

CHAPTER SIX

CAPABILITY THROUGH HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Introduction

Different models of higher education

Many different models of higher education have emerged during its long history. The process has been seen, for example, as one of personal development in face-to-face dialogue with an expert mentor, guide and critic; as a system of training for entry into a learned profession culminating in a rite of admission; as the assimilation by the student of the basic content and essential methods of a specialist discipline as they are expounded by expert lecturers; as an individual quest for knowledge, understanding and insight in relation to which institutional provision is an array of resources and the final award a by-product.

Sometimes one model is used to ground the critique of another, sometimes different models are realised side by side in the practice of the same institution, sometimes practice draws on elements typical of different models which may or may not combine coherently.

In the last hundred years there has been a substantial change in the nature and population of Higher Education institutions in Great Britain. Higher Education is no longer the province of a narrow clericaly preparing for specialist professional functions nor is it the finishing school of the upper classes. Models tacitly based upon such functional assumptions have become anachronistic, as have models based mainly on the direct continuation of schooling. Students now arrive in H.E. institutions at a wide variety of ages, from a wide variety of backgrounds and with a wide range of prior experience: they arrive with very different ambitions and aspirations, and increasingly institutions see it as their role to enable the realisation of these.

Developments in humanities and social sciences education

In the humanities and social science disciplines, the widening of intake in age range and background has had a particularly tangible impact. Patterns of provision have been questioned and renegotiated; student aspirations and student opinion have become a significant element of the planning and evaluation agenda. Established assumptions as to the central importance of curricular coherence, integrity and progression have been questioned, and the significance of the student's own activity as a learner had attained greater recognition.

Specific aspects of the history of the humanities and social sciences can sometimes give the impression of cumulative and incremental progress, but this does not reflect the fundamental logic of these disciplines. They are not stable, unitary, clearly differentiated bodies of object matter, method and theory. Their methodologies are open to critique and are in principle controvertible, the nature and limits of their content are arguable and not predetermined, their boundary definitions and interdisciplinary barriers are constructed, are perceived to be so, and are therefore negotiable. The nature of these disciplines is neither precise, coherent, nor stable. They lend themselves to radical reconstruction of theory and practice, and allow for fundamentally different and frequently irreconcilable approaches to co-exist within the same field of activity.

These features can be seen as inherent strengths that have continued to be valued in humanities and social science education, including by employers (1). They also offer a framework into which capability principles and practices can be integrated.

Learning processes and intended outcomes: traditional and evolving

Students seeking a higher education in humanities and social science disciplines are normally required as an essential part of their course to acquire and develop a range of interpretative, analytic and critical skills. It is not sufficient for students to be able to ingest, recall, understand, assimilate and represent accurately bodies of evidence, argument and theory handed out by teachers, though even these activities can contribute something to the development of capability.

The student is expected to go beyond such a limited and passive role and to participate in academic activities typical of the disciplines she studies.

Academics in the humanities and social sciences have become accustomed to seeing themselves and their disciplines as the object matter of their own and each others' critical and analytic study and theoretical interpretation. They are used to challenges to the fundamental values and methods of their disciplines, and such questioning is given prominence even at an undergraduate level. In this way, the disciplines students study are themselves problematised within the curriculum.

Contemporary students of the humanities and social sciences enter into a complex conversation to which they are invited to make their own personal contribution, albeit traditionally in the local and relatively private forum of the seminar, the simulation exercise, the report, the essay and the examination paper. The student is invited by the very nature of the disciplines, by their present state and by the ways they interrelate, to become an active participant, not a passive observer.

Typically, courses in the humanities and social sciences have tended to move away from a normative definition of core content, and have given progressively greater recognition to the role of student choice and the value of student autonomy in the individual's determination of her specific programme of studies. There has been a lesser but significant degree of recognition of student activity in shaping approaches to both methods and criteria of assessment. Interesting developments of this kind are represented amongst the examples discussed in the following sections.

Increasingly recognition is being given to the validity of non-traditional methods of communication and presentation - the video instead of the essay, the slide-tape production instead of the seminar paper, the film, the play, the portfolio, the exhibition, conference-paper, client-orientated professional report, and diary instead of the dissertation. Opening the variety of ways students can present their work and their outcomes, and especially opening the method and medium of presentation (and perhaps the criteria for its assessment) to negotiation directly enhances the level and significance of the students' active participation and promotes the development of skills not necessarily at issue elsewhere in the curriculum.

Students interests and experiences as the starting point for learning

The increasing realisation that the curriculum need not necessarily be determined by, and certainly need not be limited to, a fixed canon of content, progressively opens up the opportunity for increasing exploitation of students' learning and experience prior to entry on a particular course. Recognition of the value of prior learning can vary from making the student's prior experience the object-matter of study within the course, to allowing the negotiation of course elements which build directly on the student's specific prior experience, to the allocation of a formal credit value to the student's prior learning as contributing to the award sought.

In many humanities and social science disciplines it has long been accepted that a student does not require an 'A'-level or equivalent qualification in that specific discipline in order to study it at an undergraduate level. The substantial body of experience of the success - and also of the problems - of older students coming to higher education from a wide variety of backgrounds other than 'A'-level study, has shown the value of reviewing entry qualifications on the one hand, and curricular strategies on the other, to avoid creating unnecessary obstacles to non-standard but intellectually competent students.

