



An Analysis of the Accreditation of Transferable Skills in Extra Curricular Activities within Higher Education

MARY DICKINSON, *Educational Liaison Centre, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK*

ABSTRACT *This paper examines an established Student Tutoring programme in the higher education sector. In particular it investigates the methods by which the development of key skills in participating Student Tutors may be assessed and examines the procedures available for a Student Tutoring scheme to gain accredited status. In light of the recognised deficit in certain transferable skills amongst graduates, this paper also aims to encourage administrators to take the tutoring framework a step further, giving selected student participants the opportunity to gain management experience through overseeing aspects of a tutoring scheme.*

What is Student Tutoring?

Most of the UK Student Tutoring schemes were established in the late 1980s. The concept of tutoring, however, is not so recent. Goodlad cites Andrew Bells' *Experiment in Education*, which demonstrated, as far back as 1797, that student tutors enabled slower pupils to 'keep pace' with their class (Goodlad, 1995, p. 2).

Today, Student Tutors (mostly undergraduate university students) volunteer to assist teaching staff in local schools and colleges with their classes over a specified period. For the teacher, the tutor's presence is a useful additional resource allowing more individual attention to be given to pupils and enabling them to learn in a more enjoyable way (see CSV, 1995). The Student Tutors are also positive role models for younger pupils and, as such, are encouraged to raise pupils' aspirations to continue in education and further training.

There are many benefits to the Student Tutor through their participation in the scheme, including developing communication and time management skills and enhanced self-

confidence. The specific learning outcomes of the Student Tutoring programme at the University of Surrey are detailed in Table 1.

Establishing Student Tutoring at Surrey: 1992 to date

Since the University of Surrey joined the Student Tutoring scheme, as a result of the Lord Mayor of London's appeal during the 1991–92 academic year, hundreds of undergraduate students have volunteered.

The first year of the Student Tutoring scheme involved 79 undergraduate students and a total of 32 schools and colleges. Its initial success was well received by the local community. D'arcy and Walbeoff noted the comments made by the then Mayor of Guildford who stated: "We cannot over-estimate the great strength of the Student Tutoring scheme through which schools and colleges, the University and local business have worked together for the benefit of everyone in our Borough" (D'arcy & Walbeoff, 1994, p. 3).

The scheme at the University of Surrey has continued to develop and whilst Student Tutoring is now operating in many higher education institutions, the formal accreditation of it, as a skills development programmes is however, still not common place. The next section takes a closer look at the potential for the accreditation of the Student Tutoring scheme.

Accrediting Transferable Skills

Prior to 1996, a student's participation in the Student Tutoring scheme was recognised by awarding a University of Surrey Certificate signed by the Vice-Chancellor. However, with the national move towards portfolios of achievement, a more formally recognised qualification was sought. The National Open College Network was approached to give the Student Tutoring scheme more 'official' recognition. The National Open College Network aims to *provide access to accreditation for all learners* and it is therefore experienced in the measurement of learning outcomes in the transferable domain. The flexibility of Open College Network accreditation methods proved, for the University of Surrey, an effective medium for measuring and accrediting the transferable skills gained by students through their experience as Student Tutors.

Today the accredited award that the University of Surrey Student Tutoring scheme offers its participants is a nationally recognised level of attainment that Student Tutors can add to their personal portfolios. The qualification awarded to a Student Tutor fulfilling the criteria is equivalent to an NVQ Level 3 credit.

The Evolution of Assessment

Any scheme that leads to the award of a nationally recognised qualification must ensure that its award criteria are consistent with national standards. These issues are addressed in the tutoring scheme's Programme Submission Document (PSD) which forms the backbone of the National Open College network awards.

The PSD states the requirements that Student Tutors must meet in order to be eligible for a National Open College award. For instance, University of Surrey Student Tutors are expected to attend their designated school for not less than one hour per week for 10 weeks. An additional one hour of preparation and one hour of reflection are also

TABLE 1. The transferable skills developed by student tutors

• Adaptability	• Communication skills
• Co-operation	• Sensitivity
• Self-confidence	• Initiative
• Organisation	• Personal presentation
• Time keeping	• Problem-solving

Source: France and Gray (1997).

required each week. This fulfils the NVQ Level 3 criteria of 30 hours work in total per credit.

