of their findings and highlight the issues they felt deserved further discussion (see Teaching Observation, 21 April 2004, appendix B).

Again, this was a useful innovation and it is one that I still sometimes employ. It seems to fit the ‘democratic’ model that Anderson discusses, above, because it allows students the freedom to develop their own ideas and interact with each other outside of the classroom as well as in it. In a sense it helps facilitate reflective learning in the way that it re-orders the hierarchy of the group to give the students more power.\textsuperscript{53} Students often came very well-prepared; they had clearly discussed and reflected in some detail and opened up many areas to explore. Its main limitation was, however, that it is impossible to prevent ‘passengers’ from developing. Students were sometimes good at reporting others who were not pulling their weight, but, as Race points out, groups of four often encourage ‘passengers’ and these groups have a tendency to split into two groups of two.\textsuperscript{54} This would mean that two of the students would do most of the work (usually the strongest and already most engaged) and the

\textsuperscript{52} See, for example, Jacques, \textit{Learning in Groups}, pp. 93-4; Phil Race, \textit{The Lecturer’s Toolkit}, pp. 150-1.
\textsuperscript{54} Race, \textit{The Lecturer’s Toolkit}, p. 143.
others would fall away. Moreover, by the time of the fourth and fifth seminars, it had come to seem slightly formulaic.

What I found most attractive about this format was the fortnightly, two-hour slots and this is an element I have embraced enthusiastically. This means that there are a total of five two-hour slots over the course of semester. These allow much more in depth discussion and debate and, if the full two hours was not required, it was always possible to switch to another activity (discussing other related issues, assignments, etc.) or finish slightly early. I have now introduced these to all my modules and I think they have succeeded very well, although, interestingly, there were the first signs of some complaints about them in the last academic session (see appendix R).

I have now adopted a much more mixed approach to student engagement in the seminar room. In order to illustrate how this works, I have chosen a different example, my course on US-UK Relations (see appendix IJ). At this point I should stress that the important element at the start is to ensure the students understand that there will be some different formats each week. I go through each of the five weeks in turn to explain this in the first lecture. Then in the first seminar, after going round the group and getting everyone to introduce themselves, I will begin with a buzz group. For example, I will divide the group into twos or threes and then giving them a short series of broad questions (in this case, 'What do you think a "Special Relationship" is?' 'What are the characteristics of 'specialness' in relations between two countries?' and, if you have time, 'Can you think of any other 'special' relationships between nations other than the US and UK?'). By this time they will have had some introductory lectures on the topic, but will still bring their own prior experiences to the group. They then elect a spokesperson to report back, but I then look to the others to develop some of the ideas and fill in the gaps with any additional thoughts. This is usually successful in drawing them out and helping to break the ice as well as giving them some broad areas that they can develop in subsequent seminars.

In the next two meetings I will repeat this, but only every so often. Sometimes, I will simply address the relevant topics and questions in the handbook. The advantage of

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55 Jacques, *Learning in Groups*, p. 84; Race, *The Lecturer's Toolkit*, p. 150.
this approach is that the students are free to interpret different areas as they see fit. I will try to guide them, but I particularly want them to ask questions both of me and each other. I might still fit a buzz group in, but perhaps halfway through if we have come to a particularly challenging issue that seems to have brought the discussion to a halt. This is often also a good time to take a break as two hours is a long time to engage in this way. At the end of week three, I divide them into groups of three or four for the following fortnight’s class. This can be according to where they sit or randomly from the register.\textsuperscript{56} I then assign them a 'case-study', each of which is considered by scholars to be a 'crisis' in US-UK relations. Rather than being like the examples that are often used in management and business studies, these are designed to give students specific instances from which they can than generalise in discussion.\textsuperscript{57} These are the Suez crisis of 1956, the Skybolt crisis of 1962, the Vietnam War and the 1982 Falklands War. I then draw their attention to the four points I want them to consider for the following meeting and ask them to address these and any other issues they think are relevant, as well as problems, questions, etc. I explain that they should swap email addresses and contact each other as soon as possible to sort out how they are going to divide the work. Absent members are contacted immediately by me to ensure that they participate. As with the other syndicates, I encourage those who are doing the work to contact me if there are others who they cannot contact or refuses to meet, or do work in the first few days if possible. As they have 13 days between the two seminars this gives them ample time to do this. Again, I tell them that if they want to email handouts to me, then I will copy them for the rest of the class, place them on Blackboard and make visual equipment available in the seminar room.

