University of Brighton

Centre for Learning and Teaching

Study Pack

Learning and teaching in Higher Education

2015-16 edition

Introduction

This study pack is intended to enhance your understanding of the processes involved in teaching and learning in higher education, to help you support your students' learning as effectively as possible. You will find it particularly useful if you are taking module LT725, *Understanding Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* (if you are taking LT725, you are advised to look at the Module Design study pack as well)

This pack provides you with opportunities to:

- reflect on your own aims and assumptions as a teacher
- familiarise yourself with some key theoretical perspectives and debates relevant to learning and teaching in higher education generally and in your own discipline
- consider your students' views of learning and teaching and the ways in which they go about study tasks
- identify the kinds of educational environments which are likely to encourage students to learn effectively.

Although this pack contains fewer suggestions than the others for practical activities to try out with your students we hope it will:

- generate insights that may influence your teaching
- raise questions you might decide to explore further
- enable you to relate the more theoretical readings to your own disciplinary or professional context, and the needs and behaviours of your students.

As with the other study packs, we recommend you spend no more than **20 hours in total**, an average of three to four hours (for reading, thinking, responding) for each stage, **so you will need to be selective**, particularly about the suggested readings. In light of what is said in Stage 1 about deep and surface learning, the last thing we want to do is to overload you and encourage a surface approach! If you find that there is too much to take in, even in the core materials, please use the recommended summaries to get a general overview of each topic and concentrate your time on thinking about the relevance to your own teaching; leave the optional further readings to follow up at a later date if you are interested.

All the key readings are available electronically, either through the Online Library or through external websites, and in most cases can also be printed out if you prefer. All URLs were checked and correct as of September 2015 - please let the Course Leader know if you find any problems.

How to use the pack

The study pack contains three elements:

1. text within the pack that introduces you to the main concepts, issues and debates surrounding the topic in question;
2. recommended readings, which are either journal articles or chapters from books, accompanied by support material to help you gain the most from these readings and apply them to your professional role (e.g. review questions, suggested activities, references to other material in print form or on the web etc.)
3. recommended workplace activities designed to help you integrate the ideas in the pack into your own teaching (e.g. classroom approaches, discussions with colleagues, personal reflection and planning etc.)

How to use the study packs

We encourage you to think of the pack as a resource to be used practically and flexibly to support your own professional development, rather than as a set of course materials to be worked through and 'learnt' as if preparing for examinations. We normally recommend that you limit the amount of time you spend on each pack to about 20 hours, so you will need to be selective about which articles/chapters you read, and which activities you decide to carry out. You can return to the pack later to examine portions in more detail depending on your interests and circumstances.

We suggest the following process for studying the pack:

1. **begin by skim-reading the pack from beginning to end** at a single sitting, noting the main features of the pack including suggested readings and activities
2. identify those elements of the pack **you feel are most relevant for you**, and draw up a plan for the route you intend to plot through the pack
3. **carry out the readings and activities you identified in your plan,** making sure to record your responses to the readings and activities as carefully as possible, and to retain any relevant documents arising from your work that might provide useful evidence to support your assessed work for the course.

Section 1: Understanding student learning

We generally expect students in the same cohort to vary in the knowledge and abilities they bring to a course or module. But they may also have had different experiences of teaching and learning as processes, leading to different understandings of what teachers and students are expected to do. Prior experience is likely to influence how individuals interpret and respond to new learning situations, and how they approach the tasks they encounter. Some of these interpretations and responses may be significantly different from what teachers and course designers intend. Some students will expect to rely heavily on their teachers to guide them through all aspects of their studies, including the ideas they should accept or reject, while others will adopt a more independent, self-reliant approach. (Please note this has little to do with recent initiatives to widen participation in HE - such variations are found among 'traditional' as well as 'non-traditional' students.)

Stage 1 of this pack considers three of the ways students are said to differ: their *approaches to learning*, their *conceptions of learning*, and their *learning styles*; and provides some suggestions for further reading.