The learning outcomes and assessment methods also form a vital component of the PSD. Learning outcomes are the 'results', in terms of skills developed or experience gained that the Tutor should have achieved upon completing the programme. The outcomes selected for the Surrey scheme are detailed below.

The Learning Outcomes of Student Tutoring

The student tutor should:

- Be able to show sensitivity, awareness and understanding concerning the role of education and individual pupils' needs.
- Have an awareness of the importance of their reliability upon effective work and have developed their ability to use their own initiative.
- Have developed interpersonal skills of communication, problem-solving and organisation.
- Have developed the personal skills of self-confidence assertiveness and time management.
- Have shown the ability to adapt to the demands and changes of the educational environment.

These learning outcomes become meaningful, and measurable, as they are viewed within a related framework of transferable skills. The development of the following skills are used to measure achievement of the learning outcomes by the Student Tutors participating in the Surrey scheme. These skills were selected after consultation with teachers at the local primary schools, with teacher training staff at the university and using the skills that employers have said that they want to see developed in graduates (see Hobrough *et al.*, 1998).

However, transferable skills are not easily measured since their assessment can be affected by a student's presentation skills, cultural background, or even their personality. Therefore any assessment criteria must be well designed, the methods properly executed and the process transparently monitored in order to ensure consistency. The following section details the procedures used at Surrey.

The Assessment Procedures for the Accreditation of Student Tutors at Surrey

This section examines the methods of assessing participating students, with a critique of the techniques employed. At Surrey the onus is put on the student to prove that the learning outcomes outlined above have been achieved and that the skills listed in Table

1 have been developed. The procedures that were adopted involved a threefold assessment of the Student Tutors via:

- a reflective journal,
- self and teacher assessment and
- a short presentation to a panel with subsequent spontaneous questions and answers.

The Reflective Journal

Journal entries “can provide tangible evidence of the mental process. They make thoughts visible and concrete, giving a way to interact with, elaborate on, and expand ideas” (Kerka, 1996, p. 1). For some, the “value of journal writing cannot be over emphasised” (see Sommer, 1989).

Reflective journals have also been used extensively in the preparation of adult educators (see Brookfield, 1987, 1995). The activities in the cognitive domain that are developed by this type of journal writing exercise are said to include “observation, speculation, doubt, self-questioning, self-awareness, problem stating, problem solving, emoting and ideation” (Holt, 1994).

The reflective dialogue journal is based on Holly’s notion of log, diary and journal (Holly, 1989) and ideally (within the teacher training context) becomes a professional conversation between the mentoring teacher educator and the pre-service trainee teacher (in Clegg, 1996, p. 3).

Writing a confessional style journal has long been viewed as a cathartic release of pent-up emotion and, importantly, a time where one usually alone faces life-events in a contemplative way. This arguably has a positive affect in its own right. Day (1993, pp. 83–93) described the world in which we operate as a “culture of ‘busyness’ ” and Clegg, (1998, p. 4) argues that having time to sit and think about the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of, (in her case) ‘educational delivery’ is in itself an invaluable experience.

However liberated the journal writer feels after their writing, the actual practice is usually instigated by, and founded on, learning objectives and criteria and as such, “merely writing in a journal does not automatically ensure critical reflection or other learning outcomes” (Kerka, 1996, p. 2).

The limitations of journal writing can be anticipated and include the fact that the process is time consuming, that there may be a lack of genuine reflective content and that the practitioner may write merely as an academic performance.

On the issue of time consumption, Schön’s 1987 text shows that, most good practice derives from (time) thinking before the practice event. He stresses the need for uninterrupted time to think about reflection -on and reflection-in action. “Schön’s reflection in action exposes my view, the crucial issue of how practitioners manipulate the gap between one specific practice interaction and the next in order to give themselves enough time for appropriate reflection” (Evans, 1997, p. 2).

Second, a limited amount of research has been done to examine how much evidence of real reflective activity takes place within the broad banner of reflective practice. For example, in Holt’s 1994 study, only 40% of respondents found the journals helpful.