This approach has generally worked well and feedback has been positive (appendix \textsuperscript{R}) and I think I may expand it in the future. Students seemed to be particularly pleased with being able to access the reading on-line; they generally come well-prepared and they seem enthusiastic about the topics that they choose. Many of them go well-beyond what is expected of them and make very full presentations. It still is generally the case that a particular group of students is considered to be the 'expert' one on the topic, so I think that I should further encourage the others to prepare for the

\textsuperscript{56} For approaches to random groups, see Race, \textit{The Lecturer's Toolkit}, p. 146-7.
\textsuperscript{57} See Jacques, \textit{Learning in Groups}, pp. 94-5.
other presentations as well, although the lectures are at least meant to introduce them to the topics. Moreover, the nature of the literature on the different areas means that some cases (for example, Suez) offer far more material than others (the Falklands), which is of some frustration to me and the students but, aside from ordering more books for the library in certain key areas, there is little that can be done about this. Moreover, problems with unenthusiastic students remain. There are, for example, perennial problems such tardiness, which can be disruptive at any time and particularly where presentations are concerned, group members not preparing or participating fully in class and the issue of complete non-attendance. These can be dealt with. For instance, one can make clear that arriving late for seminars is unacceptable because it is discourteous to other members of the group and to the tutor and it means that important material at the beginning of the session will be missed. On non-attendance and apart from chasing students to ensure that they come to every session, this is another problem offering no immediate solution beyond keeping attendance registers and encouraging active engagement and enthusiasm. 58

Indeed, as stated at the beginning of this section, enthusiasm and encouraging motivation are key in the large group situation and have informed my approaches to all these situations. As Anderson suggests from detailed research on the role of tutors in groups, students have an expectation that tutors will 'energetically apply the skills appropriate for facilitating debate' (emphasis in original).59 This can mean encouraging an informal, friendly atmosphere and not allowing certain people to monopolise the floor. In a large group, simple things like praising can be used to motivate. 60 The intention here is to get students to reflect, even if it requires intervention on the part of the tutor. 61 And even if a student does not grasp the concept or understand the significance of a particular event, whether they have prepared a presentation or are simply exploring their ideas within the group setting, there is almost always something one can take to demonstrate how well they have done. This can be challenging, but it is essential us errors constructively and, as Biggs points out, these can be used as a formative assessment to ensure that the students are

58 For more useful ways to deal with these problems, see Race, The Lecturer's Too/kit, pp. 159-62.
59 Charles Anderson, 'Enabling and Shaping Understanding through Tutorials', in Ference Marton, Dai Hounsell and Noel Entwisle (eds), The Experience of Learning, p. 188.
60 Race, The Lecturer's Too/kit, p. 16, point 12.
61 For numerous examples of what tutors can do to encourage interaction, see Cowan, On Becoming an Innovative University Teacher, pp. 47-64.
moving in the right direction.\textsuperscript{62} Even if they've completely missed the point, I try to turn it round ('Are you saying...? ' Do you mean...?'). This may be interpreted as a form of what Brockbank and McGill call 'confrontation'.\textsuperscript{63} and it makes the points more positive, so the student is hopefully drawn in, which can then help to illustrate a point to the others especially if the particular student has a chance to reflect and agree/disagree with your suggestion. This can then in turn lead others to reflect on the points made and hopefully draw them in too.

Conclusions and Reflections

The mixed-methods approach to my group teaching is the one with which I am becoming most comfortable. The idea of syndicates can be extremely beneficial and I am grateful for being introduced to it so early in my career at Aberystwyth. Yet the main problem with it is that it tends to become formulaic after the first few weeks and my approach to large group teaching has been predicated on the notion that variety is valuable. While there is certainly value in repeating exercises, and I will develop this further, I do not want it to become staid and dull for the students over the course of what often seems like a long semester when there is much to be covered in preparation for course assignments and examinations. The 'case study' section of the course lends itself well to the demands of this kind of approach and I certainly intend to keep it for next time. Moreover, I am looking to see whether it can be adapted for use on some of my other courses to engage the students in this way.