Surface, deep and strategic approaches to learning

One of the most influential ideas in the literature on learning in HE is the suggestion that students adopt either a *surface*, *deep* or *strategic* approach to specific study tasks depending on how they interpret the task and the educational environment in which it occurs. Though any such categories are oversimplified, they offer two key insights which can be useful to us as teachers:

- the way in which students go about their study tasks is influenced by what they think we expect them to do
- different kinds of educational environment may encourage students to go about study tasks in different ways.

Both points may seem obvious, but they help us to keep in mind that students' approaches to learning are not fixed qualities in the individual, but are at least partly determined by what we do as teachers. The section below, *Environments that support learning*, summarises the characteristics of such environments.

Students' conceptions of learning

Students may also have fundamentally different understandings of what it means to learn in formal education - in other words, different *conceptions of learning* - which may be based on previous experience but in turn affect the approaches they take. The most influential model of *conceptions of learning* was initially developed by Saljo (1979) and is summarised by Atherton at:. http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/theories.htm.

The result is that some students may perform certain study tasks badly (and may not understand or act on feedback from teachers) because they fail to comprehend the nature of the task - it requires a different conception of learning and knowledge from the one they currently hold. Teachers can help by:

1. Devising learning activities and assessment tasks which require a progressively more complex performance, that is, a progressively 'deeper' approach and more sophisticated view of the nature of knowledge. This approach has been detailed by Biggs (2003, and Biggs & Tang, 2007, 2011), using the term he coined, '**constructive alignment**'.

In constructive alignment, the intended learning outcomes are written to include an activity, not just a topic: for example, to *explain* a particular concept. That activity, *explain*, is then specified in the teaching context so that it is activated in order to achieve the outcome. Likewise, that activity, *explain*, is specified in the assessment task, to ascertain if the outcome has been achieved and how well. The target verb *explain* is represented in the teaching/learning context and in the assessment (Biggs & Tang, 2011: 98).

For useful summaries of constructive alignment, see: Biggs' own website: http://www.johnbiggs.com.au/academic/constructive-alignment/

2. Ensuring that students understand the intended learning outcomes of activities and tasks and then providing feedback that is comprehensible and consistent with the intended learning outcomes.

It's important to note that the approaches outlined here (or at least their domination of HE educational research for several years), have since been criticised for focusing too narrowly on the individual student. See Stage 4 on *'Socio-cultural Perspectives on Learning'*.

Section 1 activities

i. Read: Chapter 4: "Approaches to learning" in Ramsden, P. (2003) *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* 2nd ed. London:Routledge. Also available as an ebook via myilibrary: Ramsden, Paul. 2003., *Learning to Teach in Higher Education. [online].* Taylor & Francis. Available from: http://ezproxy.brighton.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.myilibrary.com?id=2596]

   James Atherton's summary: *Learning and Teaching: Deep and Surface learning* (2005) is also available at http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/deepsurf.htm.

ii. Choose one particular study task you have set for your students and describe what students who took a deep, surface and strategic approach would do. How might you help your students to adopt a deep approach to the task?

iii. How do you and your colleagues help students to understand the different expectations and requirements at different levels of study?

Learning styles

It is important to note that there are serious concerns about the potential misuse of learning styles inventories, particularly in other sectors where some teachers have been urged to 'diagnose' individual students and try to cater for every possible style in their lesson planning.

Some years ago, the Learning and Skills Research Centre commissioned a large-scale, systematic review of the relevant literature from a team of academics led by Professor Frank Coffield. The 172 page review (LSRC, 2004a) includes detailed explanations and evaluations of the most influential models of learning styles and is available online at: http://sxills.nl/lerenlerennu/bronnen/Learning%20styles%20by%20Coffield%20e.a..pdf .

