

Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning

Essays and Studies

A Study of Enquiry-Based Learning in Action: an Example from a Literary Studies Third-Year Course

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Abstract

This essay provides an interpretative account of how a student group dealt with an Enquiry-Based Learning task from a final-year course on Eighteenth-Century Poetry (see CEEBL Resource Pack 001). The study of poetry, particularly from this period, is often seen as the area within Literary Studies that presents students with the greatest difficulties. The task was to create a booklet for an invented second-level Open University course (based on a former actual Open University course, "A204: The Age of Enlightenment"). The group chose to centre the booklet on William Collins's "Ode on the Poetical Character", one of the most demanding poems of the period. The chapter describes the enabling factors for the students' work, the process by which they decided on the task and their approach to it, their method of work, and how they produced the outcome. Material from students' work in progress and feedback after completion of the problem is used to illustrate the process. The essay summarises the main lessons to be learnt for educators and defines the skills - both subject-specific and transferable - that the group developed, relating these to the Quality Assurance Agency's Subject benchmarking criteria.

Context

We have argued elsewhere that Enquiry-Based Learning methods are conceptually appropriate for Literary Studies courses when adapted to meet the local needs of the discipline (see Hutchings, B. and O'Rourke, K. (2002) "Problem-Based Learning in Literary Studies" in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, Volume 1:1, pp 73-83, Sage Publications, London; Hutchings, B. and O'Rourke, K. (2004) "Medical Studies to Literary Studies: Adapting Paradigms of Problem-Based Learning Process for New Disciplines" in *Challenging Research in Problem-Based Learning*, eds. Savin-Baden, M. and Wilkie, K. pp 174-189, SRHE and Open University Press). We defined our procedures in these essays as Problem-Based Learning in order to highlight the conceptual basis of the learning method and because we removed all the conventional frameworks of courses, including reading-lists and syllabus (except as defined by the course title). Thus the problems themselves were the sole drivers of the learning. However, Enquiry-Based Learning is a more flexible and appropriate term, and can readily include forms of Problem-Based Learning. Thus the present article presents its case-study as a means of drawing out the key lessons for this range of innovative methods of teaching advanced literary studies.

All students opting for these courses had taken a second-year broad course on eighteenth-century literature, which Bill directed, so students were familiar with him in his role as a teacher. Relatively small groups (sizes ranged from 10-18) allowed for careful monitoring and for Karen to observe all sessions (with the advance and ready agreement of the students) as part of her project research and evaluation methodology. Eighteenth-century literature, especially poetry, is still perceived, even by experienced students, as a 'difficult' area, and so a stern test for any teaching method.

Because the group consisted of advanced undergraduates in the final year of study, the skills developed and demonstrated in the course of their work can be effectively judged against both the Quality Assurance Agency's Subject Benchmarking definitions of 'graduateness' in English and the immediate requirements of students' expectations of career development (see www.qaa.ac.uk). Both these criteria will be referred to in our study of the process.

The course structure required students to tackle three problems over the twelve-week period of a semester. The first, short problem was non-assessed, with students reporting

their findings in informal oral presentations. The main aim of this problem was to allow students to practise the learning method, to evolve group dynamics and to learn by experience – as is consistent with the philosophy of Enquiry-Based Learning. The two subsequent problems produced oral and then written outcomes. Our case-study takes a group through one of the written problems from the eighteenth-century poetry course. A detailed summary of the course can be found at www.manchester.ac.uk/ceeb/.

Student commentary referred to in this article was gathered in a variety of ways:

- 'End of course' evaluation forms
- Focus group transcriptions
- Student feedback
- Classroom observation
- Semi-structured interviews

Student quotations have been italicized for ease of identification. At the end of the essay, we provide examples of students' general feedback on the course in their own handwriting.

