Understanding the learner for more effective university teaching

A PhD by Published Works

Paul Sander
Back when I was a child
Before life removed all the innocence
My father would lift me high
And dance with my mother and me
And then
Spin me around 'til I fell asleep
Then up the stairs he would carry me
And I knew for sure
I was loved

If I could get another chance
Another walk
Another dance with him
I'd play a song that would never ever end
How I'd love love love
To dance with my father again

When I and my mother
Would disagree
To get my way I would run
From her to him
He'd make me laugh just to comfort me
yeah yeah
Then finally make me do
Just what my mama said
Later that night when I was asleep
He left a dollar under my sheet
Never dreamed that he
Would be gone from me

If I could steal one final glance
One final step
One final dance with him
I'd play a song that would never ever end
Cause I'd love love love to
Dance with my father again

Sometimes I'd listen outside her door
And I'd hear how mama would cry for him
I'd pray for her even more than me
I'd pray for her even more than me

I know I'm praying for much too much
But could you send her
The only man she loved
I know you don't do it usually
But Dear Lord
She's dying to dance with my father again

Every night I fall asleep
And this is all I ever dream

"Dance With My Father" Luther Vandross
Declaration
This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed...........................................(candidate)

Date...........................................8 January 2004

Statement 1
This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.
Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes and through explicit references.
A full list of references is appended.

Signed...........................................(candidate)

Date...........................................8 January 2004

Statement 2
I hereby give consent for my work, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed...........................................(candidate)

Date...........................................8 January 2004

Paul Sander
Summary

Understanding the learner for more effective university teaching

To teach students efficiently and effectively, it is helpful to understand their conceptions of teaching and learning. Given the higher proportion of school leavers entering Higher Education and greater undergraduate diversity, this is more imperative. With the greater likelihood of large class sizes, more formalised means of understanding students must be sought. Whilst using small group work as part of undergraduate teaching can help, some explicit attempts to collect profile information on students can help teachers offer better learning experiences.

Student Expectation Research

The research programme started with a piece of action research (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1996; Stevenson and Sander, 1998) with distance learning students, by collecting their expectations through both a telephone survey and a postal questionnaire.

Action Research has very limited generalisability, but the principle of surveying students' expectations was promising and extended. The USET survey (Sander et al, 2000) found mismatches between the teaching that students hoped for and expected. Expectations do not have to be met, although there may be some merit in doing so (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1997). Expectations may also be managed (Hill, 1995).

One finding from the USET study was that different groups of students had different reasons for disliking student presentations, perhaps due to different levels of academic confidence. Students' reasons for disliking presentations were pursued through re-analysis of the USET qualitative data (Stevenson and Sander, 2002, Sander and Stevenson, 2002). However, that students dislike presentations is worrying given their effectiveness (Sander, Sanders and Stevenson, 2002).

Academic Confidence Research

To explore the possibility of a link between academic confidence and reasons for not liking student presentations, the Academic Confidence Scale was developed and validated (Sander and Sanders, 2003). In addition to finding the hypothesised group differences in confidence, a startling drop in academic confidence during the first year was detected.
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Stevenson, K. and Sander, P. (2002). Medical students are from Mars – business and psychology students are from Venus – University lecturers are from Pluto. Medical Teacher, 24, 1, 27-31.


Stevenson K., Sander P. and Naylor P. (1996) Student perceptions of the tutors role in distance learning, Open Learning, 11, 1, 22-30

Complete References

Paul Sander
Preface

Autobiographical background

Part 1: The world of Further Education

I “cut my teeth”, so to speak, in teaching, as a lecturer in psychology in a variety of further education (FE) colleges in London and the East Midlands. Actually, “lecturer” is an overly grand title for a jobbing A-level teacher, because teachers we were. As such, I experienced a great variety of students on a range of courses in addition to the A-level classes. Across all courses and colleges, it would be fair to say that teachers in FE, like myself, viewed classes of twenty-five students as large classes. Sometimes, college management could be persuaded to agree and would consent to splitting the class, giving pleasant and effective teaching groups.

Typically, A-level students would be taught for five hours a week for each subject, whilst students on other courses, like BTEC, Access, or GCSE courses would get an hour or so less.

What a luxury those small classes and large contact times now seems: Within those class settings, time could be set aside for mini-lectures that would introduce a topic, or set the scene. But also, time would be spent on group work, individual project work, working through questions, and classroom debates. Alongside these non-didactic activities,
was the opportunity to get to know the students. I would set myself a target of knowing the name of every student I taught within the first month of the academic year. I do not recall ever failing; although I probably did, once or twice! It did not take much longer to know something about each of the students; what they liked and disliked, both in class and maybe outside of the college environment, so having a conversation with them was never a problem.

Not only did this knowledge of the students help lubricate the social encounters in the classroom, but also it helped inform the teaching process. Worksheets could be tailored to specific needs: Extra activities could be planned to overcome problems. All of this helped to maximise the chances of student success in their public examinations, in which my students were, in my view, largely successful.

Whilst the classroom environment was a pleasant challenge, all was not well in the world of further education; so I decided to chance my luck and look for a job in the expanding world of Higher Education (HE). I was successful in getting a lecturing position in a new university in South Wales. Despite the fact that I would now be dealing with students just the other side of the A-level "hurdle", the teaching environment was very, very different. To an extent, I had to learn to teach all over again. I am not sure, though, that I do so; in HE, with the same level of success as I achieved in FE.
Part 2: The world of Higher Education

Concurrent with my twilight years in Further Education, I worked as a tutor for the Open University (OU) on a third level social psychology module. Whilst the role of an OU tutor was largely one of a teaching technician, there was scope for good teaching organisation and ability in the tutorials that supported the students. I was fortunate to join my old teaching friend Keith in an established tutorial system for the course in the East Midlands. From this collaboration came the beginnings of the research that has led to this submission of a PhD by published works. In this I have, along with a few well-chosen collaborators, tried to understand students’ conceptions of the teaching and learning along with their perceptions of teaching environments that teachers do or could create for them. From an understanding of the students’ perceptions and conceptions, it is hoped that more effective learning opportunities can be created for them.

This transitional phase with the OU, in my move from FE to HE, carried with it, many of the advantages of the FE teaching environment that I was familiar with, namely small student groups, typically of about 15 keen, willing and mature students. The keenness, willingness and maturity of the students was a pleasant departure from the typical full time (FT) student intake in FE, but the small number of generally highly motivated student perhaps did not prepare me that well for the realities of the job ahead.
Observing the students in my first lecture as a university teacher, I was aware that there was a much wider age range in the student population than I could remember from when I was an undergraduate and looking at the entry qualifications, students came from a much wider variety of backgrounds and had very different qualifications.

In preparation for my first lecture, I cast my mind back, perhaps foolishly, to when I was a university undergraduate, and prepared a “formal” lecture, which failed to impress anybody, including myself. The students wanted to be engaged. Indeed, a group of students came and asked me to involve them more in class activities. These students, it quickly became clear, were just the same as the A-level students I had spent so long teaching in that they needed to be engaged. How, though, could that be done with really large classes? To think that I used to object to a class of twenty-five students! I wish I had just twenty-five now.

Over the few years I have been in higher education, I have been searching for two things: (i) practical ways of engaging the students in meaningful learning experiences in situations which are not obviously conducive to learning, i.e. lecture theatres of over one hundred and twenty students and (ii) an understanding of the students’ perspective on student learning and university teaching, with the aim of trying to “marry” this up to accepted best teaching practice. My training as a psychologist stood me; I was sure, in good stead for pursuing a line of research into investigating how
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students see the various learning experiences that teachers create for them and how can this understanding be used to create more effective learning experiences for our students.
University of Wales Requirements

"Candidates shall be required to provide a critical analysis of some 5,000 - 10,000 words giving an evaluation of the field in which they have worked, and indicating also the original contribution to learning in that field which in their opinion their work has made." It has not been easy deciding how to tackle this brief.

Overview

In this submission for a PhD by published works, I start out by outlining and critically evaluating the field in which I have worked and into this field I locate the two strands of research that I am putting forward in this submission. The two research strands are presented in roughly chronological order and synthesised in the following section as a research aim and specific research objectives. The aim and objectives are presented at this point, as they were not specifically articulated at the outset. Indeed, the two research strands started as action research to help student learning and evolved in a way that none of us envisaged at the time.

Following the aim and objectives is a consideration of the methodologies that have been used. These considerations are beyond those considered in any of the individual papers. Then it is possible for me to outline what I consider to be the original contributions I have made to the field. However, it is worth pointing out that it is very difficult to positively evaluate one’s own work. Hopefully readers will be in a better position to evaluate the originality and usefulness of my research, although I do hope that the reader will be kind.

This submission concludes with some ideas for how this research will be developed in the future. The academic papers that this submission depends on are attached in the appendix.
Critical Analysis

Evaluation of the field in which I have worked

Introduction

There are two distinct research strands in this submission for a PhD by published works. Firstly, there is the exploration of students' expectations of teaching, learning and assessment in Higher Education, which is set against a background of customer expectations in quality assurance and consumer research (Scott, 1999; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990). From this research, it is argued that to provide effective learning environments, teachers need to know what students are expecting and respond to those expectations. One study in this research strand, (Sander, Stevenson, King and Coates, 2000) led to the hypothesis that differences in students' feelings about one teaching and learning method, student presentations, were due to differences in confidence levels in two, quite different groups of students. This led to the second and still ongoing strand of research which seeks to measure student confidence and then use this measure to explore differences in confidence levels both in different student groups and in different learning situations (Sander and Sanders, 2003a). This research strand is underpinned by self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), particularly as applied to educational settings (Multon, Brown and Lent, 1991).

The argument is that to teach students efficiently and effectively, it is helpful, perhaps essential, to understand the students (e.g. Pillay, 2002); in particular, their expectations of teaching and learning. Understanding students' expectations is something that has been touched on by Shank, Walker and Hayes (1993, 1995 1996), Walker, Shank and Hayes (1994), Hill, (1995). Scott, (1999) developed and synthesised an expectations' philosophy in an educational context, in parallel to my research. My own educational expectations philosophy concludes the Sander and Stevenson (2002) paper. Whilst Scott's thoughtful paper has clarified my thinking, it draws on similar or
identical sources and does not take away the originality of my research contributions. To the best of my knowledge, this synthesis of consumer satisfaction and the students’ expectations about higher educational provision is an important and largely original academic contribution, although the recent publication by Clewes (2003) shows that others have, unsurprisingly, been thinking in the same way. Clewes, working with postgraduate students’ expectations builds up a three stage model in the educational service provision.

Perhaps the single most relevant point from consumer research comes from Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990, p51) who contrast “inside out” and “outside in” thinking. Applied to educational settings, those involved in providing education tend to think “inside out”, believing they know what students want (or need) rather than trying to think “outside in”, to understand students and work with them to offer the best possible quality of education. The confidence research, extends this belief that students need to be understood if they are to be engaged by education and guided towards graduation and graduate skills (graduateness). In this we are still thinking “outside in” in trying to understand students with the aim of optimising educational provision.

**Strand one: Student Expectations’ Research**

This research programme started as action research (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1995, 1996; Stevenson and Sander, 1998) with distance learning students, collecting their expectations of teaching methods that could be used in the regular tutorials and workshops that supported their course. Students’ expectations were collected through both a telephone survey and a postal questionnaire. Contrary to our own expectations, the telephone interviews were easy to conduct. Indeed, so pleased were the students to be asked about their education, it was often difficult to bring the interviews to an end. Rarely did they last less than an hour.

The expectations that the students had of their forthcoming tutorials were used to structure a tutorial programme that tended to progress from a didactic
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style to participative and facilitatory workshops, helping students become autonomous, independent learners. The programme started with didactic teaching methods, because that was what most of the students said they wanted. The teaching methods moved on to facilitatory workshops because we believed that these were more appropriate teaching methods, which we were, fortunately able to resource. Evaluation of the tutorial programme suggested that the re-designed programme had pleased more of the students more of the time. This led us to believe that the implementation of an expectations led course design had been successful (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1997).

Our principle of surveying students' expectations was promising and so it was extended, using a wider range of students on full time degree courses, in three different UK universities. In the USET survey (Sander et al, 2000), students on courses in traditional universities were asked not just about what teaching and learning methods they expected, but also what they would really like (hoped for) and what they really did not want. The survey revealed mismatches between the teaching that students hoped for and expected. In particular, full time university students were expecting to be taught in a way they did not want to be taught, as shown in table 1. Such mismatches are worrying because they could cause inefficient or ineffective teaching / learning and disengaged students (Mann, 2001). Discrepancies, or gaps between expectations and educational provision can be addressed in one of two ways. Firstly, expectations could be managed, to bring them into line with what the university or course offers (e.g. Hill, 1995). Secondly, they could be responded to by changing what is on offer to match what the students are expecting (e.g. Stevenson and Sander, 1998; Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1996, 1997; see Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). Expectations do not have to be met (Scott, 1999) although we suggest that there is some merit in trying to do so (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1997).
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Table 1: Students' views about university teaching and learning methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching and learning methods</th>
<th>Expected</th>
<th>Hoped For</th>
<th>Not wanted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rank order</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First (Most important)</td>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Interactive lecture</td>
<td>Role Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Interactive lecture</td>
<td>Student Centred Teaching</td>
<td>Formal lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Tutorial</td>
<td>Tutorial</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focusing on student presentations, the USET study showed that different groups of students had different reasons for disliking them, perhaps, we suggested, due to different levels of confidence that the students had in their academic ability, leading to the second strand of research presented here. The USET data suggested that the medical students would need presentations to be run in a way that ensured that they could be confident in the accuracy of the material that was being presented by other students. In contrast, the psychology students would generally need more support through the anxieties of actually presenting. It should be noted, though that both concerns were present in each group. Without knowing what the worries and concerns of students actually are, it is not possible to support them reliably in an activity, which many find daunting.

The reasons students had for disliking student presentations were pursued through re-analysis of the USET qualitative data (Stevenson and Sander, 2002, Sander and Stevenson, 2002). However, that students dislike presentations is worrying given that we made a strong case for teaching through student presentations (Sander, Sanders and Stevenson, 2002).
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Education, expectations and the customer culture

Psychologists have recognised the importance of the expectations that people have in understanding human behaviour, often by encapsulating them into the top-down approach to human information processing (eg Eysenck and Keane, 1995). In the commercial world, expectations have been seen as composite constructs, which can be divided into three components (Prakash, 1984; Thompson and Sunol, 1994):

- Ideal expectations (what a customer would ideally like to occur)
- Predictive expectations (what the customer assumes is probably going to occur)
- Normative expectations, which evolve from experience of service provision, by other similar service providers

Educational research has also recognised the importance of expectations, for instance, in connection with the ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Brophy, 1983; Wineburg, 1987). Steele (1992) showed that the careful manipulation of the expectations of students from traditionally disadvantaged groups could positively affect retention and performance, which is important as it suggests that addressing expectations can produce measurable improvements in student outcomes.

Is there scope for combining the importance of understanding educational expectations with the insights gained into customer expectations to help understand the student experience of teaching and learning within Higher Education? The current climate in Higher Education suggests that students could be seen as primary customers (Hill, 1995 page 15; Thorne and Cuthbert, 1996, page 176, Scott, 1999) who are increasingly aware of their customer rights. The belief that students may have of themselves as customers of educational provision, or at least of education as a commodity (Winn, 2002), can only be enhanced by the introduction of course fees.
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If teachers in Higher Education are becoming framed as service providers then one way to ensure the provision of a quality service, is to know the expectations of customers as they enter into the service transaction (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, 1990). The Gap Model seeks to understand the discrepancies that may exist between customer expectations and the service delivered on the basis that customer dissatisfaction results from discrepancies, ultimately between what customers are expecting and what they see as being delivered. As Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) say

"A set of key discrepancies or gaps exists regarding executive perceptions of service quality and the tasks associated with service delivery to consumers. These gaps can be major hurdles in attempting to deliver a service which consumers would perceive as being of high quality" (page 44).

This analysis, therefore requires that the views of customers have to be fully understood to ensure effective service provision, and could equally well apply to the changing world of contemporary Higher Education. With this in mind, the service provision gaps can be rephrased to apply specifically to the teacher / student / education setting:

**Gap 1:** Between students’ expectations and teachers’ perceptions of those expectations, i.e. not knowing what students expect.

**Gap 2:** Between teachers’ understanding of students’ expectations and the learning experiences that are designed, i.e. the wrong learning experiences.

The reasons for this gap are many and include inadequate commitment to service quality; the belief that delivering to or above customer’s expectations is not feasible or, in an educational setting, even desirable; there may be no check on maintenance of standards to all customers and absence of goal settings relating to commitment to delivery to customer based standards (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990).
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**Gap 3:** Between the teaching / learning that has been designed and specified for the students and the teaching / learning that are actually delivered, i.e. the service performance gap.

**Gap 4:** Between education delivered and communications to students, for instance in student handbooks, and publicity material about the education that students can expect, i.e. when promises do not match delivery.

Gaps three and four differ in that in gap three, there may be a management belief that the teaching / learning that is being delivered is what has been promised, for instance in information and publicity material, but there is no check on what is actually going on in learning environments. In gap four, in contrast, there is the opportunity for student-customers to be deliberately misled in what they can expect. Gap three can be overcome by better training of, in this case, teachers, especially in relation to management philosophy.

**Gap 5** Between students' expectations and perceived education received.

In understanding these gaps and in trying to reduce them, educationalists are thinking "outside in". By researching what customers expect of the service and then working to provide service that meets customer expectations, a better quality service and greater student-customer satisfaction is assured (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990, page 51). This is a characteristic of successful service industries. To alter customer's expectations and bring them into line with what the service provider can deliver is concordant with this gap analysis.

Within this context, research on students' expectations of Higher Education suggests that they are dependent on a number of factors. These include culture (Shank, Walker and Hayes, 1996; Twale, Shannon and Moore 1997); gender (Walker, Shank and Hayes, 1993); age (Levine, 1993); university type (Shank, Walker and Hayes, 1995); level of study (Stevenson and Sander...
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1998) and mode of study (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1997 compared with Sander et al, 2000).

Would Higher Education benefit if it did think “Outside in”? The evidence from the early phases of the research being discussed in this submission is that it would. Attempts to understand students’ expectations would be the start of an engagement process that would underpin the whole of their educational experience in HE. On top of that, students’ expectations can be usefully worked with, especially if augmented with student feedback data on a regular basis, to enhance the quality of the students’ learning experience.

However, the parallel between education and service industries is not exact. Arguments can be made for the case that there is a distinct difference between providing students with effective learning opportunities and selling “fast food” (see Mok, 1999). Scott (1999) contrasts “neo-liberal policy rhetoric which refers to academics as ‘providing’ teaching to student ‘customers’” (page 199) with other contemporary views of education as a two-way dialogue between teachers and students (Laurillard, 1993). Scott suggests that collecting and responding to student expectations is very much in accord with the view of education as a two-way dialogue, as teachers and students are working together in the students’ education. That is quite different from seeing the student as a customer who can determine what teachers and their universities must provide to keep them happy. Perhaps the main problem with a customer culture in Higher Education is that it not always possible for students to actually evaluate the educational provision that they have been experiencing. In this respect, education would be, taking examples from Scott, (1999) like surgery or legal advice. These are all professional services that are high in “credence properties” (Lovelock, 2001, page 13) That is, characteristics or qualities that the customer just does not have the expert insight to enable him or her to evaluate properly, in distinct contrast to “fast food”. Clewes (2003) suggests that the service quality model focuses too much on service delivery and too little on service / educational outcomes.

When we have presented our research on student expectations, we have frequently been challenged for being perceived to be arguing for giving
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students what they want. Nothing could be further from the truth (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1997). Scott’s analysis (1999) serves to support what we have been saying since 1996, which is that understanding what students are wanting from their education and what they are expecting in the way of learning experiences can only be profitable for both student and teacher. Where the professional judgement of the teacher is that students’ expectations are unreasonable, for instance in not wanting student presentations, action can be taken. This action can include an explanation for why, in the professional judgement of the teacher, presentations are a good thing particularly when accompanied by extra help and guidance to reassure the students that their concerns are being heeded.

A study by Cook and Leckey (1999) shows how science students, in one university at least, have expectations of what Higher Education will be like that are way out of line with what they experience in Higher Education, which, in turn impacts on the likelihood that the students will study in ways commensurate with "graduateness". Interestingly, given our findings in the second research strand, Cook and Leckey found that students’ confidence to work in an unsupervised manner dropped during the first semester of study. These findings were backed up in a further large-scale study (Lowe and Cook, 2003).

Asking students their views is interesting and useful. How often these views should be sought is a matter for debate. I have collected the expectations of incoming students to our psychology course for three consecutive years and found little change in students’ views, whereas Stevenson and Sander (1998) show that students on different levels of a course can have quite different expectations.

There comes a point, given a relatively stable course and continuing recruitment from the same “pool” of students, that little new information is revealed in pre-course expectations surveys that can be addressed at course level. The important principle is that there are times when students’ expectations do need to be sought and addressed. Obvious examples are when a new teacher takes on a course, or when a new course is offered or

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when the student profile changes, perhaps due to a change in recruitment policy.

The academic confidence research is as intimately tied in with understanding and knowing about students as the expectations research. It is important to know about how student confidence is affected by aspects of the course. In this research, it came about through student presentations. Why do students dislike presentations and what is the effect on students of persuading them to do presentations, knowing that this is not a preferred teaching and learning method, even if it is a teaching and learning method that has considerable merit?

**Student Presentations.**

Student presentations have become the focus of research by Hounsell and colleagues at Edinburgh University. Hounsell notes (Hounsell and McClune, 2002, page 2) that “A review of the pedagogical literature on oral presentations in higher education yields only a modest crop of findings, predominantly from small scale studies of practices in single course unit or module”. Kember (2001) advocates students presenting the results of independent exploratory research to each other in class as a way of facilitating a move away from students’ dependence on didactic/reproductive learning. Hansen and Williams (2003) compared two versions of the same cross-cultural class, a "traditional" version and a "contemporary" version, which included student presentations along with other teaching/learning innovations. There were no systematic differences between the two versions on the exam and course evaluation measures used which at least shows that presentations do no harm.

Hansen and Williams should be applauded for having a control group against which to compare their contemporary course, although the lack of systematic benefit for the contemporary course could be for many reasons other than its mode of delivery. In contrast, Giuliano (2001) showed that students could favourably receive a course that centred on student presentations, although there was no direct comparison condition. Student evaluation of the course
showed that they valued both working on their own presentations and learning from the presentations of their peers. Relying heavily on student presentations, DeSousa and Franck (1980) designed a course to develop the classroom presentation skills of foreign student teaching assistants. Evaluations of the class showed considerable benefit to the students. Hart and Williams (1992) structured a class into small groups, each of which had a good public speaker who acted as a role model and a challenge to the other group members who strive to match her/his skills. Outcome measures showed that this strategy improved the public speaking skills of students in presentation assignments. Lau (1988), worked closely with students as partners to increase their motivation in engaging in student presentations, which is an aspect of presentations that is developed in the curriculum at Alverno College.

Alverno College centres the student experience around assessment-as-learning with the aim of providing education which is learner-centred, knowledge-centred, assessment-centred and community-centred (Hakel, 2001; Mentkowski, 2000; Mentkowski and associates, 2000). In essence, the educational programme at Alverno seeks to move away from education as a process in which declarative and procedural knowledge is “given away” through lectures, books and journals, to an educational programme which seeks to ensure that students have useful knowledge and understanding which they can apply and use and will continue to do so beyond the end of the course. One of the ways this is done is by recognising that learning should be active and interactive (Mentkowski, 2000). Interactive learning programmes give students communication skills, one of the eight abilities in the Alverno curriculum in which students must become proficient. In this context, communication means more than writing essays, referring to oral communication and social interaction in general. As two Alverno students say “an idea is no good unless you can communicate it to other people”, and “in order to get along in this world, you have to be able to interact with other people” (Mentkowski, 2000, page 79-80).
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One of the important things that come out of interactive learning experiences, including student presentations, is an awareness of differing perspectives that students, learners or people in general may have and that these differing perspectives have to be treated with respect. The significance of other people's perspective is not lost on students, who raise it as one of the positive aspects of student presentations (Sander and Sanders, in preparation).

A consideration of the use of student presentations in the UK can be found in Curtis (1999), Rees and Harris (1992) and Hounsell, McCullock and Scott (1996). The benefits of student presentations, according to these authors are:

- They provide variety in learning approaches.
- They provide stimulation for the group.
- They promote the sharing of information and enthusiasm amongst peers.
- They encourage autonomy and independent learning.
- They provide opportunities for the development of team skills and listening skills.
- They provide an increase in expertise of the individual student, not only in terms of knowledge, but also in presentation skills, confidence and self-esteem.
- They allow for the testing of knowledge and understanding in a situation where the tutor is able to assess whether the student is able to apply and extend previously gained knowledge in the form of concepts and theories to their own work.
- They increase the likelihood that students will consult original sources rather than textbooks, giving them familiarity with research methods and encouraging critical evaluation, which means that work in other areas of the course improves.
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- They lead to an improvement in the quality of seminar discussion and participation.
- For courses that include student projects, presentations stimulate ideas for project topics, and suggest methods of data collection and analysis.
- They promote preparation (usually through role play) for specific professional / real life situations
- They provide an essential preparation for employability by developing a number of transferable and life skills.

If student presentations followed a series of fully referenced lead lectures, designed to provide summaries of the main theoretical and research issues in the area, then a learning context would have been created that matched the four criteria that Biggs (1999) suggests are paramount. These are a well-structured knowledge base; an appropriate motivational context; learner activity; and interaction with others.

Strand Two: Academic Confidence Research

Theories of Academic Motivation

Increasingly, the self and self-beliefs are being seen as key indexes of achievement motivation. In educational settings, "the perceptions students create, develop, and hold to be true about themselves and about their academic capabilities are vital forces in their success or failure in school" (Pajares and Schunk, in press, page 1). Two theories of motivation that are central to this research are expectancy-value theory and self-efficacy theory. The confidence part of the research presented here is based on self-efficacy theory and discussed elsewhere. Expectancy-value theory argues that choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by people's beliefs about how well they will do on an activity and the extent to which that activity is valued (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). Expectancy refers to the beliefs that people have about how they are likely to do on a particular task or activity, which are subtly different from efficacy beliefs which are beliefs about being
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able to perform necessary behaviours. Values, which are the incentives or reasons for doing an activity, consist of attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value and cost. Achievement related choices and performance depend on expectancies and values which, in turn are the product of a complex developmental and sociocultural set of influences (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002).

The aim of motivation theories is to understand why a person chooses to engage or not to engage in specific activities (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). Self-efficacy beliefs operate at a more micro level of analysis and are more task and situation specific (Pajares, 1996b). Academic confidence in the research presented here was tapped into through a scale with statements comprising task and situation specific behaviours and attitudes. Therefore, the task and situation specificity of academic confidence had considerable commonality with self-efficacy. Further, the scale comprised statements generated by teachers, which the student-respondents had to rate. There was no measure of the value of the behaviours or attitudes behind the statements, nor were the statements student generated, representing the value of academic behaviours and attitudes to students. This is a line of enquiry planned for the future. In understanding the results, expectancy-value theory may be of use.