Although the authors concluded that most models had little scientific validity, in a separate, related document (LSRC, 2004b), they also acknowledged that they could be useful to prompt a dialogue with students:

> *A knowledge of learning styles can be used to increase the self-awareness of students and tutors about their strengths and weaknesses as learners. .. According to Sadler-Smith (2001, 300), the potential of such awareness lies in 'enabling individuals to see and to question their long-held habitual behaviours'; individuals can be taught to monitor their selection and use of various learning styles and strategies* (LSRC 2004b, p.37)

The ASSIST (Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students) was one of the few inventories which emerged well from the Coffield study; it was developed by Noel Entwistle and colleagues at the University of Edinburgh based on the work cited above on approaches and conceptions of learning. You can download the questionnaire itself with a theoretical and methodological commentary from http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk//questionnaires/ASSIST.pdf [accessed 10th September 2012]. However, we **strongly** urge you **not** to simply administer the questionnaire to students and then either score their responses yourself or ask them to do so. The questionnaire deals with sensitive matters which need to be handled in a tactful manner which avoids undermining students' self-confidence.

Other widely used inventories are:

- the VARK learning styles inventory - which distinguishes between Visual, Aural, Read/write or Kinaesthetic learners. For more information, click on the following link: http://vark-learn.com/the-vark-questionnaire/
- the Honey and Mumford inventory, based on the work of the psychologist David Kolb. For a useful introduction to Kolb's work on experiential learning, see http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-explrn.htm
- Gardners's work on Multiple Intelligences is also potentially fruitful for discussion with students - brief introduction and further links at http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/multiple.htm [all 3 accessed 2nd September 2013]

Educational environments

The studies referred to above suggest that it is the educational environments we create - the ways in which we teach, the learning activities we devise, and the assessment procedures we use - that have the most significant effect on students' learning. They also suggest that environments conducive to learning should:

- ensure students have adequate prior knowledge and understanding
- match content to the intellectual stage of development students have reached
- help students to perceive relevance and to develop interest in the syllabus
- encourage in students more independent, purposive, and reflective ways of studying
- offer choice in both courses or topics studied and assignments
- provide a syllabus which encourages depth and avoids an excessive workload
- teach in ways which explain concepts fully, with enthusiasm and empathy

- emphasise and model the ways of thinking characteristic of the discipline
- choose textbooks and provide learning resources which provoke thinking
- provide opportunities for discussion and collaborative working on realistic problems
- design assignments which encourage active questioning and discussion
- assess and provide feedback in ways which directly reward understanding
- develop a departmental or course team ethos which encourages reflection on teaching

(adapted from Entwistle, undated)

This may also seem fairly obvious, but is surprisingly hard to put into practice consistently.

Research into student motivation leads to similar recommendations:

- attempt to create a learning context that actively supports students' growing interests and needs and does not undermine their intrinsic motivation
- enhance student motivation by using a combination of intrinsically interesting tasks, responsibility delegated to them, opportunities for recognisable achievement and personal growth, and recognition and advancement
- try to teach in an enthusiastic style
- develop educational materials that fit students' interests and real-world knowledge, and challenge them
- provide clear feedback on performance, whether formal or informal
- use assessment techniques that measure both understanding and knowledge, while not fostering high levels of competition (Zinkiewicz et el. 2003)

Activity:
In the light of these two lists of recommendations, evaluate the educational environment of a course or module on which you teach (bear in mind that your teaching is an integral part of the environment.) How might the environment be made more conducive to learning?

Further reading:

Atherton, J. S. (2005) *Learning and Teaching:Theories of Learning* [online]. Available at: http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/theories.htm.
Atherton provides a really user-friendly and engaged introduction to the field

Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2011) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: what the student does*. 4th ed. [electronic resource]. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Available at: http://capitadiscovery.co.uk/brighton-ac/items/1249458 (this links via the library catalogue where you need to follow the "text online" link to view the e-book).
[The 3rd edition of this text is also available as an ebook]
Brabrand, C. & Jacob Andersen, J. (2006) *Teaching Teaching & Understanding Understanding* [online]. University of Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press
19 minute award-winning short-film (DVD) about Constructive Alignment. (3 films)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ngc9ihb35g
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcybQlLAV2k
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggThtInFtnM

Brown, G.(2004) *How students learn* (a supplement to the RoutledgeFalmer *Key Guides for Effective Teaching in Higher Education* series) [online]. Available at: http://media.routledgeweb.com/pdf/seriesinfo/how_to_learn.pdf

Entwistle, N. (undated) *Supporting effective learning: a research perspective,* University of Edinburgh: Centre for Research on Learning and Instruction, pp12-13.