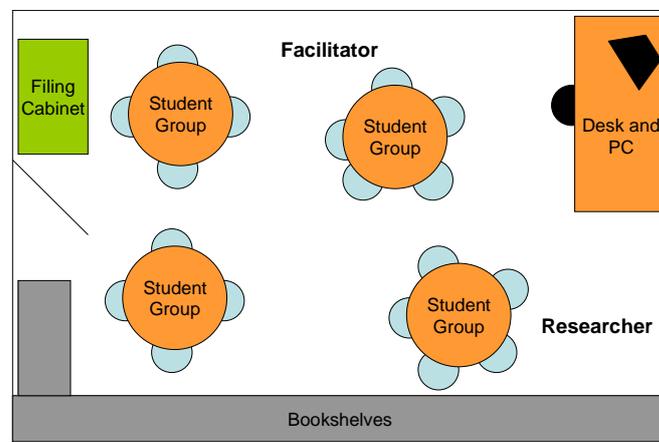
Enabling

Environment is all - well, nearly all. This should be a principle evident to scholars of the English eighteenth century, that period marked above all by sensitivity amongst artists to the living environment, both rural and urban. It is not only the Romantic poets of the later part of the century who were acutely aware of landscape and its power. The major poet of the first half of the century, Alexander Pope, created his own garden at Twickenham and wrote a poem, the *Epistle to Burlington*, that remains a classic definition of the aesthetics of the English landscape garden. The century of neoclassical architecture and the beginnings of the gothic revival was also the age of town planning, most famously at Bath. The eighteenth-century novel, above all the locus for the study of human manners within social environment, of course reflects these concerns. Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, Fanny Burney's *Evelina* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* are prominent examples of eighteenth-century novels in which urban and rural environments not only figure as settings for action, but actually have a major impact on the development of the characters.

Creative learning is enabled by providing spatio-temporal dimensions that allow the desired learning style to flourish. Yet how often do teaching strategies give appropriate priority to the conditions of learning? The most sophisticated, hi-tech lecture theatre is no use if uncomfortable for the audience. As student-centredness is among its prime factors, Enquiry-Based Learning requires an environment that is as flexible and as open to a wide range of possible student use as is possible.

We can divide enabling conditions into three main categories:

- **Space.** We were fortunate that Bill's teaching-room, a converted secretarial office, was above average size, and could therefore accommodate the groups, even if the larger ones were a squeeze. For their task work, groups split up, in our case into sub-groups of 4/5. In order to create focal points, and to establish a de-centralised teaching space, small coffee-tables were provided, with seating around them. This set-up also created space for the facilitator to move around among groups and for students to move in and out of their groups as required.



"Different groups had different ways of working and you were able to learn from seeing how other groups were operating"

"This co-operative and interactive environment enables students that sometimes might feel shy about sharing their opinions with a large group to share their thoughts without feeling daunted or intimidated"

"We are almost learning by accident. It's like...intravenous ... it's not like being in the lecture theatre"

- **Time.** Time is finite, but, within inevitable constraints, freedom is the key enabling factor. Two hours per week were scheduled for the sessions, but students were encouraged to develop their own rhythm as their progress and not the timetable dictated. Thus they were not imprisoned for two hours, but free to come and go as they felt appropriate. They were also encouraged to use time outside scheduled sessions as they felt appropriate, with Bill offering the use of his room when other constraints allowed. The result of this freedom and reciprocal trust was a lightly-worn but evident sense of responsibility, further enhanced by attitudes to resources.

“The content from this course has really stuck in, long term. A lot of the courses you can do very little all year and then cram for two weeks. In this course, because it was course-work and problem-based you had to plan and so you learnt so much and it was work you wanted to do because you chose to do it”

“You go out... with your head buzzing rather than feeling you’ve just passively sat there. You can’t be passive, you have to be active and committed on this course”

“By its nature Literature is a fairly solitary subject and I believe that PBL classes play an important part in promoting student interaction and debate. As the group gets together, friendships develop and students get to know one another better. Not only have we been able to provide academic support to each other, we have begun to socialize outside the classroom”

