

EFYE 2016: Workshop Summary

09:00-10:00 Tuesday 5 April

Are institutional resources and academics' approaches to teaching conducive to students' independent, self-regulated learning?

Craig Bartle (Coventry University)

Summary of main points raised during the workshop	<i>page 2</i>
Workshop slides	<i>page 4</i>
Brief summary of my PhD and some preliminary findings	<i>page 8</i>

Many thanks to everyone who participated in my workshop. If anyone has further questions, or would be interested in discussing any issues raised, or collaborating in any way, please get in touch.

I would be particularly interested in hearing from anyone who has examples of effective ways of promoting and helping students to become effective independent learners within HE institutions and/or experience of using grounded theory within an educational setting.

Contact:

Email: craig.bartle@coventry.ac.uk

Tel: 0247 765 9875

Mob: 07980 267 187

The main points made by participants following the workshop discussions are detailed below:

Task 1: Discuss how on-line spaces can be used to help and guide student learning. List any features/content you would include.

- Make sure all virtual learning environments (VLEs) are well designed with clearly signposted pathways to appropriate learning resources.
- Make course aims and the levels of achievement expected clear to students throughout their studies.
- Student led Facebook groups would allow students to discuss any problems or issues to do with their coursework. Screenshots from Moodle/Blackboard could also be posted on Facebook so students do not always have to access Moodle/Blackboard for information.
- Provide links to youtube and other websites with tips on being a successful student.
- Encourage students to collaborate by editing and working on the same on-line documents (e.g. through Office 365).
- Encourage self-assessment through Blackboard/Moodle. Students can get tips through subsequent feedback.
- Staff could provide links to appropriate tasks/resources to improve students' skill levels based on feedback about students' academic writing, grammar and spelling etc.
- Provide a clear and brief description about any topics, help or guidance offered on-line so students can quickly see if they need to engage with the materials/resources. This will help students avoid duplicating work they already understand while providing additional information or guidance for those who may need it.
- Create an electronic reference database for each student to document all the resources they have consulted to help them develop as learners.
- Make sure ALL staff, not just academic staff/tutors, have access to any VLEs.
- Ensure that *appropriate* study skills are embedded into courses/modules *at appropriate times*. First year students may not need the same level of study skills as students in later years.

Some issues for consideration:

- Self determination theory suggests that three pre-conditions need to be met to keep students motivated to learn (autonomy, confidence, and relatedness). A greater use of on-line and remote learning provides a challenge for developing students' relationships with their tutors. Careful consideration needs to be given to think about how this can be encouraged in such situations.
- A heavy reliance on VLEs requires a robust network and reliable facilities. It is important to think about how and why it will be used and who is responsible for constructing and maintaining such facilities. If they are not reliable there will be a reluctance from both staff and students to engage with them.
- Not all staff and students will have the skillsets necessary to fully engage with VLEs. Training needs should be considered.
- Resource development and training have financial implications.

Task 2 Feedback: Discuss how you/your institutions encourage independent learning. List examples that your group consider to be particularly effective.

- There needs to be a clearly defined definition of independent learning.
- Address students' and tutors' expectations. There is often an expectation that students arrive at university with the ability to work autonomously, but this is often not the case.



Approaches by participants to address this problem varied, from explaining to students that they will be required to work on their own from their first day at university, with help when requested, through to a gradual and integrated support and guidance as students progress through their course ("Taking the spoon out gradually").

- Make the *reasons* for engaging in independent study very clear. As well as knowing *how* to study independently, students also need to know *why* it is important to study independently.
- For many courses there is an expectation that students will spend more time engaged in independent studying than attending classes, yet there is a tendency for staff to focus the majority of their attention on what goes on during contact time, and much less on what staff expect students to be doing when studying independently.
- Feedback should include guidance about students' approaches to learning and how this can be improved.
- Peer support and feedback can be very useful and well received.
- Centrally accessible resource with top tips for becoming an effective independent learner to help students gain confidence.
- Work placements can be a useful way of encouraging independent learning.
- Make on-campus facilities and physical learning spaces as appealing as possible to encourage students to come into university to work away from the classroom.
- Conduct electronic live polls in class to gauge how well *all* students have been gathering information and improving their understanding of subjects between classes. Tutors could then ask certain students to expand on their answers during the classes, which could lead to discussions about studying processes.

Issue for consideration:

- We need to think about how we can best support staff and tutors to enable them to incorporate into their classes, or offer their students, appropriate guidance and help.


Workshop Slides:



Are institutional resources and academics' approaches to teaching conducive to students' independent, self-regulated learning?