Social Comparison

People try to make sense of themselves and others in their personal and social worlds (Stapel and Tesser, 2001). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2002) detail both internal and external frames of reference that students can use as part of the sense making process, basing their argument on social comparison theory that originated with Festinger half a century ago. Specifically, there may be five sources of information for external comparisons: (a) direct observation of achievement of students in the class, (b) teachers' responses and comments in the classroom, (c) responses from classmates, (d) responses from others outside the classroom, and (e) grades. One of the best documented comparisons is the “better than average” effect, which describes the tendency that people have to rate themselves as better than average (Suls, Lemos and Stewart, 2002). The better than average effect was seen in the Sander and
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Sanders (2003) paper, where 78% of first year student respondents estimated that they would perform better than a hypothetical national average at the end of their third year of degree study. Suls, Lemos and Stewart (2002) showed that the better than average effect worked differently for students with high self-esteem, in comparison with other students. Specifically, low self-esteem students perhaps too readily acknowledge their negative attributes.

Many of the day-to-day situations in which students find themselves, activate self-constructs as education, by its nature, is constantly challenging students. The activation of self-constructs increases the likelihood of social comparisons, suggesting that students are frequently using an external frame of reference. Social comparison is an intrinsic part of the self, and some situations make people’s interest in others through social comparisons more likely (Stapel and Tesser, 2001). The complex, social nature of the self and how that can influence the social comparison process is explored by Gardiner, Gabriel and Hochscild (2002).

Academic Confidence, Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

The self-concept is a person’s perception of himself or herself, formed through experience with the environment, especially significant others and reinforcements. The self-concept is thought to be a construct that may be useful in predicting and explaining how people behave, but is not an entity so should not be reified. With increasing age, the self-concept is more multifaceted (Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton, 1976). Academic self-concept involves a self-description and a self-evaluation of perceived academic abilities, along with global beliefs of self-worth associated with perceived academic competence (McCoach and Siegle, 2003). Self-concepts in specific subject areas may be expected to affect the students’ level of intrinsic motivation, the effort they will expend, their degree of persistence and their anxiety levels (Skaalvik and Rankin, 1995). Skaalvik and Rankin stress that the academic self-concept that a student has may be different from their self-efficacy in any domain specific performance because self-efficacy and self-concept operate at different levels of generality. Further, because of the importance of mastery experience, self-efficacy could be thought of as being...

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the result of an interaction between the person and the task, whereas self-concept is much more a property of the person, which accords with its greater generality (Zorkina and Nalbone, 2003). Skaalvik and Valås (1999), though present evidence to show that achievement affects subsequent self-confidence and none that self-concept affects subsequent achievement. The similarities and differences between academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy are considered in detail by Bong and Skaalvik (2003).

With specific reference to school children, Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976), argue that the self-concept can be thought of comprising two components, an academic component and a non-academic component, with the academic self-concept having causal predominance over academic achievement (Shavelson and Bolus, 1982). However, the academic component appears not to be a unitary concept (Marsh, Byrne and Shavelson, 1988). Considering the academic self-concept as multifaceted, with differing self-concepts for different areas of academic study (Shavelson and Bolus, 1982) led to the development of the Internal/External frames of reference model to explain why different areas of academic self-concept could be so different from each other. The external frame of reference, in which students are comparing their performance in one area of academic performance to other students, is an example of the social comparison process. Social comparison theory would predict that when students compare themselves favourably to other students around them, in a particular subject area, they are more likely to have a high self-concept in that academic area (McCoach and Siegle, 2003). It is the internal frame of reference, which is believed to produce the low correlations in academic self-concept in different areas of study (Marsh, Byrne and Shavelson, 1988).

The external comparison process does not have to be with specific people. Zorkina and Nalbone (2003) randomly allocated students to either a low of high confidence group by telling the student-participants that, in the high confidence condition, the test was designed for Ivy League university students, whereas, in the low confidence condition, the test was designed for high school students across the nation. That such a manipulation had an
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effect on subsequent test performance and academic confidence shows, as Zorkina and Nalbone say, how careful teachers have to be in introducing topics, tasks and tests. It also emphasises the susceptibility of environmental manipulations on academic confidence and performance, as predicted by self-efficacy theory. This point is supported by Alfassi (2003), who, in applying self-efficacy theory to educational practice, showed that an educational program that fostered both academic competence and confidence was beneficial for students who were at risk of dropping out of school.

Cassidy and Eachus (2000) showed a relationship between low academic confidence, external academic locus of control and a surface approach to learning. In contrast, students whose reason to participate in education was for cognitive interest had positive academic self-concepts (Michie, Glachan and Bray, 2001), a point supported by House (2000) who found that self-confidence was significantly correlated by the number of hours spent talking with teachers outside class, involvement in volunteer work and participation in student clubs or groups.

Gender differences in general academic self-esteem are unclear (Skaalvik, 1990), although there is evidence that females have more negative academic self-concepts than males (Michie, Glachan and Bray, 2001), especially if they are in male-dominated programs (Uelkue-Steiner, Kurtz-Costes and Kinlaw, 2000).

There are exceptions to the specificity argument in the research literature. Schraw (1997) found evidence for the domain-general hypothesis, which predicted that confidence judgements would be related not only to performance on a particular test but also to confidence judgements and performance on unrelated tests. The complexity of the relationship between self-variables and performance is discussed by Lent, Brown and Gore (1997).

The multifaceted nature of academic self-concept suggests that the micro-level of analysis is preferable, along with task and situation specificity of self-efficacy. That is not to say that concepts of the self are not important in understanding the learner. On the contrary, self-beliefs are a critical
Understanding the Learner component of human striving (Pajares and Schunk, in press). Further, there is probably some overlap in the constructs of self-concept and self-efficacy, at least in the area of mathematics for teenage school children (Pletsch, Walker and Chapman, 2003).

The focus of the research presented here is to find practical solutions to problems that students may have in their academic studies and to seek to understand the students' perceptions of their study and learning. It is not to theorise about the self and the social world.

Academic Confidence Scale

To explore the possibility of a link between academic confidence and reasons for not liking student presentations, the Academic Confidence Scale (ACS) was developed (Sander and Sanders, 2003a; Sanders and Sander, in preparation). In addition to finding the hypothesised differences in confidence between cohorts of psychology and medical students, comparable to those used in the USET study, a startling drop in academic confidence during the first year was detected. Why this is so is still being explored, but an important indicator to the genuineness of this finding comes from Lowe and Cook (2003) who also identified a group of students, 39% of the sample, who were clearly not coping with their transition into the Higher Education environment. This is a larger sized group than that identified in our research, but, nonetheless, a group which seems to be comparable.

At the moment, we are collecting data from level 1 students to see whether this finding can be replicated and, if so, what might cause it. There are many possible explanations for the drop in academic confidence over the first year of undergraduate study. One of them is that students come into university with high hopes and expectations, only to find them dashed by an alien environment very unlike the one they had experienced at school. Certainly, the transition from school to university places many demands on students (Chemers, Hu and Garcia, 2001). With a better understanding of students, in part by understanding their expectations of teaching and learning, when they come into university, a learning environment can be created that will engage...
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them (Kember, 2001; Shuell, 1988), and move them forward in their education.

Confidence and self-efficacy in an educational context

Confidence has been a variable of interest to those researching students in higher education as self-perception of intellectual ability was a positive influence on adjustment in college (Boulter, 2002). Within a medical setting, the relationship between medical students' confidence and their experience in caring for patients (Harrell, Kearl, Reed, Grigsby and Caudill, 1993) has been explored. The results showed a high confidence levels for medical students with a mean confidence score of 4 on a 5 point Lickert scale. Also within a medical context, Bell, Horsfall and Goodwin (1998) developed the Mental Health Nursing Clinical Confidence Scale, to assess the impact of mental health clinical placements on undergraduate nurses' attitudes and clinical confidence.

In a classroom setting, Harrison, Maples, Testa and Jones (1993) measured students' confidence, as part of a study on the academic self-concept of undergraduates. Reynolds, Ramirez, Magrina and Allen (1980), constructed the Academic Self-Concept Scale, the construct validity of which has subsequently been established (Reynolds, 1988). The Student Goals Exploration test (Stark, Bentley, Lowther and Shaw, 1991) has, as its last set of scales, measures of confidence level and student anxiety. Looking at the transition from school into university, Fielstein and Bush (1998) sought to identify non-cognitive variables influencing academic confidence as well as satisfaction with the transition into university and pre-college decision-making. Schraw (1997) measured students' confidence in their answers to test items.

An academic self-efficacy / academic confidence scale was required that addressed confidence specifically in academic study in a university setting, and expanded considerably on the proxy measure used in the ASSIST scale (Entwisle, internet link). My research required a measure for confidence that could be given to students, which gave insights into their confidence in their attitudes and behaviour towards discrete and general aspects of their degree...
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course at any moment in time. It was anticipated that the measure would be sufficiently sensitive to allow the effects of student presentations on confidence to be measured. The development and validation of the ACS as presented in Sander and Sanders (2003a) is, we suggest, an original contribution to the area. The emerging findings from ongoing research on the impact of presentations on academic confidence suggests that further development of the scale is required, but that is not unusual in the construction of a psychometric tool. The small group of students, identified by the Performance Expectation Ladder (PEL) positioning, that had low scores on the ACS suggest that the ACS could be useful to those seeking to understand students. Although the PEL was originally designed as a validation device, it too could be useful in achieving similar goals.

The confidence aspect of the research is underpinned by Bandura’s influential work on self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1993), in that it focuses on context specific judgements, oriented towards the future and seen as malleable (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003). Academic confidence is conceptualised as being how students differ in the extent to which they have a ‘strong belief, firm trust, or sure expectation’ of what university has to offer (taken from the Oxford English Dictionary definition of confident, Second Edition 1989). As with self-efficacy, (Tait and Entwistle 1996) academic confidence is likely to stem from the same four sources, the most important of which is mastery experience (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2002). By mastery experience, Bandura is putting the, perhaps, obvious case for people to consider the effects of their actions, as well as their interpretation of the effects of their actions. Outcomes interpreted as successful bring about an increase in self-efficacy, whereas those that are interpreted as failures tend to reduce self-efficacy beliefs. The priority of mastery experiences in the creation and maintenance of high self-efficacy has important implications for academic achievement, as students should be set educational challenges which are achievable, maybe with differing levels of support, along with guidance and encouragement, perhaps through the tutorial system, which focuses on altering students’ beliefs of their self-worth or competence.
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The other three sources of self-efficacy are: vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological states. These sources of self-efficacy are important as they further show how self-efficacy, and like it, academic confidence, are in a dynamic relationship with the environment. As a result, almost certainly, academic confidence is likely to be subject to change as experience impinges upon expectation and it may be that the extent of a student’s academic confidence may predict the nature of that experience. That McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) found that the best predictor of academic performance was previous academic performance with a smaller, although significant link between self-efficacy and academic performance, suggests that students’ beliefs about their abilities are not always in line with their abilities. Academic confidence is best seen, similarly to self-efficacy, as a mediating variable between the individual’s inherent abilities, their learning styles and the opportunities afforded by the academic environment of higher education, which does have predictive ability to academic performance (Milton, Brown and Lent, 1991).

In using the hypothetical construct of “confidence” to help explain important and interesting differences between students and, indeed, groups of students, as found in the USET study, it is worth bearing in mind that this type of explanation is typical of individualistic cultures, which tend to look for causes of behaviour within the person. As Markus and Kitayama say, we work with the

“Western view of the individual as an independent, self-contained, autonomous entity who (a) comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes (e.g. traits, abilities, motives and values) and (b) behaves primarily as a consequence of these internal attributes” (page 224)

Whilst Bandura’s conception of self-efficacy sees people in dynamic relationships with their environment, it perhaps does not sufficiently focus specifically onto the social environment, which is integral to the inter-dependent cultural perspective that is usually contrasted with the independent perspective (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). To argue that Bandura was not aware of the importance of the social environment would be wrong, as vicarious experiences as a source of efficacy beliefs are inherently social, as
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is verbal persuasion. However, the social element in the learning experience has developed greatly. Northedge (2003a,b), taking a socio-cultural stance, locates knowledge in a "discourse community" (page 19). The goal of the student is "to become an effective participant in an unfamiliar knowledge community" (page 21). It is the teacher's role to help the student become "a user of various specialist discourses" and "a participant within the relevant knowledge communities" (page 22). Thus, teachers are engaging with students to enable students to engage with discourse communities.

The "frames of reference" discussion (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2002) addresses and develops the social element in the way students' see themselves as learners and does so in a way that sees students in learning contexts in a far more inter-dependant way. It does this by suggesting that students understand their own level of academic functioning, in part, through comparison with other learners in the same situation. Other students provide an external frame of reference.

The PEL, which was constructed to validate the ACS (Sander and Sanders, 2003a) required the student participants to identify not just what they expected their academic performance to be, in percentage points, in relation to a hypothetical average, but also in relation to their class. To complete this task in any meaningful sort of way, the student participants have to use external frames of reference. That is, they have to have an idea of how they are performing, or are likely to perform, against their perceptions of the performance of the rest of their class. Academic confidence is going to work in a similar way, in that students are going to gain confidence in their academic skills not just from mastery experiences, per se, but through being able to master tasks that other respected individuals in their class are able to master.

"External comparison is a process by which a student compares his or her performance with the perceived performance of another, which may be a comparison group or a comparison person. The comparison group and the comparison person may differ."
(Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2002, p234).
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Alongside the external frame of reference, is an internal frame of reference. Internal frames of reference are when students compare their performance in one area of academic study with their performance in another area of academic study, regardless of how these self-perceived abilities compare with those of other students (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2002). Thus, students on a psychology course may compare their progress on one course, with their progress on another, which opens up another important critical debate that is central to self-efficacy thinking, namely the issue of specificity. This will be considered in the next section.

In completing the PEL, student participants will have used internal as well as external frames of reference to decide on their likely achievement for each of the three academic years asked for on the PEL.

Academic confidence as an explanatory variable

The self-efficacy literature is full of reminders that self-efficacy can change from situation to situation, as well as over time and so any attempts to measure self-efficacy should be situation specific (e.g. Pajares, 1996a, 1997, Bandura 2001) and, perhaps time specific. The ACS attempted to record a global measure of students' academic confidence which heeded the specificity warning in that one core component of confidence was being measured, namely students' confidence in their academic studies. It may be that such a thing is not realistic or meaningful for many students as academic confidence may alter between modules or, indeed between components and associated assessments on modules. For example, a student may have a much greater sense of confidence on a developmental psychology module that they are studying than on a statistics module and within the developmental psychology module, they may have more confidence in their ability to learn from a lead lecture series than from compulsory student presentations. To measure the impact of assessment components or discrete teaching/learning methods in a module, a more focused and, as a result a shorter, confidence scale may be required.
Nonetheless, it still seems reasonable to believe that students entering Higher Education come in with not just their expectations of their new course of study, but also with a variable degree of confidence in their ability to meet the demands, as they perceive them, of their new course. Thus we suggested that the medical students in the USET study might well have been more confident than the psychology students. It still seems a surprise that the absolute degree of difference in the ACS scale scores between the two comparable groups of students was not larger. That careful analysis of the responses to each of the individual statements in the ACS showed that the medical students scored significantly lower on two of the statements (statements 10 and 17) than the psychology students both unpacks the surprise of the finding and suggests possible limitations of the ACS due to its broadness, unless, of course the medical students rated low confidence here as a way of saying that they just do not expect to have to do either of these things. If that is the case, the ACS needs refining.

**Summary**

One of the effects of the changes in Higher Education over the last decade has been that a customer culture has, perhaps unwittingly, been created. Within a customer culture, it is true that

"Customer satisfaction is believed to derive from the extent to which perceived standard of service...matches the expectations of the customer" (Scott, 1999, page 198).

Such an analysis suggests that teaching methods should be aligned with students' expectations in order to facilitate learning through initial engagement and to keep student-customers happy. The academic confidence research is important here, as teachers need to be sensitive not just to the needs of their students, but also to the impact of their teaching methods on them. Therefore they should have some insight into students' confidence at crucial points during the students' course.

Understanding the expectations that students have and the confidence that they may or may not have, is only a small part of trying to understand the student as a learner. However, I have tried to locate the expectations and
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confidence research within a broader research literature, which shows, I hope, that understanding students, including their expectations of teaching and learning, and their academic confidence, is both important and useful.

Aims and Objectives

In retrospect, the research that I am submitting for consideration for a PhD by published works can be summarised by a general aim and seven specific objectives. I present this aim and these objectives here as they were not articulated at the start of the research, back in 1994.

Aim

The research programme was designed to explore students' perceptions and conceptions of teaching and learning.

Objectives

1. To identify students' expectations of teaching and learning methods
2. To identify students' preferences for methods of teaching, learning and assessment
3. To measure how the experience of being part of an unpopular teaching arrangement affects those preferences and student confidence
4. To measure how the experience of undertaking unpopular assessments affects those preferences and student confidence
5. To assess the effect of academic confidence on expectations of and perceptions of differing teaching, learning and assessment procedures.
6. To assess the effect of academic experience on academic confidence.
7. To identify factors students consider relevant to academic confidence.
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The aim and objectives, as articulated above are, I believe addressed by the eight papers, which I wish to be considered for a PhD by publications. These are listed in the appendix and attached to this submission.

**Methodological considerations**

The initial action research, which sought to explore the expectations that level 3 Open University students had of tutorials to support their course, was difficult to co-ordinate as three tutors were to interview a sample of their new students by telephone. An interview protocol was developed and each tutor agreed to ask each of these questions, although the responses that followed led into unique conversations. The interview questions were also the same as those sent out on the postal survey that supported these in depth telephone interviews. The case for telephone interviews has been made by Miller (1995).

The action research, which was the starting point for this research programme is excellent for addressing specific issues in the classroom. The USET study sought to go further, by looking at a wider range of students from different courses and universities. It was successful in a small way, in that it extended the research on students' perceptions and expectations of their course beyond a cohort of psychology students, to include a group of medical students and a group of business studies students. However, these groups were still opportunity groups, but without the full co-operation of colleagues from a range of courses and universities, it would be hard to extend this research. Some effort was made, through a poster presentation at Plymouth University in 1997, but to no avail.

The sampling strategy used and, indeed the relationship between the researcher(s) and the sample have been questioned. The query centred around the sampling used in a conference paper (Sander and Sanders, 2003b). In this study, the participants / subjects were also the students of the researchers which was alleged to be too close to allow for dispassionate, objective research. As all the other studies that I present here have used student participants whose teachers were the researchers, the criticism, if
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founded, applies to these studies as well. This allegation requires further consideration.

Educational Action Research

A distinction can be drawn between normative scientific research and action research. Normative science seeks to establish general laws about behaviour, within psychology, specifically about human and, less often non-human animal behaviour. Within an educational setting, educational research specialists would be seeking to establish general "truths" that could be handed down to teacher-practitioners to apply in their professional capacity. This is an approach that separates out the researcher and those who apply the research findings - the teachers (Posch, 2003). Such a division sets up a hierarchical system that divides or separates theory and practice and puts the researcher in a more important position than the teacher. In contrast, action research believes that theory and practice are not dividable, nor are theories authoritative (Somekh, 2003). Rather, action research places teachers in a position where they can be the researcher, enabling them to understand and guide their teaching practice. Within such a framework, theories are to be seen as resources for thinking about problems of living and teachers have a professional practice that is supported, not by externally generated theory or generalised principles, but by experience tested in teaching settings (Bridges, 2003). The teacher now assumes responsibility, through personal agency and autonomy, in a democratic setting, for identifying problems, thinking of ways to solve them, carrying out the research, considering the data and using the outcome to inform teaching practice. Research framed in this way is both a means of continuing professional development and a means of promoting reflexive practice (Bridges, 2003; Norton, 2001). In summary, action research aims to bring about change, here in educational practice and to increase the understanding of the researcher (Dick, 1993). Such local theorising and problem solving can subsequently be linked with, compared to and informed by "external" theories; evidence and ideas (Dadds, 2003), but action research is both philosophically and practically different from science (Bryant, 1996).
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Action research has important benefits beyond empowering the practitioner for action research is, in some situations, the only practical way of proceeding. One of the key strengths is its sensitivity to local problems like teaching and assessment issues in a classroom. It provides a means to rapid solutions to local problems, facilitating both better teaching practice and enhanced professionalism in the teacher. Action research promotes a constructivist view of learning (Norton, 1991, Somekh, 2003) and collaboration between partners and stakeholders (Dadds, 2003; Elliott, 2003; Norton, 2001). The collaboration can be between teachers researching a common aspect of practice and collaboration between teachers and students, removing the divide between the researcher and the researched. Philosophically, action research values the teacher’s insider perspective, concordant with existentialism and phenomenology (Norton, 2001; Somekh, 2003) and promotes practical and more immediate solutions to local problems, concordant with pragmatism (Dick, 1993). Methodologically, the collection of qualitative data is often preferred given the responsivity required to find solutions to immediate and local problems (Dick, 1993).

Focusing on the methodology of action research, it is essential to stress the dialectical (Norton, 2001), cyclical or spiral (Dick, 1993) nature of action research, which means that there is a constant interplay between intention and planning before acting and a review or evaluation after acting which informs further actions.

In the research presented here, action research was not just the most appropriate methodology to use, but the only one that could have been used. The starting point for the research was to consider the most effective tutorial provision for Open University students in one region, on one course (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1997). The educational literature offered possible ways of structuring the tutorials but without considering the students and their perspective on teaching, there could be no definite solution to enhancing the immediate cohort of students, so action research was required, with collaboration between the tutors and the students. Given that the wide ranging views that students might have had, qualitative data was the only...
meaningful data to collect. The insights that were gained enabled us as tutors to modify our practice. The local nature of the solution found was emphasised when we exercise was repeated with a subsequent cohort of students in the same region and on the same module and with students on another module (Stevenson and Sander, 1998). The results showed that different groups of students on the same module had different preferences and suggested that the preferences of foundation students might be quite different from the preferences of third level students.

Whilst the USET study (Sander et al, 2000) was more extensive and collected more quantitative data, it was, none-the-less a piece of action research in that the collaborating teachers wished to explore the student’s perspective on teaching, learning and assessment. In this, we were building on both the methodology and the insights gained from the Open University studies and applying them to face-to-face teaching in three conventional universities. The results from this study has usefully informed our teaching practice and resulted in further questions being raised which were explored in the confidence part of the research.

No phases of the research have attempted to produce or test laws or theories. The research was stimulated by a local problem, shared with colleagues, explored with students, reflected up and practice altered appropriately. There have been some emergent issues that appear to not be time or place specific. These include: the efficient use of time; not liking student presentations due to the fact that provoke anxiety or because they may be a source of incorrect knowledge, and a more positive view of presentations after they have happened than in anticipation of them. These emergent themes though do not constitute a testable scientific theory, nor should they been seen as educational laws. Rather they are barriers to student engagement and learning that other teachers may like to look out for.

The research as a whole (as opposed to any one study within the research) conforms to the ITDEM delineation of action research (Norton, 2001):
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Identification of a problem by teachers in their teaching

How can university teaching be made more effective and engaging?

Thinking of ways to tackle the problem

Ask the students what their perspective is. In this the students are seen as important collaborators with views to be respected and used to inform teaching practice.

Doing it

The two Open University studies and the USET study all were attempts to understand the students' perspective of teaching, learning and assessment.

Evaluating it

From the process of evaluating the data came the ELPO paper (Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1997) which argued that the research programme is not implying that you should give students just what they want. Rather the students' wishes and preferences should be used alongside professional knowledge. Thus, for example, student presentations were retained.

Modifying practice

Our practice as university teachers was changed in a number of ways, including how we organised and planned Open University tutorials; how essays were marked; how to introduce students to presentations; the amount of emotional support available for students doing presentations; ways of ensuring that the material that students presented was appropriate; enhancing teacher approachability and looking for ways of getting greater student involvement in lectures.

Using a normative or essentialistic scientific paradigm would not have helped us as teachers to help our students. Only the action research methodology used could have done that.
The USET Questionnaire

The USET questionnaire worked well, although a small number of participants attempted to rank their 3 least preferred teaching and learning methods. Student participants were asked to identify just their least preferred method as the language involved in trying to explain the task of selecting a ranking of the three least preferred teaching and learning methods was, at best tortuous and probably unclear. The confusion came from the preceding rankings, which required the students to identify and then rank the three teaching and learning methods that were hoped for and expected. To be used now the USET questionnaire would have to be updated as it failed to mention Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), for example, an increasingly prevalent form of teaching which is “here to stay” (Hartley, 1998, p105). It could also be bettered by using teaching and learning methods that were more specifically tailored to courses. The version we used had to suit the varied teaching methods of three diverse courses.

The attempt to understand students’ assessment preferences probably revealed just which assessments were familiar to the students. The sampling was still restricted, but the study has attracted international interest and was covered in The Psychologist (April 2000, page 180), the British Medical Journal (November 2000, page 410) and the Times Higher Education Supplement (September 29, 2000, page 38).

Academic Confidence Research

The confidence research needs to check that the students’ conception of confidence matches the teacher-driven conceptualisation used in the development of the ACS. There is still the important question of what academic confidence is, along with an understanding of the dynamic relationship between academic confidence and academic performance. The relationship between academic confidence as measured by the ACS, and Bandura’s self-efficacy theory needs to be explored further. Whilst the claim we make (Sander and Sanders, 2003a; Sanders and Sander, in preparation) that the data we have from the PEL validates the ACS, there is still the
possibility that the ACS is measuring something more than just academic confidence or, indeed, something other than academic confidence, such as academic studying habits or student diligence. Having said that, Multon, Brown and Lent (1991) present an argument for persistence being an integral part of self-efficacy. Given that the differences between diligence and persistence are perhaps, more semantic than substantial, there may not be a real concern with the ACS, but it does need further empirical work. There is also the distinct possibility that the ACS is too broad, perhaps in measuring general studying habits, falling foul of the specificity requirements for self-efficacy. This is addressed in a later section.

The published paper that presents the confidence findings (Sander and Sanders, 2003a) includes a factor analysis of the data which is used to suggest that there are a six sub-scales within the ACS: studying, understanding, attendance, grades, verbalising and clarifying. As table 1 in the published paper shows, the loadings, even when showing those greater than 0.3 are not uniquely mapped between ACS statements and the resultant factors. To take this possible factor structure further would require the development of the ACS, to ensure that statements loaded uniquely onto just one factor.

The same paper also refers to the Ladder of Aspiration (LofAsp). This is the Performance Expectation Ladder (PEL). Subsequent consideration suggested that the tool was not a measure of what students aspired to in the three years of their study. Rather it measured what students thought they were likely to do, in percentage points. Thus the term Performance Expectation Ladder was felt to be preferable.

**My original contribution in understanding the learner for more effective university teaching**

Having considered the background literature and the place of my research within that literature, an assessment of whether that research makes a contribution to that literature needs to be made. That the research can be
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seamlessly integrated into the research literature shows its theoretical underpinnings, but it may add nothing new. It may just have replicated existing research findings. However I believe that is not the case. The gathering of the expectations that students have of learning and teaching and using them in course design and delivery is developed beyond that done in previous research. Similarly, attempts to measure the academic confidence of students in order to assess the impact of the course or elements of the course on students, is new to Higher Education. These contributions to understanding student learning in Higher Education are important, if in a small way, because Higher Education has changed substantially in the last decade, with some of these changes leading to the customerisation of HE. Indeed, a higher proportion and a greater diversity of school leavers are entering Higher Education (e.g. Biggs, 1999). Now, about 40% of school leavers are taking up Higher Education places as opposed to 15% a decade ago. The expansion of the Higher Education system in the UK has recognised the need to include students with a greater diversity in age, experience, socio-economic status and cultural background. This initiative has further reduced the homogeneity of the student population (Biggs, 1999). This increase in student numbers and student diversity is happening against a background of decreasing resources. There are now students with a greater range of abilities, as measured by public examination results, and probably a greater range of commitments to Higher Education as well as a worryingly variable range of skills that will enable them to cope with Higher Education.