The step beyond that to opening the curriculum to the recognition of the value of prior learning helps develop a more positive policy for access that is not limited to allowing new groups into a static system, but allowing the system itself to develop in order to meet the needs, and equally in order to exploit to the full the talents, skills, capacities and resources of all students.

Combining study and employment

Just as curriculum designers can take on the challenge of recognising the value of students' prior experience and of allowing it to contribute directly to the structure and content of the student's course, it is equally possible for a student to combine study and employment in such a way that the student is employed to do something which is itself part of the course. This has long been familiar in one sense in terms of the use of periods of paid placement. New initiatives go significantly further, to allow, for example, the possibility of a part-time student carrying out tasks in a professional capacity which are at the same time projects assessed and credited within the course structure, or to allow a full-time student to take on a formal consultancy role for a client, the negotiation, design and presentation skills being then assessed side by side with the academic value of the product.

Instrumentalism vs liberalism: a meaningful dichotomy?

Student numbers in the humanities and social sciences have never been so high. At the same time, the pressures to absorb wholesale the currently fashionable emphasis on relevance and instrumentalism are growing. While it would be supine for educators to accept uncritically a demand that they provide courses which produce graduates tailored to fit the immediate needs of the employment market, students stand only to gain from a shift in emphasis that foregrounds learner responsibility and accountability as the basis for the development of personal, social and communicative skills and a range of transferable skills which enhance their employability, their capacity for self-employment, their entrepreneurship and their ability to contribute to the development of society, be it as parent, worker or citizen. Ronald Barnett puts the case eloquently:

Insisting on the imaginative, creative and critical components of a genuinely open learning experience will go much of the way to enabling students to fulfil their potential throughout the rest of their lives. This means, equally, that the appropriate design of the curriculum cannot be simply read off the world as it is now and in particular off the economy and its associated institutions. (2)

Indeed, one might well question the soundness of a system which defines its notion of education so narrowly that it sees no need for remedial intervention when faced by students who show high academic competence, write intelligent, critical, original work, but remain completely at a loss when faced with the need to communicate ideas verbally, to share in group activities, to define their own educational objectives, to present and argue a case or to show evidence of the array of skills needed if they are to make their way in the world at large.

An enhanced respect for student autonomy should not entail an abdication from the need to intervene critically to promote a student's self-development as an effective communicator, a successful teamworker, a responsible planner. The conversation that grounds the relationships that are central to study in this field must begin with a respect for students' needs and aspirations. It also provides the means whereby all parties to the dialogue, students and tutors alike, can be challenged and changed.

The fundamental objectives of the Capability initiative are to promote student autonomy and responsibility in the learning process, to enhance active learning, co-operative interaction and effective communication. Taking on board the challenges of the Capability project should not, however, lead to a simplistic identification of instrumental value with process and intrinsic value with content, still less to the acceptance of process as transferable and content as not. Knowledge can be transferable as well as skills.

Study in the humanities and social sciences does not simply enable the development of skills and knowledge. Students' perceptions, feelings, emotions, sensibilities, attitudes, value assumptions and value commitments are also liable to development and change, though this rarely appears as a foregrounded issue in non-professional areas of study. The twinned emphasis on responsibility and accountability enables such outcomes, and the processes whereby they might be developed to be made more explicit.

Reports from the field

The focus on capability as a theme in curricular thinking offers humanities and social science academics a creative opportunity to throw into sharper relief issues which relate quite directly to the fundamental values of their own disciplines and their lived practice, but which are often left in the realm of the implicit and the informal.

Enhancing the responsibility students have for their own learning and of their autonomy as learners helps promote the students' ownership of their programmes of study, it increases the transparency of assessment and enables the reflective and self-analytical appropriation of the skills, knowledge and capacities students acquire during their courses of study so that they can more effectively appraise themselves in relation to their ambitions and aspirations.

The quality of students' learning experience is enhanced when the system as a whole is maximally responsive to students' perceptions of their own educational needs and is felt to enable and foster the development and extension of the students' capacities to act effectively in response to a wide variety of challenges: intellectual, social, cultural, economic and interpersonal.

Theme One: Reviewing and Building on Experience

Students are increasingly mobile. As structures change to promote wider access, potential and existing students will have greater freedom to make use of Higher Education learning opportunities in different ways, and for different purposes. Opening up higher education to more and different students in itself makes any notion of a homogenous student population a thing of the past. Mature students study in humanities and social sciences more than any other

field. The positive value humanities and social sciences teachers place on breadth of background and prior experience adds to the attractiveness of these areas to mature students.

Humanities and Social Science disciplines have long accepted students who have neither relevant experience nor A level preparation in either a specific or related subject. Well before the days of CATS and APEL, many humanities and social sciences departments made arrangements to accept students through non-traditional routes. Such developments are now made a positive virtue, in the competition for students. As a more diverse range of students engages in humanities and social sciences study, the challenge of their varying aspirations, backgrounds, and learning interests becomes sharper.

