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3. Second Teaching Cycle

Second Teaching Cycle:

Promoting a deep learning approach through active student engagement

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

William Butler Yeats, Nobel Prize Winning Irish Dramatist, Author and Poet (1865 - 1939)
3.1 Executive Summary

This report describes how incorporating a deep learning approach in the teaching of the Schools Libraries and Learning Resources module can encourage active student engagement. The findings of this report are based upon a module that I taught for the first time in Semester Two in 2008 in the Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University. Such an intervention was implemented by the inclusion of weekly interactive activities, such as buzz groups and poster sessions that encouraged participation from all of the students in different ways. Comprehensive feedback was obtained via questionnaire data and a Staff and Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) meeting. The latter resulted in this module being highly commended by students.

3.2 Introduction

The aim of this report is to illustrate how adopting a deep learning approach in teaching encourages active student engagement.

3.2.1 The traditional teaching format for this module

This module has been traditionally taught via lectures and seminars as a Semester Two option module for full-time students in the department. Distance learning students can study this module once they have reached an option choice in their programme in Part One of the taught programme. During the DL study schools (April, June and September), a module introduction section is offered to the 2nd year ILS distance learning students whereby module co-ordinators "sell" their module in a fifteen minute slot. I was asked to promote the Schools option at both the June and September courses in 2008 (sheet included as Appendix Sa).

Head's of Department have traditionally taught this module to full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students, as this has been their subject area. This is the first time that a member of DIS staff has taken complete responsibility for the course. With my educational background, and interest in this area, I was an appropriate suitable replacement. As an undergraduate student in 1994, I also studied this module with the previous Head of Department. This module was last taught in Semester 2 in 2005/2006.
Undergraduate students complete a web-based resource guide for their assessed work and sit a written 2 hour exam in June (end of Semester Two), and postgraduates have an extended, analytical critique and a web-based resource guide to complete for their assessment. This assessed work requires Internet searching, information retrieval, information literacy and research-based skills, plus a working knowledge of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 in particular and an awareness of learning styles.

3.2.2 Learning Outcomes

As stated in the module outline, at the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Explain the context in which school libraries operate
- Explain the role performed by the School Library Resource Centre to meet the information needs of the school community
- Analyse the impact that the School Library Resource Centre might have on student learning and their academic achievement
- Explain the impact of ICT on the School Library Resource Centre
- Discuss the resourcing and management implications for the School Library Resource Centre of providing curriculum support within a school

See Appendix 8b for a copy of the module handbook with the aims and objectives for the module, with assessment criteria and reading lists. I produced an assessment advice sheet to aid the students on the course.

3.2.3 Intended aim of teaching intervention

The aim of this teaching cycle is to promote a deep learning approach in teaching through active student engagement and dialogue activities in the classroom.

3.3 Brief Review of the Literature

The move to student-centred models of learning has shifted the learning process. For learning to occur at all, and for us then to know that the learning is complete, we need: new experiences,
foundations, rehearsal, processing, understanding and demonstration (Cottrell 2008: 50).

Pedagogical research has demonstrated that students are more likely to adopt "deep learning" strategies when they are both challenged and supported to engage actively with the questions and problems of their discipline, for example, Prosser & Trigwell, (1999) and Ramsden (2003). Deep learning involves critically examining new ideas, linking them to already known concepts, principles and cognitive structures.

Some characteristics of deep learning involve:

- Looking for meaning
- Focussing on the central argument or concepts needed to solve a problem
- Interacting actively
- Distinguishing between argument and evidence
- Making connections between different modules
- Relating new and previous knowledge
- Linking course content to real life

This adopted style of learning leads to an understanding and long-term retention of concepts so that these can be used for problem solving in unfamiliar contexts. The teachers' role is to enable students to make mistakes without penalty, reward effort; use assessments that require thought and ideas to be used together; be consistent and fair in assessing declared intended learning outcomes and establish trust (Compiled from Biggs (1999), Entwistle (1998) and Ramsden (1992).