Others, like Kompf (1994), have highlighted potential weaknesses in the model and have suggested that reflective assessment should be a contributor rather than a single means of student assessment. As Kompf (1994, p. 1) states:

In conclusion, it is proposed that the cognitive developmental explanation and model for reflective processes offered in this paper might demonstrate that

reflection is the result of constructions which change because of events or experience, are interdependent and involve prioritisation, and may or may not lead to meaningful successive conceptual development unless used as the basis for comprehensive deliberative strategies.

Third, and perhaps most controversially, is the problem of the *performing reflective*. It is argued that:

if students know that their reflections are being assessed, they have an incentive to concoct the reflections which they thinks the tutor wants to see. Writing reflections could become just another example of the process of students 'pleasing the teacher' a strategy which has been referred to as 'impression management' (AlMaskati & Thomas, 1995).

Others though think that this is an unfair supposition and that the majority of participants are honest about their reflections.

We think that despite the elements of 'impression management' (tutor management?) that must be present, most students do make an honest effort to enter into the spirit of the exercise and, in consequence, gain something of personal and professional significance from it. (Brown & McCartney, 1995, p. 12)

Brown and McCartney (1995, p. 2) also wrote:

An underlying and often understated assumption about reflection in the learning situation is that it is connected with learning competence, learning is apparently enhanced if the element of reflection is incorporated into it. Accent is placed on reflection because, it is supposed, self discovery resulting from reflection will improve and enrich the learning experience.

The careful use of the words "apparently" and "supposed" could lead the reader to question how valuable the exercise really is. Barclay's (1996) study of journal writing found that the success of the journal depended heavily on the learning styles adopted by the individual and as such assessment methods were caught in a dichotomy of assessing the reflections as opposed to the competence of the work being reflected upon. For example, someone very good at reflective writing may be a very poor practitioner in his or her field. Clegg (1996, p. 2) described this situation as a *contradiction* between quality assurance and reflective practice (my emphasis).

University of Surrey Student Tutoring assessment includes journal writing as only one of three methods of assessment. Journal writing is included as a reflective element of assessment, as the balance of the literature reviewed seems to suggest that reflective practice is empowering for all of the participants and therefore has an inherent value (see in particular Boud *et al.*, 1985; Claxton, 1984; Schön, 1987).

With these limitations noted, and coupled with the anecdotal preferences of the students involved in the University of Surrey programme, reflection is included in the programme as an exercise as part of a larger assessment model. Although the practice has proven to be of little value when examined out of context, [1] it *can* provide genuine learning opportunities and warrants inclusion as the example below highlights.

The following excerpt is taken from the reflective journal of a Surrey Student Tutor.

Some children don't like to do what they are told and at one point I needed the authority of the teacher to have them sorted. Afterwards everything went fine.

We now hear her reflective voice as she continues:

Once more I've noticed how easy it would be to go ahead with brighter children and leave the slow ones behind.

Here the Student Tutor has recognised within herself an area in which her tutoring skills need improvement. She follows this realisation with a resolve, effectively a learning agenda for herself:

Patience commitment and self-motivation make a good teacher (Marin, 1998, personal com.)

Marin's account clearly demonstrates the way in which the reflection process can naturally lead to self-awareness and illustrates that there is potential for the Student Tutor's reflective journal to become a seedbed for critical thought and skills development.

Self-assessment and Teacher Assessment Forms

Student Tutors at the University of Surrey are also required to complete a self-assessment form which asks them to measure how *they* feel they have met the particular learning outcomes (refer to Table 1). Self-assessment, similar to reflective learning, places the emphasis on the evaluative skills of the Student Tutor and as Rowntree states:

Self-assessment and peer assessments can take a proper place alongside teacher assessments and be interpreted only in a summative assessment system whose outcome is not a grade or label but a *profile* of the student. (Rowntree, 1994, p. 149)

Student Tutors at Surrey are given self-assessment forms asking them to rate the level of their development against a series of specific outcomes. The role of the other methods of assessment is to substantiate these claims. The teacher whom the Student Tutor has been assisting is also given a feedback form, similar in style to the student's self-assessment form, and is asked to comment on how they feel the student has developed. This is submitted together with an attendance sheet confirming that the Student Tutor attended the required 10 hours of lessons.