LSRC, (2004a) *Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning: a systematic and critical review* [online]. [Coffield] Available at: http://sxills.nl/lerenlerennu/bronnen/Learning%20styles%20by%20Coffield%20e.a..pdf .

LSRC, (2004b) *Should we be using learning styles?:what research has to say to practice.*[online]. Available at: http://itslifejimbutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/LSRC_LearningStyles.pdf

Smith, M. K. (1999, 2008) 'Learning theory' from *the encyclopaedia of informal education* [online]. Available at: http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-learn.htm.
This site is a generally useful and relevant guide to adult learning; for instance, see also the pages on andragogy.

The Theory Into Practice (TIP) database (part of the Instructional Design website) contains descriptions of over 50 theories relevant to human learning and instruction. Each description includes the following sections: overview, scope/application, example, principles, and references. Available at: http://www.instructionaldesign.org/index.html
See also the part of the site on teaching and learning:
http://www.innovativelearning.com/teaching/index.html

The ASSIST (Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students) was the best known of those which emerged well from the Coffield study;
http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk//questionnaires/ASSIST.pdf.

Zinkiewicz, L., Hammond, N.& Trapp, A. (2003) *Applying Psychology Disciplinary Knowledge to Psychology Teaching and Learning: A review of selected psychological research and theory with implications for teaching practice*, Psychology LTSN, Report and Evaluation Series No.2 [online]. University of York. Available at:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/evidencenet/Applying_psychology_disciplinary_knowledge_to_psychology_teaching_and_learning

Other widely used inventories are:

- the VARK learning styles inventory http://vark-learn.com/the-vark-questionnaire/
- the Honey and Mumford inventory, based on the work of the psychologist David Kolb. see http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-explrn.htm
- Gardner's work on Multiple Intelligences is also potentially fruitful for discussion with students - brief introduction and further links at http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/multiple.htm

Section 2: What do we mean by critical?

'Critical thinking' is often regarded as a defining characteristic of higher education. In almost all course handbooks, module descriptors and assessment criteria, you will find such phrases as 'critically evaluate', 'critical awareness' and 'critical understanding'. The term 'critical' also occurs frequently in texts about higher education, including those which articulate the national

academic infrastructure for HE, such as the QAA's academic standards and quality infrastructure (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/Pages/default.aspx). This has two main elements:

- the QAA.s Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (2014)http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=2843#.VgATo51waUk
- the QAA's Subject Benchmark Statements http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements

(If you have not seen these before, take some time to read the generic qualifications/level descriptors and the subject benchmark statement(s) relevant to your own discipline. Are they compatible with your own course materials and your understanding of learning and teaching in your own subject? If not, are there good reasons for this?)

However, academics do not always agree or make explicit their usage of key terms, so it is not surprising that many students find it difficult to understand what their lecturers mean by 'critical', especially when it appears in shorthand feedback phrases such as ' insufficiently critical' on their assignments.

Section 2 activities

i) Look at the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for one or more of the modules you teach.
   - Does the word 'critical' appear?
   - If so, what does it mean in this context, and how would you explain to one of your students what exactly they need to do to fulfil this requirement?
   - If it doesn't appear in these documents, think about what explicit or implicit assumptions are made about 'criticality' in your subject.

ii) Read Chapter 1 'Conditions of Critical Thought', Barnett, R. (1997) *Higher Education: A Critical Business*. SRHE/OU, pp. 11-22 [The following link should take you directly to the electronic version of the book. http://ezproxy.brighton.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.myilibrary.com?id=113011].