Craig Bartle


fppt.com



Workshop Overview

- Introduction (5 minutes)
- Workshop Task 1 (10 minutes)
- Feedback (10 minutes)
- Workshop Task 2 (20 minutes)
- Feedback (10 Minutes)

fppt.com



Project's Aim

- To examine the processes students engage in when studying away from the classroom.
- To help academic institutions improve the student experience through informed decisions about curriculum design, academic support services, resources and learning spaces.

fppt.com

Why is this research important?

Aims to address several key issues:

- The need for further research exploring student perspectives of independent learning (Thomas *et al.* 2015: 6)
- To clarify what is understood by the term 'independent learning' (Mckendry and Boyd 2012)
- To assess the extent, and suitability, of help and guidance offered to students (Yorke 2000, Laing *et al.* 2005, Gansemer-Topf 2013)

fppt.com

Methodological Approach

- Qualitative: Glasarian Grounded Theory

Methodological Tools

- Student reflections (video/written diary submissions)
- Interviews/focus groups (students and tutors)
- Institutional wide survey (students and tutors)

fppt.com

Task 1

In groups:

Discuss how on-line spaces can be used to help and guide student learning.

List any features/content you would include.

fppt.com



Task 2

In groups:

Discuss how you/your institutions encourage independent learning.

List examples that your group consider to be particularly effective.

fppt.com

Services at Coventry University to encourage independent learning:

- Centre for Academic Writing
- Sigma

Specific approaches used by academic staff to encourage/help students become autonomous learners:

- Introductory, non-assessed, assignments
- Recommended reading/on-line materials and talks
- Group work
- Flexible assignments
- Detailed feedback focusing on studying techniques

fppt.com

References

Gansemer-Topf, A.M.(2013) 'How assessment can advance efforts to enhance undergraduate student perspectives'. *New Directions for Student Services* 2013 (142), 61-70

Laing, C., Robinson, A. & Johnston, V. (2012) 'Managing the transition into higher education. An on-line Spiral Induction Programme' *Active Learning in Higher Education* 6 (3), 243-255

Mckendry, S. and Boyd, V. (2012) 'Defining the "Independent Learner" in UK Higher Education: Staff and Students' Understanding of the Concept'. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 24 (2), 209-220

Thomas, L., Jones, R., and Ottaway, J. (2015) *Effective Practice in the Design of Directed Independent Learning Opportunities*. York: Higher Education Academy and the Quality Assurance Agency

Yorke, M. (2000) 'Smoothing the transition into higher education: what can be learned from student non-completion'. *Journal of Institutional Research* 9 (1), 35-47

fppt.com

Thank you for participating

fppt.com

Brief summary of my PhD: Life Beyond the Classroom: Helping university students become effective independent learners. (Year 2, part-time)

Background

This project will investigate how students use their independent study time and what higher education institutions can do to help students become more effective autonomous learners.

An ability to study independently is generally accepted as one of the key attributes students need to be successful in higher education. Previous research has, however, expressed concern that the concept of independent learning lacks clarity and a shared understanding (Mckendry and Boyd 2012). Additionally, students are frequently arriving at university without the necessary skillsets to succeed (Laing et al. 2005). A failure to address this shortfall can lead to an increase in student attrition as students struggle to adapt (Yorke 2000, Thomas 2013).

Using a predominately qualitative methodology, areas of good practice from the HE sector will be identified and considered alongside an in-depth investigation of the experiences of staff members and students at Coventry University. The research findings will inform a number of outputs including a detailed set of recommendations for best practice at Coventry University and the wider HE sector.

Some Preliminary Findings (from the first round of data collection)

- A timely induction programme allowing for students' diverse educational experiences is essential for ensuring students understand how they can most effectively utilise their time at university and where they can turn to for help.
- International students often struggle with the learning processes required in a UK HE institution without the appropriate guidance and help before and during their studies.
- Tutors need to understand the factors that motivate student learning so they can structure their teaching and assessments accordingly to ensure appropriate learning takes place away from the classroom.
- Mixed ability classes were seen as being problematic by some students who felt that they were being held back by students they perceived as being less able than themselves. This was particularly prominent during group work.
- Tutors need to be careful not to overestimate students' level of IT proficiency.
- Staff were concerned that they do not always have the time to develop their courses without working well beyond their official working hours.
- Tutors would welcome opportunities to improve different aspects of their teaching through institutionally supported courses.

References

Laing, C., Robinson, A. and Johnson, V. (2005) 'Managing the transition into higher education. An on-line spiral induction programme.' *Active Learning in Higher Education* 6 (3), 243-255

Mckendry, S. and Boyd, V. (2012) 'Defining the Independent Learner in UK Higher Education: Staff and Students' Understanding of the Concept.' *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 24 (2) 209-220

Thomas, L. (2013) 'What works? Facilitating an effective transition into higher education', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* 14 (1), 4-24

Yorke, M. (2000) 'Smoothing the transition into higher education: what can be learned from student non-completion', *Journal of Institutional Research* 9 (1), 35-47