- **Resources.** Using Bill’s room as the focal point for the work enabled its resources to become an integral part of the process. Books, copies of periodicals such as the *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, computer (with access to the library catalogue and internet) and, in this case, specially relevant tools such as old copies of Open University booklets - dating from the days when Bill had been a part-time tutor on the Open University’s very successful A204 (Age of Enlightenment) course - were all open for students’ use. Feedback we have received from Enquiry-Based Learning courses has frequently picked out this aspect of resources availability as a significant factor in the establishment of reciprocal trust and hence responsibility. Human beings are also resources. Our model firmly defines the facilitator as a resource. Many Problem-Based Learning models insist that the role of facilitators is simply to encourage and, if necessary, regulate process. But if they are also academics directing or teaching the course, an active, fully Enquiry-Based approach to research should lead students, where

appropriate, to use them as a legitimate resource. Our account of the process below shows instances when this resource was called on. The key conceptual point here is that Enquiry-Based work should be holistic, part of the process of living, just as literature is about and part of life. And that means the facilitator's life, as well as the students'. And talking of living, a final but crucial resource was the students' - and facilitator's - need for frequent refreshment. As the group put it in a poem they wrote at the end of the course, "Maud's coffee was our reprieve, / Its sublime caffeine answered our need".

"Our group really felt we had taught ourselves with each other's help and we felt a real pride in our independent learning. I have acquired knowledge in a more creative way"

"PBL promotes personal research....the student becomes more familiar with the multifarious resources at their disposal, such as e-journals and databases. There is the opportunity to support one another in the research and explore different avenues of information. The whole experience becomes one of interchange where students share opinions, research and experience in order to achieve an end result"

"All of us hold a key to loads of information. We are all sources of information as much as the bookshelves and the tutor"

Process

This section has as its focus the practitioners themselves, how the students set about learning and what strengths they employed and developed. The initial group formation had been made entirely by chance. Our practice in the first meeting was simply to allow students to sit at whatever place they choose at the round tables, the last one in getting the last remaining place. With a student cohort as large as ours, there is little likelihood that students will already know each other well - unless a pair or more have taken a deliberate decision to join a course together, which was not the case on this occasion.

The four students who make up our case-study group came from different routes. Jo and Tom were in the same entry cohort, and had encountered each other in earlier seminar groups. Lyndsey and Rachel were in their fourth year of study. They were new both to each other and to Jo and Tom. The quartet's experience of working together on earlier problems had rapidly shown that they brought to the process a productive mix of styles and qualities. Jo had a natural sensitivity to poetic style and language, and was deeply interested in, and

responsive to, the texture of poetry, its rhythms and intricate details. Tom had an interest in the development of literary history, particularly poetics and aesthetics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He had developed this during his second-year work in the Augustan and Romantic periods, and had chosen courses in third year that allowed him to concentrate in these areas. Lyndsey had a natural skill as a motivator, both of herself and of others. She had enthusiasm, a commitment to action, a talent for lateral thinking and openness to new ideas. She had begun the course in the previous year, before having to defer, and had taken to Enquiry-Based Learning methods. Rachel had spent an enjoyable year in France teaching secondary age pupils as an *assistante*. Her teaching experience came through in her concern with communication, her ability to understand and identify with people, and her interest in the educational process.

The freedom of Enquiry-Based Learning allowed all these strengths and qualities to become apparent. Each singly significant, together they formed a powerful and creative combination. Noticeably, in a group of students nearing the end of their undergraduate studies, these qualities were also significant in helping to shape their future aims. Jo and Tom both decided during the course of the semester that they would apply for a Masters programme. Both, in very different ways, demonstrated a naturally academic approach to their work, which they saw as something they wished to continue. Lyndsey, who was slightly older than the others and had experience of the workplace before she decided to return to education, saw her studies as part of a programme of personal development enabling her to re-enter the world of work with enhanced and new strengths. Rachel had, after her successful experience in France, decided on teaching as a career, and during the semester applied for a place on a postgraduate teacher training programme.

The process of working on the earlier problems had clarified for the group a methodology that suited their individual and joint strengths. In brief, the method they discovered was that of concentration on one short text as the centre from which broader implications and investigations might be drawn. For their non-assessed problem they had chosen to deliver the script for a thirty-minute Radio Four programme introducing the audience to eighteenth-century poetry. The problem left it entirely to the students to decide on which aspects, poems and authors they would select. Like most groups taking on this task, they initially tried to be too ambitious, in terms of scope and level. Rachel's awareness of the importance of taking into account the medium and the intended audience brought the

group to a more measured approach. Jo's inclination to see the heart of poetry as lying in the intimacy of its language and metre brought the idea of a small central focus. Tom's and Lyndsey's willingness to go beyond, into context and comparisons, ensured that the focus would not remain too narrow to answer the challenge of the task. The crucial advantage of the approach that emerged was that it brought together both the academic and the personal skills of everyone.