This increasing heterogeneity of undergraduate students, particularly in new universities makes it more imperative to understand students’ conceptions of teaching, learning and of knowledge itself if students are to be engaged with the educational process. Engagement with students is important for effective learning, according to influential theories of education (e.g. Laurillard, 1993), and, importantly, is also integral to Scott’s (1999) analysis of the place of students’ expectations in a seemingly increasingly customer oriented educational environment. Aligning the learning process to students’ conceptions is addressed by Pillay (2002).
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With small class sizes, the implicit “expert knowledge” (Sterling and Shapiro, 1985, p352) of teachers may be sufficient to give them an understanding of their students. With the greater likelihood of large class sizes (Gibbs, Lucas and Simonite, 1996), more formalised means of understanding students must be sought. Whilst using small group work as part of undergraduate teaching can help, some explicit attempts to collect profile information on students can help teachers offer better learning experiences (Cassidy and Eachus, 2000). The ASSIST scale (Tait and Entwistle, 1996, Entwistle, internet link) was developed as part of “a computer-based system to identify students whose study skills and strategies appear to be ineffective, which will also provide advice to students that is to some extent targeted to their individual needs” (p97). The ASSIST measures deep, surface, strategic and apathetic approaches to learning and academic progress. The Study Process Questionnaire (Biggs, Kember and Leung 2001) also measures the extent to which students tend to use deep or surface learning styles. Reflective thinking in students can be measured (Kember et al, 2000; see also, Leung and Kember, 2003), as can students’ epistemological beliefs (Schommer, 1990, 1998; see also Clarebout, Elen, Luyten and Bamps, 2002), as both reflective thinking and epistemological beliefs will have an important effect on the students’ ability to benefit from learning situations (Pillay, 2002).

The two research strands being discussed here sought to find out about the individual students’ perceptions and conceptions of learning, teaching and assessment, in the hope that better learning environments could be created for them. As such, the first research strand, the expectations research, sought to understand the views that students had about aspects of the education that they were expecting. Such views are quite different from psychometric measures of constructs such as learning style, epistemological beliefs and reflectivity. The second research strand did go down this route of using a psychometric scale to measure a construct, academic confidence, that was postulated to explain interesting differences in students view on student presentations as a disliked learning method.
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In summary, there is now a more diverse student population, which is more likely to see itself as a consumer of an educational provision, more directly linked to future employment (e.g. Northedge, 2003), especially for mature students (Pillay, 2002), through an increase in vocational courses on offer. With the greater heterogeneity of the student population, greater efforts should be made by university teachers to find out about and understand their students. Folk knowledge is unlikely to be effective anymore. Certainly university teachers should not consider today’s students as similar to themselves when they were at university.

Alongside and perhaps related to, the expansion in Higher Education, universities have had to consider the nature of their teaching, which has led, in part, to an articulated account of “graduateness” (HEQC, 1995). One of the properties of “graduateness” is being an independent or autonomous learner. Whilst this is not a new or original outcome of university education, attention on the process of turning undergraduates into independent or autonomous learners is. Effective learning environments in promoting graduateness are thought to be those that:

- Are student centred as opposed to being teacher centred, like the formal lecture
- Promote a deep approach to learning, by requiring the student to actively engage with the subject, rather than coping by superficial and strategic learning
- Require the student to be actively working with the subject, rather than passively sitting and listening to “an expert” talking about it
- Encourage the student to reflect upon their learning, to learn from what has gone well and reconsider what has not worked so well. Students are encouraged to develop self-awareness and feedback on that awareness, enhancing balanced self-assessment of identified strengths and weaknesses

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- Are inclusive of all students, which means, with the substantially increased heterogeneity of the typical undergraduate class, teaching methods / learning environments that reach all students should be embraced

(Adapted from UWIC’s learning and teaching strategy)

In these learning environments, students should develop, test and apply their learning in independent, interactive or collaborative contexts. Does this happen? Brown (1993) makes clear that teaching methods can be considered as lying on a continuum from being high in teacher participation and control to high in student participation and control. A formal lecture would be a good example of a teaching method, albeit not one that was much wanted, according to Sander et al (2000), that was high in teacher participation and control. Conversely, student presentations would be a teaching / learning method that was high in student participation and control. As with the formal lecture, students were not very keen on this method either. Arguably, teaching methods, or learning environments that are high in student participation and control are more likely to further the aim of making students autonomous, independent learners. The formal lecture may have survived in Higher Education because, it was relatively easy to prepare and deliver and, given that just the top 15% of school leavers were entering higher education, was sufficiently effective for those academically bright, interested, committed and motivated students, who were recruited. As the current admissions policy to Higher Education is increasing the number of less able and perhaps initially less committed students, the passive, un-engaging, formal lecture may be increasingly ineffective and maybe why it is not being much liked.

For effective teaching to happen, students have to be engaged from when they first enter university. Are students going to be engaged by being taught in a way that they do not want to be taught? Can a case be presented to students, justifying teaching them in ways that do not want to be taught in? To promote graduateness, teaching methods that are high in student participation and control but also, as far as possible, in line with students’ expectations, have to be used. This is not to say that there is not a place for lectures, or other methods that are high in teacher participation and control,
but they are likely to need supporting by tutorials, workshops or some other more intimate and interactive means. The complementary roles of the learner, the teacher and the learning environment are encapsulated in Biggs' (1999) 3P model of learning and teaching, which is important as it highlights the fact that effective teaching builds on student and teacher characteristics. Meyer (e.g. Lucas and Meyer, 2003; Meyer, 1998; Meyer and Scrivener, 1995) has elaborated on the student variables, showing the inter-relationship of motivation, intention, preconceptions of the subject and the learning environment, student conceptions of learning, epistemology and subject in the learning process.

The student variables aspect of the teaching / learning relationship is important as this is the part of the learning process that both research strands are focusing on. It is argued that through knowing the students better, suitable teaching contexts can be used for appropriate learning focused activities, to guide and support all students through their course successfully, which is very much in line with the sociocultural perspective on education. As Northedge (2003a) says: “students need teachers who can provide opportunities for supported participation in the relevant knowledge community”. From a negotiation between students and teachers, learning focused activities should inexorably lead to learning outcomes. To effectively engage with students, teachers need to know something meaningful about them, so the "Student Factors" element in the 3P model is crucial. This is neatly encapsulated by Clarebout (1999), who argues that university teching should look to connect with the students, rather than give students information

To connect effectively with students, you need to know something about them. When teaching small, school-sized classes, on a frequent basis, that was relatively easy. How do you find out about students in a class of one or two hundred? There are two possibilities. Firstly, the traditional method of teaching students in small tutorial groups can be employed, to the extent that teacher workloads and other resources, including rooms, permit. Another method would be to use survey tools to build up a picture of the strengths and weaknesses of a new student cohort (e.g. Lucas and Meyer, 2002; Meyer,
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1998). Admittedly, this would not provide the same intimate picture that individual discourse would provide, but it may be a useful and manageable step in the right direction. Following this path, students could be surveyed in induction week to find out about their: expectations of university and their expectations of their subject or course; conception of learning, i.e. learning facts or understanding issues; epistemological beliefs, i.e. knowledge as fixed and absolute, or knowledge as relative and changing. As Leung and Kember (2003) have shown a link between students’ preference for particular learning environments, their epistemological beliefs and their conceptions of learning, the understanding of students’ conception of learning and epistemological beliefs is particularly important. Students with a belief in knowledge as fixed and absolute, may well prefer a lecture format which enables them to “be given” the knowledge by an “expert” teacher, but in an environment in which they can have some control, in case they “get lost” or fail to record “the facts”, as they see them. For these students, a formal lecture would work only for as long as the lecture could be followed. If the lecture became interactive, allowing students to ask the lecturer to slow down, repeat what has just been said or to keep the slide up for longer, it would suit their preferences. The student with a belief in knowledge as fixed and absolute would cope much less well in a learning environment in which students were asked to work together to research topics and share the expertise that they gained in their research (e.g. Sander, 2002). Importantly, Kember (2001) suggests that the practice of asking students to research a topic and present it to their peers can be important in encouraging students to facilitative/transformative approach to knowledge, commensurate with the goals of graduateness. As Kember says:

“...students who commence higher education with didactic/reproductive beliefs can find the process difficult and even traumatic. They are uncomfortable with teaching approaches which do not correspond with their model of teachers presenting information to be passively absorbed by students.” (Kember 2001, page 217)

From this, it follows that students who expect to be “given” knowledge, which can then be learnt and reproduced, will have difficulties in a learning environment that does not give them knowledge. Likewise, students who
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seek to gain new understandings of a topic, through working with problems
and issues will not be helped in a lecture setting in which an "expert" teacher
seeks to "give" them knowledge.

The USET study suggested that there are mismatches between student
expectations and preferences for teaching / learning and the learning
environments that exist for students. If it is known that students have
expectations that are out of line with what a university has to offer, whatever
they are, then these mismatches need to be managed or met. It is important
to remember, though, that Higher Education does not always have to meet the
expectations of students (Scott, 1999; Stevenson, Sander and Naylor, 1997).
For instance, expectations about particular teaching / learning methods
wanted or not wanted could be responded to by changing the learning
environment, to one that would initially engage with the students, but would
then take them on to becoming independent, autonomous learners, perhaps
through supporting students in teaching / learning methods that students do
not much like. Likewise, a mismatch of students' conceptions of learning /
epistemological beliefs about knowledge and the inherent beliefs of the
teaching and learning environment they are working in, could either be
responded to, perhaps by a support programme of workshops designed to
align students to university teaching (e.g. Norton, internet reference) or
managed. The design of effective learning environments is not easy (see
Clarebout, Elen, Johnson, and Shaw, 2002; Clarebout, Lowyck and Elen,
2003; Elen and Clarebout, 2002), but is important because, as Shuell (1986)
says:

"If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective
manner, then the teacher's fundamental task is to get students to
engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving
those outcomes" (Page 429)

The series of studies, starting with the action research studies and
progressing to the larger scale USET study were attempts to understand
students' expectations of university teaching so they could be responded to in
the design of course learning environments. There are a number of important
points that come out of this research, which are discussed in the original
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articles. The following are pertinent to the discussion here. The research showed that understanding students' expectations can usefully inform course design and delivery. With particular reference to the USET study, why are students realistically hoping for interactive lectures? Is this a teaching method that is familiar to them, from their school days? Does it fit in with their beliefs about knowledge and learning? If so, there may be a way to go in turning such students into autonomous learners. In terms of expectations, at least students are mostly getting something close to what they would like. Having said that, students are still, in part expecting to be taught through formal lectures - although they would prefer not to be so taught. This is a view that is corroborated by Biggs, (1999). However, some teaching methods that students may not like, may, nonetheless have advantages for the students in their education, which leads to the final point. Expectations may have to be managed, to convince students that, for instance, student presentations may be beneficial to them. Trying to understand why many students find student presentations daunting and why, generally the psychology students found them more daunting that the medical students in the USET survey, was the focus for the second line of research, on academic confidence.

The subsequent confidence research showed that measuring academic confidence was both possible and useful. The discovery that academic confidence drops during the first year of the course, at least for one group of degree students, is worthy of further study. We termed this the "Gung Ho!" effect. Likewise, the identification of a group of students who were clearly not coping with their degree course, through the ACS and the PEL, is also potentially important and worthy of further study.

**Future directions**

1. **How does Academic Confidence change over time?**

The "Gung Ho!" hypothesis was formulated to explain the drop in academic confidence found during the first year of academic study (Sander and Sanders, 2003a). Further research is being carried out to establish the
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robustness of the effect by giving the current level 1 cohort on our psychology degree the ACS and the PEL at the four points during the first year of study and final at the very start of the second year. These data should enable the effect of time in general and assessment results in particular, on the PEL and ACS to be determined.

2. Confidence and student presentations

We have a large quantity of data that was collected to explore the impact of student presentations on academic confidence, using an analytical survey methodology to compare the effect of presentations that were either assessed or not assessed. This research develops the Sander, Sanders and Stevenson (2002) study that was done to assess the usefulness of further exploring students perceptions of student presentations. Preliminary analysis has been done on the quantitative data, which suggests that the impact of presentations on student confidence is not as clear and as convincing as might have been expected. It might be that student presentations do not affect students' academic confidence, but given the comments made in relation to student presentations, in the USET study, this seems somewhat implausible, especially as the student participants used are comparable groups on the same course at the same university as the one used in the USET study which yielded the main reason for not liking presentation as a lack of confidence and their effect on self-esteem. Therefore, with help from a recent graduate, the qualitative data are being explored. Hopefully, this will give some further insights into the way that students feel about presentations.

3. What is confidence as measured by the ACS?

A start has been made to try and explore the nature of students' academic confidence from the perspective of the student, a project provoked in part by similar work by Lane and Lane (2002). To this end psychology students have been asked to rate each of the 24 statements in the ACS for how much, each statement contributes to academic success and helps make for a confident student. It may be that a reconsideration of the response format will be required, by asking students to select, say the six most important statements. With those selected statements, student
participants can rank order them from most to least important to their understanding of student confidence.

4. Frames of reference

Inspired by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2002), I wondered about student participants completing the PEL. The PEL was designed as a validating tool, but it is an interesting instrument in its own right, which, on consideration, places considerable demands on the student participants. To complete the PEL in any meaningful way requires students to utilise both external (i.e. other students) and internal (i.e. past experiences) frames of reference. What precise frames of reference do student participants use? And how do they differ between students who have done psychology before coming to university and those for who the study of academic psychology is a new experience? The effect of prior study of psychology on completing the PEL should be detectable from the data being collected on the change in ACS scores over time given that we already have data on students’ studies prior to university.

Conclusion

It is hoped that a cogent and coherent case has been made for focusing in on the student in the learning process, and trying to understand more about the students’ starting positions at the beginning of their university education. As Cassidy and Eachus (2000) conclude, “profile information…is both beneficial to inform teaching practice and students to raise awareness regarding learning strategies and study skills” (p318). Profile information collected at the beginning of a university course could provide a known and understood starting position, from which, learning environments can be designed to move the student forward, both in their chosen subject matter and in “graduateness” skills. Whilst recognising that “graduateness” may be a laudable aim, students are unlikely to be coming into Higher Education with the graduate skills including autonomy and independence in learning (e.g. Cook and Leckey, 1999), especially in the inclusive recruitment climate that now exists in Higher Education. Therefore, there is a need to recognise that these school
leavers are likely to need working with, carefully, and in partnership (Laurillard, 1993; Norhedge, 2003a&b; Scott, 1999) to give them the skill, and the confidence in that skill, to become independent, autonomous, reflective, deep, active learners in their field of study. The transition from school or college to university places many demands on undergraduates (Chemers, Hu and Garcia, 2001; Cook and Leckey, 1999; Lowe and Cook, 2003). Maybe many, if not all of the students need to be helped in this transition, to a greater or lesser extent, including helping them become used to the different learning environment of university, and embracing a more relativistic view of knowledge.

There are many possible explanations for the drop in academic confidence over the first year of undergraduate study that Sander and Sanders' (2003a) found. One of them is that students came into university with high hopes and expectations, only to find them dashed by an alien environment very unlike the one they had experienced for fourteen or more years at school or college. Maybe they found an environment, which taught them in an impersonal way, maybe even in large, formal lectures; had limited and maybe difficult access to teaching staff and provided slow and limited feedback to assignments and exams. It may even be that they were expected to have greater "graduate" skills than was reasonable (Cook and Leckey, 1999; Lowe and Cook, 2003).

It would seem that the Higher Education culture that university students find themselves in might make it difficult for many of them, especially those from less traditional university backgrounds, to effectively study for a degree. From the university teacher's perspective, the increased student diversity in an under resourced and slowly changing environment makes it difficult for the teacher to work effectively with each student, in the way that a school teacher is expected to work. At the bottom of this is the fact that there are often too many students in each class, making it almost impossible for teachers to get to know their students, to help them on a more individual basis, despite the fact that more students now need individual attention to enable them to flourish in a university environment. Research strands one and two are
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attempts at practically addressing the need to get to know students to facilitate effective education.
Appendix

Publications for this submission of a PhD by
Published Works

Peer Reviewed


Stevenson, K. and Sander, P. (2002). Medical students are from Mars – business and psychology students are from Venus – University lecturers are from Pluto. Medical Teacher, 24, 1, 27-31.

Stevenson K., Sander P. and Naylor P. (1996) Student perceptions of the tutors role in distance learning, Open Learning, 11, 1, 22-30


Editorial decision

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Paul's contribution - Keith Stevenson's Perspective

Understanding the Learner
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Submitted papers
Measuring confidence in academic study:

A summary report

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Guided by the work of Bandura on self-efficacy, this study seeks to determine the extent to which differences in students' expectations of higher education could be explained by differing levels of confidence.

Method. An Academic Confidence Scale (ACS) was constructed and used for a survey of level one students, to explore differences in confidence between two very different student groups. One group was further tested for their confidence later in the year and at the same time; they completed a Ladder of Aspiration (LofAsp), to validate the Academic Confidence Scale. With these data, the ACS could be explored further for underlying factors.

Results. Factor analysis of the ACS yielded six factors (Studying, Understanding, Verbalising, Clarifying, Attendance and Grades). The LoFAsp provided validation of the ACS. From the LoFAsp, a small group that rated themselves lower than the national average was identified. This group was interesting both in terms of ACS scores and academic performance. ACS scores showed a significant reduction over time.

Discussion. A comparison of the ACS scores between the two student groups suggests that confidence could only be responsible to a small extent for differences in students' expectations of higher education. The reduction in ACS scores indicates that ACS is affected by student performance, rather than affects student performance. It also asks questions about students' ability to reason with statistical data as well as their views on their likely performance on their course.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, confidence, university, students
INTRODUCTION

Confident, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) is ‘having strong belief, firm trust, or sure expectation; feeling certain, fully assured, ‘self-reliant, bold; sure of oneself, one’s cause, etc.; having no fear of failure’. Experience tells us that confidence differs between people in the same situation and that people have differing levels of confidence in different situations. Thus someone who is highly confident in a familiar setting, for example, may lose confidence in an unfamiliar and challenging environment. The study reported here originates firstly from the work by Bandura (e.g. 1977, 1993) on concept of self-efficacy, and secondly from a study on students’ perceptions of university teaching (Sander et al, 2000). This research details the development of a scale to measure one specific form of confidence, namely academic confidence.

Self-efficacy has been defined (Bandura, 1986, page 391), as “people’s judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance” and stems from four sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological states (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy can also be seen as the confidence that people have in their ability to do the things that they try to do (Pajares, 2000). Thus self-efficacy can be seen as a product of a reflexive loop between the individual and their environment: successful experience resulting in higher levels of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy scales have been applied to educational research, primarily in studies of academic motivation and self-regulation (Pajares, 1997, 2002). Self-efficacy influences the choices people make in specific situations, such as whether to start a task. It influences the effort people put into tasks and their persistence, especially when the “going gets tough”. Furthermore, self-efficacy has not only a psychological effect, but also a physiological effect, affecting, for instance, anxiety levels (Pajares, 2002). In summary, self-efficacy research has helped to tease out the contributions that ability and self-confidence in one’s ability makes to academic success and in careers beyond education (Crozier, 1997).

Why develop a measure of academic confidence?

There is, therefore, a wealth of empirical evidence showing that self-efficacy affects academic performance, as part of its general effect on behaviour. However this blanket effect may obscure some more specific differences that could be applicable to educational settings,
Measuring confidence in academic study: A summary report.

in particular in higher education, where the autonomy and independence of the student are essential to success (witness the key components of the contemporary interest in the concept of 'graduateness'). In this context, a new construct distinct from its parent concept, self-efficacy, was suggested, a construct that we termed "academic confidence".

Originally, academic confidence was hypothesised as explaining some interesting group differences in an earlier study (Sander et al, 2000). This study examined the expectations of two groups of UK university students; one group comprised medical students in a traditional university and the other psychology students in a new university. One aspect of the results was the striking differences in reasons given by students for not liking role-play and student presentations as methods of teaching. Essentially, the medical students were worried that these were not effective methods, whereas the psychology students were worried about their own competence to do them (see also Sander and Stevenson 2002, Stevenson and Sander, 2002). The possibility of academic confidence as an explanation for this difference arose from an examination of the differing entry profiles of the two groups. The medical students had an average A-level point score of 27.8, in contrast to 15.0 for the psychology students, (using the standard pre 2002 UCAS formula for assigning A level points, where A =10, B=8, C=6, D=4, E=2 and AS grades assigned half value points e.g. an A grade AS level =5).

Academic confidence is conceptualised as being how students differ in the extent to which they have a 'strong belief, firm trust, or sure expectation' of what university has to offer. As part of its parent concept, self-efficacy, academic confidence may stem from the same four sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological states. It is likely to be subject to change as experience impinges upon expectation. The question becomes to what extent may it predict the nature of that experience? McLean (2001), in a study of medical students found that learning style was clearly associated with academic performance. How might academic confidence interact with learning styles? Could it have a role to play in predicting academic performance?

Academic confidence, therefore, is proposed as a mediating variable between the individual's inherent abilities, their learning styles and the opportunities afforded by the academic environment of higher education.

In order to explore this further it was necessary to develop an instrument to measure this specific construct. As the notion of academic confidence has its theoretical foundations
in Bandura’s work on self-efficacy, the guidelines for measuring self-efficacy are taken to be equally applicable in measuring academic confidence.

METHOD

Level 1 students were surveyed at two points in the academic year. In induction week (time 1), psychology students and medical students, at two different universities, completed an Academic Confidence Scale (ACS, see appendix 1) that had already been tested for acceptable internal reliability. At the end of the Easter term (time 2), the same group of psychology students were invited to complete the ACS fir a second time, along with a validation task, the Ladder of Aspiration (LofAsp, see appendix 2), based on the work of Cantrill (1965) and Sanders (1987).

Results

At time 1, 102 psychology students and 182 medical students completed the ACS. The average A level points for the medical students were 32.04 (sd=3.88) in comparison with the psychology students, whose average A level points were 17.41 (sd=3.78). At time 2, at the end of the Easter term, 88 psychology students responded to the ACS and LofAsp, 81 of whom had completed the ACS in the first phase.

From the first phase of the study, the responses from both sets of students to the ACS were factor analysed which yielded factors of: Studying, Understanding, Verbalising, Clarifying, Attendance and Grades (Table 1). As shown, in table 1, the statements that comprised the ACS did not, generally load onto just one factor, suggesting that it would not be acceptable to look at differences between the two groups of students for each of these factors. However, there was a significant difference between the medical students and the psychology students for mean ACS score (t=1.784, df=262, p<0.05, one tailed). A one-tailed test was felt to be acceptable, as the Sander et al (2000) study had predicted that there would be greater academic confidence in the medical students. To further explore the differences in academic confidence between the medical students and the psychology students, differences for each of the 24 statements in the ACS were examined using t-tests. This showed that the medical students had significantly higher scores for statements 2, 5, 6, 18, 21, 22 (table 2). In contrast, the psychology students had significantly higher scores for statements 10 and 17 (table 3), which explains the small difference between the two student groups for overall ACS score.
Table 1: Statement loadings on each of the six factors

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>.308</td>
<td>.751</td>
<td>.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Study effectively on your own in independent/private study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Produce your best work under examination conditions</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Respond to questions asked by a lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Manage your work load to meet coursework deadlines</td>
<td>.542</td>
<td>.301</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Give a presentation to a small group of fellow students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.706</td>
<td>.337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Attend most taught sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td>.833</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Attain good grades in your work</td>
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<td>.546</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Engage in profitable academic debate with your peers</td>
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<td>.681</td>
<td>.837</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Ask lecturers questions about the material they are teaching, in a one-to-one setting</td>
<td></td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Ask lecturers questions about the material they are teaching, during a lecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Understand the material outlined and discussed with you by lecturers</td>
<td></td>
<td>.610</td>
<td></td>
<td>.350</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Follow the themes and debates in lectures</td>
<td></td>
<td>.736</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Prepare thoroughly for tutorials</td>
<td></td>
<td>.351</td>
<td>.677</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Read the recommended background material</td>
<td></td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>.664</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Produce coursework at the required standard</td>
<td></td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>.406</td>
<td>.431</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Write in an appropriate academic style</td>
<td></td>
<td>.464</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>.617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Ask for help if you don't understand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Be on time for lectures</td>
<td>.705</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Make the most of the opportunity of studying for a degree at university</td>
<td>.400</td>
<td>.420</td>
<td>.301</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Pass assessments at the first attempt</td>
<td>.382</td>
<td></td>
<td>.757</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Plan appropriate revision schedules</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td></td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Remain adequately motivated throughout</td>
<td>.743</td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Produce your best work in coursework assignments</td>
<td>.614</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.800</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Attend tutorials</td>
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Table 2: Statements for which the medical students score significant more confident than psychology students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACS Statement</th>
<th>Mean [SD] ACS score</th>
<th>Tests of difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.02 [1.099]</td>
<td>3.50 [0.917]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.29 [1.068]</td>
<td>3.95 [0.887]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.56 [0.555]</td>
<td>4.78 [0.438]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.27 [0.799]</td>
<td>4.51 [0.726]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.37 [1.052]</td>
<td>3.68 [0.952]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.68 [0.747]</td>
<td>3.98 [0.897]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Statements for which the psychology students score significant more confident than medical students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACS Statement</th>
<th>Mean [SD] ACS score</th>
<th>Tests of difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.12 [1.131]</td>
<td>2.69 [1.053]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.26 [0.716]</td>
<td>4.04 [0.837]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The LofAsp scores provided three groups of students when students’ predicted performance in level 3 was compared to the hypothesised and given national average of 57%. These groups were “Better than the National Average” (N=69), “Equal to the National Average” (N=10) and “Worse than the National Average” (N=9). With these three LofAsp groups, it was possible to look at the differences in their ACS scores at time 2 (end of Easter term). Analysis of variance across the three groups, for ACS scores was significant, \( F(2, 85) = 5.404 \), \( p<0.01 \). Post hoc tests (Tukey’s) showed that the small group of nine students who perceived themselves as likely to score lower than the national average in the final year of their degree (Worse than the National Average group) had significantly lower ACS scores than the other two groups. These were the only significant differences. The ACS scores at induction (time 1) for these three LofAsp groups did not differ significantly.

This non-significant difference in ACS scores for the three LofAsp groups at time 1 is important as it easily allows differential changes in ASC scores over time to be explored. This could be done for the three LofAsp groups, as well as combined ACS scores. Across all students, 83% showed a decrease in ACS score. Initially, the overall mean ACS score was 3.79, which dropped to 3.5 at time 2. This drop is significant \( t=7.238, \text{df}=80, p<0.001 \). For the “Worse than the National Average” group there was a significant drop \( t=4.099, \text{df}=8, p<0.05 \).
as well as for the “Greater than the National Average” group (t=6.161, df=62, p<0.001). There was no significant change for the “Equal to the National Average group”.