Barnett explores some of the positive ways in which we might understand critical thinking, but also the danger that in some academic contexts, "Far from opening our cognitive universe, criticism ends up keeping things safe but unchallenging."

How do his arguments resonate with your own experience as a student and a teacher?

Section 2 activities continued

iii) Consider his claim that "*Critical spaces have to be sustained collaboratively, and cannot be secured in the presence of power. Our pedagogies in higher education, accordingly, have to accord real critical space to students, and to encourage them to take advantage of it rather than to fear it"*?

How could you help to create a '*real critical space'* for your students?

Further reading

These issues also apply to this course, where we ask you to be critical about your own teaching as well as the readings and debates you encounter. Two online extracts from Brookfield, S. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* are relevant here:

The Getting of Wisdom: What Critically Reflective Teaching is and Why It's Important (the section on 'Hunting Assumptions' is particularly helpful): http://catac.wikispaces.com/file/view/Preview+of+%E2%80%9CThe+Getting+of+Wisdom%E2%80%9D.pdf

Storming the Citadel: Reading Theory Critically http://www.paulofreire.ufpb.br/paulofreire/Files/outros/Brookfield.pdf

Finally, a balanced and useful discussion of how and why we might help students to understand more clearly what is expected when they enter higher education:
Haggis, T. (2006) Pedagogies for diversity: retaining critical challenge amidst fears of 'dumbing down, *Studies in Higher Education* Volume 31, Number 5. Available online at: http://ezproxy.brighton.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03075070600922709 (university login required if you are off-campus).

Section 3: Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge

The idea of *threshold concepts* originally emerged from a UK national research project (Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses - http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/). Through interviewing academics in four subject areas, Jan (Erik) Meyer and Ray Land began to uncover the distinctive key concepts in each discipline, with which students often struggled to engage but which, once grasped, would lead to a fundamental transformation of their understanding. The name comes from the sense that understanding such a concept is like *'passing through a portal or conceptual gateway'* that opens up *'previously inaccessible way[s] of thinking about something'* (Meyer and Land 2003, p.1).

Over the past few years this idea has itself generated some particularly fruitful ways of thinking about curriculum design and teaching. As Glynis Cousin, one of the other members of the group, has suggested in a useful summary for the Geography Subject Centre:

> *If we want to develop an understanding of the pedagogy of the subject we teach, we have to start somewhere and making sense of what seems central and often difficult to*

grasp by most learners, is a good place to begin our inquiry. A tendency among academic teachers is to stuff their curriculum with content, burdening themselves with the task of transmitting vast amounts of knowledge bulk and their students of absorbing and reproducing this bulk. In contrast, a focus on threshold concepts enables teachers to make refined decisions about what is fundamental to a grasp of the subject they are teaching. It is a 'less is more' approach to curriculum design. (Cousin 2006).

Stage 3 activities

i. Read the article by Meyer and Land "Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines" available at http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk//docs/ETLreport4.pdf [accessed 10th September 2012]. (If you are short of time, the summary by Cousin cited above is a very helpful starting point.)

ii. Can you identify any examples of threshold concepts in your own subject? You might recall aspects that you found especially hard to grasp when you were a student (although one characteristic of TCs is that once you have passed through the 'portal', it is hard to remember what it felt like not to know this). Are there any other aspects of the subject you teach that (some) students struggle to learn, but without which they cannot really move on to higher levels? NB It is easier to identify TCs in some disciplinary contexts than others; in areas of practice such as art and design, and some other professional fields, where there is not such a defined 'body of knowledge' involved, you may find it more productive to think about 'threshold practices' or 'ways of thinking and practising'.

iii. Do you have particular teaching strategies that you use to help students grasp these threshold concepts? (An important implication of Meyer and Land's work is that students should not be shielded from 'troublesome knowledge'. But should be introduced in a structured and supported way to situations where their existing commonsense knowledge is no longer adequate to the evidence. This is often the point where they make the conceptual breakthroughs.)