Yet I still value the occasional 'free flowing' discussion where students are left to explore the issues they think are important with some input from me as group leader. Occasionally dividing them into buzz groups, use of tests and votes to decide on important issues can also be useful as can both ice-breakers and ways to consolidate deeper learning. I am also keen to stress the points that we have covered and to suggest the direction in which I think the class discussion is moving in order to try to engage them further. This can sometimes lead to people who have not really engaged up until that point to interject to say that they disagree with some of the points that

\textsuperscript{62} Biggs, \textit{Teaching for Quality Learning}, pp. 77-8.
\textsuperscript{63} Brockbank and McGill, \textit{Facilitating Reflective Learning}, pp. 201-4.
have been made up until then, which can then lead on to others agreeing with this new angle. Evidence shows that different students respond to focused and free flowing differently and some appreciate one more than others, so this approach of focused and free flowing is the one I find can be most rewarding, both for me and for the students. 64

Perhaps the area that I now feel requires most development is the lecture itself. I feel that the lectures most important function continues to be the introduction of new, or contested material, which will then be developed in a much more active and deep way in the seminar discussion. I have found this to have worked well, but I am aware that concentrating for 50 minutes in this kind of setting can be a challenge, even if I do my best to engage the students with anecdotes and asides. This is why I feel that it is essential to engage the students more in this setting. I already make use of questions throughout the lecture. Sometimes I have found that it is useful to present a series of questions at the start of the session, which I will develop throughout the lecture and then return to again at the end. I often also break up the lecture in the middle by throwing out ideas and asking questions. This gives students a chance to consolidate their thinking and their notes. Yet the problem with this is that it tends actively to engage those students who are already most enthusiastic and outgoing at the beginning and omit some of those who might participate if they were given more incentive and motivation to do so. I am therefore preparing to introduce more active learning elements at all stages of the lecture process in future sessions. Although I have attempted this to a limited degree before, it something I feel I must develop through the use of buzz groups and other techniques. 65 Although I will continue to use questions, which I feel are essential if students are to reflect upon the issues raised in the lectures before the seminar, I will definitely start to encourage students to engage with them more in the lecture rather than using them as an introduction to seminar discussions. This can only encourage further reflection, engagement and learning.

In this way, I feel that my overall aim of making the lectures and seminars into a more coherent whole can be achieved. In all of this, it is essential to get the balance right in

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65 For example, as in Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning*, pp. 109-10.
terms of giving the students the ability to participate, but not putting too much pressure on them; giving them direction, but not pressing my views too much. As it seems that large class sizes are now a long-term feature of British higher education, the need to motivate and maintain students' interests in the lecture and seminar room remains essential. This is something I am continually striving to achieve and something I aim to keep developing in the years to come.

Reflections and Plan for Continuing Professional Development

This portfolio has dealt with my own ideas about teaching in higher education and incorporated some of the educational literature that has influenced these ideas. I have particularly tried to build on the ideas developed by Kolb, Cowan and others to demonstrate the importance of reflective teaching practice to the success of the student learning experience. Specifically, this portfolio has explored teaching cycles dealing with disciplinary issues and the problems of large group teaching. I hope it reflects my attitudes towards teaching, the way I have tried to engage students and the successes and continuing challenges of doing this. I feel that I have progressed considerably in terms of my own understanding of teaching since I began as a graduate tutor in 1999. I have also come a long way in reflective practice since I began at Aberystwyth in 2003 and undertook this qualification. I feel I should stress again, however, that this is a continuing and ongoing process. It is one that certainly does not stop with the submission of this portfolio; instead this must be the beginning of a new period of engagement and reflection that will carry me into the next stage of my teaching career.

Broadly, this means continuing to engage in the kinds of debates that I have here, in particular, the need to engage students in deep learning, to facilitate their learning, and to help them deal with problem solving. Yet it also means getting them to reflect on what they are doing, where they are succeeding and how they feel they can improve, while encouraging them to be constructively crucial of my approaches through formal and informal feedback. Indeed, informal feedback is an area I would particularly like to develop in the near future. In this way the learning experience, attending lectures and seminars, reflecting on them, carrying out independent study, asking questions, making presentations and writing assignments and exams all have to be seen as
elements in a much broader process. This also includes continuing to attend staff
development sessions, some of which I have undertaken as part of this reflective
process (appendix D) and important sessions on developing good practice within my
own Department. I am very fortunate in this respect in that my Department conducts
weekly Staff Forums in order to engage academics in issues relating to student
support and learning and other matters (see appendix E). This will continue to be an
important part of my personal development. The reflective process also includes
continuing to get feedback from my peers. This is an element that I have found to be
incredibly useful in this process, both in terms of the formal feedback through peer
observation and meetings with my mentor (appendices B and C), but also through
informal chats, tips and suggestions that cannot adequately be represented in a more
formal document of this kind. In this way, the process of engaging with the practice of
reflective teaching and learning continues.
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