The “Worse than the National Average” group was interesting in other ways, too. Four had left the course by the end of level 1; all but one had resit assessments from semester 1; four had “mitigating circumstances” presented to the semester 1 exam board and; one had to be counselled on the request of the exam board. These nine students scored around 7% less in their overall semester 1 assessments, but they were not significantly lower in A level points, nor was there a significant difference in age in this group of students, compared to the other two groups.

Seventy-eight percent of students who completed the ACS at time 2 thought that they would perform better than the National Average, of whom, 3 thought that they would get a mark in excess of 87%!

Interestingly, correlations between the average grade for semester 1 and each of the 24 ACS statements from both time 1 and time 2, for the psychology students, yielded just three statements, 2, 20 and 21 that were significant (table 4), all from the ACS scores at time 2. Correlations between pre-university performance (GCSE scores and A level points) and ACS scores at time 1 and time 2 and average semester grade were computed. There was no significant correlation between ACS scores and pre-university performance measures. However, A level points did correlate with average semester 1 grades (r=0.344, n=68, p<0.005).

Table 4: Statements for which there was a significant correlation, for the psychology students, between time 2 ACS score and average semester 1 grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACS Statement</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>r=0.243, n=88, p&lt;0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>r=0.307, n=88, p&lt;0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>r=0.230, n=88, p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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DISCUSSION

The differences in ACS scores for the LofAsp groups is taken as good evidence of the validity of the ACS. In contrast to research on self-efficacy and academic performance, it would seem that the ACS scores from the students used in these studies were affected by academic performance, rather than predicting academic performance. This is evidenced by the significant correlations between the average grade for semester 1 and statements 2, 20 and 21 from the ACS, each of which directly relates to examination performance. There was no correlation between any of the ACS statements at time 1 and semester 1 performance, which would seem to rule out the use of the ACS as a diagnostic tool at the start of a course, or as a measure for admission’s purposes.

One of the key features of self-efficacy theory is that self-efficacy is specific to particular situations (Pajares, 1996). There can be no meaningful measure of global self-efficacy. That the ACS scores from time 1 do not correlate with later performance indicators, whether average semester grades or LofAsp predictions, suggests that the academic environment in university is, for the student, quite different than the school or college environment that they have just left. The drop in ACS during the first year of study also points to the university environment as a new environment in which the student has to develop a level of confidence. The fact that there was a significant correlation between A level points and semester 1 grades (for the psychology students – the only group for which the level 1 grades was available), but not between A level points and ACS scores at time 1 or time 2, or between ACS scores at either time and average semester 1 grades, suggests that students, in rating their academic confidence, are judging something broader than academic performance as measured by marks awarded for assessed work.

The decrement in ACS score between time 1 and time 2, though, leads to the interesting Gung-Ho! hypothesis. This hypothesis predicts that students enter university, or at least the university that these psychology students came to, with unrealistic expectations that get lowered through adverse experiences on the course. When the differential affect of LofAsp group and ACS score changes over time is considered, it may well be that the Gung Ho! Hypothesis only relates to the “Better than the National Average” group and not the “Worse than the National Average” group. That there was no significant drop for the “Same as the National Average” group, is quite reassuring as estimating likely level 3 performance as equal to
the National Average is probably the safest thing to do in the LoFAsp test situation. There is no reason to believe that Gung-Ho! would be more applicable to psychology students than medical students, but there was no ACS data from time 2 for the medical students to explore this further. The Gung-Ho! hypothesis is particularly interesting and could be explored in a longitudinal study that monitored changes in ACS scores over the duration of a degree course.

The ACS would appear to be sufficiently sensitive to be used to monitor the impact of teaching / learning innovations on a course, or to identify students in a large cohort, who could benefit from advise, guidance or encouragement, with the aim of boosting their academic confidence. It could also be useful for the teaching team to be aware of students who would seem to be highly, and perhaps overly, confident in their academic studies.

The prediction that the differences between medical and psychology student groups on perceptions of university teaching could be attributable to different confidence levels (Sander et al, 2000) is only weakly supported. The medical students were more confident for overall ACS scores, although, given that the average A level points for the medical students is getting on for twice that of the psychology students, it is surprising that there was not a greater difference. In all, there were no significant differences between these two student groups for 16 statements in the ACS. The six statements that the medical students scored significantly more confident on, suggest, perhaps, a general attribute of diligence (see Bernard and Schuttenberg, 1985; Covington, Spratt and Ormelich, 1980) in these students. The two statements for which the psychology students scored higher, suggests a greater confidence in asking for help in these students who have the substantially lower entry qualifications. If so, the place of these two statements in the ACS should be considered.

The small difference between the medical and psychology groups could also be because the ACS statements were worded in a way that did not measure confidence in performance at an absolute level, which the LoFAsp did. Rather, the ACS could have been measuring confidence more in relation to students' aspirations. Also, the ACS covers a much broader spectrum of issues relating to academic performance. Had the medical students completed the LoFsp, a substantial difference in predicted level 3 performance might have been observed.
Another issue relating to the validation of the ACS by the LofAsp concerns the generation of the ACS statements. These were generated by teachers with many years of teaching experience, which arguably, presents a view of academic confidence as seen by an out group of teachers, than by the in-group of students themselves. It might be profitable to try and understand academic confidence from the students’ perspective as it is possible that academic confidence, as seen by students, might well be different. Scenarios could be compiled, depicting a confident student, or a student lacking in confidence. Students could then be asked to identify aspects of the behaviour of students in the scenarios, which could reveal students’ thinking about academic confidence. The out-group, teacher’s perspective and the in-group, student’s perspective could be compared and its impact on the structure and content of ACS considered.

Further research is aimed at understanding the relationship between the ACS factors and academic confidence. To pursue this, the wording of statements would have to be refined to develop a psychometric tool that had statements loading onto just one factor of the six factors of the ACS. It would be interesting to see how the different LofAsp groups and students from different academic subjects, like medicine and psychology, perform on any resultant subscales.

Finally, the responses to the LofAsp gave insight into the way in which students, who had at least one semester’s training in research methods and statistics, use statistical data. In this study, students were asked to estimate their likely performance against an average percentage score, described as the National Average. Experience would suggest that 78% of the participants on the psychology course used in this study would not really get a final grade higher than a national average. There is, though, a large research literature from diverse areas of psychology, which shows that people are not good at using statistical data, even when they have been trained to think statistically. For example, in the area of health psychology, unrealistic optimism has been offered as an explanation for various types of behaviour, including poor health (Sissons and Carter 1996). Linked to this may well be people’s desire not to see themselves as average.
CONCLUSION:

There is good statistical evidence for the validity of the ACS and good statistical evidence to believe that there are six factors, although intuitively and statistically, some of the factors seem to more directly linked to academic confidence than others. Further work could consider the place of statements 10 and 17 in the ACS and the refinement of the ACS to produce sub-scales.

Overall, there is good reason to believe that the ACS could be used to identify students who are coping less well with a course. It is could also be that the ACS is sufficiently valid and sensitive to be used to explore the impact of different or innovative teaching and learning methods, like assessed and non-assessed student presentations.

Whilst there is a significant difference in ACS scores between the medical students and psychology students for Studying, Attendance and Clarifying, it is felt that the qualitative differences between these two groups require further investigation and explanation.
REFERENCES


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Measuring confidence in academic study: A summary report.


Stevenson, K. and Sander, P., (2002). Medical students are from Mars – business and psychology students are from Venus – University lecturers are from Pluto. Medical Teacher, 24, 1, 27-31.
**Appendix 1**

**How confident are you that you will be able to:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Very confident</strong></th>
<th><strong>Not at all confident</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Study effectively on your own in independent/private study</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Produce your best work under examination conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Respond to questions asked by a lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Manage your work load to meet coursework deadlines</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Give a presentation to a small group of fellow students</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Attend most taught sessions</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Attain good grades in your work</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Engage in profitable academic debate with your peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ask lecturers questions about the material they are teaching, in a one-to-one setting</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ask lecturers questions about the material they are teaching, during a lecture</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Understand the material outlined and discussed with you by lecturers.</td>
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<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Follow the themes and debates in lectures.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Prepare thoroughly for tutorials.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Read the recommended background material.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Produce coursework at the required standard.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Write in an appropriate academic style.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Ask for help if you don't understand.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Be on time for lectures.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Make the most of the opportunity of studying for a degree at university</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Pass assessments at the first attempt.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Plan appropriate revision schedules.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Remain adequately motivated throughout.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Produce your best work in coursework assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Attend tutorials</td>
<td></td>
<td>0 0 0 0</td>
<td>Not at all confident 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Now we are asking you to look ahead to think about what will be likely outcomes for you and your group for the next three years of the course. That is, at the end of level 1 this summer, at the end of level 2 in 2003, and at the point of graduation in 2004. To help you make this decision we have highlighted an average mark for psychology across all UK Universities.

So using the table below, for each year please indicate:
1. What you think will be the average mark for your year group by writing 'YG'
2. What you think will be your own average mark by writing 'ME'

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<th>Summer 2003</th>
<th>Summer 2004</th>
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<td></td>
<td>End of Level 1</td>
<td>End of Level 2</td>
<td>Graduation</td>
</tr>
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<td>95-100</td>
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<tr>
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<td>85-89</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
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Mean for psychology

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Engaging the learner: Reflections on the use of student presentations

Paul Sander, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, Llalage Sanders, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff & Keith Stevenson, Leicester University.

Abstract
Previous research has shown that university students, when asked to rank different methods of learning and assessment tend to rate student presentations unfavourably. There are though, sound reasons for constructing learning situations around student presentations, resulting in presentations being an integral part of our psychology degree over the last ten years. However, the course has experienced a considerable rise in the number of students during the same period, making it much harder to create meaningful opportunities for student presentations. In spite of this growth, the team considered ways in which presentations can remain within the course and systematically evaluated their effectiveness. Whilst data show that students may find the experience stressful and that they have some concerns about the quality of their learning, these concerns, we believe are more than outweighed by the advantages, which are discussed at length. Students' retrospective reflections on courses that have been designed around student presentations give a much more favourable view of this learning method than that given through hypothetical ratings.

Introduction
We believe that an important part of our professional practice is to reflect on our teaching and, in the best traditions of quality assurance inspections, ask ourselves whether there is evidence of learning taking place in our students. To answer this question, the teaching methods used and the approach to study adopted by the students have to be considered. Teaching methods may be considered as lying on a continuum from being high in student participation and control to high in teacher participation and control, where the traditional, formal lecture lies (Brown, 1993). High teacher participation and control may result in a high degree of passivity in students in lectures. An academically bright, interested and committed student who wants to do well is likely to get more out of a formal lecture than a student who is less committed, who just wants to collect a degree, and who is not interested in attaining an in depth understanding of the subject matter being studied. The latter group of students with poorer achievement motivation is in higher proportion in today's classes (Biggs, 1999). If these
Students' learning environment is predominantly the formal lecture, then it is to be expected that these students will often seem to be engaged in a range of behaviours that are unlikely to be associated with learning. The students themselves may, incorrectly, feel that they are learning because they are writing down all of every slide that is displayed or because they are enjoying a good theatrical performance by the teacher. Alternatively, they may reflect their low engagement by dreaming (sleeping even), playing with their mobile phone or other activities, which are likely to be incompatible with learning.

In a situation where the majority of the teaching is through formal lectures, then there is likely to be less learning taking place than might in a different teaching and learning environment, which was designed to engage students to a greater extent. Sadly there is some evidence (Butler, 1992) that the formal lecture is still over represented in higher education.

Can the teaching and learning environment be designed to promote greater student participation, engagement and, maybe, deep learning in the students? (see, for example, Biggs, 1999; Entwistle, 1988; Hartley, 1998).

Whilst the traditional lecture may be enhanced to engage students more, making it more effective, (see Biggs, 1999) alternative teaching methods such as small group teaching, laboratory work where possible, or research projects may well stimulate students, promoting better involvement with the academic material (Brown, 1993) and hence better learning.

Action research that had worked well in developing effective tutorials for students on a distance learning course (Stevenson, Sander & Naylor, 1995) suggested a possible strategy for structuring teaching and learning environments that might be more effective than relying solely on the lecture. The process advocated involved asking the students, before the course started, how they would prefer to be taught and why. This seemed to be a good strategy because students themselves are ‘one of the best resources in any learning situation’ (Rees & Harris, 1992), to which might be added that they are a frequently overlooked resource. In this, we were acting as teachers looking critically at our own teaching situations for the purpose of improving the quality of the students’ learning environment (Hopkins, 1998; LeFrançois, 2000). Stevenson, Sander and Naylor’s (1996) research used a telephone interview with a small sample of an incoming cohort, supported by a postal questionnaire to the whole cohort. The students’ views about how tutorials could be made more effective were informative and, on occasions, surprising. This feedback facilitated modification of tutorial practice and, where possible and desirable, student preferences.

Reassured that this was a fruitful way of guiding teaching practice, the methodology was extended to examine students’ expectations of teaching in traditional university settings (Sander, Stevenson, King & Coates, 2000). When students were asked to identify the way they would most like to be taught during their undergraduate course, student presentations came ninth and last in a list of teaching and learning methods. When asked to identify the methods they would least like to be taught by, student presentations came third behind formal lectures and student role-play (Table 1).

The message was clear: when asked to rate presentations as a teaching/learning method, students did not like them. The students gave two main reasons for their dislike. One was the stress and anxiety they frequently cause and the other was concern over the poor learning opportunities which may be given to peers who could be expected to learn from each presentation. There is some evidence that the relative importance of these reasons differs across different student groups (Sander & Stevenson, in press). The students identified interactive
lectures and well designed group environments like tutorials as favoured teaching and learning methods. When assessments were considered, presentations did a little better, coming fifth in the list of nine possible assessment methods (Table 2).

The data from students' expectations of university study suggest that students generally do not want presentations as part of their teaching and learning or assessment. However, Biggs (1999, p.110) argues that there are good reasons to believe that putting students in a situation where they become the teacher can be very effective. Three reasons are given: the student-teacher will present material from a different perspective; the student-teacher will be more aware of examples of ineffective communication from experienced teachers and avoid them and; to avoid losing face with their peers, the student-teacher will make great efforts to avoid getting things wrong. One way to set up students as teachers is through student presentations. Some examples of good practice can be found in Hounsell, McCulloch and Scott (1996), Curtis (1999) and Dienes (personal communication, 31 August, 2001). Rees and Harris (1992), arguing for a place for student presentations in the undergraduate curriculum suggest that they offer a number of distinct advantages, all of which are likely to promote deep learning. Curtis (1999), in her survey of practice in higher education arrived at similar conclusions. The benefits of student presentations, according to these authors are:

- They provide variety in learning approaches.
- They provide stimulation for the group.
- They promote the sharing of information and enthusiasm amongst peers.
- They encourage autonomy and independent learning.
- They provide opportunities for the development of team skills and listening skills.
- They provide an increase in expertise of the individual student, not only in terms of knowledge, but also in presentation skills, confidence and self-esteem.

Table 1. Students' rank ordering of teaching and learning methods they would like and would not like during their undergraduate course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching and Learning Method</th>
<th>Rank (1 represents the most frequent choice)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would like to be taught by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive lecture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student centred teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching session based around group work</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal lecture</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student role play</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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- They provide variety in learning approaches.
- They provide stimulation for the group.
- They promote the sharing of information and enthusiasm amongst peers.
- They encourage autonomy and independent learning.
- They provide opportunities for the development of team skills and listening skills.
- They provide an increase in expertise of the individual student, not only in terms of knowledge, but also in presentation skills, confidence and self-esteem.
They allow for the testing of knowledge and understanding in a situation where the tutor is able to assess whether the student is able to apply and extend previously gained knowledge in the form of concepts and theories to their own work.

They increase the likelihood that students will consult original sources rather than textbooks, giving them familiarity with research methods and encouraging critical evaluation, which means that work in other areas of the course improves.

They lead to an improvement in the quality of seminar discussion and participation.

For courses that include student projects, presentations stimulate ideas for project topics, and suggest methods of data collection and analysis.

They promote preparation (usually through role play) for specific professional/real life situations.

They provide an essential preparation for employability by developing a number of transferable and life skills.

If student presentations followed a series of fully referenced-led lectures, designed to provide summaries of the main theoretical and research issues in the area, then a learning context would have been created that matched the four criteria that Biggs (1999) suggests are paramount. These are a well structured knowledge base; an appropriate motivational context; learner activity; and interaction with others.

There are known academic difficulties with student presentations, in addition to the students’ concerns over stress levels and the quality of information they may be given. It is not unknown for students to complain that teachers are expected to teach. Indeed, one of Stevenson, Sander and Naylor’s (1996) respondents remarked that they had been paid to be taught! In this context ‘it is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned that what the teacher does’ (Shuell, 1986). Hartley (1998) draws attention to the fact that the criteria for a good presentation can be vague, which is of particular significance if the presentations are to be assessed. Nor can

---

### Table 2. Ranked preferences for the different assessment methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Methods</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course work consisting of:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>1=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research projects</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems/exercises</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral presentations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory work</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course journal</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster presentations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing exercises</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1 represents the most frequent choice)
presentations easily be repeated, which means that they should be videoed to allow independent verification of any grades awarded or to resolve student appeals. Nor can they be assessed 'blind'. It is hard to see how a live presentation can be anonymised in the same way that an essay or an exam script can.

Of course presentations do not have to be assessed. Assessment and teaching/learning are two separate issues. If they are to be assessed, the weighting can be relatively small. Students are increasingly used to video cameras and a discrete and static camera can easily be forgotten. The key question is whether it is possible to address the concerns that students have with presentations, to allow the benefits from them to show. The action research that is reported here identifies developments in modules to incorporate student presentations, which may or may not be assessed and considers their effectiveness, evidenced by student evaluations.


Background
Our undergraduate psychology degree recruited its first intake in 1991. This degree was designed by a small team, two of which were psychologists. Prior to this all psychology teaching had been restricted to contributing to courses in vocational subjects allied to medicine, in particular speech therapy. The new degree was called Psychology and Communication and shared some teaching with speech therapy students. To quote from the course documentation of the time 'Students on our degree study not only the core psychology components common to all such undergraduate degrees, but also linguistics and phonetics. The aim of the course is to enable students to have a thorough understanding of communication as an interactive and dynamic process.'

Scientific analysis of communication was central to the degree, but so was the aim of encouraging the students to become effective communicators. To this end, and based on the considerable teaching experience of the existing team, all three years of study required the students to undertake presentations, both as part of the learning strategy and as assessment. This may be best illustrated by examples taken from each end of the degree.

In the first term of Level I the students studied Communication Skills, which involved an analysis of effective communication and consisted largely of group work and presentations. Class presentations were introduced gradually through the term. To begin with, the cohort worked largely in small groups presenting information informally within the group. As the term progressed, the group would choose a spokesperson to present to the class, then the group would present to the class and the final step was for individuals to prepare and give their own presentations. In this way each student acquired some experience of presenting and learned the elements of effective presentations by watching their peers.

At the other extreme, one of the higher level subjects on the degree was Language and Social Psychology. This module began with a lead lecture series, designed to identify and clarify the main theoretical and research issues in the area. After these, students were each assigned a relevant recent research paper to read, digest and present to the rest of the class as a formal presentation. Thus at this stage students were responsible to an extent for their peers' learning.

This repeated exposure to presentations seemed to be both a satisfactory method of teaching and assessment as well as improving students' presentation skills, now recognised as one of the core skills of undergraduate programme (e.g. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000).
Evaluation data collected at the time indicated that some students still found it an unnerving experience, but the overall response was positive. Such a programme of study will not make every individual into polished presenters, but the teaching team feel that each student’s standard improved as a result of the experience. When our first cohort (n = 20) graduated in 1994 it was anticipated that they would be better prepared for the interviews and presentations that would require for the next step in their respective careers. (Indeed when one of our finalists presented the results of her final year project at a national student conference, the standard of her presentation technique caused the Chair to compliment her and produced a spontaneous round of applause from the audience).

However, nothing is static in higher education in UK these days. Our terms became semesters; our subjects became modules. Our degree increased in popularity, our graduates appeared to prosper, our Funding Council assessment declared our provision to be Excellent and, as in the rest of the sector, our intake gradually increased. By 1997 our recruitment target stood at 80 and we were offering a straight psychology route in parallel with the communication route to appeal to those who did not want to study the specialist areas of linguistics and phonetics.

Identifying the problem
The teaching team found itself in a dilemma faced by all of HE in these days of ‘expanding’ higher education: how to maintain academic standards in the face of increasing student numbers without commensurate increase in resources? An effect of this was to curtail the tutorial and small group activities, which facilitate student presentations, that had been prevalent within the degree, as there were just too many students and too few staff to run them. Another serious effect of expansion was the necessity to review the number of presentations used in the degree. A group of 20 students each making a 20-minute presentation in a two-hour weekly session takes four weeks. Quadruple the student numbers, and the result does not even fit a 15 week semester. Inevitably, the number of modules involving presentations decreased over time. This meant that the overall improvement in student performance was no longer as evident as it had been in the early days. The subject matter of Communication Skills became absorbed by other level I modules in a rationalisation of provision across the year. These other modules however did not allow for small group work, but were instead lecture based. Modules at Levels 2 and 3 were amended gradually over a couple of years and presentations were omitted from both teaching strategies and assessment. Eventually, in the annual informal review of the course in the summer of 2000, it was necessary to acknowledge that only one module was still using presentations, Level 2 Developmental Psychology.

This presented a quandary, as student presentations as a teaching method had been directly endorsed by both external examiners and the students themselves. The external examiners commented on the depth of learning students demonstrated in their assessed student work for these modules. The students, in both formal evaluations and through anecdotal discussion, showed that presentations were valued as part of the learning process. Comparing the average module mark from Level 2 Developmental Psychology, which used non-assessed presentations, with the average year mark showed that students were certainly not disadvantaged by presentations as, from the introduction of the module in 1996, the mean module mark has always been greater than the overall mean year mark. Yet, the very success of the degree itself and the resultant increase in class size was militating against the use of presentations.
Thinking of ways to tackle it
The question became: What are the alternatives?

1. Reduce the duration of each presentation. A significant reduction in length will however restrict the depth of information that can be covered. This may not be a problem if the purpose of the presentation is either to build skills in the presenter or to be a means of assessment. It would be a problem if others were expected to learn from the student presenter.

2. Allow team presentations of individual topics. The topics still take 20 minutes but three or four students are presenting the material. For example, a module that could be successfully adapted was a Level 2 module, psychometrics. The task here was to present a psychometric test to the class. The presentations were to be structured with the following: background, description of the test, experience of administration, scoring, its current use in research and evaluation. When the class was 20, this task was shared between two students. With a class of 80, it could be shared between six. Although this module, too, was subsequently modified and the use of presentations abandoned. However, not all modules are amenable to this type of approach.

3. Run concurrent sessions. This has resource implications in terms of staff and rooms, but was the approach used by the one module that had retained presentations throughout the course changes. Level 2 Developmental Psychology adopted this approach with group workshops run in the main hall. Each of eight groups of 10 students would cover the same topics in a series of workshops. Each topic was delivered through a student presentation, the lecturer circulating amongst the workshop groups throughout the session. With non-assessed presentations it can work.

It would be possible, therefore, in some instances, but not all, to adopt strategies that preserved presentations as an integral part of the degree.

Doing it
The team was resolved to reintroduce presentations as a key element of the degree and two opportunities were available.

The first was a level three option, Culture, Identity and Development. It was made clear to students that a substantial part of the assessment for this would take the form of presentations. Thirteen students enrolled on this option, several stating that the nature of the assessment had been influential in their decision. Thus those who enjoy presenting, admittedly a minority, had the chance of selecting this option. Those who did not could avoid it.

The second modification affected all Level 3 students: the introduction of a project Colloquium day. The final year project comprises four modules, one of which is in Semester 1. The Colloquium was to take place at the end of the first Semester and students were to present their project proposal. The task was to present a clear outline of the method and rationale for the planned research study and to invite commentary, feedback and ideas. It was considered reasonable to give each student a 20-minute slot, 15 for presenting and five for questions. In order for this to be viable, it was necessary to run four simultaneous symposia, with two members of staff in each. Although this was quite a heavy demand on resources it was at least intensive and the team was of the opinion that it was justified. Each student was required to attend one full symposium (one half-day). The only outcomes were Pass or Fail, and this depended on the satisfactory presentation of rationale and plan. Criticisms of the plan did not affect the pass/fail but were seen as formative oral feedback. Each candidate was also subsequently presented with formative written feedback on his or her presentation skills.
As well as reintroducing a presentation to the degree, the Colloquium had a second aim. It was timed to ensure that students had to engage sufficiently with their area of choice to be able to present adequately and, therefore, this acted as an incentive in the time-management of their project.

Evaluating it

Evaluations of the Colloquium suggested that both aims were achieved. End of year evaluation forms included the question: Please tell us what you think was best and worst about doing project presentations. As Table 3 shows, the 59 students who responded, provided twice as many positive responses as negative. This is despite being asked for both!

Presentations were also spontaneously mentioned in the evaluations of the project modules and are presented in Table 4.

Four of the seven completed evaluations for Culture, Identity and Development also mentioned presentations, three of which were in favour (Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive items</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>Negative items</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop ideas/understand/focus/organise</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hate presentations (including standing up in front of others)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help/suggestions/feedback from either staff or peers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>No fun/nerves/scary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation (including work mood/good start)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No point/waste of time/repetition of ethics form</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small groups</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Too close to exams</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful/good/Interesting</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Didn’t know what was expected</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not intimidating (relaxed/informal)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rushed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining presentation skills and confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No project idea so presentation was difficult</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not graded, just pass/fail</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added to grade</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lack of guidance from supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral about presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shouldn’t be assessed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy pass</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dragged out the starting process, so I got bored</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realisation of the enormous task ahead</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No comment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes the paradoxical response: ‘seemed to be a waste of time but got me into work mood’.
The Level 2 module on Developmental Psychology had maintained since its introduction the use of presentations as a teaching technique but not as assessment. The evaluations for this module in the last academic year (Table 6) that spontaneously mentioned presentations show again twice as many favourable comments as unfavourable.

Final year students were also asked to rate the usefulness and enjoyment of the different teaching strategies employed on the course. Presentations as a teaching method were ranked fifth out of six for usefulness (above workshops), and sixth for enjoyment. As a means of assessment they were ranked fifth out of seven for usefulness (above Examinations requiring essays, and MCQ examinations) but seventh on enjoyment. It would seem that these data are consistent with those of Sander, Stevenson, King and Coates (2000). If students are asked to rate presentations the response is relatively negative. However when students are asked to reflect on presentations the response is more positive. It may be that hypothetical presentations generate a more negative response than does the reality. Certainly this interpretation is supported by the four respondents from Developmental Psychology (Table 6) who described how they were nervous before the presentations but enjoyed theirs and others.

**Modifying practice**

From these data it is apparent that students generally appreciate the role of presentation in their learning. This, combined with the earlier comments of external examiners and anecdotal evidence from students and graduates, justify the team’s determination to maintain them as an integral part of the degree. We have modified our practice to accommodate the four-fold increase in student numbers by the sixth year of recruitment.