The assessment procedures for Student Tutoring at the University of Surrey, in line with Derek Rowntree's recommendations, are designed to build an overall 'profile' since they rest on the summative picture built up through a number of complementary assessments.

Presentation

A student presentation assessment was introduced into the procedures in 1998 to encourage the Student Tutor to articulate *how* they felt they had achieved the assessment criteria and thus to further develop the reflective process. It enabled the student to not just merely describe what had happened but to explain the 'how' and 'why' of their development.

The short presentation, to peers and supervisors, actively involves the student in the 'profile' building process whilst also having the added value of giving a chance to develop communication skills.

Following the presentation, the Student Tutor is asked a number of questions by the participating university staff and it is in this arena that any inconsistencies between the journal, self and teacher assessments can be addressed and resolved.

The presentations are also video taped so that, if they wish to do so, it is possible for the Student Tutor to assess his/her presentation skills. Most students choose to watch their presentations and often request feedback from the staff. The video is also useful for moderation purposes. A National Open College Network external moderator assesses a third of the Student Tutors' videos, assessment forms and reflective diaries to ensure consistency in the assessment process.

The following section examines how, at Surrey, we are developing further the Student Tutoring scheme and the ways in which we are working to give our future graduates more of the skills that employers, and the Government, are saying they want: "professional skills, such as communication, self-management and planning" (Dearing, 1997: Recommendation 31).

Giving Students Managerial Experience

As facilitators of learning, one of our most basic assumptions is that learning should not be capped. Therefore we must continually seek opportunities to overcome perceived restrictions to learning. The Surrey Student Tutoring scheme views its volunteer tutors primarily as learners and intends to enable these learners to continually develop their skills and to receive recognition for doing so. As the Dearing (1997) report notes, a number of employers are dissatisfied by a lack of certain key skills exhibited by university graduates. It is our belief that, through the Student Tutoring scheme, we can take significant steps to implement learning strategies aimed at giving the participating students the skills they need to reduce this deficit.

The basic Student Tutoring programme has also been updated, as the skills required from undergraduates by employers (Assiter, 1995) have changed over the past decade. In a similar vein, recent national, and international, research projects undertaken at Surrey demonstrate that small to medium enterprises (SME's) have identified a number of key skills which they look for when recruiting graduates (Hobrough *et al.*, 1998). These skills are listed below.

- (1) Communication
- (2) IT/Computing
- (3) Qualifications
- (4) Interpersonal skills
- (5) Enthusiasm
- (6) Flexibility
- (7) Confidence
- (8) Experience
- (9) Specialist knowledge
- (10) Technical skills

A study conducted in Cardiff confirms that: "there is clear evidence to suggest that there is a mismatch between the skills the employers say they want and their actual ability to recruit graduates with such skills" (Heskerth, 1998).

The UK Government has also acknowledged this deficit in skills. The DfEE has recently invested in over 50 individual projects aimed at enhancing "graduate employability". In early 1998, Baroness Blackstone (1998) stated that: "it is vital that higher education has effective links with the world of work, so that it can deliver the skills and knowledge to maximise graduates".

Employers themselves are making similar comments. A spokesperson for Abbey National, a significant graduate employer stated in a recent interview: "Our main problem is finding people who demonstrate an overall balance of skills covering the academic and personal sides" (Wade, 1997). The annual conference of the Association of Graduate recruiters reiterated this in 1997, stressing the need for graduates to have some "transferable core work skills" (Schofield, 1997).

Intending to take Student Tutoring a step further, we have developed a new programme aimed at giving management experience to undergraduates whilst also extending the development of transferable skills, through the tutoring framework, to local sixth forms.

The 'Schools Without Walls' Programme

The scheme, funded by the DfEE was devised to accommodate both FE and HE in the Student Tutoring programme. As the name suggests this project is concerned with removing barriers to learning and facilitating communication between the university and local schools. It has added value in that it harnesses the potential richness that comes from examining and experiencing the educational diversity of the state and independent sectors.