Practice: Working on the problem

Choosing the task

Observations

This section of the course, requiring a written outcome, asked students to choose from a range of tasks that leaned more towards the conventionally academic than earlier problems where oral outcomes invited a more media-oriented approach. There was strong pressure from Tom to attempt one of the problems at the most academic end of the permitted spectrum:

PROBLEM 7: CREATING AN EDITION

ASSESSMENT OUTCOME: WRITTEN – CHOOSE (a) or (b)

The following advertisements have appeared in the **Times Literary Supplement** and the **New York Review of Books**.

- a) **Manchester University Press** is considering publishing a selection of eighteenth-century poetry. It invites potential editorial teams to submit proposals, using one 'major' poet or two or three 'minor' poets as their specimen example. The word-limit for the selection is the same as in the Fairer and Gerrard Blackwell edition (with a 5% tolerance either way). Editors are free to propose their own format, commentary and annotation as appropriate to their conception of the aims of the new edition. Editors should accompany their specimen example with a statement of the rationale for their choice of selection and critical apparatus.
- b) **Oxford University Press** is proposing to embark upon the following major scholarly publishing projects:
 - A complete edition of the poetry of Thomas Gray
 - A complete edition of Alexander Pope's verse epistles
 - A complete edition of the satirical poetry of Jonathan Swift
 - A complete edition of the poetry of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
 - A complete edition of James Thomson's *The Seasons*
 - A complete edition of William Cowper's *The Task*
 - An edition of representative eighteenth-century odes
 - An edition of the poetry of Oliver Goldsmith

Applicants for the post of general editor are invited to present a specimen of ONE of these editions, together with a statement outlining the rationale for the format and presentation of the specimen.

This - an intimidating problem for most students, and, on reflection, perhaps one more suitable for postgraduates - appealed to Tom's scholarly streak. He saw that footnotes to a carefully chosen excerpt would enable the outcome to demonstrate a strong sense of philosophical and aesthetic context. Much time in the first session was spent discussing what an edition means and entails, and how one might proceed with it. This brought the group to considerable consultation with the facilitator. The more 'academic' the task, the more the 'expert' academic will be seen as a key resource.

"There were instances when we needed a second, academic opinion. We would ask for the help of our tutor...who was there to advise us....and point us in the right direction if our focus began to wander"

The facilitator's main response was to draw the group's attention to the range of editions, with varying editorial policies and approaches, available for consultation on his bookshelves. An analysis of editions is not habitually a part of undergraduate, as distinct from postgraduate, courses. Even with this academically strong group of final-year students, there was apparent uncertainty about what editions involved and unease about committing themselves to the task. The group came to the decision that this task was too technical for all members to feel comfortable, and would not maximise all the diverse strengths of the group. But the time spent discussing and investigating editions increased the group's knowledge of a topic that might not otherwise have been raised on the course. Thus the process of discussion and eventual rejection of the idea was by no means wasted time, but a significant part of the students' learning: a distinctly 'value-added' element of their course. Finally, the group opted for an alternative that would still have significant 'academic' content, but also use other strengths:

PROBLEM 3: CREATING A COURSE
ASSESSMENT OUTCOME: WRITTEN

The Open University is setting up a new undergraduate course (level 2) on eighteenth-century literature. Its aim is to introduce students to a representative selection of set texts, chosen to reflect the range of literature of the period and to raise and address the problems that modern readers from a diversity of backgrounds have in approaching the literature of a past age. The teaching is conducted largely through distance learning, and it is therefore essential that the course is supported by effective course booklets. Each booklet is to focus on one long poem, or an extract from a long poem, or a selection of short poems. You have been commissioned to produce one such booklet on an appropriate work by any one poet or an appropriate combination of two or three poets. The format of the booklets is up to the presenters, but should operate according to the following principles:

- No prior knowledge of the author's work is to be assumed on the part of the students
- No prior experience of the literature of the period is to be assumed on the part of the students
- Students must be assumed to come from a diversity of backgrounds, social and cultural
- Students will have successfully passed the Arts Foundation course (level 1), which introduces them to critical methods and the range of approaches to literature, but they cannot be expected to have addressed the particular problems that your choice of text presents
- The material should focus on critical and interpretative issues, in order to allow students to engage with the important literary issues in the poem(s). All biographical material will have been presented in another introductory booklet.