In some cases, non-vocational subjects in the humanities have been seen to represent a particular challenge to the principles of educating for capability, although it has long been recognised that employers seeking capable people seek humanities graduates as much as they seek technological specialists. Increasingly, however, academics in the humanities are questioning the extent to which traditional methods of teaching actually militate against the development of the qualities which they aspire to promote. How can autonomy and independence be fostered by a lecturer holding forth while students passively receive instruction? The arguments for a capability approach are coming to be seen to have an educational validity, that has nothing to do with a narrow interpretation of relevance or vocationalism. At the same time, employers are beginning to appreciate the value of qualities fostered through styles of humanities teaching that lay special emphasis on student activity and responsibility.

Courses already exist which illustrate ways in which students' interests and experience, their experiential bodies of knowledge and informally constructed theories, can be respected from the point of entry.

It is often said that traditional A level entry students are the most difficult to persuade to take more responsibility for their own learning. When students on the BA (Hons) in European Studies/Italian at the *University of Kent* {76} expressed dissatisfaction with the range of material concerning Italian culture and civilization that they have been able to cover during their 'A'-level courses, their dissatisfaction provided the basis for introducing a capability approach. Class meetings were devoted to discussing which aspects of Italian culture and civilisation would interest students and why. Groups were made responsible and accountable for searching out sources and relevant information, and presenting the outcomes of their enquiry to class members. This work represented about one quarter of the course programme. Monitoring was done by report and essay writing, seminar work and oral discussion. Some limited experiment in self-evaluation was also attempted:

Students took the challenge seriously. Some went out looking for sources and bibliography. Others concentrated on producing a brief outline of what they would have liked to study individually. Tasks were then prepared for the whole term, with basic bibliographical references and an emphasis on team work. For example, two or three students were to work on particular aspect of the programme. {74}

The Certificate in Community Studies at *Leeds Polytechnic* {91} is a part time modular course for adults with experience of paid or unpaid work in the community. The course is based on a minimum of formal lecturing and a maximum of student activity through pair and group work. Personal study materials and focussed assignments support student directed learning. Students can also make up their programme from a range of interdisciplinary modules within the social sciences and humanities leading to a Diploma or BA (Hons) in Social and Community Studies. Assessment is based on an assignment structured around a learning contract that focuses on a live issue and is to be carried out wherever possible in conjunction with relevant organisations outside the Polytechnic. The topics, objectives and criteria for evaluation of the contract are negotiated between students and tutor.

At *Teesside Polytechnic* ({216}) students on a BTEC HND/C in Public Administration work in syndicated groups to create the content of their syllabus. They do this through researching, discussing and writing and making presentations on how Social Services meet the needs of specified client groups.

Syndicate group members are allocated, and over the year, rotate, the following roles:

- Team leader and Report Editor;
- Oral presenter;
- Researcher;
- Critical researcher (foreseeing criticisms and questions likely to arise in discussion)

Between 36 and 60 students work in 9 teams to cover 5 Social Services and four client groups. Students in each syndicate group make a learning contract with each other, and produce a "team diary" as an appendix to their report.

From *Quality in Learning*, edited by John Stephenson and Susan Weil, published by Kogan Page, London in 1992.

Download the *Quality in Learning* Introduction file from the ICLML catalogue for details of other chapters in this book (www.iclml.com)

They are actively encouraged to make use of their peers and of extra-institutional resources. Time is built into the timetable and rooms made available for groups to meet with or without a tutor (their choice.) Every item of work produced is included for assessment purposes. By the end of the module, each team is in possession of a library of contemporary social policies that the course as a whole has created.

The sophisticated organisation of student interaction ensures each group interacts with every other, that student reports are duplicated and circulated, that each group report is appraised, assessed, augmented, so that an exchange of student created information takes place.'

A groupwork diary system was also introduced, to help students, make learning contracts with each other and plan group activity. As a further aid to this group, each group had a staffed tutorial about a month prior to the presentation for guidance both on source of information and how to approach the task.'

Critical to this approach are firstly the guidance given to the student with regard to the standards expected, and secondly, the system of feedback which disseminates information both about content and levels of skill performance - this is an integral part of the student learning process as the feedback forms part of each report exchanged between student groups.

The RSA document, *More means different*' argued that different approaches to quality and course design are essential in a move from an elite to a mass system. It can also be argued that different means more. A capability approach can in fact attract students who would otherwise be reluctant to pursue an academic qualification for its own sake. In striving to meet the diversity of students' needs, new interpretations of quality evolve.

Since 1990, students on a BA (Hons) in Contemporary Studies at *Humberside Polytechnic {72}* have been prepared from the outset to engage in the research activities of outside agencies. Year 1 students participate in a workshop course, which equips them with necessary skills, including those of communication, self-presentation and self-awareness. They then participate - on a paid basis - in projects negotiated by the College Staff, the experience and reports from which are used for Integrated assignments on the workshop course.

During the second year, students themselves negotiate links with outside agencies, and engage in research projects as part of their work placement during the summer term.

Ten students, for example, were employed to carry out a tenant satisfaction survey for a local Housing Association. Eight of them organised and completed a sample survey of face-to face interviews and the other two carried out an in-depth case study of two hostels, one for young, single people and the other for those with learning difficulties. The first year students involved were all studying a Housing Studies course on the Contemporary Studies degree. This research therefore gave them an insight into how a housing association operates and the type of tenants involved. They were able to use their skills to help the association monitor and evaluate the service it provides. The report was assessed for information technology skills and for a critical evaluation of the methodology employed. The assignment also provided the opportunity for the student to reflect on his or her contribution to the project.