A study by Brooks (1997) observed that the more autonomous your learning is, the more you take control of your own learning. The disadvantage of autonomous learning is that you become responsible for not doing it. Recent research in American universities has shown that the largest group of failing students are the students who fail because they do not try. They fail or get low marks because they do not take an active part in learning. If there are lectures, they do not attend; if there is reading, they do not read; if there are exercises, they do not do them; if they need to ask questions, they do not ask them, and then they get poor results. (Brooks, 1997: 135-136).
According to Cottrell (2008:55), active is part of the CREAM strategy for learning: Creative (if you develop one aspect you strengthen all of the others), Reflective (analyse and experience), Effective (space, time and prioritise) Active (active learning and creativity requires motivation) and Motivated (an awareness of short and long term desired outcomes). Therefore, it is important to be personally involved and doing things physically and mentally, in order to make sense of what you learn. Seeing learning as a process of knowledge construction means that teaching moves away from transmission of information towards the design of learning tasks and environments that will support students' active engagement with their subject (Biggs, 1999).

Surface learning by contrast, involves accepting facts and ideas uncritically and attempts to store these as isolated, unconnected items. In active learning, you are engaged in the whole learning process and in a position to see why information has been selected.

### 3.4 The Teaching Cycle

#### 3.4.1 Planning, Structuring and Implementing the Cycle

As already stated, this module is an option module (10 credits) and is available as a taught course to all full-time students on the undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the Department of Information Studies who have reached Part Two of their degree. School Libraries and Learning Resources and the Focus on the Child option module are interchangeable, operating on a bi-annual basis. Distance learning students can study this module after completing a specified number of credits on their course (this will vary depending on whether they are UG or PG); they do not have any interruption with rotating modules as they work from a written module and access the VLE for additional communication and learning activities that are related to the module.

#### 3.4.2 Weekly Session

The sessions were held in a lecture room (123) in DIS on a Tuesday morning from 10 am to 12 noon for a period of ten weeks, with the exception of a visit to a local Welsh Secondary school in Aberystwyth. I chose a two hour slot on the timetable, in favour of two separate slots, which allowed a ten minute break in between for refreshment and a breather and more "quality" time with the
students to mix tradition (passive) with non-traditional learning (active)! Instead of rushing through a session in fifty minutes.

The sessions were followed up by regular postings of PowerPoint slides and references in the designated area on Blackboard.

### 3.4.3 Interactive learning activities

I chose to include a different activity each week alongside a formal, taught element of the course. This type of active varied in length and purpose. For each activity included, I related this to the overall module content, and encouraged participation, interaction with class members and an output which was then placed on a notice board in the classroom for the students for ownership of a teaching space. The notice board display also provided a visual progression of topics included in the course.

The interactive learning activities were also tied in with the components of the teaching system - the curriculum and its intended learning outcomes, the teaching methods used, the assessment tasks, with each one aligned (Biggs 2003). The third principle of "Good Practice" states that "Good practice encourages active learning". Cross, in her 1998 NCHE lecture suggests that "active learning is the grand meta-principle and what we know about student learning is that students who are actively engaged in learning for deeper understanding are likely to learn more than students not so engaged".

The interactive learning activities that were used during the ten weeks included:

- Poster session
- Buzz groups
- School Library visit (2 hours)
- Brainstorming/mind maps for exam revision
- Designing a School Library plan
- Evaluation paper exercise
- Critical analysis of a paper (Herring)
- World Book Day* reading and short story
- Fishbowls debate
- Internet searching session of e-resources (portals, blogs, wikis)
Many of these ideas were inspired by the Designing learning - two
day - course, and the Skills in presentation course (see CPD
reports in Section 5 and Gibbs book in reference section).

*World Book Day
The Education Show 2008 was being held at the NEC in Birmingham
whilst I was teaching the School Library module. I arranged to
attend the show for a day (see CPD report) where the focus was
on literacy and the Secondary school curriculum.

I attended a seminar at the World Book Day stand and was inspired
by the entries that were read out from the World Book Day Short
Stories Competition 2007-2008. I was given a complimentary copy
of the anthologies entitled: Why were her toes like that? By Stuart
Ross, who judged the competition and chose the twelve winners.