Methodology of the Programme

'Schools Without Walls' involves a university student acting as a 'Mentor-Manager' and two sixth-form students, one from a state school and one from an independent school acting as 'tutors'. This group as a team then attends local primary schools and assists the regular teachers in a manner very similar to the traditional student-tutoring model.

Schools volunteer the students from their sixth form, whom, they feel, would benefit from the Student Tutoring experience and the university students apply to advertisements and are then interviewed by university staff.

After training to become a Mentor-Manager the university student is 'assigned' two sixth-form students, from local colleges, one from the state sector and one from an independent college. The Mentor-Manager then supervises the sixth-form students as they assist class teachers in local primary schools over a 10-week period.

The learning outcomes of the 'Schools Without Walls' project seek to encompass and build on the skills which may developed via Student Tutoring. Whilst the key skills remain similar in both schemes, the evidence for their development is examined at far greater depth and scope in the 'Schools Without Walls'. The university student's development is measured via assessment forms completed by themselves, their peers, the primary school teacher, the sixth-form liaison teacher and their mentees. In addition to the assessment forms the university students are also required to produce an extended reflective essay on the role of a manager.

The proposed learning outcomes of 'Schools Without Walls' are as follows:

- To raise the employment aspirations of the sixth-form students and school pupils involved.
- To provide a forum for the development of the real-life skills that employers are saying that they want from their staff.
- To increase the level and quality of learning taking place in the recipient school.

- To enable the university student to gain some insight into the 'managerial' aspects of handling two students.
- To increase the communication skills for recipient pupils, sixth-form students and undergraduates.
- To enhance the problem solving and organisational skills of sixth-form students and undergraduates.
- To increase the self-confidence of the sixth-form student and the undergraduate.
- To develop the awareness of other educational dynamics for the sixth-form students and undergraduates, i.e. state and independent school culture.
- To increase the aspirations of the pupils and the sixth-form students to continue in education.

The University of Surrey's Student Tutoring and 'Schools Without Walls' schemes aim to provide a useful resource for the graduate employment market by increasing the skills of the graduate work force. Student Tutoring and 'Schools Without Walls' have therefore had their evaluation and assessment methods designed to be effective vehicles for skills development, particularly the skills required by employers nationally and internationally.

Conclusions

To facilitate the development of the skills required by graduate employers, universities need to provide undergraduates with an appropriate forum and with projects specifically designed to develop certain key skills. From the undergraduates' (indeed from any learner's) point of view, a well-managed programme is needed, a programme where the development of these skills can be monitored and, importantly, accredited so that recognition is gained for what is a sizeable commitment of the student's time and energy.

As competition for graduate employment increases (see, for example, Association of Graduate Recruiters, 1993) university graduates are finding that having a good academic degree is not necessarily enough to succeed. Employers also require a balance of skills and experience from their employees. Extra-curricula skills development schemes, such as the Student Tutoring and 'Schools Without Walls' projects, can be utilised to facilitate the closure of this perceived skills gap, thus easing the progression from education into employment.

When we take into consideration the fact that 71% of the Student Tutors in the 1997–98 University of Surrey programme volunteered because they explicitly "wanted to increase their chances of getting a good job" (Dickinson, 1999a, p. 16) and 100% of the 'Schools Without Walls' university students wanted to "put some managerial experience on their CV" (Dickinson, 1999b, p. 4) there is clearly a student-led demand for these schemes to be developed in the higher education sector.

Note on Contributor

MARY DICKINSON is the Initiatives Officer at the Educational Liaison Centre at the University of Surrey. After training as an educator of adults she has held a training and research position within higher education whilst continuing her doctoral studies. Her research interests include the 'identities of the university' and examining the efficacy of skills development activities within the higher education sector. *Correspondence:* Mrs Mary Dickinson, Educational Liaison Centre, Level 5. Senate House, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU2 5XH. Tel: (01483) 259920. Fax: (01483) 572454. E-mail: M.Dickinson@surrey.ac.uk

NOTE

- [1] Recent research on the Student Tutors at the University of Surrey has shown that only 13% displayed any evidence of genuine reflection in their journals (Dickinson, 1999b).