Conclusions

- Groups need time and space to work out their best *modus operandi*
- The most effective work combines separate strengths
- Particularly challenging problems can alert students to gaps in their knowledge, even if the problem is not in the end chosen
- Enquiry-Based approaches can lead students to engage with ideas that may not be included in their final work, but nevertheless play an important role in their broader intellectual development

Addressing the problem

Observations

Work on this task drew on the strengths developed by the group on earlier problems. Thus it was quickly decided that a single central poem would be the focus of the booklet, while Rachel kept on reminding the group about the target readership and the need to keep the educational aims of the booklet to the fore. When it came to choosing the poem, Tom argued for William Collins's "Ode on the Poetical Character" on the grounds that it had been touched on in earlier sessions as a poem that reflects a concern with the nature of poetic

creation and expression and would therefore make an ideal exemplum of the issues in eighteenth-century poetics. The others, having persuaded him against his choice of problem, respected his arguments and accepted. The group thus found itself confronting one of the most difficult poems in a difficult period of poetry. Collins's poem was then approached through the students' various strengths. Thus, Tom's cogent arguments for choosing this poem led to material that appeared in such sections of the finished booklet as "The Role of the Poet", where the poem was firmly located as belonging "at the heart of a key eighteenth-century debate". Jo's concern with poetic texture produced sections such as "The Shape of the Poem", where Collins's curious structure - with a central mesode replacing the final epode more common in Pindaric Odes - was interpreted in a way that linked with questions about poetic roles: "Collins is structuring his status as poet as a turning and counterturning around a central image or emblem as if searching for a path in." Lyndsey addressed with her customary enthusiasm and energy the poem's allusions to Milton and other writers, so drawing on her developing strengths as a researcher, while Rachel was able to provide the biblical knowledge essential for a poem that self-consciously relates itself to creation myths. This range of information strengthened the opening chapter on "Origins" and later sections on intertextuality and poetic lineage.

Each aspect of the work encountered its problems. For example, an intensive period of reading led to the group's realisation of the sheer difficulty of the poem on a syntactic and lexical level. This challenge was met in various ways. Tom interpreted the poem's linguistic difficulty as a creative reflection of its engagement with tough and complex issues, while Lyndsey's meticulous approach to a reading of the poem reflected her desire to develop a methodical strategy for her own study processes, providing much of the substance for the group's conclusions. Not the least of the beneficial effects of the task on student learning was to reinforce the centrality of 'close reading' in the academic study of literature.

Conclusions

- A good group functions through give and take, and respect for each other's strengths
- Difficulties can be productive, are part of the challenge of Enquiry-Based Learning and demonstrate how it develops transferable strategies
- Serious literature has the richness and complexity to reach out to the different experiences of diverse readers

- Creative group work enables students to learn from each other within the natural processes of human communication and so encourages the development of **valuable interpersonal skills**

Producing the outcome

Observations

The resources contained in Bill's room - exploited when the possibility of the edition was being considered - were still more useful here. The 'booklet problem' - the idea for which had come from Bill's own experience as an Open University teacher - necessitated consideration of the appropriate register for an unfamiliar context, a trickier version of an issue confronted in problems relating to the media.

- What kind of language would communicate serious issues to a relatively inexperienced audience without being condescending?
- How much recapitulation of ideas would be sensible for purposes of emphasis?
- What makes for a communicative format?

The group welcomed the opportunity to read actual examples of second-level Open University booklet material and to judge how successful the 'professional' course team had been in resolving these difficulties. They were thus able to adopt the role of critics, looking from the viewpoint of students who themselves had only recently been second level and new to the literature of the eighteenth century. At the same time, they were undertaking the highly creative task of selecting, adapting and improving in order to accommodate format to a significantly different and difficult topic. They were being put into the 'real life' position of assessing educational material and becoming themselves educators. This proved an exciting challenge, particularly for Rachel who was already committed to teaching as a career. For the whole group, commenting on professional material proved to be a powerful learning method.