**Table 4. Project Module Evaluations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before Colloquium</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not realise had to do a proposal for the presentation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information on the proposal and the presentation, what was required, was excellent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful workshops on presentation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>After Colloquium</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glad only one possible final presentation to deal with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation assessment helped me get my project ideas and intentions clear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The end of term presentation was the turning point in my study. Well worth doing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped prepare me to start writing the dissertation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5. Culture, Identity and Development Evaluations (n = 7)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module chosen because said it was 100 per cent presentation.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation the best part of the module: Based on a topic/angle student can choose = generally better motivation and eventual understanding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take out student presentations - I hate them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the presentation it may be better to prepare a paper and then present that paper.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Developmental Psychology Evaluations (n = 33)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentations were extremely useful, very interesting, best part of module</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was very nervous before my presentation but really enjoyed mine and others'</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very effective way of learning/promote independent learning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided different perspectives and student views on a subject – good</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good opportunity to develop presentations skills which are very important for future jobs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good change from usual lecture structure – refreshing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided detailed and interesting handouts prepared by fellow students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair that no lectures given on topics for last few presentations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations increased motive to attend (I’ll go to yours if you go to mine)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glad the presentations were dealt with sensitively by lecturer as so many students afraid of them</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were good preparation for next year’s presentation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Several people in the group avoided the presentations as were too nervous or embarrassed and so they and the rest of the group missed out on the topic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t like presentations as my learning depends on unreliable students who are often absent or present the information poorly</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn the presentations into lectures so information presented better</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured group discussions may be better than presentations because students don’t turn up for presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor students’ topic choice for presentations more closely as they are often not relevant enough</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tutors weren’t listening to the presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good in theory but not worth the stress caused to many students by them</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make the presentations more important in module mark</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps have groups smaller than 10 for presentations to reduce intimidation factor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group size was small enough to reduce intimidation factor in presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would have been fairer to have the submission date for the critical summary before any presentations began</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasise more the importance of presentations so students more committed to them</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We are not, however, complacent, for two reasons. Firstly, we would like to extend the use of presentations in the degree and particularly to reinstate their use in Level 1. Secondly, our Level 1 intake is now 120 students, pushing our resourcefulness as a committed and professional teaching team to its limits. It is hoped that we will be able to retain the use of a technique that has proven to be both innovative and effective.

Discussion
If we just listen to the students when they rate presentations in a hypothetical situation, we would not expose them to presentations, whether assessed or not. When reflecting on a presentation, there is a very noticeable swing to a more favourable view. This has been shown in evaluations that specifically asked students to reflect on a particular presentation, as was the case for the Project Colloquium. Importantly, it has also been shown in module evaluations (Developmental Psychology and Culture Identity and Development) where students were asked only to reflect on the good points of the course and those points that would benefit from improvement. From a research point of view, it should be noted that if you want to find out the students’ views on presentations, then you should specifically ask them about presentations in the module evaluation!

What happens when students have to engage with student presentations and when assessments are through presentations? What are the benefits to the students and how do the students feel when reflecting on their experiences? There can be no denying that presentations cause anxiety. Indeed, teaching can cause anxiety in even the most practised of teachers. Twenty-three responses (the two most frequent negative items) from the project presentation evaluations specifically remarked on the stressfulness generally of presentations. From the Developmental evaluations, a further nine students commented on stress. Should teachers not expose their students to this stress? We believe that student presentations are both acceptable and desirable but teachers should recognize the stress they may cause in some students and offer all reasonable support. In Developmental Psychology and Culture, Identity and Development, this support has always been paramount. It is surprising that one student from Culture Identity and Development says that the presentations should be removed from the module because they hate them, when it was always made clear that presentations would be a core component of the module. However, as most of us involved with education will know this is not an isolated case of providing information for students to no avail.

Students tell us that they are concerned about the quality of material that they may receive through student presentations. From the data presented here, five students from Developmental Psychology specifically raise this concern, despite the fact that in this module this problem is minimised through requiring the students to submit, for grading, a critical summary from the area they were allocated for their presentation. A similar system is in place in Culture, Identity and Development, where an academic paper, seen to be similar to a paper in a conference setting, is submitted for grading prior to the presentation. There is one student, though, from the evaluations in Table 5 who seems to have missed this central point! Comparison of these module marks with other modules within the same year certainly shows that students are not disadvantaged by learning through presentations from other students. However, to claim that any increment in the module mark for either Developmental psychology or Culture, Identity and Development, over other modules or the year average was due to the use of student presentations would be most unwise.

In the research colloquium, it was not intended that the students necessarily learnt
from each other’s presentations, so the frequent quality of the material was not similarly controlled. It is reassuring to note enough, that the second most favourable comment the students made was about the feedback that they gained from the audience (Table 3).

In the Developmental Psychology evaluations (Table 6), five comments were made about the unreliable information, noting that some students fail to turn up for their presentation. The difficulties of assessing parallel presentations have already been noted, but formative peer assessment was included in this module for the first time in the academic year 2000/01 in a specific attempt to address this problem, in addition to the support already given. It is debatable whether it made any difference to the non-attendance rate, but the presenters were keen to read evaluations from their peers. It also gave the module leader further feedback on the quality of the talks. Summative and formative peer assessment is integral to Culture, Identity and Development, but there was no problem with non-attendance, maybe because the presentations were teacher assessed, but also because the specialised nature of the third level option attracted just a small number (n = 13) of committed students.

Wherever presentations are assessed and count towards the overall degree qualification of the student, great attempts have been made to ensure that the marking criteria are specific, valid and reliable. The project presentations are not videoed, nor those in Culture Identity and Development, but, following feedback from the external examiner, they will have to be in future. We have no solutions to the impossibility of blind marking. The answer to students who tell us that they want to be taught by teachers, is that lectures still predominate on the degree, although this is usually prefaced by a frequently given comment on creating independent learners. Indeed Developmental Psychology and Culture, Identity and Development start with a series of lead lectures, which are augmented and developed through the student presentations.

From the data presented here, we believe that there are sound professional reasons for believing that presentations are effective, in line with Rees and Harris (1992) and Curtis (1999). We are impressed by the level of energy that presentations generate in the students. There is no going to sleep! The quality of work that has come from Developmental Psychology and Culture Identity and Development has been commented on by external examiners, supporting the teachers’ views. Indeed, for this, the first year of Culture Identity and Development, the mean module mark ranked the module second out of the ten taught modules in Level 3. The external examiner also noted that the assessment regime was innovative and clearly highly motivating for the students who had a high level of engagement with distinctive and varied material.

We believe that student presentations do encourage engagement with the material to a much greater extent than the ubiquitous lecture. It is true that not all students like presentations, but even a cursory examination of the data presented by Sander et al. (2000) shows that no teacher is going to please all students, all the time which hints at an overall solution. Student presentations have a place in the students’ course. It would be as wrong to have a course dominated by presentations as it would to have a course dominated by lectures. Variety in the students’ learning environment is essential and augmenting the lecture with presentations is beneficial. That is not to say that there are not other ways in which students can be encouraged to engage with the material which can be equally as effective. The following, unsolicited acknowledgement, suggests that student presentations can have a useful role to play, not only in the learning process but also in career opportunities. In this case, the student has recognised a desire to become a teacher.
I would like to thank (tutor) for (the) support in the last year and for providing a multitude of opportunities for giving presentations which has helped me recognise my desire to lecture...’ (Project Student, 2001)

To promote effective learning, students need to be involved. Asking them to take the role of teacher and produce engaging presentations of their own seems to be an efficient way of doing this. It also has the additional benefit of providing students with a range of communicational and presentation skills that will be very advantageous in their future careers. Perhaps formal lectures with a low degree of student participation, involvement and control are an easy option for both the teacher the student?

There is evidence that says that students negatively rate the idea of student presentations (Sander et al., 2000), creating a tension with the belief held by this teaching team that student presentations have a valuable place in the students’ learning experience. We feel that our consideration of student evaluations of modules that have used student presentations, show that students themselves frequently feel positively about presentations when reflecting on their recent experience with them. It could be argued that control groups were not used in this study and in other ways, the study falls short of good experimental practice. For instance students’ performance on the compulsory, Level 2 Developmental Psychology module could have been compared with their performance on another Level 2 module. Similarly, performance on Culture, Identity and Development could have been compared, either with another module, or the same students’ performance on other options that they took. To have done this would have raised many more questions as a result of confounding variables such as different teachers, different material, different rooms, timetable slots, peers and so on. For the same reason, it would be unwise to compare module grade performances, despite the face appeal of hard numerical data. Action research often results in studies that do not have the same methodological rigour expected in good experimentation. However, following a good experimental route in a teaching situation such as this would create numerous ethical and practical problems. What we have done is follow the line of action research promoting reflection on professional practice, with the intention of improving the quality of learning in our students (see Bryant, 1996). Whilst recognising the inherent limitations of this study, we are confident in the conclusions offered.

References


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Why we don’t like student presentations: the students speak

Paul Sander, University of Wales Institute &
Keith Stevenson, Nottingham University

The USET (University Students’ Expectations of Teaching) study (Sander et al., 2000) obtained data from three cohorts of incoming first year students in three different universities, studying on different courses. The students completed a detailed questionnaire, which elicited their views on teaching and learning methods that were wanted, expected and not wanted. It also sought expectations on assessment and the qualities of a good teacher. The main finding was that students expected to be taught in ways that were not entirely congruent with their preferences. Generally, students wanted an interactive learning environment, not formal lectures. Nor did they want student presentations or role-play. In this report, further analysis of the USET data is presented, which suggests that there were distinct differences between the groups in their orientation to university study. There was a notable contrast between Med-Le who indicated a preference for an efficient course that made optimal use of time to ensure that the students were given the correct information and knowledge and, Psych-U who preferred support and understanding from accessible and approachable teachers. This analysis is supported by some of the original USET data; data from two further small scale surveys and; evaluations from a new third level module which was designed around assessed student presentations. From considering the implications of these data, an expectations philosophy is outlined which identifies the place and the need for collecting and responding to student expectations within universities and how doing so can further promote teaching and learning as an active dialogue and partnership between students and teachers.

Customer expectations and higher education

An influential view is that it is of fundamental importance for any service provider to know what users of a service expect of that service (Zeithaml et al., 1990) because ‘customer satisfaction is believed to derive from the extent to which perceived standard of service ... matches the expectations of the customer’ (Scott, 1999, p.198). To ensure that service provision matches customer expectations, organisations need to think ‘outside in’ by researching what the customer expects of their service and then working to provide a service that meets those customer expectations (Zeithaml et al., 1990, p.51). However, the relationship between customer and service provider can be more dynamic than this, in that it is possible, and sometimes desirable, for a service provider to alter the expectations of customers so that they become in line with what can be realistically provided. Within an educational setting this is of crucial importance because, for instance, there may be good reasons for teaching students in ways that the students might initially prefer not to be taught.

The service provided by a higher education institute (HEI) is different in many important ways from commercial service providers, but an awareness of student-customer expectations could, nonetheless be important. These expectations could be met; there could be a justification for a provision that was counter to expectations or; expectations could be managed to match what can be provided. The need for the careful management of the expectations of potential students to a university has been discussed by Hill (1995) and, is explored
further by Crook and Leckey (1999) who show that what may have been reasonable expectations from previous educational experience at school may well not stand as reasonable expectations at university. This would hold true for both general university life, such as campus provisions and, of course-specific academic issues like teaching, learning and assessment. Typically, HEIs manage student expectations through the use of open days, usefully involving current students (e.g. Hill, 1995), advertising and the usual range of promotional material like prospectuses.

Whether HEIs change to meet student expectations or student expectations are manipulated to bring them in line with what an HEI can provide (or both), it is necessary to know what students are expecting. In that, HEIs should follow the advice of Zeithaml et al. (1990) and think ‘outside in’. By collecting and responding to students’ expectations, an organisation can be sensitive and responsive to changing student needs. As a result, the quality of education experienced by students may well be enhanced, and possibly, the long-term viability of the organisation as a provider of quality education. By being aware of differences in students’ expectations, both between courses and within courses, the educational service providers can be more responsive to individual students. For example, Remedios, Lieberman and Benton (2000), following Greenwald and Gillmore (1997), show that it is necessary to be aware of student’s grade expectations in order to understand the link between grading and student satisfaction. Traditionally, research has shown that students rate courses more favourably if they do well (e.g. Kolitch & Dean, 1999). There is also evidence from the USET (University Students’ Expectations of Teaching) project, to show that university students may expect to be taught in ways in which they would rather not be (Sander et al., 2000). This could, reasonably, be seen as a rather lamentable situation which deserves to be addressed.

Here, the data from the USET project is further analysed to highlight important differences between the three groups of students studied – first year cohorts of medical students (Med-Le), business studies (Bus-Lo) students and psychology (Psych-U) students at three different UK universities, two of which are pre-1992 universities and one, post-1992. All data was collected at the beginning of the first term. This analysis focuses on and develops the original finding that, generally, students do not look forward to being taught by student presentations, role-play or formal lectures, with the specific aim of exploring why these students did not like to be taught in these ways. This was done by carefully and exhaustively categorising the qualitative data relating to the justifications given by the respondents for the first ranked teaching and learning methods that were hoped for, expected and not wanted.

The commitment that the participants showed to the research is evidenced by the extent of the written comments that were asked for in conjunction with each of the sections of the questionnaire (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Total number of respondents</th>
<th>Average total words in response to open questions</th>
<th>Blanks (no comment made in a section)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psych-U</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>58.47</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus-Lo</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>34.49</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med-Le</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>75.90</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Qualitative analysis – summary statistics
All of the written reasons justifying the voices and ratings given were typed into a Word document. A search was carried out, using keywords through the computer and validated and augmented by careful inspection. In the first instance, a search was performed for comments falling into two higher order categories: (a) a comment relating to being bored; and (b) a comment relating to the efficient use of time, including being able to concentrate in the teaching session. Table 2 shows the extent to which the Med-Le students, in contrast to the other two groups, were concerned with time, concentration and efficiency.

Table 2: Notable verbal occurrences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item or similar</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boring</td>
<td>Bus-Lo</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Med-Le</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psych-U</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Med-Le</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bus-Lo</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psych-U</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Med-Le</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bus-Lo</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psych-U</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td>Med-Le</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bus-Lo</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psych-U</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do students not want student presentations for the same reason?

The original, quantitative analysis showed that, over all three student groups, the formal lecture was the least liked, followed by student role-play and student presentations, although there were small differences between groups. What was it about student role-play, presentations and the formal lecture that made students not want to learn or be taught this way? To pursue this, all the reasons given by the participants relating to teaching and learning methods not wanted were further coded. Those comments relating to role-play and presentations were categorised if they were indicative of a lack of personal confidence (can't do (personal)) or whether they expressed a belief that these methods do not work (doesn't work (effectiveness)). The only dominant theme that emerged for not wanting formal lectures was that they were boring or ineffective. Table 3 provides illustrative quotes from these categories. The frequency of responses in each category when compared as a percentage of students within each group showed that the Bus-Lo students showed similar frequency in responding to each category. Interestingly, and in contrast, the Psych-U students were much more likely to not want presentations or role-play because they felt they didn't have the competence to cope with them, whereas the Med-Le students were more likely to reject role-play and presentations because they felt that they didn't work or that they were not optimally effective (Table 4). The differences between the three centres in reasons for not wanting role-plays and presentations is statistically significant (chi-squared=30.2, df=2, p<0.001). It should be noted, though, that there were four Med-Le students who reported enjoying presentations or role-play, as measured by either of these being selected as the teaching and learning methods that they most hoped for. There was also one student from Bus-Lo and two students from Psych-U who wanted role-play or student presentations. Clearly, a teacher is never going to please all of the people all of the time!

The dominant reason for not wanting formal lectures related to the lack of social interaction, boredom and the problem of getting lost if unable to keep up with the pace. These reasons were stable across the three groups. Again, for completeness, it should be noted that there were six Psych-U students, nine Bus-Lo students and 24 Med-Le students who selected formal lectures as their hoped for teaching and learning method. Proportionally, there were almost twice as many in Med-Le who preferred this method, which may be linked to these students' concern for an efficient use of time and a greater tendency to accept a passive approach to their education. In line with this,
### Table 3: Illustrative reasons for not wanting to be taught through role-play, student presentations or formal lectures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching method</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Psych-U</th>
<th>Bus-Lo</th>
<th>Med-Le</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role play and Presentation</td>
<td>Can't do</td>
<td>‘I dislike being placed at the centre of attention.’ (Psych-U 08)</td>
<td>‘Mainly shyness, particularly if you have to stand up in front of a large group.’ (Bus-Lo 59)</td>
<td>‘I think that many people would be uncomfortable/embarrassed by this.’ (Med-Le 105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doesn't work</td>
<td>‘Fear of not covering the essential ideas in a subject.’ (Psych-U 25)</td>
<td>‘Difficult to learn from presentations sometimes.’ (Bus-Lo 9)</td>
<td>‘Although funny and providing variety, the presentations are rarely informative and are difficult to learn anything from.’ (Med-Le 189)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can work</td>
<td>Although there were two students who selected role-play first, neither wrote a comment to explain this choice.</td>
<td>‘To allow learning through experience (role play). A good manager should have the ability to cope with unexpected and sometimes awkward situations.’ (Bus-Lo 111)</td>
<td>‘I enjoy acting and being imaginative! It also makes topics more interesting watching other students perform role-plays.’ (Med-Le 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal lectures</td>
<td>boring/ineffective</td>
<td>‘I retain and recall very little information as I am not an active part of the lecture so pay little attention to what is being said.’ (Psych-U 18)</td>
<td>‘I find them quite dull and will be unable to focus my concentration on what is being said. Note taking while trying to listen and understand is very hard.’ (Bus-Lo 85)</td>
<td>‘There is no chance to clarify points during the lecture.’ (Med-Le 10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Categorisation of comments for teaching and learning methods not wanted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Psych-U</th>
<th></th>
<th>Bus-Lo</th>
<th></th>
<th>Med-Le</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and presentation</td>
<td>Can’t do 29</td>
<td>39.7% 13</td>
<td>10.08%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(personal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doesn’t 8</td>
<td>10.96%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.63%</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>31.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>work (effectiveness)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boring/ 20</td>
<td>27.40%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24.81%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ineffective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Comment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.59%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.95%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. not in the three categories above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanks</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.33%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39.53%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than one classifiable comment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total comments</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
<td>129</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N respondents</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
<td>128</td>
<td>195</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The original study (Sander et al., 2000) showed that the Med-Le students were more committed to assessment by examination and showed greater acceptance of private study. It is anticipated that use of the Repertory Grid methodology to contrast these differing teaching and learning methods would lead to a further understanding of students' feelings towards them (e.g. Brown & Detoy, 1988). Research along these lines is currently being pursued.

Interim summary

The analysis presented so far suggests that there are some differences between Med-Le, Bus-Lo and Psych-U, which were not explored fully by Sander et al. (2000), with the Med-Le students being more committed to making efficient use of time to get the course covered, by formal means, if necessary. It is distinctly possible that the Med-Le students, who have the highest A level point profile (27.8 points against 22.5 for Bus-Lo and 15.0 for Psych-U), are showing a preference for those teaching and learning styles that have served them well in the past. It may be that Med-Le are approaching their study with considerably greater self-confidence than the Psych-U students who have the lowest average A level points. Sadly, confidence in academic study was not measured, but future research aims to rectify that.

Additional data

Working with the belief that it is important to understand the expectations with which students come to university, all incoming students to the Psych-U course are given an open ended questionnaire which aims to explore their expectations of university study and the reasons lying behind their choice of course and university. Some of these data corroborate the idea that the students coming to this course may be relatively lacking in confidence. There are two questions relevant to this analysis. From the second cohort (N=119), the frequencies of the categorised responses showed that the Psych-U course was chosen by
almost a sixth of the cohort because the
tudents had heard that the staff on that
course were friendly and understanding. In the
previous year \( (N=51) \) similar feelings were
manifest (see Table 5). This category, more
importantly, is ranked second in those
categories that the course team has control
over. This suggests that, to these students,
approachable, empathic staff are important.
Whilst this may be for reasons other than their

Table 5: Why have you chosen to study at
(this university)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff as place to study in</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The psychology course itself</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of the course</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near to home</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly/understanding</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology course open day</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus/facilities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locality</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades required</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent rating of the course (HEFCW inspection)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports facilities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course was recommended</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small/close-knit teaching team</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPS accreditation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance offer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already at UWIC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: no second rank is shown for 1999 because the
responses that were generated fell into different
categories to those used for the 2000 data.
Comments in bold are those that under control of the
course team.

lack of confidence in the ability to cope with
university study, it certainly does not contradict
this idea. It should be noted that these are
spontaneous comments to a very general, open
question, which, it can be argued gives them
added importance.

Another open-ended question asked the
students what they expected from their tutors.
In line with the inter-centre differences on the
qualities of a good teacher already discussed
(see Table 4), the clear leader from 71 per cent
of the students was guidance/help/support/
encouragement (Table 6).

Table 6: What do you expect from your tutors
at (this university)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guidance/help/support/encouragement</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information (handouts, teaching, etc.)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/accessible</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Lots'</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Keep me busy'</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be fair</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: no second rank is shown for 1999 because the
responses that were generated fell into different
categories to those used for the 2000 data.
Comments in bold are those that under control of the
course team.

These findings do not contradict the idea
that the Psych-U students are not fully confident
that they will meet the demands of degree level
university study without the patient help, guidance,
assistance and encouragement from their
tutors. It is recognised that further, mor
A-level profile of the three USET groups. These students seemed to be saying that they might not be confident in approaching university study. They felt they may need support and reassurance and that their teachers should respect their preference, for instance, in not wishing to talk in public. These concerns could be ameliorated by knowing that their teachers would be sympathetic and by having easy access to members of the teaching team for guidance and support. The Psych-U students would like teaching and learning to be group based. They would prefer little reliance on their own unmonitored learning, which has not been the customary view of university education.

Whilst there is nothing in these findings that would surprise or challenge a sensitive teacher, it is reassuring to have empirical data to support these beliefs and convictions.

**Should we give the students everything they say they want?**

Collecting the expectations that students have, may be useful in creating effective courses. However, it does not follow that ‘every fleeting whim of the customer must be met’ (Zikmund & Amico, 1986, cited in Scott, 1999, p.198). A good example of this comes again from considering the teaching methods that students say they do not want. In all three groups, student presentations came high in the list of teaching methods not wanted albeit with some small variation between centres in the relative strength of feeling (Sander et al., 2000). Some teachers feel that student presentations can be a useful way of promoting student learning and so may not want to abandon them, just because students say that they don’t want them. A way around this conflict of wishes may be found if attention is given to why students don’t favour presentations. From the USET data, typical explanations for not wanting student presentations were:

- not liking being the focus of attention;
- lack of assurance in the accuracy of the information presented by others;
- lack of involvement by students who are not presenting and;
- concern over the quality of the presentation.

**Interim summary**

The message that came from the initial consideration of the USET data was that there were clear preferences in how students wished to learn which could be significantly different from how they expected to learn. In addition to this, the further analysis of the qualitative data suggests that there needs to be some careful consideration of students’ general orientation to university study. It would seem that in the USET study, there were, fortuitously, two contrasting groups. At one extreme there are the Med-Le students with their good A level profile. These students wanted to get on with their course, making efficient use of their time, working with teachers who have expert and assured knowledge. If their learning had to be in a traditional, formal way, so be it. They had the skills to cope with what learning at university has traditionally been all about. In contrast, there were the Psych-U students with the lowest
Within the Psych-U course a new Level 3 module option had been introduced in which presentations were a key component in both the teaching and the assessment of the module. At the beginning of the module, time was spent discussing with students why presentations were part of the learning and assessment. It was explained that care would be taken to ensure that the student presentations were relevant, accurate and up to date by having the students submit a paper for formal assessment by the tutor, which would then provide the basis of the presentation. Time was spent talking about presentation skills and support and guidance was given to those who expressed anxiety about giving a presentation to their peers. Module evaluations were extremely favourable suggesting that presentations can be beneficial to student learning, if approached in a sensitive and informed way.

**An Expectations Philosophy**

Teaching and learning as a partnership between students and their teachers (Laurillard, 1993; Scott, 1999), provides the basis for an expectations philosophy (Figure 1) in which teachers, students, course managers and, maybe, senior management, work in partnership with each other to create effective learning environments for students. Within the context of an expectations philosophy, this partnership should be flexible and responsive, with a commitment to considering the customer perspective. The quadrants at the bottom of Figure 1 explore the outcomes of the interaction between organisational flexibility and the consideration of the customer perspective. To realise this, expectations of students should be collected at the course level and at the institutional level. These expectations can either be met or managed. It should be important to universities to ensure that students are expecting from the organisation what the organisation is actually able and willing to deliver (Hill, 1995). Institutional issues could range from car parking to library facilities, student counselling and welfare to student clubs and societies. Research is required to understand students’ expectations of university life, as opposed to the teaching and learning environment.

Students’ expectations could usefully be followed up at later points in the course (Hill, 1995; Leckey & Cook, 1999), through the ubiquitous module evaluation questionnaire (see Sander & Stevenson, 1999). Systematic longitudinal research in this area is planned as expectations and perceptions of service quality change over time (Boulding, Kaira, Staelin & Zeithaml, 1993). This should provide a better understanding of how students are socialised into the university learning environment by comparing expectations with performance on the course and attitudes to it. It is hoped that this will shed some light on student withdrawal and some of the factors behind academic success. It may also help to understand how some students come to like student presentations and role-play!

**Conclusion**

Students beginning higher education have expectations and preferences about university and careful consideration of these expectations shows that university students are not a homogenous group. For a variety of reasons, different groups will have different expectations, which need to be recognised and worked with. Through the systematic collection of expectations, which can be relatively easy, more effective courses can be designed and delivered. Importantly, this will be with the particular needs of the student cohort in mind. From this, students will know that they have been listened to and their views have been considered in the creation of their learning environments.
Errata

Apologies to Paul Sander and Keith Stevenson for an error in Figure 1 of their article entitled ‘Why we don’t like student presentations: the students speak’ [Issue 14]. Please find the correct version below.

Annette Daly, Editor.

Figure 1: The Expectations Philosophy in Higher Education Institutions.

Organisational Development
- Information
- Planning

Organisational Management
- Affects
  - Public image, Structure and profile of organisation

Curriculum Development
- Information
- Planning

Curriculum Management
- Affects
  - Design and delivery of course and teacher’s interactions with students

Expectations Philosophy
- Students
- Partnerships
- Managers
- Teachers

Policy
- Procedure
- Collect and consider expectations

Policy
- Respond to meet expectations
- Manage expectations
- Justify delivery to counter-expectations

Organisational environment
- Flexible organisation
- Flexible teachers
- Commitment to collect and respond to expectations

Considers customer perspective

Organisational flexibility
- Responsive: Optimal performance
- Dependent on luck as much as judgement

Customer perspective
- Frustration: Unresponsive
- Them and us

Organisation inflexibility
- Unresponsive

Note: We would like to acknowledge the contribution made by our colleagues, Annamária Széky, Conny Karisson and Ulla Muda, in the development of this model.
References

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Medical students are from Mars—business and psychology students are from Venus—University teachers are from Pluto?

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SUMMARY This study explores further the reasons given by the first year medical students in comparison with first year business and first year psychology students for their selection of lectures, student role play, and student presentations as their least preferred teaching method. The reasons were originally given in a questionnaire exploring student expectations of university teaching completed by 195 medical, 128 business and 72 psychology students in their first week at university (Sander et al., 2000). The analysis reported here suggests that whilst students irrespective of course gave similar reasons for not liking lectures, there were subtle differences between medical students and business and psychology students in the reasons they gave for not liking student role play and student presentations. These differences suggest that many first year medical students can be suspicious of the value of student-centred learning methods. Teachers hoping to use these methods should acknowledge student suspicion and work to help students see the value of these techniques to encourage their full participation.