Further reading

Atherton, J. S. (2011) *Doceo; Learning as Loss 1* [online]. Available at: http://www.doceo.co.uk/original/learnloss_1.htm

Meyer, J.H.F & Land, R. (eds) (2006) *Overcoming barriers to student understanding: threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge* Abingdon:Routledge.

Land, R., Meyer, J.& Smith, J. (eds.) (2008) *Threshold Concepts Within the Disciplines*. Sense Publishers.

Section 4: Socio-cultural perspectives on learning

The models of learning we looked at in Section 1 have had a pervasive influence on research into teaching in higher education over recent decades, providing much of the basis of what is often referred to as a '*student-centred*' approach to teaching. However, in recent years these ideas have come under increasing scrutiny. Critics - particularly from the field of adult and continuing education (see, for example, Malcolm, J. & Zukas, M., 2001) - have argued that most studies concerned with *approaches to learning* and *conceptions of learning* have been conducted within a rather narrow set of conceptual, theoretical and methodological perspectives, with learning regarded primarily as a process located in the head of the individual student. Despite their value in drawing our attention to some important questions of curriculum design, such studies may also be criticised for failing to acknowledge the complex social and cultural dimensions of learning and teaching, and for giving insufficient attention to matters like gender, ethnicity, life-history, diversity of educational experience or context. Many people who work in higher education are understandably sceptical about the implication that we can make significant valid generalisations about complex matters like learning which pertain across countries, cultures and generations, as well as across all the varied fields and modes of higher education.

Partly in response to concerns like these, interest has grown in alternative models which take account of the social and cultural aspects of learning (see Lave & Wenger, 1991). These socio-cultural models focus on the fact that learning and thinking involve *interpersonal* and *communal* processes in addition to individual processes. In general terms, socio-cultural models assume that people learn and develop through *participating* in particular activities and through using the *cultural resources* of the *community* of people who engage in those activities.

Adopting a socio-cultural perspective on learning and teaching encourages us to view the different disciplinary and professional fields within higher education as a series of more or less distinct '*communities of practice*'. Wenger defines them as follows:

> groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. (Wenger, 2006)

So marine biology, accountancy and art history, for example, can be taken as three broad-scale communities of practice. Each community of practice is viewed as having a characteristic set of activities, 'ways of knowing and thinking', cultural resources, forms of communication and social relations which distinguish it from other communities of practice. Put another way, marine biologists are assumed to engage in particular activities, to use particular cultural resources and to think, know, speak and write in particular ways which identify or mark them out as marine biologists, and which differ from those of accountants or art-historians. (There is some overlap here with work on 'academic literacies' and also with threshold concepts, though the focus of attention is somewhat different).

From these perspectives, student learning is understood to be a process of *increasing participation* in a particular community of practice and teaching is understood to be a process of enabling students to increasingly participate in the distinctive activities of the community. In socio-cultural models, therefore, the role of the teacher-practitioner is to represent the complex practice of the community and to create opportunities for students to increasingly participate in that practice.

Section 4 activities

i. Read the introductory articles by Wenger at http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/ and Smith at http://www.infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.htm

ii. What 'communities of practice' do you feel you belong to?

- (In relation to one of these) how did you first enter it, and how have you developed your own understanding of the collective 'ways of knowing and thinking' of the group?
- Does this resemble the 'legitimate peripheral participation' described by Lave and Wenger?

iii) How do you help your own students to move towards the point where they are fully functioning members of the communities of practice relevant to your course?