The finished booklet adopted some of the successful devices used in the Open University material consulted. For example, questions for users/recipients of the booklet to consider punctuated the text at appropriate moments. So our students' section on the structure of the poem was prefaced by "What do you understand by each of the words in the title? Does

the title influence your reading of the poem? Does the title give rise to certain expectations about the poem?" Pausing in this way matched the team's own decision to take a careful, measured approach to a difficult poem and encouraged a reflective approach on the part of readers. Each section ended with a review – a bullet-point summary of key ideas covered, another device to encourage reflection.

The team took the decision that the challenging nature of the material required a structure that built up carefully as more difficult topics were broached. They noted, for the benefit of the OU editorial team, stages in this process. For example, "*[By this point the successful student will have understood some of the main themes of the poem and the subject of intertextuality. We now move on to a more complex approach to subjectivity as suggested in the poem.]*" Equal care was devoted to finding the best way of encouraging readers to understand how the poem related to a wider poetic context. For example, students were asked towards the end of the booklet to read another of Collins's poems from the same volume, "Ode to Evening", and to consider how it differed from "Poetical Character". The subsequent discussion acutely linked this new poem to key themes of the booklet, such as intertextuality and the problematic relation between human limitation and poetic ambition: "In this poem ["Ode to Evening"] Collins takes his inspiration from the book of nature, the Creation of God: therefore he no longer has to deal with the impossibility of the human/divine connection present in his subjective view of that which he conceives as objective (the writings of Milton and Spenser)." The argument led to a broader contrast between organised poetry of natural description (for example, James Thomson's *The Seasons*) and the fragmenting effect of poems that attempt to chart an inward, psychological exploration, such as Thomas Gray's *De Principiis Cogitandi*: "It is in this context that we find Collins's *Ode on the Poetical Character*, essentially a mapping of the mind, a journey through Collins's own perceptions of literature, the history of literature, the nature of the 'poetical character' and the role of the poet." Thus main themes from earlier sections were woven into a conclusion that was both sophisticated and challenging, but to which readers had been brought gradually and sensitively. The booklet, by the same token, came to represent a significant academic achievement in its own right.

The achievement of a coherent whole, one that melded individual strengths and individually written sections, involved extensive, and time-consuming, group editorial meetings. The team grasped quickly that an effective booklet had to be more than the sum of separate

parts. This brought to the fore the skill of team-working, one which had been hard won on that first trial problem. There, this group had decided that the most convincing test of the validity of a radio script was actually to produce it in its final version, as it would be broadcast. They thus, after many a long hour in Tom's house, produced a complete tape-recording that they presented as their outcome. Now they applied the same concerted approach to the production of a written outcome. So effective was this working practice that they requested a common group mark for the whole problem on the grounds that the final product was the result of a fully integrated team effort, rather than - as some other groups tackling the same problem have presented - a succession of four separate chapters. This action on the group's part demonstrated highly mature skills. They were now negotiating with an academic (and so their 'superior') regarding the assessment. Their capability to negotiate among themselves was now being transformed to a different and challenging context, requiring initiative and courage.

Conclusions

- One of the strengths of this problem was to focus students' attention on educational processes themselves
- Creativity can be evoked by reversing roles: students were put in the situation of being educators, so giving them a fresh perspective on the learning process
- A problem that - unlike conventional academic essay questions with an assumed and familiar register - obliges students to consider issues of language alerts students to the nature and challenges of communication
- Learning how to teach is the best way of learning oneself: the group felt at the end of the process that their understanding of the poem and its complex issues was immeasurably deepened
- You cannot impose on students an ethos of working together: team-work is most effectively achieved through their experience of finding out what produces the best results

Reflection

The extraordinary achievement of this example of Enquiry-Based Learning can be measured by the way in which process and product answered, in one fell swoop, virtually the entire list of criteria defined in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's benchmarking statement for English. These covered all areas: subject knowledge (such as "appreciation of the power of imagination in literary creation" and "knowledge of linguistic, literary, cultural and socio-historical contexts in which literature is written and read"), subject-specific skills (such as "critical skills in the close reading and analysis of texts", "sensitivity to generic conventions" and "rhetorical skills of effective communication and argument") and generic and graduate skills (such as "the capacity to adapt and transfer the critical methods of the discipline to a variety of working environments", "competence in the planning and execution of essays and project-work" and "the ability to work with and in relation to others through the presentation of ideas and information and the collective negotiation of solutions").