Background
Do medical students differ in ways they least like to be taught in comparison with other undergraduates? This paper develops an issue that was raised but not fully explored in an earlier study carried out by the authors that investigated medical, business and psychology first-year university students’ preferences and expectations of teaching style (Sander et al., 2000). The issue relates to possible significant differences in the reasons first-year medical students give for teaching styles they do not value in comparison with other undergraduates and the implications that such differences may have for medical teachers.

There is evidence that students within disciplines have different learning styles (Entwistle, 1981; Grasha & Reichman, 1996; Vaughan et al., 2001) and studies have been carried out that demonstrate associations between different personalities and different cultures and preferred learning styles (Biggs, 1987; Honey & Mumford, 1992). But what particular styles of teaching do students beginning their university careers dislike and are their reasons for not liking these teaching styles generally similar? One way of finding out how students’ least like to be taught is to survey their hopes and fears before their course begins. This approach has been used successfully with students in other educational settings (Shank et al., 1996; Stevenson & Sander, 1998).

In the original study (Sander et al., 2000) the sample comprised 195 medical, 128 business studies and 72 psychology first-year students enrolled at Leicester University, Loughborough University and University of Wales Institute Cardiff, respectively. The students were asked to complete the specially designed University Students Expectations of Teaching (USET) questionnaire in the first week of their impending university career. They were asked to indicate how they hoped they would be taught, how they expected to be taught and how they would least like to be taught on the course they had chosen to follow. They were also asked about how they would prefer to be assessed and finally asked to indicate what qualities they thought were most important in a good university teacher. Students were also asked to write down the reason for their choices.

The main findings of the USET study were that this sample of students entering universities in UK in 1998 were expecting not to be taught in a way that they would prefer, as well as expecting to be taught in a way that they did not like. There was a clear message about least preferred teaching styles. Formal lecture was equally disliked by students in each institution but almost universally expected as the most likely main method of teaching. Interestingly there was more tolerance for the interactive lecture, where students felt they would have an opportunity to become more involved and discuss issues raised in the lecture.

Student role-play and student presentations as teaching methods, although involving students more than lectures, were also clearly disliked by students irrespective of institution. We were interested to find out why students disliked these teaching methods and disputed the value of them as a means of developing learning. Was this dislike of problem-based student-centred teaching styles general across all three centres or were there differences associated with centre attended and subject studied?

Method
For this study the 395 USET questionnaire student response sheets were sorted by least preferred teaching style. The 312 response sheets that had lectures, role-play or student presentations as their first least preferred teaching method were reviewed. The section that asked students to
explain why they had chosen one of these teaching methods as their least preferred was examined by two raters independently [KS and PS]. From the 312 response sheets there were 265 (85%) that had comments justifying the students' choice. The remaining 47 cases could not be coded as the section for justifying student's choice was left blank. The 265 student responses were read through first to establish what kinds of reasons the students provided. Both raters agreed that all responses explaining dislike of formal lecture could be coded into one of two recognizable categories:

1. ineffective if the response referred to the passive nature of the lecturing process as boring or lacking in student interaction, or
2. personal if the response referred to specific difficulties that the individual student had in dealing with lectures as a teaching style.

Where the student was referring to student role-play or student presentation as their least preferred teaching style the raters agreed that all statements could be coded as:

1. ineffective if the response cited a reason to do with ineffective use of teaching time, or
2. personal if the response cited a reason to do with a personal dislike of the method causing stress or embarrassment to them or other students.

Two forms of analysis were carried out. First, the number of comments in each category was compared across each subject discipline. Second, the quality of comments was considered and compared. Examples of student reasoning were provided to illustrate different reasoning styles apparent between students.

Results
The quantitative and qualitative analyses of students' reasons explaining why they did not want a particular teaching style revealed some interesting similarities and differences that are outlined below.

Most of the comments from students who chose lecture as their least liked teaching style argued that lectures were too passive to be effective. Comments describing lectures as lacking in student input were roughly evenly distributed across the three groups. Irrespective of course they had chosen to follow, students justified their choice by explaining that formal lectures force students to be passive. Almost all of the medical students' comments describe lectures in this way and this proportion was matched similarly by business and psychology students, although the business students produced slightly more personal reasons. In essence, irrespective of discipline or institution, the students thought lectures would be ineffective because they are rarely interactive and they do not encourage students to think (Table 1).

The reasons given by the students for why they disliked role-play and student presentations, however, showed some interesting differences, with students following different courses providing qualitatively different reasons for their choice.

Medical students provided many more justifications that role-play or student presentations were not effective as teaching methods in comparison with reasons given by business or psychology students. The argument that these two techniques are ineffective and waste valuable learning time was made more by medical students (75% of responses) than by business or psychology students (54% and 22% respectively).

Conversely, the psychology students provided many more justifications that role-play and student presentations were personally embarrassing to participate in, compared with comments of this sort made by business and medical students. Table 2 illustrates this difference with 78% of comments by psychology students citing a personal reason (e.g. embarrassment at speaking in front of others) for not liking these techniques, compared with only 46% and 25% citing personal reasons from business and medical students respectively. This clear difference in the proportion of comments made between centres was mirrored also in the qualitative analysis of the comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Reasons given by students for why they least liked formal lectures as a teaching method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All you learn is what you would learn if you simply read the books/lecture notes—nothing more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Involves least contact with teaching staff and implies that assessment will simply be a 'regurgitation' of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It doesn't put the emphasis on making you think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal lectures are boring and dull, no student input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I think that you can learn more by actually participating rather than just taking notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group work is less pressured and allows you to learn to be a doctor, not an exam parrot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is no participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continuously taking notes gets boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not interactive enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No allowance for students not understanding or wishing to input something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychology students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No interaction, no learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is easier to understand and develop more views if the students can interact with the lecturer about topics, not just listen to the facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I retain and recall very little information as I am not an active part of the lecture so pay little attention to what is being said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I find it quite hard to keep up the pace of taking notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not all the information given in a lecture goes in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why did medical students dislike role-play and presentations?
The analysis of the comments made by the Leicester University medical students who selected role-play or student presentations as their least preferred method of teaching revealed a tendency to concentrate mostly on issues to do with efficient use of their time (Table 3). Generally they seemed to be concerned that their time as students should be used to their best advantage and not wasted. This was typified by many of the medical students, who argued that expert knowledge delivered by an authority figure was a better use of their time than activities such as student presentations where the information presented may not be as reliable. As students they had suspicions about the value to them of ‘student produced’ knowledge. These students seemed to be saying that they trusted ‘lecturer delivered’ knowledge more than knowledge that emerges from teaching sessions that involve role-play and student presentations.

Why did business students dislike role-play and presentations?
The Loughborough University business students demonstrated a form of altruism in their responses to explaining why they least liked role-play or student presentations. The quotes demonstrate a caring concern for weaker members in the group. The students were concerned that some students could be discriminated against, as the two teaching methods in their view tend to favour more confident students (Table 4).

It is interesting to see how these student-centred learning activities, which are advocated as very powerful learning mediums by professional educators, are regarded by these students as not that useful, or discriminatory. The use of unfairness as a reason for not using these teaching methods seemed central to this group and may reflect on poorly supported attempts to use these methods in the past.

Why did psychology students dislike role-play and presentations?
The UWIC psychology student statements on why they least prefer role-play and presentations are different in tone and reasoning from the other two groups. These students show much more concern for the effect that the teaching style had on them personally (Table 5).

They point to the difficulties that these teaching methods create, mentioning the embarrassment and personal anxiety that speaking in front of others produces in them. Perhaps this reflects a general lack of confidence on the part of these students in their own abilities. Whatever the reason it is striking to see how often the students from this cohort mention how anxiety producing the teaching techniques of role-play and student presentation are for them.

| Table 2: Categorization of comments explaining why two teaching techniques were not wanted as teaching methods by 265 first-year students from three UK universities |
|---|---|---|
|       | Med-Le | Bus-Lo | Psych-U |
|       | Freq | %   | Freq | %   | Freq | %   |
| Formal lectures | Boring/Ineffective | 48 | 94 | 32 | 76 | 20 | 87 |
|                | Don’t like (Personal) | 3 | 6 | 10 | 24 | 3 | 13 |
|                | Sub-total | 51 | 42 | 23 | 8 | 22 |
| Role play and presentation | Doesn’t work (Ineffective) | 63 | 75 | 15 | 54 | 8 | 22 |
|                | Don’t like (Personal) | 21 | 25 | 13 | 46 | 29 | 78 |
|                | Sub-total | 84 | 28 | 37 | 23 |
|                | Grand total | 135 | 70 | 60 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Business students’ comments explaining why they least prefer role-play and student presentations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Difficult to learn from presentations sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This is more acting than learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some people always end up doing more than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not fair to shy or nervous people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many people would not feel comfortable in this situation and I don’t believe it gives an effective way of learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Psychology students’ comments explaining why they least prefer role play and student presentations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• You might have to be good at drama, which I am not, for role plays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participating in front of groups makes me very nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’d just get too nervous standing up in front of everyone else and talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I find using this method extremely embarrassing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The USET survey (Sander et al., 2000) demonstrated that student expectations of and preference for particular teaching styles can be gathered quickly and efficiently from large numbers of students at the beginning of their course. Whilst it was interesting to note why students hoped for or expected a particular teaching style the authors felt that there was further value to be gained in this study by examining the reasons students gave for not liking a particular style. Our analysis in this paper therefore concentrates on comparing the reasons students gave to justify their choice of least preferred teaching style.

Students in our survey, irrespective of university or course followed, disliked formal lectures. The reasons they gave were mostly similar: the formal lecture is boring, it does not involve students, it is difficult to concentrate and take notes, it does not encourage thinking. When we looked at reasons for not liking role-play and student presentations we saw some differences between courses. Medical students appeared much more concerned about efficient use of their time. There is also a suggestion that a number of first-year medical students preferred to receive knowledge from an acknowledged expert source rather than generate the knowledge through reflecting on their experience of role-play or student presentations. Business students seemed to use discrimination or unfairness as their reason for not liking role-play and student presentations. Psychology students argued that the two methods affected them personally and they found the techniques stressful or embarrassing.

These differences may reflect the effect that the different academic histories of these students could have on preferred teaching style. Medical students in the USET study had by far the highest A-level points average (university entry exam average grade), and UWIC psychology students had by far the lowest (Table 6).

This may explain why the medical cohort, who because of their entry qualifications are aware that they have the capability to perform competently at university, see more efficient use of time as the main driving force for teaching-style selection. Psychology students in this study, on the other hand, with significantly lower grade average entry qualifications, were perhaps far more concerned about their ability to survive academically. They expressed this through their concerns about the effect these teaching styles have on them personally and how worrying they find the experience of speaking or acting out roles in public. A study that could separate students by academic ability and teaching preference could help establish whether academic ability is indeed a factor that influences teaching-style preferences.

Table 6. Characteristics of the USET study sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree course</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Average A-level grade points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Leicester</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Loughborough</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>UWIC</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

The study reported here demonstrates to the authors that students arrive at university with different levels of confidence and different reasons for disliking styles of teaching they feel are not best suited to them. Some medical students, although confident of their academic ability, may be suspicious of teaching techniques that stray from the familiar 'expert delivers knowledge' model. This has important implications for teachers of the problem-based learning medical curriculum. Perhaps time spent gathering students' hopes and fears about teaching styles at the start of the year would be useful in helping staff recognize the concerns their current students have about teaching styles. It might also benefit teachers if students who have suspicions about the value of role-play and student presentations were identified at the beginning of a course; they could then be supported through teaching processes that they fear have no value to them.

Practice points

- Medical students arrive at university with different levels of confidence about the styles of teaching they are likely to experience.
- First-year students, whether medical or not, expect to find formal lectures boring, not interactive and ineffective.
- First-year medical students can be suspicious of role-play and student presentations as they feel they are not necessarily an effective use of student time.
- First-year medical students are suspicious of teaching techniques that stray from the 'teacher delivers expert knowledge' model with which they are familiar.
- Teachers should work to find out what student expectations are of the teaching styles they will experience and support students who are sceptical of the value of student-centred techniques.

Notes on contributors

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PAUL SANDER has taught at UWIC since 1995, following 15 years in further education, and tutoring at the Open University. He teaches social and developmental psychology. He is currently the Course Director for the three psychology degrees offered by UWIC and has interests in student recruitment, and the experience of academic study.

References


University Students’ Expectations of Teaching

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ABSTRACT This study used a specially designed questionnaire to explore undergraduate students’ expectations of and preferences in teaching, learning and assessment. A convenience sample of 395 first-year university undergraduates at the start of their university life was used. They were enrolled on a Medical, Business Studies or Psychology degree course at one of three British universities. Overall, the similarities in expectations and preferences between the three groups were greater than the differences. Specifically, the students expected to be taught by formal and interactive lectures but preferred to be taught by interactive lectures and group-based activities. Their least favoured learning methods were formal lecture, role-play and student presentations. Coursework assessment preference was for essays, research projects and problems/exercises. Although there was an overall preference slightly in favour of coursework assessment rather than examinations, this was not consistent across all three centres. Students asked to rate various qualities of a good teacher selected ‘teaching skill’, followed by ‘approachability’ as the most important. The effective collection and value to institutions of students’ expectations is discussed.

Introduction

The current climate in higher education suggests that students could be seen as primary customers (Hill, 1995, p. 15; Thorne & Cuthbert, 1996, p. 176) who are increasingly aware of their customer rights, one of which is regularly exercised through formal and informal feedback processes. If teachers in higher education are becoming framed as service providers, then one way to ensure the provision of a quality service is to know the expectations of customers as they enter into the service transaction (Zeithaml et al., 1990). Education has typically adopted an ‘inside out’ approach, with those on the inside assuming that they know what students need and what they expect the teacher to give. However, successful service industries have been shown to think ‘outside in’. They research what customers expect of the service and they then work to provide the service that meets those customer expectations (Zeithaml et al., 1990, p. 51).

In the commercial world, expectations have been seen as composite constructs. Ideal
expectations (what a customer would ideally like to occur) are distinguished from predictive expectations (what the customer assumes is probably going to occur), and normative expectations which evolve from experience of service provision by other similar service providers (Prakash, 1984; Thompson & Sunol, 1994).

Psychologists have recognised the importance of expectations in understanding human behaviour, encapsulating this into the top-down approach to human information processing (e.g. Eysenck & Keane, 1995, p. 2). Educational research has also recognised the importance of expectations, for instance in connection with the ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Brophy, 1983; Wineburg, 1987); and a study by Steele (1992) showed that the careful manipulation of the expectations of students from traditionally disadvantaged groups could positively affect retention and performance. This is an important finding since it suggests that addressing expectations can produce measurable improvements in student outcomes.

Research on students’ expectations of higher education suggests that they are dependent on a number of factors. These include culture (Shank et al., 1996; Twale et al., 1997); gender (Walker et al., 1994); age (Levine, 1993); university type (Shank et al., 1995) and mode of study (Stevenson & Sander, 1998). Furthermore, expectations and perceptions of service quality change over time (Boulding et al., 1993).

Whilst the variability of students’ expectations may mean that they require careful usage, an expectations driven approach to quality assurance in educational delivery may offer distinct advantages (McElwee & Redman, 1993). Some applications of an ‘outside-in’ line of reasoning within UK higher education (Hill, 1995; Harrop & Douglas, 1996; Booth, 1997; Narasimhan, 1997), and higher education in the USA (Shank et al., 1993, 1995), suggest that the expectations and preferences of students are valuable data which should be collected and considered.

Some small-scale studies have tried to access and respond to student expectations of tutorial teaching in distance learning students. Stevenson et al. (1996) asked students, before the start of the module, what their preferences were for use of tutorial time. Where possible, these expectations were responded to in the design of the tutorial programme for the year, and the students’ satisfaction with the tutorial programme was monitored through attendance and formal feedback systems.

The apparent success of this small piece of action research led to the proposal of the ELPO (expectation led planned organisation) model for designing teaching and learning programmes using pre-course expectations of the students (Stevenson, et al., 1997). The ELPO model encourages teachers to form partnerships with students to negotiate the most effective teaching and learning methods. The responsive nature of the ELPO model, it is argued, also encourages students to take a greater interest in their learning, which in turn promotes feelings of ownership and partnership in the learning experience.

If the ELPO model is to be applied to traditional higher education institutes, there is a need to develop an effective questionnaire that allows students to express and justify their preferences for teaching style. Baldwin et al. (1997) demonstrated the usefulness of a large survey-type approach to gathering information from undergraduate students. Motivated by the need to collect data quickly and easily and in a form readily amenable to statistical analysis, the University Students’ Expectations of Teaching (USET) questionnaire was developed to enable students to tell the teaching team what they believed should happen in teaching and learning (ideal expectations), what they believed was likely to happen (predictive expectations) and what they definitely did not want to happen (counter-ideal expectations). The opportunity was also taken to collect students’ views on assessment and their judgement of the qualities of a good teacher. The questionnaire aimed to identify both quantitative and qualitative information about students’ preferences for teaching (Sander &
University Students’ Expectations of Teaching 311

Stevenson, 1999a). In more detail, the questionnaire sought first-year university students’ opinions in the following areas:

1. teaching and learning methods that the students realistically expected, ideally hoped for and definitely did not want;
2. the preferred weighting of coursework and examination assessment;
3. preferred assessment styles; and
4. the qualities of a good university teacher.

There are two good reasons why finding out about student expectations of and preferences for teaching styles they are likely to encounter as they start their university career could be valuable information for higher education institutions. Firstly, new undergraduates may have unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of how their course might be delivered, and it would be appropriate to have those expectations managed to a more appropriate or realistic level (Hill, 1995). Secondly, teachers and managers could use the expectations and preferences of the current cohort of students to provide an educational service that is both effective and pleasing to those student customers (Sander & Stevenson, 1998). There may often be some flexibility in the design of teaching programmes, and the expectations of the students gathered in this way could be used each year to help decide the final structure of teaching provision. Identifying that there is room for change and that change may be desirable does not mean that students’ expectations and preferences should automatically drive the direction of the change. However, they may be usefully considered. The long-term aim is to help institutions construct course teaching and learning styles which are at least as rigorous, effective and as economically efficient to deliver as current teaching provision, but which engage students in ways of learning which students prefer.

The purpose of this investigation, therefore, is firstly to establish how effective the USET questionnaire is at eliciting student expectations of teaching, and secondly, to consider the value of the expectations data that the students provide.

Method

Participants

There were three groups of respondents selected, for convenience, from three British universities, studying for a different degree in each (see Table I). The centres were selected by virtue of being the places where the researchers worked and the courses were easily available. All students were first-year intake, new to their course, although a small minority had previous university experience (see Table II). The age range was from school leavers to mature returnees to higher education. In collaboration with the Course Directors, all students used in this study completed the USET questionnaire either during the induction period or within the first week of term. None of these students had experienced any substantial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre code</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Questionnaire administered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (Med)</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Fourth day of teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (Bus)</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>Business studies</td>
<td>First morning of induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (Psych)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Second day of induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
teaching on their course, but might have had some prior knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment methods from reading the pre-enrolment information material supplied to all students.

Procedure

A large-scale pilot study carried out with psychology students at one of the institutions (Centre C) the previous year identified a set of teaching and learning methods experienced by students. Likewise, assessment methods and perceived qualities of a good teacher were identified. From these data, the USET questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire asked students to rank their top three teaching and learning styles expected and hoped for. It was judged to be problematic and potentially ambiguous for students to identify and rank their bottom three teaching and learning styles using an ordinal scale. Instead, students were asked just to identify their most disliked teaching and learning style. Where students provided a rank, data were kept as such. To avoid ambiguity in the understanding of the different teaching and learning styles, these were defined as shown in Fig. 1.

The balance that students suggested should exist between coursework and examination was collected by asking the students to suggest their preferred appropriate percentage split. The student preference for type of assessment was collected from the students’ ranking of their top three assessment types from a list comprising examinations and coursework, the latter consisting of:

- essays;
- laboratory work;
- research projects;
- poster presentations;
- oral presentations;
- course journal;
- computing exercises;
- problems/exercises.

An option ‘other’ was included. Finally, students were asked to order the following qualities of a good teacher from most important to least important:

- approachableness;
- teaching skills;
- enthusiasm;
- knowledge; and
- organisation.

### Table II. Entry qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre codes</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Average A level points at entry</th>
<th>Degree (number of students)</th>
<th>Overseas qualifications (number of students)</th>
<th>BTEC or GNVQ (number of students)</th>
<th>Access or diploma (number of students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (Med)</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>6 (2:1 or first)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B (Bus)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (Psych)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In each of the sections of the questionnaire related to hoped for teaching and learning methods, expected teaching and learning methods, and not wanted teaching and learning methods, students were asked, in an open question, to explain the choices they had made.

Data Analysis

USET responses were coded as follows.

- Respondents were asked to rank from 1 (most preferred) to 3 the three teaching and learning methods hoped for and expected. These were scored 3, 2 and 1.
- The least wanted teaching and learning method was a single choice, but some students ranked from 1 to 3 again and these data were retained.
- The coursework/examination weighting was a percentage.
- Assessments were ranked from 1 to 3. These were scored 3, 2 and 1.
- Teacher qualities were ranked from 1 to 5 and scored 0 to 4, in reverse order, resulting in a high score meaning a more preferred method or quality. Respondents were also asked to identify any other important qualities that they felt marked out a good teacher.

All scores were entered onto an SPSS data sheet (version 7.5 for Windows 95). The data sheet was also exported into Excel (version 7 for Windows 95) for some analysis. At no point in this study did a respondent select ‘other’, so it has been omitted from the tables reported.
here. Individual respondents’ qualitative data were typed into a word processor document (Microsoft Word, version 7), along with their centre. The categorised responses for the three categories of teaching and learning methods were stored on an analogous document and the codes transferred back to SPSS/Excel by respondent and centre. The categorisation was done by inspection by one researcher after carefully reading and recording a modified list of categories. A ‘blank’ was recorded where no information was provided. The categories were as follows.

**Hoped for teaching and learning**

- Interaction between students and staff/social setting
- To have things explained, to be informed
- Groups provide effective learning
- Gives me motivation or interest
- Works for me/provides an effective experience

**Expected teaching and learning**

- What happens
- Inappropriate answer (i.e. not an expectation)
- Efficient or best
- Because of the subject or course

**Teaching and learning methods that were not wanted**

- I am no good at it
- Embarrassing or similar emotional response
- I know or believe that the method doesn’t work
- There is no expert or assured knowledge
- It isn’t enjoyable

Due to the large number of statistical tests that were done on the complete data set, the critical value for rejecting a null hypothesis was set at \( p = 0.0009 \). Where the complete data set was not looked at, the significance level remains at the customary value of 0.05. SPSS reports all probabilities to three decimal places, so a value of \( p = 0.000 \) can be interpreted as \( p < 0.0005 \) (i.e. less than the critical value 0.0009).

**Statistical Testing**

In all statistical analyses the data is assumed to be non-parametric as it was derived from ordinal data points. Correlations were looked for using Spearman’s Rank Order correlation coefficient between the following pairs of variables:

- expected teaching and learning and hoped for teaching and learning;
- hoped for teaching and learning and teaching and learning methods that were not wanted;
- expected teaching and learning and teaching and learning methods that were not wanted

Tests of difference were made as follows:

- between centre comparisons of expected teaching and learning; hoped for teaching and learning; teaching and learning methods not wanted. These comparisons were made using Kruskal Wallis tests, as there was an independent groups design with three levels for centre;
between centre comparisons of the frequency of categorised qualitative data using chi-squared test, for each of the teaching and learning methods that were hoped for, expected and not wanted;

- within participant comparisons of mean rank of the individual teaching and learning methods that were hoped for, expected and not wanted. As each participant was ranked in each of these three categories, the design here was repeated measures. As no more than two comparisons were made at any time (e.g. mean rank of interactive lecturing that was hoped for and mean rank of interactive lecturing that was expected), Wilcoxon T tests were used.

- comparisons between centres of preferred assessment styles, using the Kruskal Wallis test; and

- comparison between centres of the perceived qualities of a good teacher, using the Kruskal Wallis test.

Results

Validity of USET Questionnaire

The data provided by the USET questionnaire facilitated further consideration of validity by correlating the ranks of the overall mean ratings of the nine teaching and learning methods that were expected, wanted and not wanted. There was a statistically significant negative correlation (rho = -0.87, n = 9, p < 0.01) between teaching and learning methods that were hoped for and those that were not wanted. The correlations between teaching and learning methods that were hoped for and those that were expected (rho = 0.57), and teaching and learning methods that were expected and those that were not wanted (rho = -0.48), were not significant. These correlations suggest that the respondents were distinguishing between teaching and learning methods that were expected, were hoped for and were not wanted. However, the statistically non-significant correlations are reasonably high and in an expected direction. This might suggest that the courses from which the participants were drawn were providing a teaching and learning environment that the students hoped for.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Summary statistics across all 395 respondents were computed by assigning a score of 3 to the most highly ranked selection, then 2, 1 and 0 for an item that was not selected. From these descending ranks, means and standard deviations were calculated over all 395 data points (see Table III).

Expected Teaching and Learning

The most frequently expected teaching and learning methods were formal lectures and interactive lectures. Over all respondents, formal lectures appeared 273 (69%) times in the first, second or third rank; interactive lectures appeared 208 (53%) times. This finding was consistent across the three centres.

Comparison between centres showed some effects that were statistically significant (Kruskal Wallis test, df = 2, p < 0.0005): Centre A (Med) in comparison with Centre B (Bus) and Centre C (Psych) shows participants in Centre A (Med) wanting fewer student presentations, more teaching based around group work and less interactive teaching.

Comparison between centres showed some interesting effects that were approaching statistical significance (p = 0.002 with Kruskal Wallis tests):
TABLE III. Teaching and learning methods: means and standard deviations of ranked scores across all 395 participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hope Mean</th>
<th>Hope SD</th>
<th>Expect Mean</th>
<th>Expect SD</th>
<th>No thanks Mean</th>
<th>No thanks SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal lecture</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive lecture</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-centred teaching</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching session based around group work</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private study</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student role play</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Centre A (Med) in comparison with Centre C (Psych) shows participants in Centre A (Med) wanting fewer tutorials and more private study;
- Centre A (Med) in comparison with Centre B (Bus) shows participants in Centre A (Med) wanting more private study; and
- Centre B (Bus) in comparison with Centre C (Psych) shows participants in Centre B (Bus) wanting fewer tutorials.

Hoped for Teaching and Learning

The teaching and learning method that appeared as the most preferred was the interactive lecture, with 287 votes (73%). A ‘vote’ equaled a placing of the method in a respondent’s top three ranks. This was followed by tutorials (182 votes, 46%); teaching based around group work (173 votes, 44%); student-centred teaching (164 votes, 42%); group work (138 votes, 35%). This finding was consistent across centres and may suggest a preference for teacher-led teaching and learning, but with active participation by students. However, analysis of the categorised qualitative data showed that Centre C (Psych) students were significantly more likely than Centre A (Med) or Centre B (Bus) students to explain their response within the category ‘groups provide effective learning’ (chi squared: $X^2 = 15.28$, $p < 0.0005$). This suggests that the Centre C (Psych) students are more likely than the students in the other two centres to believe in the effectiveness of group work.