World Book Day is the biggest annual celebration of books and
reading in the UK and Ireland. In 2008, it fell on 6th March which
was appropriate for the course. It was a special tenth year this year
where many schools held a big read. Many personalities, including
the BBC news reader Huw Edwards become involved to inspire
reading. The National Literacy Trust's aim is "to encourage people to
explore the pleasures of books and reading by providing them with
the opportunity to have a book of their own".

A competition is held for youngsters aged 6-16 from all over the
British Isles and school entries submitted for judging in the hope of
winning for their school. The sentence that inspired the stories was
"Arran knew that he should be scared". The criteria used for judging
is based on the most imaginative, well-constructed, original and
thoughtful pieces from all ages and geographical areas.

Information literacy was part of my remit in the course and is
defined in the UK by the Chartered Institute of Library and
Information Professionals CIUP as "knowing when and why you
need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and
communicate it in an ethical manner".

I used the first sentence from the signed Ross book as my
interactive learning activity for the week in the session. The
students really enjoyed reading and writing with a starting sentence
and openly shared their thoughts in a group setting. I compiled a
mini booklet of all of their written work, which is still displayed in
the teaching room (Room 123 in DIS) to date as part of the display to publicise the course.

3.5 Gathering Evidence as a Method of Evaluating the Intervention

A number of approaches were utilised as a means of evaluating the teaching intervention as listed below:

- Discussed as an item at the Staff Student Consultative Committee
- Post-it notes feedback from e-resources workshop
- Module evaluation form to all students in the last session resulting in individual feedback
- Class register statistics

3.5.1 Limitations

As with all interventions, a number of possible limitations did arise:

- The group were a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate students with varying special educational needs and educational reasons for choosing this module as an option
- The timing of the weekly session challenged a few (arriving on time for 10am)
- The school visit had to fall towards the end of the course due to Easter and the librarian's commitments

3.6 Interpretation and Analysis of Feedback

3.6.1 Staff Student Consultative Committee Meeting

SSCC meetings are held during each academic term to obtain feedback from students, and to consider issues that are raised that affect teaching and learning in the department. I was not able to be present at the SSCC held on the 30 April 2008, and so when an email arrived before the end of the working day from my mentor, I was surprised and delighted by the news that was imparted below:

"I just wanted to let you know that at SSCC today, the third years wanted to mention how good 2 of the modules were and say thanks. School Libraries was one of them. You should be very
proud and pleased about that", A copy of the original electronic message can be found in Appendix 9.

3.6.2 Post-it notes

During the e-resources session in a workstation, I asked the students to make a few comments on a post-it note about their thoughts and experience before departure.

Here are a few of the responses received:

"I think it's an interesting conference...and the websites are funny and interesting"

"great to get to look at the variety of electronic sources"

"these e-resources are interesting and useful"

"good workshop - enjoyable - annoying for things which wanted paying for though"

A sample of some of the original yellow post-it note responses are available to view in Appendix 9a.

As this was the first time that an e-resources session had been run as part of the course, this feedback was most enlightening and helpful in checking on the validity of the session.

3.6.3 Evaluation form

The aim of using a student evaluation form was to assess the effectiveness of this deep learning approach, and to highlight any changes that need to be made for the future on the course. All of the respondents indicated that they found the intervention beneficial to their learning on the course.

The evaluation form was split into four sections:

**Section One:** Module content

**Section Two:** Teaching style

**Section Three:** Interactive learning

**Section Four:** Any other comments

Here are some comments from the returned feedback forms -

**Section One:** Module content

Preferences
• Different types of interactive activities
• Wendy's relaxed teaching style
• The visit and the interactive activities, i.e. drawing a plan of an ideal school library

Section Two: Teaching style
• A lot of aspects, but the best I think is the funny activities to learn!
• I learnt a lot more than I thought!
• Incorporated different methods such as making posters, different ways of discussion (also a trip to a school)

Section Three: Interactive learning
• Story writing
• Discussion
• Drawing a plan of an ideal school library
• School library visit [put the theory into context]

Section Four: Any other comments
• More than one visit in order to compare and contrast
• ...would have liked more information about the National Curriculum
• Overall - enjoyed the module!