This particular approach, which allows for the involvement of students in the research process for outside agencies, can work well on a consultancy basis, but this course team has encountered difficulties in applying these ideas in shorter work placement experience for a larger number of students. It is often reported that considerable time and effort is required to convince employers that they, as well as the student, will benefit from such experience:

In the Department of Nursing, Health and Community Studies at *Bournemouth Polytechnic {9}* students on the foundation programme of a BSc (Hons) in Clinical Nursing use problem based learning to reflect on their clinical practice experience. In this way, its validity as an integral part of their overall learning is emphasised. In groups, they research problems which have come to their attention in the ward setting. Group members decide their own objectives for the day, and agree whether and how to make use of staff resources. The students have a log book that provides starting points for learning - such as topics for group inquiry, - but its main purpose is for the students to complete a record of their own observations and investigations.

The introduction of this innovation at first seemed to prompt student resistance. This is a common theme in lecturers' accounts of beginning to pass over more responsibility to students. This reaction can undermine the confidence of lecturers who can already feel that they are swimming against the mainstream. Student resistance was not, however, what it initially seemed.

An evaluative exercise with the students at the end of the first term after this innovation began (September, 1990) showed that they were not comfortable with the way it was working. However, the problems identified were connected with the way the student were grouped and the subjects they investigated rather than a problem of working independently of the lecturer. This will be tackled by looking more carefully at how students are introduced to this way of working.{9}

This example underlines the importance of due care and attention being paid to preparing students for a different approach to learning. The uncertainties and lack of confidence that can effect even experienced adults when charged with taking responsibility for their own learning cannot be underestimated.

Allowing students' own interests and their prior experience to be a major element curriculum construction creates a new kind of partnership between students and lecturers. If the context of that partnership is a co-operative, team-based approach to knowledge acquisition and critical analysis which draws on a variety of methods of negotiating the curriculum, it becomes possible for fundamental questions of student responsibility and accountability to be addressed in new ways, and for a shared address to the character of students' educational experience and of the responsiveness and rigour which are concrete elements in the quality of that experience, elements constituted by the specific roles students play, the nature of the tasks they undertake, the character of the negotiations in which their aims become actualised and tasks determined, the nature of the products they present for criticism and assessment and the ways in which that assessment takes place.

Theme Two: Planning, Negotiation and Approval

While it is rare to find whole courses or whole years of courses based entirely on learning contracts, contract elements of various degrees of formality are common, though not always identified as such. A direct focus on the negotiation of learning contracts foregrounds the role of student as active autonomous learners, defining their learning goals in a context that demands responsibility and accountability.

A modular structure may give students more responsibility for choosing their own path through a programme of set offerings. In itself, however, it does not guarantee that students will have opportunities for being responsible and accountable for their learning within and across modules. The example that follows illustrates how a modular approach can be used to address that very issue.

At *Wolverhampton Polytechnic {246}*, optional modules are offered under the Enterprise in Humanities programme to students on the BA/BSc (Hons) Modular Degree and Diploma Scheme. Students are offered a framework within which to identify the skills and abilities they wish or need to develop in relation to future employment while studying the humanities. Examples include:

- Being organised
- Using time effectively
- Communicating effectively in different situations
- Planning and thinking ahead
- Working with others to achieve a goal
- Acting with self-confidence
- Handling conflict and differences of opinion

Having assessed their learning needs, students are accountable for devising and implementing a structured programme, based on group projects, to deliver agreed learning outcomes. Five modules are offered at levels 1, 2, and 3. Various approaches are used to equip students for self and peer directed learning. The negotiation and validation of learning agreements take different forms during this three year optional strand of enterprise modules, enabling students to become progressively more responsible and accountable over the course of their degree.

Modularity enables students to determine their own meaning for academic coherence; Capability modules can make that coherence personally meaningful. Opportunities for student responsibility and accountability provide the 'grouting' that enables students to relate their learning to their own development, and the world within which they live and work.

In the case of Wolverhampton, student are not thrown in at the deep end, but rather are progressively prepared to set goals and to identify criteria against which they can review progress and performance:

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In year 1, initial preparation for this way of working is supported by a student/staff manual. This introduces each topic, suggests further reading, and gives a selection of structured exercises. The manual includes a list and description of 38 key competences to guide students in their skills development. In future, it is intended to provide this module through a resource based learning approach, derived from the manual. {246}

Students are also helped to become familiar and confident with the negotiation and assessment of learning agreements through a variety of exercises and tasks. All tasks and subsequent group projects are assessed 50% for process, 50% for product/outcome.

Extensive consultation with local school and college teachers, access course tutors, HMI and employers was undertaken during the development of this programme. But although positive support was received from HMI and in the early stages employers,

It has been difficult to maintain employer involvement to the extent the team anticipated and this confirms the general picture reported by higher education in relation to employer involvement in teaching and learning. {246}

As more institutions draw heavily on employer and community resources, interest in familiar programmes can flag in favour of new ones. Employers need to recognise the impact that their withdrawal of interest can have upon such developments, including staff and student morale. Moreover, their withdrawal reduces the options for negotiation that the student may identify as important to their own development and career aspirations.