Further reading

Atherton, J.S. (2011) *Learning and Teaching; Situated learning* [online]. Available at: http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/situated.htm

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Wenger

Malcolm, J. & Zukas, M. (2001) Bridging pedagogic gaps:conceptual discontinuities in higher education, *Journal of Teaching in Higher Education*, 6, pp32-42. Available at: http://ezproxy.brighton.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13562510020029581

Northedge, A. (2003) Rethinking teaching in the context of diversity, *Teaching in Higher Education*, Volume 8, Number 1, pp. 17-32(16). Available at: http://ezproxy.brighton.ac.uk/login?url=http://ejournals.ebsco.com/direct.asp?ArticleID=82UK52EWUKUFCUU9V7HP

Smith, M. K. (2003) Communities of practice [online]*, the encyclopaedia of informal education*. Available at: http://www.infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.htm

Wenger, E. (2006) *Communities of practice* [online]. Available at: http://www.ewenger.com/theory/

Section 5: Blended Learning and Teaching

Blended Learning (BL) is defined in this as a combination of face-to-face (F2F) and e-learning. E-learning is generally interpreted as any use of technology in learning.

This section is not a practical manual - but there are links at the end to take you to the local support available to you in developing this aspect of your teaching, as well as references to further reading and advice

One way in which BL is facilitated is through a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and nearly every university in the world now has a VLE. At Brighton the VLE is called studentcentral and it is uses Blackboard software. The use of the VLE enables students to access resources, collaborate with other students, submit assignments and take assessments.

The minimum requirements which academics need to provide in the use of studentcentral at Brighton are:

- Statement on the use of the Studentcentral area and what is expected of students in their use of the area
- Announcements section which is used to communicate with students
- Module descriptor
- Module handbook (if appropriate)
- Learning resources (including reading lists)
- Handouts (eg lecture notes, powerpoint presentations)
- Assessment guidelines (including details on the use of eSubmission)
- Staff contact details

Why should e-learning be considered separately from other forms of learning and teaching? Some kinds of e-learning, such as parts of this pack, simply use the Internet to deliver learning materials and the principles are similar to those for F2F teaching. However, most e-learning materials and activities need to be more carefully structured and prepared than usual, because it is harder to adjust pace and content as we go along in response to students' reactions.

E-learning activities may involve collaboration, communication and assessment. The collaboration may use discussion forum or Web 2.0 technologies. Web 2.0 technologies enable the collaborative construction of knowledge through blogs, wikis and social networking. Some of the issues are the same as with F2F such as those concerning group one whereas others relate to the technology. It is recommended that you use software supported by the University as there are risks to be considered when using external commercial sites such as Facebook.

Salmon has developed a 5 stage model for moderating online discussions (Salmon, 2011) and helpful suggestions and ideas for e-tivities which are “frameworks for enhancing active and participative online learning by individual and groups.” (Salmon, 2002)

Technology is always changing and it is important to be able to consider its potential in your teaching both now and in the future. The EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative produces a series called “7 Things You Should Know About ..” emerging technologies and their relevance to learning and teaching (Educause, 2011).

Section 5 activity

As a teacher, do you currently use e-learning activities than go beyond the minimum requirement given above? If so, briefly state which technology you use and why. For example, a quiz to test formative learning. If not, identify an e-learning activity you would like to introduce and give the reason why.

Practical guidance on using studentcentral

This link "Where can I get help on using studentcentral?" will take you to contact details for your local Learning Technology Advisor (LTA) who can help you make the best use of studentcentral. The LTAs also provide information, training and general computing support to teaching and research staff. You can also use the Help button at the top of every studentcentral screen to find information about different procedures, details of workshops and associated training materials as well as FAQs and practical tips.

Further reading

Commoncraft (2007), *Blogs in Plain English* [online]. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN2I1pWXjXI

Commoncraft (2007) *Social Bookmarking in Plain English* [online]. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeBmvDpVbWc

Jaques, D. & Salmon, G. (2006) *Learning in groups: a handbook for face-to-face and online environments* [online]. Taylor and Francis. Available at: http://ezproxy.brighton.ac.uk/login?url=http://www.myilibrary.com?id=71534

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NB All the web links cited in this pack were checked in September 2015.