REFERENCES

- ALMASKATI, H. & THOMAS (1995) Contextual Influence on Thinking in Organisations: Tutor versus learner Orientations to Organisation Learning. Paper presented at the 12th Egos Colloquim, *Contrasts and contradictions in Organisations in Istanbul*, July.
- ASSITER, A. (1995) *Transferable Skills in Higher Education* (London, Kogan Page).
- ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE RECRUITERS (1993) *Graduate Employment Prospects* (London, AGCAS).
- BLACKSTONE, B. (1998) *£8 Million to Increase Student Employability*, press release (London, DfEE).
- BOUD, D., KEOGH, R. & WALKER, D. (Eds) (1985) *Reflection: turning experience into learning* (London, Kogan Page).
- BROOKFIELD, S. (1987) *Developing Critical Thinkers: challenging adults to explore alternative ways* (Milton Keynes, Open University Press).
- BROOKFIELD, S. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, (Jossey Bass Higher and Adult Education Series, San Francisco).
- BROWN, R. & MCCARTNEY, S. (1995) *Multiple Mirrors: Reflecting on Reflections*. Paper presented at the HEC Conference. Beyond Competence to Capability and the Learning Society, November 1995, UMIST.
- CLAXTON, G. (1984) *Live & Learn. An Introduction to the Psychology of Growth and Change Everyday Life* (Open University Press, Milton Keynes).
- CLEGG, S. (1996) Training and accreditation of research awards supervisors. *Journal of Graduate Education*, 2(1).
- CLEGG, S. (1998) *The Experience of Using Journals with Research Awards Supervisors*, Leeds Metropolitan University, (unpublished).
- COMMUNITY SERVICE VOLUNTEERS (1995) *The Added Value of Student Tutors_Volunteering in Schools* (London, Russell Press).
- D'ARCY, M. & WALBEOFF, T. (1994) *University of Surrey Annual Report*, unpublished.
- DAY, C. (1993) Reflection: a necessary but not sufficient condition for professional development. *British Educational Research Journal*, 19(1) pp. 83–93.
- DEARING, R. (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society*, NICHE Summary Report.
- DICKINSON, M. (1999a) Do gooders or do betters? *Educational Research*, 41(2), pp. 13–19.
- DICKINSON, M. (1999b) *The Efficacy of the Reflective Journal*, University of Surrey, unpublished.
- EVANS, D. (1997) *Reflective Learning through Practice Based Assignments*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association, September 1997, University of York.
- FRANCE, W. & GRAY, A. (1997) *Programme Submission Document*, University of Surrey, unpublished.
- GOODLAD, S. (1995) *Students as Tutors and Mentors* (London, Kogan Page).
- HESKERTH, A. (1998) Reward in this life, *The Guardian*, 24 April.
- HOBROUGH, J., SAVAGE, A., NEWMAN, J. & BATES, R. (1998) Growth at the interface: higher education and SMEs—2000 and beyond, in: *Interim Report to Higher Education Regional Development Fund* (Government Office of the South East) University of Surrey, unpublished.
- HOLLY, M. (1989) *Writing to Grow: Keeping a Private Professional Journal* (Heinnman, Portsmouth, NH).
- HOLT, S. (1994) Reflective journal writing and its effects on teaching adults. In *The Year in Review*, Vol. 3 (Dayton: Virginia Educators Research Network).
- KERKA, S. (1996) *Journal Writing and Adult Learning*, ERIC Digest number 174.
- KOMPF, M. (1995) Through the looking glass: some criticisms of reflection. Paper presented to the Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, CA.
- MARIN, M. (1998) *Student Tutoring Reflective Diary*, University of Surrey, personal communication (used with permission).
- ROWNTREE, D. (1994) *Assessing Students: how shall we know them?* 2nd edn. (London, Kogan Page).
- SCHOFIELD, P. (1997) The skilling fields, *The Independent*, 31 July, p. 11.
- SCHÖN, D. A. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass).
- SOMMER, R. (1989) *Teaching Writing to Adults* (Jossey-Bass San Francisco).
- WADE, G. (1997) What's in store this time for the class of '97, *The Guardian*, 1 February.