The principles and practices of enterprise learning are currently diffusing to other subject areas within the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, as staff and students recognise the increased emphasis given to personal and interpersonal competencies and skills in the workplace. Students of Geography, History and Media/Communications, for example, now recognise the prominence given to such competencies and skills in recent and planned curriculum development initiatives.

At ***Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education*** {32} in the Division of Applied Social Studies, 120 full time, 15 part time students (on average) undertake 60% of their final year through independent study. They are prepared for this during their first and 2nd years of their degree, when such study represents 27% of these years' work. This tends to take the form of methods, skills and project work that can support students' different pathways through the degree. During the final year, with only general supervision, students undertake a fully negotiated programme. They plan and implement their studies, including the nomination of the method of assessment. In addition, students may choose from a range of modular units to support their independent study programme.

Mature students, especially those who were failed by the education system the first time around, can be positively attracted by programmes that give priority to their needs and concerns. This course was developed as part of the College's response to changing social and education needs, including employment. In particular, it was designed to be of special benefit to women, students from social groups who have not previously benefited from higher education, and other categories of mature students without formal entry qualifications. A major attraction of the programme is its scope for integrating work experience, within the context of studying social sciences. This provides the opportunity for students to relate theory to practice. A more recent innovative development is the registration of part-time students' own work-based projects for the award of the degree:

Since September, 1989, independent study has been offered as a third year option for ***Manchester Polytechnic***{118} students taking history as part of the BA (Hons) Humanities/Social Studies degree and the BA (Hons) Historical Studies degree. Students spend the equivalent of 3 hours class contact time (approximately 1/2 day per week) for 22 weeks in the autumn and spring terms.

Contracts are drawn up between client, student and tutor. These identify the scope of the projects, the manner of assessment, and the ways in which the project seeks to meet the needs of all three parties. Students are accountable for producing interim progress reports, written in a business style. (mid course) as well as a final report and/or product (end of course)

Examples of work undertaken thus far include

A disk and catalogue history of Cheadle for the Stockport libraries and the organisation of a library display of selected materials, now published by the library and available for any interested user.

Archive material for Stott Benham Ltd., a firm of catering equipment manufacturers was organised and appropriate publicity material was developed. This was reported in the company's journal.

Manchester Region History Review: A student undertook a comparative study of the financial management strategies used by local history journals

Manchester Chamber of Commerce: A report on all educational initiatives undertaken by the Chamber since 1885 was prepared, as was an article that summarised the conclusions of the project (published in the Chambers monthly journal)

Salford Museum: Materials appropriate to the development of a local heritage industry and held at various locations throughout Salford were catalogued and summarised in a report.

Manchester Airport: an inquiry into the development of the airport, based on materials held by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce {118}

The decision to revise the history degree programme was stimulated on the one hand by general debates about the economic relevance that became heated during the late 1980s, early 1990s:

They became challenged to introduce innovations that would improve the quality of provision without undermining the merits of more conventional approaches to history study. More attention began to be paid to how what was claimed in the course objectives, such as with regard to the development of skills, was actually achieved through the teaching and learning strategies adopted. It was agreed that students ought to have more control over their own education.{118}

Some subjects can easily boast of an emphasis on work placements and practical skills. This was not the case in history. Non-utilitarian and non-vocational values were central to its academic identity. At the same time, the study of history and of the humanities and social studies generally was seen to incorporate opportunities to develop a wide range of historical skills. These involved technical skills as well as those of analysis, evaluation and communication. But there were few chances for students to apply these in historical work outside academic institutions.

A wide range of strategies were used to woo appropriate employers to involve themselves with this initiative. These included direct approaches as well as feature articles and advertisements in local newspapers and journals, including those produced by local Chambers of Commerce. Students themselves were also encouraged to take the initiative in identifying and persuading employers.

Students and employers were helped to understand clearly the many possibilities for historical work in the community. Long term projects were also offered, so that the work of one student could be continued in subsequent years: for example, a series of Library handbooks and displays.

Emphasising the role of negotiation in the curriculum foregrounds issues of student responsibility and accountability, crucial dimensions of the modes of autonomy demanded of a capable and reliable person working co-operatively with others. The emphasis on client-orientated activities helps establish and develop partnership between the Universities and a wide variety of commercial, industrial, cultural and charitable institutions in their region; such connections, apart from their obvious use in extending the reputation of the institution and its courses, and a possible spin-off use in opening employment possibilities for students, can have a particular use in renegotiating the ways in which the external clients perceive and value of humanities and social science disciplines and their products. Promotion of capability is also the promotion of quality, quality experienced as enhanced capacity for decision-making, autonomous action and responsible execution of tasks.

Theme Three: Active and Interactive Learning

Traditional approaches to teaching - lectures, seminars and tutorials - have a long and respected history, but they can sit uneasily with notions of active and interactive learning that emphasise the need for students to grapple with academic material on their own terms, and in ways that develop their capability. Courses have often operated as a collection of individuals working separately. This is at odds with the understanding of societal and cultural processes that is the focus of study in this field. More simply, it is not typical of life or work.

