

- a) How effectively can the resources and culture of a rural residential community be integrated with the teaching and learning culture of an urban university and how fruitful can such working together be?
- b) To what extent can such a project engage higher education students in sustainability issues and what impact can such engagement have on the community, the environment and the students' own learning experience?
- c) To what extent is the concept of community volunteering an effective 'driver' in realising the above project?



The initial, practical aspect of the project will come to a conclusion in June. Minuted records of the work of the volunteers have been maintained and there will also be film and video evidence which will provide a valuable resource for evaluation of the project. It is anticipated that several research publications will be produced as a

result of the evaluation process.

Once LEAF 07 has taken place and initial evaluation completed, the two groups of trustees will meet with volunteer representatives to discuss further developments within the

project which is envisaged as taking a number of years to reach completion. There is a long way to go before a fully developed teaching and learning centre is realised at Trebullom but developments so far have been positive and encouraging.

## Development Grant Report - Alan Bainbridge

### '...it really feels like I have finished my studies now.' An online exploration of learning biographies.

Alan Bainbridge is a senior Lecturer in the Department of Childhood Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University and teaches on the Childhood Studies and Early Years programmes. He places particular significance on using psychodynamic principles in research and is presently working on the motivational experiences of adult learners and how new professionals develop their work place identity.

#### Background:

My ESCalate funded research explored the opportunities for personal and professional reflection by engaging in a narrative enquiry in the form of learning biographies (see Domincé, 2000 and Kridel, 1998),

in an online environment. The central feature was to create a temporal and physical space in a virtual environment to facilitate reflexivity. The focus on past learning experiences provides an ideal opportunity to engage in reflection that highlights the

personal learner and the professional individual working with young people in educational contexts. The findings suggest that for some individuals this process of reflective enquiry may question traditional concepts of formal learning by placing learning in a

wider context that includes dealing with the past and the present.

The participants invited to take part were 'non-traditional' mature students who were engaged in a work based degree programme relating to children in educational contexts. The structure of the course required attendance one day a week and was typically very busy with teaching and administration. A part of the day was generally given over to relating theory to practical experience but the opportunities for personal reflection were limited. The original rationale proposed that learning biographies would be 'posted' within a secure virtual environment where all participants could engage in asynchronous discussion. The participants were not comfortable with this proposal and so it was agreed that the learning biography reflective discussion would only take place between each participant and myself. These exchanges were therefore conducted via e-mail over a six-month period during which the participants were asked to write about any learning experience they wished to present.

The following examples highlight varying levels of engagement as the participants reflected on their learning biographies.

**Sophie:**

Sophie did not engage in a prolonged sharing of learning biographies and only posted two narratives. This is her second response which indicates a deeper link between reflecting on learning and the self:

A lot of what we cover in the course is common sense and, as mentioned previously, about learning about oneself. This is hard. We all have flaws that we would like to leave uncovered but this course does not allow that. I do have difficulty with that

sometimes but I have realised that is the only way I can "heal" them. I do think that this course is my niche. I look forward to every Wednesday and I am determined to better myself.

It is as if the opportunity to provide a space to reflect has allowed Sophie to express thoughts and feelings that she has held for many years. Sophie's second narrative enables her to merge the past and present and also provides the opportunity to 'heal' the 'flaws' we all have.

**Lily:**

Lily was the most frequent correspondent. In the fifth posting Lily ended by writing:

I hope this makes sense. I am so tired, it is hard looking after a baby and trying to work at the same time as well you know.

Up until this point (one month and five reflections) there had been no mention of a baby.

The next biographical piece began with details about the baby, the recent death of her father and how proud she was of her mother and then she begins to discuss what learning means and not just what she is doing:

Thinking about it honestly I feel like I only value my learning when it is recognised by others, for example when I get my assignments back. I don't consciously think about the value of learning or knowledge unless I reflect back on the different things that I have accomplished in the past. Perhaps that is how children think and that is why it is so important for us to acknowledge their work.

For Lily, this year of birth and death has brought the personal and professional very close

together and she claims that 'I only value my learning when it is recognised by others' and therefore her acknowledgement of the work of children in her care becomes important and perhaps even more so now she is a mother? The final communication from Lily comes as the research project ends at a similar time to her degree course:

I have very much enjoyed this process and hope that it has somehow helped your research. It is funny now you are bringing this process to a close it really feels like I have finished my studies. I know I have handed in my final piece of work but this now feels like the end.

The learning journey has been completed, not by the final assessment task but a reflective journey that has been narrated from being a young girl at school to an academically successful young mother. By engaging in reflective dialogue the past, present and future have briefly been reconciled to provide Lily with coherence and completeness and a better understanding of her learning and her self.

**Conclusion:**

The premise for this research was that learning biographies can be an extremely useful tool for developing the reflective practice of those working with young children in educational contexts. As the participants have reflected on their own learning experience it has provided an insight into their professional and personal lives. The narratives presented here offer support for the view that learning by individuals is regarded in relation to the whole life experience and that learning is not time or content dependent. There is the possibility that working on-line could increase flow and engagement with a narrative as virtual environments may serve to remove the constraints of time and

space and therefore enhance the quality of reflection.

#### References:

Dominice, P. (2000). *Learning from Our Lives: Using educational biographies with adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc

Kridel, C (Ed) (1998). *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research*. London: Garland Publishing.

Please see Alan's project page for further details of this work. In addition, please note that we are hoping that Alan will be able to join us for at least one of the ESCalate e-learning events being planned across the UK for 2007/8.

More details will be posted on the events section in due course but if you wish to register interest, please email [jane.tuffill@bris.ac.uk](mailto:jane.tuffill@bris.ac.uk).

In particular, if you are able to offer a venue, we would be delighted to hear from you.

HE in FE update - Phil Price

## Betwixt and Between?

Phil Price is a Senior Advisor at the Higher Education Academy and is an advisor for ESCalate on Higher Education provision in Further Education Institutions.

Principle areas of interest are: how HE frameworks compare and contrast with those in schools and the post-compulsory sector; accreditation of programmes enhancing the skills of staff in HE to contribute to the learner experience; engaging with institutions and enhancing the developmental aspects of accreditation procedures and visits, bringing the full weight of the Academy's resources into play.

Recent developments in the framework for FE teacher education in the lifelong learning sector prompt questions about the educational philosophy underpinning professional development strategies for staff in this and allied sectors. These developments impact upon a range of practitioners and managers in institutions. Consequently they demand close cooperation between associated agencies with their respective territories who claim to support and enhance the student learning experience across this sector.

Developments in the FE teachers' framework have a particular impact on the HE in FE community

that operates within Further Education Colleges (FECs) in England. Differing approaches to standards development and their application by sector agencies have a significant consequence on institutional strategies for the professional development of staff. For practitioners this can create a particular dynamic of pedagogic issues, professional identity and directions for development.

New Overarching Professional Standards for teacher, tutor trainers in the lifelong learning sector<sup>1</sup> have recently been released by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK). These present a particular challenge, per se, for the HE in FE community, especially so when

viewed alongside the UK Professional Standards for supporting teaching and learning in higher education (UK PSF)<sup>2</sup>.

The Overarching Standards designed for the broader FE system in England are a response to 'Equipping our teachers for the future'<sup>3</sup>. This DfES policy initiative is designed to raise the quality of, and make fit-for- purpose, the initial and continuing professional development of staff. The Overarching Standards underpin the new Qualified Teacher: Learning and Skills (QTLS) qualification structures. They will be a key component of the infrastructure supporting the professional development of the