Clear losers in teaching and learning methods that were hoped for were student role-play, which received only 21 (5%) votes and student presentations, with only 17 (4%) votes. However, it must be stressed that out of this sample of 395 students there were 38 (10%) who actually hoped for role-play and presentations. Therefore, not everyone would be pleased if these courses had no role-play or presentations.

Comparison between centres showed one interesting effect that was approaching statistical significance: Centre A (Med) hoped for more private study than Centre B (Bus) or Centre C (Psych) (Kruskal Wallis: $X^2 = 13.892$, df = 2, $p = 0.001$).

Teaching and Learning that was Hoped for Compared with Teaching and Learning that was Expected

Across all respondents, there was a statistically significant belief that there would be less
interactive lecturing (Wilcoxon T, z = -15.291, p < 0.0005); less student-centred teaching (Wilcoxon T, z = -6.093, p < 0.0005) and less group work (Wilcoxon T, z = -4.599, p < 0.0005) than the students would actually prefer. There would also be more formal lecturing (Wilcoxon T, z = -11.474, p < 0.0005) and more private study (Wilcoxon T, z = -5.325, p < 0.0005) than wanted.

There were small variations between centres, with Centre C (Psych) not expecting more private study than wanted (Wilcoxon T, z = -1.788, p > 0.0005). The other two centres expected to get more private study than they wanted (Centre A (Med), Wilcoxon T, z = -3.745, p < 0.0005; Centre B (Bus), Wilcoxon T, z = -3.521, p < 0.0005). Centre B (Bus) hoped for more group work and teaching based around group work than was expected (Wilcoxon T, z = -4.183, p < 0.0005), and Centre C (Psych) also hoped for more teaching based around group work than it was expected would be provided (Wilcoxon T, z = -3.643, p < 0.0005).

Teaching and Learning Methods that Were Not Wanted

Over the three centres, the teaching and learning method that came out top on the overall list of most not wanted methods was student role-play, with 116 (29%) votes. The second and third most disliked teaching and learning methods were formal lectures, with 114 (29%) votes, and student presentations, with 82 (21%) votes. There was a slight difference between the centres in the rank orderings of student presentations, role-play and formal lectures (see Table IV).

There were no statistically significant differences in teaching methods that were not wanted between centres, although there is the suggestion that the Centre A (Med) students were rather less happy about the idea of student presentations than those from either Centre B (Bus) or Centre C (Psych). The categorised qualitative data showed that Centre C (Psych) students were more likely to explain, and Centre A (Med) students less likely to explain, their reasoning for their choice of not wanted teaching and learning method through the category ‘embarrassing or other similar emotional response’ ($\chi^2 = 16.62$, p < 0.0005). The Centre A (Med) students were much more likely, and the Centre B (Bus) and Centre C (Psych) students were much less likely, to respond within the category ‘there is no expert or assured knowledge’ (p < 0.0005).

Assessment

Table V shows means for the different assessment styles. A measure of student familiarity with the different methods presented in the questionnaire would have helped to identify the extent to which students were expressing a preference for methods they were already familiar
TABLE V. Mean ranked preferences for the different assessment styles across all 395 participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Style</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examinations</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework consisting of:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>essays</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laboratory work</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research projects</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poster presentations</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oral presentations</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>course journal</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computing exercises</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems/exercises</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

with. In any event, the preferred balance across all three centres between coursework and examinations was in the favour of coursework (52.27 to 47.73%). This was not the favoured direction of weighting in Centre A (Med) (see Table VI). Overall, counting places in the top three ranks, the most favoured coursework assessment styles were essays (266 votes, 67%) research projects (249 votes, 63%) and problems/exercises (172 votes, 44%).

Comparison between centres showed some effects that were statistically significant in each case with \( p < 0.0005 \), using Kruskal Wallis tests.

- Centre A (Med) in comparison with Centre B (Bus) shows participants from Centre A (Med) wanting less project work, more problem-solving exercises and more laboratory work.
- Centre A (Med) in comparison with Centre C (Psych) shows participants from Centre A (Med) wanting a lower coursework and higher examination weighting, more assessment by examination and less by coursework, less project work and more problem-solving exercises.
- Centre B (Bus) in comparison with Centre C (Psych) shows participants from Centre B (Bus) wanting less laboratory work, which perhaps is not surprising given the nature of a Business Studies degree.

Qualities of a Good Teacher

Consideration of the ‘first place ranks’ of teaching qualities across all respondents showed that ‘teaching skills’ was seen to be the most important quality. Second was ‘teacher approachability’, third was ‘knowledge’ then ‘enthusiasm’, and finally, ‘organisation’. If the ranks that each respondent gave were scored with a 4 for the most important quality through to 0 for the least important quality, and the average score was calculated, only the order of
knowledge and approachability are changed. The mean preference for each of the qualities can be seen in Table VII.

Comparison across centres yielded one statistically significant result: Centre A (Med) was less concerned about teacher approachability than Centre C (Psych) or Centre B (Bus) (Kruskal Wallis: $X^2 = 17.249$, df = 2, $p < 0.0005$).

### Discussion

The questionnaire developed for and used in this study shows that students' expectations can be easily collected, although further checks on the validity of the data generated would be reassuring. The questionnaire worked as intended with some evidence for its internal validity. All the participants willingly engaged with the questions, providing meaningful responses. The questions seemed unambiguous, except where participants were asked to indicate the teaching and learning method that they least liked. Here participants sometimes failed to identify just the least liked method, ranking the three least liked instead (students were clearly following the pattern of response requested in the previous two questions). The USET questionnaire could easily be modified to accommodate this style of response.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the results is the evidence that some students are entering university with the expectation that they will not be taught in the way they would prefer. Taken together, the participants in this study are expecting more formal lecturing and private study than they would like, but less interactive lecturing, student-centred teaching and group work.

In summary, there were some interesting and potentially important commonalities and differences of preferences and expectations in participants in the different centres. Consideration of the data suggests that expectations collected through the USET Questionnaire could usefully guide the design and delivery of courses. However, the results and their implications cannot be considered without considering the limitations and shortcomings of the study.

### Critical Evaluation

The three different courses (Medical, Business Studies and Psychology) had students with noticeably different academic histories. There were different proportions with a non-A level background. Those students that came with A levels had different A level profiles. The different academic backgrounds of the three groups of students could have confounded with different expectations of teaching and learning. For instance, the more successful, studying histories of the medical students in Centre A, as measured by their higher A level points,
could have been influential in their greater acceptance of private study, problem-solving exercises and a preference for a lower coursework weighting. Also, from their A level successes, these students might have more confidence in their own independent learning abilities, and thus, have shown less concern about teacher approachability than the students in the other two centres.

The recruitment policies of the different courses that generated this study’s participants may have resulted in a confounding of different learning styles between students in the different subject areas. The results showed that medical students in Centre A were disapproving of student presentations, largely due to the lower likelihood of expert or assured knowledge that these students believed that these methods provide. One could conjecture that the expected or assured knowledge that the students prefer to receive would be learnt, practised through exercises and reproduced in examinations. This may warrant further investigation with a similar methodology, augmented by the measurement of student learning style.

Another useful addition to the study would have been the collection of the details of the participants’ previous experiences of the different teaching, learning and assessment methods. With this information, it would have been possible to establish the extent of any differences between the three groups of students, and whether there was a relationship between preference for particular teaching and learning methods and familiarity with them.

It could also be most illuminating to follow students longitudinally through their degree (cf. Hill, 1995), and monitor changes in attitude towards different teaching and learning and assessment styles. Some preliminary work on this has been done using students on open and distance learning courses (Sander & Stevenson, 1996).

The extent to which students’ attitudes to role-play and presentations were influenced by the descriptions provided to them could be usefully explored. The descriptions of these two techniques through their wording could have generated increased anxiety in some participants. The wording might have caused the anxiety, but equally, the expressed dislike of these methods could be related to the degree of anxiety the techniques actually generate in students. If so, teachers might benefit from considering ways of managing the anxiety associated with these two teaching styles. The impact of the descriptions for the other teaching and learning methods on the expressed preferences for these methods could also be considered.

The use of definitions could have been extended to the qualities of a good teacher, which were not explained. Whilst no participant added any further qualities to the list that was derived from pilot work, a more extensive assessment of the completeness of the list used would be desirable. By asking participants to place these qualities in rank order, it was hoped that the relative importance of these qualities would be forced. Had participants been asked to rate the importance of each quality on, say, a five-point Likert-type scale, participants may have rated each as maximally important (i.e. 5 out of 5). This issue could be addressed in further studies.

Working with Students’ Expectations

Clearly, there is a message in these results about the value students place on the formal lecture. It is expected but least wanted. Students say it is ineffective. Impetus for considering the nature of teaching provision is coming from falling resources and increasing concern over teaching quality (Bourner & Flowers, 1997). The traditional method for transmitting course material to first-year undergraduate students in most UK universities is the formal lecture. It may be cost-effective but, when asked, neither students (Butler, 1992; Husbands, 1996) nor
University Students' Expectations of Teaching

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teachers (Willcoxson, 1998) regard it as effective. There may well be better teaching and learning methods which could still happen within the cost-efficient lecture room setting (Butler, 1992), as a ‘lecture’ can have many forms (Brown & Bakhtar, 1998).

Other educationally effective but cost conscious methods have been proposed (e.g. Reynolds, 1997). The findings might indicate a general preference for being taught through group involvement rather than being lectured at. Whilst it is recognised that there are increasing constraints on resources, it may be worth considering whether a formal lecture is any less demanding of resources than an interactive lecture. If not, ways of meeting students’ preferences could be considered. The expectation of more private study than wanted may be an example of an expectation that could usefully be managed, by explaining to the students that private study is an integral part of reading for a degree.

Similarly, students often show a dislike for presentations and role-play. Student presentations or role-play may be an integral and important part of a course as peer tutoring can offer significant benefits and, if assessed, can offer distinct advantages over written assignments (Hartley, 1998). Student presentations or role-play may help prepare the student for subsequent careers. Knowing students might prefer other forms of teaching and learning could help teachers to introduce presentations and role-play in as supportive and unthreatening a way as possible. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is not uncommon for students retrospectively to comment on how much they benefited from role-play and student presentation even though they did not enjoy the experience at the time. If students were to receive more support when asked to engage in these methods, their expectations could change and they may come to see themselves and their learning styles in a different and more positive way.

Data collected from exercises such as this might identify a range of expectations that students have that could not be met due to pedagogical or resource limitations. This would be very useful information, as it would allow unreasonable expectations to be sensitively managed. This could be in a variety of ways, for instance, through pre-enrolment literature, course and student handbooks and during the induction process. Illustrative of this, Hill (1995, p. 13) points out that for many courses in UK universities, the provision of ‘fully individualised written feedback on assignments, one-to-one attention through tutorials are now things of the past, due to pressure on resources’. Therefore, if students were saying that teaching and learning through these methods is what they want or expect, it should be explained to them that this would not be the case. Hopefully, students could be reassured that the teaching and learning methods they will experience will be at least as good.

Whilst there are confounding variables which should be controlled for in any further surveying of students’ expectations of teaching, learning and assessment, this study nonetheless produced some insight into the student’s perception of starting academic life at university. The method and findings could further a more responsive approach to student learning in higher education. Collecting and considering student expectations and preferences of teaching style could be an effective means of giving students a voice in course delivery and help focus course team discussion on teaching, learning and assessment. From the data presented here, such discussion might focus on interactive and formal lecturing styles, tutorials and the students’ wish for a social element to their learning. Also, the place of student presentations in teaching and assessment, assessment through examination and staff approachability could be usefully considered. Students’ expectations and preferences could also provide a baseline for considering the results from any subsequent course or module evaluation questionnaires that these students may be required to do. For instance, as it is known that these students would prefer not to have assessed student presentations, then that fact could be crucial in interpreting data from student evaluation from a module that had
assessed student presentations. Further, this scenario suggests that getting measures of student satisfaction on completion of modules or courses may not be sufficient. It may be that, after a period in employment, the full benefit of different teaching styles may be recognised.

Whilst acknowledging the limitations of the study, the important message is that students beginning higher education can have their expectations and preferences collected with ease, and doing so could be beneficial in the design and delivery of modules or courses. Sometimes expectations and preferences might be responded to by moving to meet the students’ expectations or preferences. Other expectations or preferences that the students might have could well be unrealistic. In such cases, it would be more appropriate to sensitively manage these expectations or preferences to more appropriate levels. In either event, the student has been listened to and responded to, which is, in our view, the real purpose of accessing student expectations and preferences in the first place.

Acknowledgements

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How do Open University Students Expect to be Taught at Tutorials?

Keith Stevenson, Open University (UK), University of Leicester (UK)
Paul Sander, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UK)

Stevenson, Sander and Naylor (1996) showed that the Open University third-level psychology students whose views were sought in 1994 prior to the start of their course had a preference for closely managed formal teaching at tutorials rather than open group work. Useful and provocative as the research was, questions were left. How applicable were these expectations to students at different points on their degree course? Do students entering onto a degree programme have different expectations of teaching than those nearing the end? If a new cohort of students were questioned would their expectations be the same as those found in the 1994 students?

Also do OU students at different points of study have different views on the qualities they value in a good tutor? The research presented here attempts to address these questions as well as re-emphasising the value of expectations research, following the lead of Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry who argue convincingly that ‘knowing what customers expect is the first and possibly the most critical step in delivering service quality’ (1990: 51).

The research methodology used by Stevenson et al (1996), was a mixture of semi-structured interviews with a small sample of students and a questionnaire probing the same issues with
open-ended questions used for a larger sample. Morgan (1993) discusses the place of qualitative research in teaching and learning based on the premise that learning is more than just a quantifiable accumulation of knowledge. There is growing recognition that student feedback is much more useful if it is derived from open questions rather than tick box or Likert scales (Sander and Stevenson 1997). There is some evidence too that students given the opportunity to comment at length about their views on teaching and learning take it very seriously indeed. Certainly the OU students involved in this investigation reported considerable interest at being asked to express their feelings on how they expected to be taught. The study reported here follows in the tradition of seeking the 'inside perspective' as described by Stevens (1989), and concentrates on collecting qualitative data from the students of their expectations of tutoring in the OU.

Method

First-level social science students and third-level social psychology students on OU courses were given a questionnaire designed to measure the expectations that these students had about various aspects of their tutoring. The questionnaire was returned by 17 out of 25 foundation-level students on their first meeting with their tutor and 29 out of 50 third-level social psychology students before the start of their first tutorial of the course.

The results presented here represent an analysis of the responses to two types of question:

1. Questions on what the student expected as teaching methods, what teaching methods they hoped for and those teaching methods that they did not want.
2. Questions that probed the characteristics of a good lecturer as perceived by the students.

A copy of the questionnaire is available on request.

Results

Table 1. The percentage for each year of expected teaching methods (1996 OU Students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Teaching Method</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Small group discussion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor summarises</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Mixed lecture and discussion</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on TMA</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Pure lecture</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other styles</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Other styles</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. The Teaching Methods Hoped for (as a Percentage for Each Year- 1996 OU Students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hoped for Teaching Method</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Mixed lecture and discussion</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tutor-facilitated discussion</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pure lecture</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other styles</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Other styles</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open Learning June 1998
Table 3. The teaching methods not wanted (as percentages for each year - 1996 OU Students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disliked Teaching Method</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Role play</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role play</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student presentations</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other styles</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other styles</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. 3rd Level OU Students ‘Hoped for’ Teaching Methods of 1994 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1994 ‘Hoped for’ Teaching Method</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1996 ‘Hoped for’ Teaching Method</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure lectures</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Mixed lectures and discussion</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture and discussion</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tutor-facilitated discussion</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on next assignment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Pure lecture</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other styles</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Other styles</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Why do Students Hope for Discussion as Their Most Preferred Teaching Method?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Occurring Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1 Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyable being with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing other students’ points of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps you gain in confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3 Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work helps clarify things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good to hear others’ views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good to interact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Why do Students Dislike Lectures or Student Presentations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Frequently Occurring Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1 Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures are boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mind begins to wander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations make me so nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am too old for larking around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 3 Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures are not effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures are boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations waste time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have paid for teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7. Qualities of a Good Tutor as Suggested by Level 1 and Level 3 OU Students in 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1 (23 Comments)</th>
<th>Level 3 (N=94 Comments)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reassuring</td>
<td>Available and helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens</td>
<td>Sensitive to students’ problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>Good communicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enables</td>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praises</td>
<td>Motivates and stimulates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Lively presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks 1:1</td>
<td>Gives constructive criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good sense of humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provides detailed feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will mark late assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion of results

The results make interesting reading but we must be cautious in interpreting what they mean. We set out to check what OU students expect from tutorials and tutors. We believe that satisfaction with service is directly linked to judgements made by consumers rated against their expectations (see Zeithaml et al. 1990). We as tutors need information on those expectations to see if we can set about meeting them (or managing them if they are substantially unrealistic).

Our first question was do OU students have different expectations of how they will be tutored depending on where they are in their study career? Table 1 seems to suggest that there are some differences although discussion is expected in both years, but interestingly the third-level students seem to be taking a stronger line in expecting more tutor direction in such discussions.

Our second question posed was to do with the teaching method students might hope for which might conceivably differ from what they expect. Interestingly although there are some differences the role of discussion is still high in the ‘hoped for’ columns for both groups of students. The first level OU social science students seem to recognise the value of discussion with 50 per cent suggesting discussion as the most beneficial for them although there were individuals who specified discussion as a terrifying prospect.

For the third-level students the most frequently hoped for tutor activity was a ‘mixed lecture and discussion’. The comments (provided in tables 5 and 6) suggest they feel that the discussion element will help to clarify the issue and that group discussion creates opportunities for group interaction which most of these students seem to value. Interestingly the 1994 cohort had different views. They wanted more tutor-led lecturing. What is striking in reviewing the results is the shift that seems to have occurred with the 1994 third-level cohort wishing for more lectures and the 1996 third-level cohort seeking more discussions.

This illustrates a vital point about our work. The fact that expectations can and do change from year to year makes it even more important to seek them each year prior to course commencement. By failing to recognise expectation differences tutors run the risk of repeating teaching tasks to an audience which differs in nature from the previous year and consequently may not be as satisfied with the tutor’s choice of teaching style.

The most frequently listed disliked teaching methods included pure lecturers, student presentations and role plays. The students perceived lectures to be too rigid, impersonal and monotonous which leaves the student disinterested and bored. Perhaps they are seen by the students to be ineffective because the student is passive and lacks control of their learning.

With student presentations and role play, two categories of responses emerge that almost exactly divide between the first level and third level. Those foundation students dislike the idea of presentations because they lack confidence, feel they do not have the necessary skills and dislike the pressure of
Qualities of a good tutor

This question threw up a clear difference between the two groups. The foundation level students seem to be dominated by issues of personality style of their tutor. Clearly the understanding nature of the tutor is very important to foundation students making on higher education for the first time. The third-level students provided a comprehensive list of desired tutor qualities and whilst availability and sensitivity are important to them one can also detect the greater emphasis that they put on a tutor’s teaching skills.

Particular interest in teaching style might be expected considering the limited time available to the typical third-level OU student. We must not forget either how students may be forced into a strategic style of learning (Entwistle 1988) because they need to pass final assessments. First level students could be seeking learning as a social experience whereas this function declines as the student progresses on towards third level. Not only is this evident in their preferred teaching experiences but also in the perceived qualities of a good tutor.

Conclusion

One reason for collecting expectations from students before they embark on a course is to give the tutor a chance to reflect on the content and delivery style that he/she has planned to deliver (see Stevenson et al 1997). This research supports the view that tutoring can be improved through this simple process.

However, to be truly effective the tutor needs to work in a climate where seeking expectations is accepted and responsibility for responding to them is with the tutor. It is we believe an important function of the organisation’s management team to create this climate if they truly wish to improve the quality of the organisation’s tutorial provision as perceived through its customers’ eyes.

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References

ELPO - a model that uses student feedback to develop effective open tutoring

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Raywood Comprehensive School, Nottingham, UK.

Over the last 10 years Higher Education Funding Councils identified, in their underlying principles for higher education institutions to follow, the need for teaching to be responsive to students' needs; and we are told that, generally speaking, evaluating higher education in traditional university settings is now reasonably well established (Stringer and Finlay 1993). One of the reasons for the move towards evaluation procedures is seen as a response to comments made in the round of audits of UK universities conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council and carried out in the years following their introduction in 1990. Typically traditional UK universities have responded to comments reflecting on the adequacy of their student feedback mechanisms by issuing protocols for the process. For example, at Leicester University a protocol has been established which required:

that the main objective should be to ensure that robust mechanisms were in place at departmental level for obtaining feedback from students on the quality of education provided and for effecting prompt and demonstrable response to the issues raised.

(Leicester University Protocol 1995)

Similarly in the University of Wales Institute Cardiff student feedback is actively sought through focus groups and questionnaires:

In an attempt to gather a comprehensive picture of the health of the institute as perceived by its student population, students are asked to take part in both small group sessions and in large scale questionnaire surveys.

(UWIC Academic Handbook, p.360)

It seems that the evaluation processes that are now embedded in most British universities involve seeking student feedback as a component of 'customer service', and the model that seems to have been adopted is one of 'meeting customers' stated or implied needs' (Green 1994).

Meeting customers' needs is not just an issue that is particular to traditional higher education; it is becoming important to senior managers in open learning institutions as well. Henderikx (1992) makes this point, arguing from a European perspective, in his paper on managing quality in open learning; he acknowledges the need for 'adequate evaluation and feedback' as important processes for institutions considering establishing distance learning courses.

Further, student feedback is now clearly stated in the OU UK, student charter:

You can expect the Open University [...] to give you opportunities including student feedback questionnaires, committee representation and a formal complaints procedure to register your views about your courses, the tuition and the support services.

(Open University Students Charter 1995)

While it is still not obligatory for OU UK open learning tutorials to be evaluated by students, the student view is sought out by those interested in pursuing it. The purpose of these tutors seeking evaluation of their tutorials reflects their interest in improving their tutoring (see Morgan and Morris 1994; Naylor, Cowie and Stevenson 1990a; Cowan 1994; Phillips and Stevens 1996). This point is important; and managers of tutors seeking to improve quality of tutorials should note the bene-
its mentioned by these authors that result from encouraging evaluation of provision rather than demanding it. The valuable benefits of encouraging staff to engage in action research as suggested by Schon (1983) is well put by Schratz (1992), Naylor, Cowie and Stevenson (1990b) and Stevenson, Sander and Naylor (1995).

It is important to recognise the way that evaluation is linked into the prevailing political climate and, just as important, how the evaluators perceive themselves. Brown alerts us to the view that: For students, effectiveness is likely to be related to systematic, stimulating and caring teaching that leads to success ... (however), students are being encouraged to see themselves as consumers and his may eventually affect their views of effectiveness'. He goes on to make the point that 'effectiveness and quality ... are not necessarily synonymous or even stable concepts' (Brown 1993: 230).

To take this further, we feel that the potential significance of evaluation and its purpose needs serious reflection. We are supported in this position by Lomax (1985) who argues that evaluation without action is a sterile operation: 'Evaluation should improve practice and indeed generate new practice.' This point is emphasised more recently in a UK Department for Education and Employment publication centred on the subject of higher education evaluation:

Evaluation is sometimes seen as an additional burden for those undertaking development work. Often it is seen as something undertaken to satisfy a funder rather than for its own intrinsic value. This is unfortunate since well done it can provide an invaluable means of reflecting formatively on development as it progresses. (DfEE 1996:9)

It is with this idea, that student evaluation might lead to improvements in tutoring, that we have researched our practice. Our aim has been to improve the tutoring process through involving students and tutors in reflecting on what makes tutorial provision effective (Cowie, Naylor and Stevenson 1989; Naylor, Cowie and Stevenson 1990a; Naylor, Cowie and Stevenson 1994; Stevenson and Sander 1995; Stevenson, Sander and Naylor 1996). This student-tutor partnership we have called collaborative tutoring and we feel that such collaboration has helped tutors address most of the following issues:

- the changing face of higher education from tutor-led to student-led;
- the place of evaluation and feedback in education;
- the value of student comments on course development and delivery;
- how tutors find out what students think about tutorial provision;
- how tutors and course managers might respond to student feedback on course quality.

Collaborative tutoring

Before developing this discussion it is important to acknowledge the importance of collaborative tutoring to the process of reflection. Through work initiated in 1986 the authors worked as a team planning the delivery of a tutorial programme of an honours level OU UK social psychology course. By working collaboratively we considered strategies that might help students come to terms with their course material. This collaboration also involved students. Initially our students provided feedback using five-point Likert-style checklists as well as qualitative statements of feeling. This use of students' and tutors' perspectives in the evaluation of tutorials has provided a valuable insight into how various tutorial activities have been experienced.

Whilst we recognise that ‘tick box’ feedback forms can, if carefully prepared, provide important information, we feel that evaluations based on asking students to check off on a Likert-style five-point scale how good a tutorial session had been after its delivery are inadequate. Apart from not knowing why the student rates the session as they have done, there are many other possible explanations for students’ judgements, the most obvious being that the student is likely to answer favourably to please the tutor; the tutor is pleased that the student is pleased, and change in tutoring style is unlikely to occur. Alternatively, there may be some negative responses that stem perhaps from a ‘personality clash between tutor and student; the value of the response is devalued by the tutor because it is perceived as being a ‘one off’, and again, no change occurs.

Another issue that arises from reviewing feedback from ‘qualitative comments’ feedback forms is the suspicion that comments provided by students at the end of a tutorial session are often rushed and/or trite and consequently do not provide reliable data from the student. Quite often for example, students would tick ‘yes’ to everything so as to complete the task as fast as possible before
leaving. Having said that, the feedback items which have usually provided the most valuable information to the tutor team were the qualitative statements where students had reflected hard on the issue under question.

Another issue that emerged was that whilst tutorial activities might be graded as ‘quite good’ by students they were not actually what they wanted. Despite our efforts to amend our tutorial programme in line with student and tutor feedback we still found that not all of the students were happy with all of the activities. We began to feel that the traditional way of researching student opinion was missing an important factor in student satisfaction. The factor that seemed to be missing was the expectations that students came with to the course and the influences that those expectations have on their evaluation of the tutor and the tutorial.

This issue of student expectations of tutors raises some important questions about feedback from students in open learning settings:

- Why are the evaluations being carried out?
- What questions provide the most useful responses?
- What is the best method for gathering evaluations?
- How will results be analysed and by whom?
- Who will make decisions on implementing change?
- What kinds of change will be sought?
- How will the effect of the changes be monitored?

In 1994 we began researching open learning students’ expectations of tutors. It is to this research that we now turn.

**Student expectations**

A summary of results of the 1994 student expectations study can be given as follows.

In tutorials students like:
- a well-delivered lecture;
- advance programme;
- help with preparing next assignment;
- a well-focused discussion;
- tutor to help explain the course;
- tutor to be supportive;
- tutor to be a firm chairperson.

Students do not like:
- group work that ‘got nowhere’;
- ‘being picked on’ to answer questions.

In feedback on assignments students like:
- to see how their work could be improved;
- recognition of what they had done well;
- explanation of what they had ‘got wrong’.