Such tensions have come to be experienced with greater force in recent years within humanities and social sciences higher education. This is not only because of the great influx of mature students coming from a wide diversity of backgrounds, but also as a consequence of issues that are at the forefront of contemporary debates in this field. The learner as responder to questions and material framed by the teacher becomes less acceptable as greater emphasis is placed on learner responsibility and accountability. New developments emphasise students' active construction of meaning, individually and in groups, both in relation to academic material and in relation to their own concerns, interests and aspirations.

Active and interactive learning has a place in long standing subject traditions as well as in emerging ones. Starting steps can be small. For some, the concern is to find alternatives to lectures and seminars, within traditional course structures, or approaches that complement and extend such offerings. Case studies, simulations, experiential exercises help students engage more actively with academic material and at deeper and more meaningful levels. Others are experimenting with students taking more responsibility for the planning, contents and processes of lectures and seminars.

The report, the article, the presentation, the portfolio, the video/tape/film/radio programme, the exhibition frequently replace or supplement the more familiar essay, seminar paper and dissertation. Emphasis on active learning suggests a new emphasis on the process of production and on the value of the product. Students' critical appreciation what they have produced is enabled when the product has a real audience or client. Submitting an essay to be marked is a different experience from making a presentation to a client or producing a video for practical use.

The learning possibilities of field placements, long a hallmark of study in social or community work, are being mined more effectively, as more explicit attention is being paid to active and interactive learning processes and programme outcomes. Projects too, more likely to be found in vocational subjects in recent years, are also making their own distinctive mark on students learning experiences in the humanities and social sciences. These can be subject based, but more and more are employer or community based, as students seek to relate their studies to their own questions and purposes.

In the school of English at *Birmingham Polytechnic* a BA Honours modular degree in English {5}, with 208 full time and 60 part time students has first semester, modules which emphasise 'doing' rather than 'absorbing'. An emphasis on computer aided text creation not only builds word processing skills, but also emphasises that students are:

active producers of texts rather than merely readers and the traditional reverent distance in English studies between producers and consumers of literature is broken down. {5}

Workshops and the production of portfolios are also a central part of the first year to establish from the outset the principles of group-managed and independently organised study.

Example : The 'Case study of a contemporary author' module (year 1) disabuses students of the notion that there is a body of knowledge to be 'covered' or a canon of great authors to be taught. Set texts are resources to be drawn on and the authority that is traditionally attributed to them is dislodged through an 'issues-directed' approach to teaching and learning. The only teacher-centred session is a single lecture at the end of the course."

Example : In 'European poetry in translation', the module tutor acts as editor of an anthology produced by students, whose contributions form their assessment, the course being represented by the investigation which led up to the poetry selection or the critical summary. {5}

To serve the needs of part-time students, the course team has developed distance learning packages, telephone consultation sessions and detailed feedback sheets to accompany coursework. Increases in full-time student numbers is seen by this course team as a major influence on the,

demise of the small group tutorial, much beloved by English courses and students but perhaps fostering an unhealthy dependence on the tutor. Full time students no longer have weekly sessions with personal tutors. Instead, they are encouraged to use staff as resources to draw on to help them organise their studies, facilitate their learning and plan their careers. Year tutors help them draw up self-profiles which assess their skills needs and monitor their progress towards fulfilling them at different stages of the course. Module tutors make themselves available for consultation sessions where they negotiate the exact form the students assessment will take in that area. {5}

Responding to these pressures with more emphasis on student centred learning has generated unexpected spin offs. For example, writers in residence have always been a key resource. Their role as facilitators and resource people is being opened up in new ways:

Writers in residence are facilitators, editing student anthologies, producing their plays as well as advising and encouraging on an individual basis. The resource model, though, has extended far into the classroom teaching on the course itself. Much 'class contact' time is now in the form of 'workshops', classes whose name and function preceded such 'hands on courses' as 'computer aided text creation' which would seem more obviously to deserve the title. {5}

At *Thames Polytechnic {218}* Channel Four' is the name given to a new dimension on the BA Humanities programme. 2nd year students have the opportunity to develop analytical skills in their core studies with techniques and knowledge drawn either from subjects outside the Humanities or by extending existing areas of interest into new fields. They select two short courses which includes work from across a range of areas including: information technology, social/political survey work, contemporary issues in science and society, cultural production. Recent offerings include:

Video production
Alternative energy resources
Drama in performance
Writing fiction
Before the courts
Climactic change
Colour, nature and culture
Computing in history
Forensic Science - fact and fiction
Miracle Workers? (applied chemistry)
The concerto
Noise pollution
Politics of equal opportunities
Project management and information technology
Science and sociability
Computer based simulation and modelling {218}

In the third year, students undertake a collective or individual project, the outcomes of which can be presented in a wide range of forms. The outcome can vary from the traditional long essay to more innovatory forms of work. Creativity is positively valued and the following alternative forms of production are encouraged:

Taped interviews
Photographic essays
short fictions
video narratives
drama productions
oral histories
survey reports
bibliographies
essays
collective exhibitions
desk top publication{218}

Working on such projects gives students a more active role in the design of their course. The emphasis on creative production can also enhance students' sense of their responsibility for shaping their education to some of their own intellectual interests and ambitions. A programme such as Channel Four not only offers experience in a range of skills, but also provides students with opportunities to traverse and integrate disciplines. Such emphases, including the integration of science, computing and interactive technologies can heighten confidence in the value of a degree in Humanities and its capacity to develop simultaneously a broad yet critical outlook, academic expertise, and student capability.