I intend to revisit these comments and implement changes that are appropriate and in keeping with the learning outcomes before this option module next runs with full-time students in 2010. In the words of Biggs, 2003: Chapter 5, "In fact, problems of resourcing conventional on-campus teaching, and the changing nature of HE, are coming to be blessings in disguise, forcing learning to take place outside the class, with interactive group work, peer teaching, independent learning and work-based learning, all of which are a rich source of relevant learning activities.

As far as the yellow e-folder on Blackboard is concerned, the majority of students verbally indicated that they had accessed the folder for additional notes from lectures. In fact, a couple of the students commented when I was a day later than anticipated posting any notes and references onto the area. I may consider using Blackboard more effectively as a discussion board in the near future and develop the e-learning side of this module for teaching.
Class Register

The department requests that all teaching staff keep a register of attendance for undergraduate students which is documented in the office as a record keeping exercise and for a back-up in examination boards if work has been queried.

From the beginning of the course in February, to the end in April 2008, the attendance figures were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>February 2008</th>
<th>March 2008</th>
<th>April 2008</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; =6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Attendance figures: February-April 2008

There were 5 registered undergraduate students, 1 postgraduate student, and 2 who sat in to repeat a course (this was their chosen option module). Total = 8

3.6.4 Undergraduate Examination

Only five undergraduate students took the exam in June 2008. One student miss-read the day and had to return in the August to re-sit.

The statistics do not offer meaningful data to interpret with so small a sample. I include these out of interest, rather than by way of interpretation. Two students failed the exam as they struggled with the English language and could not meet the criteria for the exam. As they were Erasmus students, who were only taking select modules from the department, the low marks on the exam, did not impact on them achieving their desired outcome for the time in the department.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IL33410</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>St.Deviation</th>
<th>Firsts</th>
<th>Fails</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Statistical breakdown

A copy of my notes and my mentor's response to the marked work is included in Appendix 9b for reference.
3.7 PGCTHE Presentation

In June 2008, just after the examination process and exam board, I was in a position to fulfil the PGCTHE scheme’s requirements to deliver a talk on a teaching cycle and in order to obtain feedback and advice. I chose my second teaching cycle; the School Library option module, as this was still fresh in my mind, and the intervention would be of wider general interest to an audience (Appendix 9c for running order of presentation and thumb nail slides for talk).

I have volunteered to talk about my experiences from this teaching cycle, at the PGCTHE Day 3 induction on 8th January 2009 as part of my CPD contribution to the University.

3.8 Reflection

The use of various interactive activities during the two hour session appears to have been beneficial and well received. Despite this however, upon reflection, a number of useful amendments are likely to benefit the students' experiences of this intervention (both FT and DL). As a member of the teaching staff, I am prepared to change and learn from mistakes and opportunities to make a difference to student learning in the department. I want to pass on my interest in the subject area and my motivational attitude.

3.9 Conclusions and Evaluations

The overall conclusion from this experience to date reveals that interactive learning activities are a particularly useful tool in encouraging students to learn on a deeper level in their studies as evidenced from student feedback. Therefore, it is proposed that this intervention should be continued, with necessary amendments, in future sessions. It could also be useful to share the findings of this invention with staff members in the department during a lunchtime session as part of a programme of lunchtime seminar events and as a means of sharing good practice. In conclusion, the e-folder appears to have been received positively by students and can be a useful tool for bridging the gap between lecture and university study.
3.10 Recommendations for Future Practice

- Continue the practice of using e-folders on Blackboard and develop the discussion area
- Consider undertaking a comparative study between UG FT and UG DL on school experiences
- Revise timetable to accommodate another school visit (Welsh and English schools - the former was offered this time)
- Provide more notice of a school visit (subject to Easter and School holidays and staff availability)
- Ask a Secondary school teacher from Aberystwyth to offer a guest lecture on the latest developments within the National Curriculum (putting the theory into practice from a teacher perspective)
- Continue using notice boards in the class as a visual stimulation and ownership of work
- Revise timetable to accommodate another school visit (Welsh and English)