Students do not like:
- pedantic spelling and grammar corrections;
- general rather than specific comments;
- being marked too leniently.

(Adapted from Stevenson, Sander and Naylor 1996)

How can these findings help us plan a service that is effective for the students?

**Two emerging models**

If we take the tutorial, as an example, presumably if we change our plans to ensure that students get what they expect we will be doing the job to our clients’ satisfaction. We are after all, according to Green (1994), in the culture of ‘customer care’ and so it might be argued, we must be seen to be responding to consumer needs. A model can be constructed that meets the expectations of our ‘customers’ and it is outlined below.

**The RASE model**

- Gather our students expectations of tutor role and tutorial style;
- Plan our tutorial programme to fit in with these newly found expressed needs;
- Provide a programme in reasonable detail for the student to decide whether it will be useful for them to attend;
- Present our tutorials in the manner that students have said is their most preferred style (e.g. lecture);
- Ensure that we do not do any of the things the students have mentioned as examples of bad tutoring (e.g. asking direct questions);
- Respond to the students’ expectations with respect to how they would like to be prepared for the next assignment (e.g. tell them how to do it).

These make up what we term the ‘Responding Always to Student Expectations’ or RASE model. By researching our students’ expectations we can have a clearer awareness of how they like their tutors to behave and we can plan our tutorial programme and tutorial style to meet their expressed expectations.
However, we would argue that this is not an appropriate path for open learning tutoring to follow. We argue that this is an inappropriate path because the creation of independent, self-directed learners, arguably one of the essential aims of the educational process (Paul 1990; Wright 1987), is likely to be derived from such a customer-focused approach.

The ELPO model

Our view the value of students’ opinions is not that tutors should feel obliged to respond to them but that it informs tutors in their capacity as decision makers. We feel that there is another argument which brings the value of students’ expectations to the professional judgement of tutors together. This can be done in a way that provides for effective tutoring and leaves both parties feeling that they have contributed to an improved learning experience.

The view that students should be given the opportunity to assess the quality of their tutor is, we think, missing the point. We argue that students are not experts in judging teachers since they cannot have the knowledge base to make these judgements. They have individualistic ways of learning, perhaps, or particular worries about being placed in groups, or concerns about the ways they might be essayed marked. All individually important we agree, but to criticise tutors for not responding to every student’s particular whim is unfair on the tutor and arguably unacceptable as a way of responding to feedback.

Lentell (1996) poses some questions about customer power and its effects on managing the academic process. She asks whether, in reviewing student feedback on tutors, the customer is always right. She also questions whether the student does know what is best for him or her, whether the professional judgement of the educator is no longer a valid resource in the planning and delivery of the tutorial sessions; and whether we are really saying that the student knows how best to present conceptually challenging material to the group of students that the tutor is contracted to teach.

Perhaps seeking students’ expectations is useful in a particular way. From thinking about how expectations are linked to evaluation we recognise the value of student perceptions of quality tuition. However, we feel that the expectations need to be evaluated and considered in line with the overall aims of the course. We suggest that expectations should be used to help course tutors plan their tutorial strategy but should not be allowed to dominate it. We have constructed a model which reflects the stages that would need to be involved in using student expectations effectively in the planning and delivery of distance learning tutorials. The process is listed below and reflects the planning required for a typical OU UK third level course with the students coming for approximately seven tutorial sessions spread out evenly over an eight-month learning period.

The Expectations-Led Planned Organisation (ELPO) model

Planning the programme of activities

- The tutor (possibly in consultation with the staff tutor or group of tutors with specialist knowledge of the course), considers what for them are core components, which the student would benefit from working with, in a tutorial. The tutorial sessions are identified and content, activity and value to student are considered.

- Before the course begins the students’ expectations of the course and how they expect it to be delivered are gathered. On the basis of these responses the tutor and staff tutor, or collaborating tutors, may decide to make alterations to the overall plan. Equally on the basis of these responses there may be discussion about how a particular activity might be better attempted in a different way.

Circulate agreed plan to students

- An agreed plan of tutorial activities is circulated to the students perhaps with some explanation as to the rationale that had been employed to justify that tutorial activity and its expected benefit to the students’ understanding of the course.

Presentation and review

- Present the first tutorial and evaluate it with a post-tutorial interview or short questionnaire. If feasible, share the experience with other tutors and/or staff tutor. On the basis of these responses the tutor or tutors may decide to make alterations to the overall plan with regard to the level of complexity of tutorial content or style of activity within the tutorial.

- Deliver the second tutorial. Evaluate, discuss
and adjust the plan for future tutorials where appropriate. (Repeat procedures for presentation and review at each further tutorial meeting.)

**Evaluation of the amended overall tutorial plan**

- Gather feelings from students and tutors about the overall package of tutorial presentations at the end of the course (before examination results can influence student opinions), both from interview and questionnaire. Discuss findings with other tutors or staff tutor, and adjust the future plan where this seems appropriate.

In this model (the ELPO model), the professional judgement of the tutors is retained and the importance of student feedback rests in its ability to encourage tutors to discuss the value of the points made. The students are also treated with respect and their views are seriously considered. This still leaves the tutor in the decision-making position but then, in our opinion, that is where the tutor ought to be. Tutors should be making decisions about tutorial content and style after working in collaboration with fellow tutors and students. Staff tutors/tutor managers can assist the process by encouraging tutors to work collaboratively and supporting the tutors who want to work with students, in the way we have described, to develop appropriate and effective tutorial teaching strategies.

**Conclusion**

The case has been made that student evaluation of their tutors can be an important element in improving the quality experienced by students in their education. This could include traditional higher education although it is primarily concerned with, and has evolved from, work with open learning tutors and learners. The motive behind evaluation, however, needs to be carefully considered as does the model of educational practice followed. It is argued that student feedback is not in itself sufficient to judge the quality of tutor performance. Operating traditional post-hoc evaluations only picks up tutoring errors after they have happened. We argue here that through collecting students' expectations before a course begins not only is student motivation increased but potential tutoring errors can be detected and avoided. Student evaluation is useful in higher education, but it must be set within an expectations framework to be used to its greatest effect.

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Phillips, M. and Stevens, V. (1996) 'Gathering student...
Feedback as an aid to staff development' Open Learning 11(3): 38-40.
Student perceptions of the tutor’s role in distance learning

KEITH STEVENSON, PAUL SANDER AND PAUL NAYLOR

Keith Stevenson, Paul Sander and Paul Naylor work as part time Psychology tutors for the Open University K East Midlands Region where they are part of a team which has developed a collaborative approach to tutoring. Whilst the assessment of tutorial presentation by students has always been a crucial element contributing to the team’s teaching plan, it was accepted that traditional methods of asking students to assess the effectiveness of tutorial presentations were likely to be coloured by students’ prior expectations. The tutor team decided to address this issue and find out what kind of tutoring the students expected from their tutor during the course of a year’s tuition.

What do distance learning students expect from their tutor? What tutorial style suits them? What tutorial style do they dislike? What kind of feedback do they expect on their assignments? How can the tutor be more effective for them? It is to these and similar questions relating to distance learning students’ expectations of the tutor’s role that we hope to find some answers. The aim of this research is to investigate how a sample of students perceive the tutor role and from a consideration of any underlying themes that emerge, improve our understanding of the tutor-learner relationship.

Whilst it is now fairly commonplace to ask students to evaluate tutors and tutorials there are some reservations concerning the validity of the data obtained. These post tutorial evaluations tend to be rushed and hurried and often simply reflect perfunctory ticks in boxes. Students may well respond favourably to release the tutor or use the opportunity to comment negatively in response to poor grades received from that tutor (Bonetti 1994; Geva-May 1993).

There are very few publications specifically reporting on distance learning students’ expectations of higher education tutorials, although there is plenty of research in associated areas. In Britain there are examples in the literature of surveys reporting on distance students’ views of tutorial support (see for example Morris and Morgan 1994). There are also examples of surveys reporting on both distance students and tutors perceptions of tutorial practice (e.g. Naylor, Cowie and Stevenson 1990). From Canada and Australia come many examples of research studies investigating student and tutor perceptions of course quality (in Canada see for example Kesuma 1993; Burge et al 1991, and in Australia see Thompson 1991; Scriven 1991). However, the issue of student expectations appears less well researched.

How do tutors know how to fulfil their role appropriately for each year’s particular student allocation? In most distance learning institutions there are guides available for new tutors providing general hints on good practice. Two such guides are the Supporting Open Learning (S.O.L.) Reference File (Howells et al 1994) issued to all OU UK tutors and in Australasia there is the Herdsa green guide entitled ‘Tutoring distance education and open learning courses’ (Kember and Murphy 1992). These guides are of immense value to new tutors perhaps not familiar with infrequent student contact and administrative details concerning assignment marking, appeals etc. The more experienced tutor may refer to such guides to establish specific procedures but is less likely to use the guide as a way of defining his/her role. It is generally accepted that the distance tutoring role is to a large extent self taught. There is also some evidence to suggest that the self taught tutor may benefit from further training.
For example, in 1989 Dale Anderson interviewed eight experienced Canadian education tutors about what skills they thought were required for effective tutoring. He noted how it was the tutors themselves who defined their role with the learners and consequently shaped their duties around this definition. This study also found that the tutors were very uncertain about this role. Anderson goes on to state with admirable forthrightness:

‘a widespread lack of understanding exists about the scope and function of the tutor role; current systems of feedback in distance education systems are inadequate for providing information related to the tutor function and performance: different types of tutoring, such as telephone or seminar, require different types of skills...and most important of all, many individuals who are directly involved in providing distance education have no understanding about the process itself.’ (Anderson 1989)

On a similar tack Brew and Wright interviewed 11 British OU tutor counsellors to ascertain how they responded to the idea of using a facilitative teaching style in their tutorials. They found that there were difficulties for some tutors to accommodate such differences to their established style. This seems to support Anderson’s claim about the self-defining nature of the tutor’s role and the lack of understanding of the processes involved in distance learning seen from a student’s perspective (Brew and Wright 1990).

Taking these views on board this study attempts to find out how the end user of the tutor function (i.e. the distance student) expects the tutor to perform in the various functional modes associated with tutoring (running a tutorial, providing guidance and feedback on assignments, telephone tutoring, being available to students etc.). The methodology employed was to be depth interviewing of ten students. Depth interviewing offers opportunities for student responses to be discussed and verified. A questionnaire to the whole cohort of students on the same third level course may provide further verification of points made in the interviews and provide a degree of triangulation. It is hoped that the analysis of results will provide us with a greater awareness of how our students expect our tutorial performance to be effective for them. We will argue that this information will be helpful in developing our understanding of the tutor-learner relationship and its interaction with the learning process.

**Method**

The research team designed a two pronged investigation to establish student expectations. Ten students would be interviewed in-depth using an agreed interview schedule whilst a larger number would be provided with a similar set of open ended questions but presented through the method of a postal questionnaire (see Figure 1).

**The interviews**

It was agreed that asking students about their expectations of the tutor’s role should be the main thrust of the research. To this end it was agreed that the five tutors from the team would interview two students each, selected in some quasi random fashion from their student listing for the coming academic year 1994, on the OU Social Psychology course D307. An agreed interview schedule was negotiated amongst the team and when finalised circulated to all five tutors. This was to help provide a similar structure to each of the interviews. It was further agreed that the interview would have to be conducted by telephone. While it was accepted that telephone interviewing is less satisfactory than face to face interviewing it was felt that given the short time period available, and the difficult ethical issues concerning the arrangement of one to one meetings with as yet unmet students, that the telephone would have to be the medium. It was also noted that distance learning expects meaningful discussion to take place between tutor and student through telephone contact and therefore from that angle the telephone interview was felt to be sufficiently well justified.

To ensure that expectations were uncontaminated by any tutor contact, the interviews were all carried out in the two weeks leading up to the first regional day school arranged for mid-February. Each tutor asked the selected students if they were willing to be interviewed about their expectations of tutoring. If the student agreed to take part, a copy of the interview schedule was dispatched and a mutually convenient time for the telephone interview was agreed. The selected students were able to consider the questions prior to the telephone interview. This was thought to provide the students with sufficient time to think out their answers rather than have the questions suddenly sprung upon them. The responses to the questions were noted, and where necessary tutors asked supplementary questions to clarify the reasoning.
behind a student’s response. Each tutor noted down the responses of their selected students after ensuring agreement of interpretation. The completed interview schedules were sent to one member of the tutor team for collation and analysis.

The questionnaires

The pre-course questionnaire was designed to map similar areas of student expectation that were also researched through the pre-course interview. It was presumed that any ideas that emerged from the interviews might become more generalisable with larger sample backing. Once the questions for the questionnaire were agreed it was printed and circulated to all students registered for the D307 course in our region.

For both the interviews and the questionnaire it was important to gather the information before the sample had experienced any tutorial teaching from our team. To this end the questionnaires were sent out three weeks before the first Day School meeting and students were asked to bring the completed form with them or send it in to the regional centre if not attending. The questionnaires were collected at this first day school and when added to those received at the regional centre became the sample for analysis by another nominated tutor.

This approach to questionnaire distribution and collection proved most successful with an exceptional return rate of completed questionnaires. From a course population of the 94 students who started the course we received 68 completed questionnaires (72 per cent return). Given the notorious low return rate of postal questionnaires we regard this 72 per cent return as a very strong sample and comments derived from this sample we regard as reliable indicators of students perceptions.

Post-course interviews

It was decided that the data would be more complete if the interviewees were asked their views again but this time having completed their course and having experienced a common tutorial programme. Eight of the ten original interviewees who completed the course agreed to provide a second set of data following the same procedure as for the pre-course interview. An amended interview schedule was circulated and agreed upon and each of the five tutors followed the same procedure as in the pre-course interviews. The students were interviewed again by telephone and their responses were again recorded and sent for analysis by one tutor.

Post-course questionnaires

By the same token all students completing the course were circulated with an amended and agreed post-course questionnaire seeking their views on tutoring but now with the added experience of completing the course and perhaps having attended the tutorials. The students were asked to return the questionnaire direct to the Regional Centre and from there they were redirected to one tutor for analysis. Whilst the return of these questionnaires was disappointing with only 31 students making the effort, the analysis helped provide some support for issues raised in the interviews.

Analysis and discussion of results

Interview data

The notes from the ten pre-course and eight post-course interviews conducted by the five tutors were collated by one of the research team from which the following points emerged. A summary of these points appears in Appendix A.

In connection with tutorial content, interviewees expect that tutorials should use course material and address course issues. Time should be devoted to forthcoming course assignments (TMAs). In doing this, not only is the tutor expected to lecture, but the tutor should also facilitate the sharing of ideas between students through discussion or group work. There was not a clear consensus about group work. There were some respondents who expressed a clear dislike of group work in particular group work that had no focus. Other students did not like constant lecturing, although the point was made that it does depend sometimes on who the lecturer was. From these data it would appear to be very difficult to please all of the students all of the time in tutorials, but a mixture of teaching techniques would appear to go some way towards it. There was a clear consensus that the tutor should control and direct any discussion or group activity, making sure they stay on track and equally importantly do not become dominated by one individual. The interviewees felt that the tutorial as a whole should have clear aims and objectives and the students should have the opportunity to know what these are. A programme in
Figure 1 Model of the Research Design

Pre-course

- Pre-course interviews N=10
- Pre-course questionnaire (returns: 68/94)

Course

- Post-course
- Post-course interviews N=8
- Post-course questionnaire (returns: 31/64)

Jan/Feb

February to October

November/Dec

\[ \text{[Diagram showing data collection timeline and response percentages]} \]

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advantage was thought to be a sensible way of achieving this.

The student interviewees definitely saw another central aspect of the tutor's work as being involved with assignment marking and grading. There was a general consensus that students expect to be taught through the comments made on assignments. This teaching is expected to be challenging and clear and expressed in ways that students can benefit. Interviewees expressed the hope that they would be guided in improving the structure of their assignments through the tutor identifying irrelevant material as well as offering ideas on other material which might have been usefully included. Whether this was done by notes in the margin or by numbered points referring to a separate sheet was seen as unimportant. The tone a tutor employed in comments, however, was seen as very important. It was expected that comments should be encouraging and interestingly there was one suggestion made that negative comments should be made impersonally.

The students were naturally aware that assignments had to be graded. It was suggested that a tutorial can serve the function of providing students with an opportunity to find out their particular tutor's special idiosyncrasies with regard to assignments. Namely, what they should contain, how they should be structured and how they should be presented on the page. Further to this there was also a feeling expressed that there was an element of luck involved in being assigned a tutor who appreciated a particular student's individual style of writing. This point has emerged before when in discussion with students and it would obviously be helpful if students can be convinced that tutors mark to a consistent standard irrespective of individual writing style or presentation on the page.

Post-course interviews supported all of the above points as well as reinforcing some of the issues raised by the pre-course interview data. For example, in considering the value of day-schools that were offered as part of the year's programme it was clear that students felt that these events could be improved. In fact it was suggested that day-schools must provide something extra if they are going to be worth the extra effort involved for students to attend. For tutorials it was confirmed that students liked to listen to tutors especially since there is so little time available for personal contact.

The interviewees again expressed the expectation that tutorials should use course materials and use activities to facilitate understanding of that material. The post-course interviewees confirmed the value of tutors teaching through comments made on assignments. Acknowledging progression was noted as much appreciated as well as another student who emphasised the value of the apparent dialogue between tutor and tutee through the medium of written comments on the assignment.

Finally, there is no doubt that students reacted favourably to their views being sought. This had at least two effects. Firstly, it made the students feel that this course was interested in its tutorial presentation and seemed to be sincerely interested in what students thought about tutors and tutorials. Secondly, the mechanism of data collection and its evaluation became something tangible that they had taken part in and could comment on first hand. Some students mentioned how this exercise helped them become more aware of the difficulties involved in data collection, analysis and evaluation. This latter effect was doubly helpful as it prepared them for their encounter with it as a major issue within their course of study.

The pre-course questionnaire

The questionnaire responses can be seen in Appendix B tables 1-5. The responses have been coded from individual written responses to open questions asking for comments. The most frequent types of response are listed.

From Table 1 we can see the expectation of a 'knowledgeable tutor' who knows the course intimately and is 'able to explain the course'. A more pragmatic expectation of 'explaining assignment' suggests an awareness that assignments have to be passed and any help in directing students with assignments will be useful. The need for 'support from a tutor' is not to be treated lightly. It is very possible that students working at a distance look on tutors to support their learning more so than traditional students. What students mean by support in a tutorial setting is not always clear but giving students encouragement on what they say in tutorials and avoiding embarrassing students by asking direct questions which they may not know how to answer are probable contenders. The final category is interesting in that a reasonable proportion of students see one of the tutor's jobs to be a direc-
tive one. A ‘good chair’ in this context seems to mean monitoring discussion and acting firmly to
close down students who stray from the point or
dominate the discussion. From Table 2 the most
frequently stated student preferred type of feedback
on assignments was information on how their
assignments could be improved. Whilst most
tutors assume that this is a sine qua non of the assessment
process it may need spelling out in more
detail. It may be that the general comments are not perceived to be sufficiently helpful to students.
This issue is raised also in the post-course question-
naire where ‘constructive criticism’ is stated as
the best aspect of feedback from a tutor by a third
of the sample.

The second issue in Table 2 expressing the view
that ‘good work should be acknowledged’ is more
interesting perhaps and may be worth bringing to
the attention of tutorial staff. It was very striking
while reading through the questionnaires how
often students expressed a desire for their work to
be commented on when it was good and to the
point, rather than only be commented on when the
tutor disagreed or suggested something had been
left out. This is undoubtedly a cry from the heart
and perhaps it also connects with the idea of
encouragement dealt with in Table 1. The post-
course questionnaire confirms the value of
acknowledging positive points and being encour-
aging. These two issues accounted for over 50 per
cent of responses.

The third comment in Table 2 expressed an irri-
tation at generalised comments relating to improv-
ing the standard of the assignment. This may need
to be thought about in more depth. Certainly tutors
assess work and comment on its strengths and
weaknesses. The students seem to be saying they
need more detail about how negative aspects of the
answer could be changed. Do we as tutors provide
sufficient detail for students? Perhaps this issue
could be pursued through a more focused student
interview. It is interesting to note that it appears
again in the post-course questionnaire with ‘com-
ments too general’ being a frequently expressed
complaint.

From Table 3 students suggest ‘course related
issues’ to be the main reason for telephoning a
tutor. ‘Clarifying course material’ is regarded as
the most likely reason for a telephone call. The
pragmatic reason of seeking clarification of issues
dealt with in a forthcoming assignment is also
thought to be a likely reason. Interestingly the
‘request for an extension’ is listed by just 27 per cent
of the sample. As tutors we reflected on these rea-
sons and we felt the ordering does not correspond
to reality. In our experience the ordering given here
would need to be reversed to tell the true story.
Perhaps the students’ good intentions are expressed here more than reality.

From Table 4 it is clear that students did not
expect to receive social calls from their tutor. They
saw the tutor-student telephone call as a means of
transmitting changes to tutorial venue or assign-
ment deadline. There was some acknowledgement
that tutors might wish to carry on a dialogue with
a student about work recently submitted but even
then this was usually couched in terms of the tutor
checking up on the student who is not performing
very well. Students may be adopting a ‘respectful
distance’ argument here but it did come across
quite strongly that telephone contact was really to
be generated by the student rather than the tutor.
This attitude of ‘respectful distance’, if true, may be
a surprise to tutors who do not regard themselves
particularly as unapproachable because of their
tutor role. Some tutors may enjoy this ‘star status’
but many may not. It may be useful for tutors to
consider this as an issue and think about ways to
reduce its effect.

From Table 5 there comes a clear message that
students do make decisions about tutorial atten-
dance. The decision is most often taken on the basis
of personal gain. ‘Will it be useful to me?’ The more
useful a tutorial is perceived to be the more likely
students will make the effort to attend. There is
clearly an interaction between usefulness of the
tutorial and the likelihood that other commitments
will take precedence. There also seems to be a cost
benefit analysis applied to distance needed to
teach against the likely benefit to be gained.
Having said that, the post-course questionnaire
indicates that our students were in general satisfied
with tutorials and day schools provided. A major-
ity of the respondents (79 per cent) suggested that
the course would be improved with more tutorial
sessions.

It is hoped that this research should have an
impact on improving tutorial and day school attend-
dance. If we listen to what students are telling us
about how tutorials/day schools might be made
more useful, then their decision to attend should
follow, and tutorial/day school attendances
should rise. Certainly in 1994 students ideas were
included into tutorial programme and attendance
at individual tutorials and regional day schools was significantly up on previous years. (For example 65 students, (75 per cent course population) attending the opening day school in February 1994 in comparison to approximately 40 students in previous years.) Of course we must wait to see if the levels are maintained this year. If they are, it may be due to the increased usefulness that students perceive in our tutorial programme, or it may simply be a function of students feeling their views are being sought and acted upon.

This latter effect (Elton Mayo’s ‘Hawthorne Effect’) is a phenomenon not unknown to researchers into human behaviour. If by being involved in thinking about the tutorial process this encouraged students to attend, then for that reason alone it would seem worthwhile continuing with the exercise each year. The fact that a significant number of students wrote enthusiastically about being involved in expressing their views on what was important to them as end users of the tutorial process suggests that asking the students what they expected from a tutor was an area of enquiry that students welcomed. As one student added on the end of her questionnaire, ‘It’s nice to be asked for a change, it really made me think about how I like to learn’.

To complement that feeling we would add that this research had a positive influence on the tutor team also. Without exception the tutors involved in interviewing students and listening to what students had to say felt that the awareness gained of the student perspective proved immensely helpful in preparing and presenting tutorials and composing assignment feedback. Talking with students and listening to what students have to say is a useful exercise in itself and we recommend it to all tutors in all areas of distance education.

Students dislike:
1. Group work that gets nowhere.
2. Being put on the spot/picked on, to answer a question.
3. Being marked too leniently.
5. Vague general comments on assignments.

Students would like:
1. Tutors to come prepared.
2. A well delivered lecture with opportunity for questions.
3. Tutors to be encouraging and supportive.
4. Tutors to have humour and dialogue in marking.
5. Day schools to be well planned and useful to justify effort to attend.

Conclusion
These expectations of students have stimulated much discussion amongst the authors. We feel we have learnt something. We most emphatically do not say that all tutorials should be changed simply to fit in with student wishes. However, we do feel quite strongly that a knowledge of what students expect can provide tutors with the opportunity to think about how their teaching strategies might need adapting to work more effectively, especially if they are markedly different from their students’ expectations. Each set of students is likely to have their own expectations of how they expect to be taught and we feel that sharing the experience of learning increases both tutors’ and students’ awareness of what it is they are trying to achieve. We will continue to question our students and we recommend the exercise to others who are interested in increasing their understanding of the tutor-learner relationship.

Summary
Drawn from most frequently stated comments from pre and post-course depth interviews and supported from pre and post-course questionnaire responses:

Students like:
1. Mixture of teaching methods.
2. Definite aims and targets.
3. Advanced notice/programme.
4. Encouraging feedback on assignments.
5. Exam preparation opportunities.

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of Cecille Wright and Emma Taylor who while they were members of the tutor team, helped in the data collection phase, Helen Lentell (OUI staff tutor) who assisted the project through organising the necessary reprographic support, and most important of all, the D307 students in Region 05 who took the time to share their expectations with us.
APPENDIX A
SUMMARY OF PRE-COURSE INTERVIEW DATA (N=10)
(The comments have been coded and expressed in rank order of frequency)

Issue 1. The student expectation of an OU Tutorial

Clarifying Course Material and TMA preparation (5 occurrences)
Sharing ideas through discussion and group work (3 occurrences)
Exam preparation through discussion of past exam questions (3 occurrences)
Queries answered on forthcoming TMA

Issue 2. The student preferred style of teaching at tutorial

A well delivered lecture with opportunity for student questions (8 occurrences)
Opportunity to be involved in a well focused discussion (5 occurrences)

Issue 3. The student least preferred style of teaching

A badly delivered lecture with no opportunities for questions (4 occurrences)
Discussion with no focus (4 occurrences)
Group work creating a "pooling of ignorance" (3 occurrences)

Issue 4. Student expectations on tutor marking

(Individual comments)

Check students' understanding
Stretch and challenge students' thinking
Assess students' ability to synthesise, express and integrate ideas
Affirm learning and ability to express thoughts in writing
Be encouraging but not lenient
Avoid personalising negative comments

Dislikes
Discussion that has no focus
Group work
Being put on spot/picked on
Being marked too leniently

Likes
Mixture of teaching methods
Definite aims and targets
Advanced notice/programme
Encouraging feedback

Recommendations
Tutor must come prepared
Encourage don't discourage
Humour+dialogue in marking
Exam preparation opportunities

APPENDIX B
ANALYSIS OF RESULTS OF PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE RETURNED BY D307 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS. (N=68)

Table 1. Student Perceptions of Tutor's Role at Tutorial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explains course</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains assignment</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good chair</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Student Preference of Feedback Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style Preferred</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How assignment could be improved</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights student's positive contribution</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains the negative points</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Student Reason Suggested for Phoning Tutor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying units</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying issues in pending assignment</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking for an extension to deadline</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Student Reasons Suggested for Tutor to Phone Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss performance on last assignment</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss general progress</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Student Reasons in Deciding Whether to Attend Tutorial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will it be useful?</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other comments</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How far away it is</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Understanding the Learner