The shift of focus in curriculum thinking from syllabus content and 'delivery' to student activity and interactivity can enable a creative address to the problem of deriving educational strategies which aim at high educational quality and economy in the use of staff resources. However, an emphasis on students as active learners co-operating in a shared educational project presents a serious challenge to the ways in which many lecturers construct their understanding of their roles as teachers. Frequently, academics think the quality of courses in terms of the suitability of syllabus content and of the rigour and originality of their own address to it: it can be an embarrassment to find oneself redefined as a facilitating resource. It is important that a shift of emphasis to student activity does not lead academics to retire to a posture of benign passivity.

Theme Four: Assessment

Assessment plays a crucial role on the construction of students' educational experience. It can provide helpful guidance and feedback to students, and help them learn from their experience as they move through a programme. Increasing attention is being paid in the Humanities and Social Sciences to the developmental potential of assessment and to assessment strategies that are congruent with student centred and capability approaches to teaching and learning, strategies, for example, that in themselves make students more active, and interactive, and stimulate creative and critical thinking and responsible creativity in production.

Assessment of the Independent Study Project in History at *Manchester Polytechnic* (Theme 3) {118} is negotiated between client, tutor and student.

A 1000 word interim progress report and the final product carry the weight of marks. The ability of the student to formulate, execute and present the conclusions of a piece of independent work is thus the central skill to be tested, but it is evaluated in the context of the more general skills [analytical, communication, technical, etc) The clients play an integral role in the assessment of their particular students, and are assisted with written and verbal guidance. The students for their part negotiate the weighting and distribution of marks across the various elements that make up their projects and are encouraged to discuss the evaluations of their work at each stage of the assessment. {118}

Monitoring of progress is also achieved through the distribution of questionnaires to clients and students.

Examples of products that have served as the basis for assessment include:

market surveys and reports; computer software; historical information packs; catalogues of historical records and archives, historical publicity material for companies, historical research for clients, the organisation of museum and library displays, articles for company journals or newsletters, historical material on video or cassette, and historical guides. {118}

At *Wolverhampton Polytechnic* (see Theme 2), on the BA in Cultural Studies Enterprise Modules {246}, an assessment contract is negotiated. Students are responsible for participating in the negotiation of the following:

- * *statement of competencies to be assessed*
- * *weightings between competences*
- * *a statement of evidence to be presented to demonstrate competences*
- * *allocation of grades between groups and individuals {246}*

Throughout the five modules, students are required to submit one analysis of personal development at the end of each semester and complete skills profiles which incorporate self assessment, peer and staff assessment. The profiles are authenticated and included in the students final portfolios.

Self, peer and tutor assessment are combined at all stages to provide evaluation of both process and product: how the students work together on the task, and what they produce as a result.

The Enterprise modules are counted towards the award of the BA Honours in the same way as other modules, make up a fifth of an undergraduate programme and are detailed on the student transcript.

The introduction of such developments are not without their challenges:

"We are facing other problems which are as yet unresolved: the inadequacies of a summative grading system to reflect the range of learning experiences; problems of assessing and grading group work and individual contributions; and the difficulties students experience in operating peer assessment. {246}"

Final assessment is negotiated and based on presentations of portfolios containing the student's CV, the personal development statement, a critical account of their work shadowing experience, and their interview preparation dossier.

In the School of Languages and European Studies at *Wolverhampton Polytechnic {249}* developments in assessment are rooted in the communicative 'revolution' in language teaching and learning that, over the past 5 or 6 years, has taken place in schools and in higher education.

A communicative language approach provides students with opportunities to be responsible and accountable for the following:

- a) extracting information from a range of sources and re-presenting it cogently, for specific audiences and specific purposes, in speech and in writing;***
- b) contributing pertinently to group meetings and helping towards their successful outcome;***
- c) working effectively as a member of a team;***
- d) and doing all the above in a foreign language. {249}***

Assessment becomes a key element in the acquisition of communicative skills:

- a) Assessment is exclusively class-based for oral work;***
- b) Written work is assessed within the routine pattern of course work, not by means of formal examination;***
- c) the assessment criteria must be available to students and gradings discussed with them in terms of these criteria. {249}***

Since the communicative syllabus relies to a large extent on effective group work, student performance is frequently judged in terms of the group as a whole, not in isolation. In this specific situation, they are also accountable for the work of the group to which they belong. This is either direct, such as for a task by a given individual by a given date, or more indirect, such as working with others over a period of time to arrive at a consensus on some issue.

The use of performance criteria places traditional preoccupations with formal language accuracy in a new light. Insofar as structural variety and lexical range increase the communicative impact of the student's performance then they are rewarded. However, these qualities in themselves are of secondary importance within the performance as a whole. In this particular example, arguments used to stimulate changes in approaches to teaching and learning were rooted in changes in the subject itself. The philosophy of communicative competence is used to underpin a shift in the traditional role of tutors, and changes in assessment, were summarised as follows:

- a) The foreign language (FL) is seen primarily as a means of communication and only secondarily, although still importantly, as an object of study. In practical terms, this means that the student uses the FL in order to communicate meanings, to express his/her thoughts and feelings, and to establish and maintain co-operative relations with fellow students.***
- b) Communication must always serve a purpose within the classroom. The listener(s) must need to know what the speaker is attempting to communicate and must be able to negotiate the meaning of the speaker's utterances wherever necessary. This process creates an awareness both of the limits of communication and the need for cooperation in the elaboration of meaning***
- c) Communication is not exclusively a linguistic issue. Grammatical and lexical competence are not in themselves enough, so students must learn the importance of basic interpersonal skills and become conscious of the pragmatic dimension of spoken interaction. "Communicative competence" is the product of a number of component competences, for example: structural, socio-linguistic and strategic.***

d) Although what has been said above relates primarily to the spoken language, a communicative syllabus has to devote equal time and attention to promoting successful writing in the FL. Rather than writing simply to display a degree of mastery over the grammar and lexis of the FL, the student learns to write for, and to a purpose, in order to reach a particular audience within a particular context. {249}

At the *Polytechnic of North London {143}*, Oral Assessment is growing in importance on the Film Studies component of the BA (Hons) Humanities degree. This involves all students, and all units except the Introduction to Film Studies and Project, in small group discussion. Each seminar group will have around 20 students who will be divided into groups of 4-5. Assessment relates to work both in the small groups and the large group. Assessment is by tutors:

- a) by observation of students in groups;
- b) using the evidence of students' written summary at the end of the unit on what they have learned from - and contributed to - the group work.

This has the following aims:

- a) to emphasise the importance of dialogue as a means of learning the language of the subject, and to indicate to students that staff take this aspect of the work seriously, as an end in itself;***
- b) to nurture the ability to participate in groups that have responsibility for their own learning and organisation, and for organising the activities of the whole group;***
- c) to develop students' awareness of the processes involved in participating in a group and in learning through discussion. {143}***

This mode of assessment currently constitutes 10% of the assessment in all units, except the foundation course. Formalising this has made it count for students.

The process of change

The above illustrates how once tutors begin to experiment with different approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, they can gradually become open to and excited by new possibilities which, at the beginning, they would not have contemplated:

"The decision to introduce this work came from the film staff group (4 members) itself. It followed the decision of the group to abandon examinations in favour of course work. There was a concern to acknowledge the existing practice, to develop it and to indicate its value to students and other staff. Discussions on this led to the possibility of assessing oral work and several discussions led to the drawing up of criteria for assessment (documented to both staff and students).{143}

Similarly, educational values and purposes provided the critical under-pinning to staff involvement in this initiative:

Assessment of group work was introduced to acknowledge the existing practice of the department; to develop it; to indicate its value to students and other staff; to acknowledge aims of education for capability and to allow for a range of abilities in students. {143}

Change also resulted from new pressures within and outside the institution:

We were concerned to respond to the general move away from exclusive use of written work as a way of testing students. This development was also in line with Equal Opportunities policies and approaches developing within the institution. {143}

Opposition was encountered and had to be met with patience and clarity about the educational value of this approach:

This came from some students and there was peer opposition (largely from other disciplines) or at least scepticism and a concern about resource implications. This was largely overcome by arguing the

educational benefits of the activity and assessment in formal committees and consultative meetings. Small group work means students are more active and that they take more responsibility for their own learning. They have an opportunity to practise using the discourse of the subject and of tackling and internalising the discipline's concepts and approaches. This approach also provides the opportunity to learn the cognitive and interpersonal skills involved in groupwork. {143}

Radical approaches to assessment can, of course, be felt to undermine the quality of awards. However, assessment strategies that draw students into dialogue and negotiation draw on values deeply embedded in humanities and social science disciplines, just as do curriculum structures which draw on students' interests and experience and promote student activity and inter-activity. The shift from student productivity as focussed on the execution of standard exercises which are submitted for marking to the creation of products with a real or potential audience, even directed to external clients, re-situates the object presented for assessment, and redefines the range of parties with a legitimate voice in the assessment procedure.

Concluding remarks

Students studying humanities and social science disciplines at university level are not expected merely to learn about those disciplines, they are expected to attain a certain competence as practitioners. While there are schools and traditions within disciplines with their own relatively standardised methods and their local dialects, it is nonetheless expected that humanities and social science academics maintain a critical and self-critical attitude to their work and develop a degree of intellectual autonomy in their practice. A capability orientation brings to the fore issues of competence, autonomy and responsibility that reflect the normal self-understanding of practitioners within humanities and social science traditions. The direct address to these issues should enhance the confidence of students and their ability to see themselves as active practitioners involved in their own process of development and supported by more expert practitioners which in turn should underpin the quality of their educational experience.

Notes

1 See for example: Council for Industry and Higher Education (1990) Towards a Partnership: The Humanities for the Working World. London: CIHE; also CNA A (1990) Humanities and Employment: The CNA A initiative. Humanities and Employment Briefing 1. London: CNA A.

2 For an elaboration of this argument, see also Barnett, Ronald. (1989) Responsiveness and Fulfilment: the value of higher education in the modern world Abingdon, Oxon: The Higher Education Foundation