The relevance of these skills for actual future experience can be gauged from comments provided when participants were well into the year following their work on this course:

"My experience of PBL as an undergraduate has had a greater and more positive influence on my postgraduate career than any other previous training. Specifically, I have integrated the notions of team work and task-based researching into my approach to my MA: both the Research Training group work and my individual preparation for taught courses. Time management, effective interaction with peers, and task delegation and organization, skills to which I was introduced and which I developed in my undergraduate PBL sessions, have provided essential foundations and have helped me to achieve success in my current studies."
(Jo)

"The beauty of PBL classes is that they have simultaneously enriched my appreciation of the scope and complexity of my subject and made me aware of the processes by which this appreciation was reached. An understanding of the problems and dynamics of group work can also apply to professions outside the subject area... This has given me huge confidence in approaching the professional world that would not have been acquired within the 'normal' university Arts education." (Tom, who is moving into a career in Law)

"PBL encourages - indeed, demands - much personal study and I enjoyed taking the initiative for my own learning. I developed a much more specific and much deeper level of knowledge compared to other, more 'traditional', modules at university. The group work aspect meant that the four of us pooled resources and worked very closely together, which greatly enriched my knowledge. For example, considering others' views of the poem/the way they approach poetry generally made me think differently and stretched me academically (e.g. Jo: very technical/linguistic and I'd never approached poetry like that!). In terms of personal skills, our group work demanded tolerance, compromise and trust. Working together as a team, with the group's best interests as the priority, was an important aspect of our work. PBL, and in particular the OU booklet, were invaluable experiences in preparation for my teacher training. We had to analyse the poem ourselves and identify the key themes/ideas that we wished to explore in the booklet. We then had to consider the 'audience' (level/previous knowledge/social and cultural background etc) and pitch the booklet appropriately. The learning process had to have a clear structure, with each 'lesson' forming a bite-sized chunk of the whole, building up from the main themes/ideas to the more complicated linguistic features and background to the socio/intellectual debates at the time. These skills are all used in teaching. Indeed, this forms the basic structure of every English 'scheme of work' in every classroom. Working as a student on a booklet for a student forced me to analyse different methods of teaching and learning, which has given me insight into education which I can now use myself in the classroom." (Rachel)

This was an academically strong group of experienced students, and, as with any case-study, care must be taken before extrapolating broad conclusions. But teachers lucky enough to encounter such students will know that academic prowess does not guarantee the kinds of social, interpersonal and communication skills so amply demonstrated in this study. The case for subject-specific Enquiry-Based Learning as the most effective method of learning about Literary Studies rests ultimately upon its capacity to create the conditions for such a powerful combination.

Identify any positive aspects of working as a group on your presentation:

Shared ideas - group members able to identify weaker areas of your presentation before actual submission - collaborative conclusions drawn on themes of time & memory - trying with & manipulating ideas a more successful method than making mind up & pursuing it blindly!

Suggest one change you could have made to improve the group effort:

I (as always) cover too much and end up scribbling ideas out right at last minute - fortunately, worked this time, but really want to give myself more time to reflect on final outcomes before actually present them into assessed problem.

Overall, I rate our group approach to preparing and delivering the presentation as

Poor

Adequate

Good

Very good

Overall, I rate my own contribution to the group as

Poor

Adequate

Good

Very good

Any other comments

Always enjoyed PBL method of learning - but this time have actually realised the ^{even} greater potential, when you throw yourself into group work. And newly converted advocate of "you only get out what you put in" - in terms of group work, and would be happy to try and convince any 2nd years who are (as I was)

reluctant to believe in the benefits of real co-operation. It's so easy to justify to yourself the belief that "you don't really need to go to the meeting because you won't let the group down in the end - you will just

Please hand this sheet to Dr Hutchings at the end of the session - it will be returned to you together with his feedback

the work in" - except putting the work in on your own, can only produce a shadow of what can be achieved in groups. ~~unproductive~~ (Need to go on?)

GENERAL COMMENTS

Please write general comments in this space. Feel free to comment on any aspect of the course unit or the programme as a whole (continue overleaf if necessary)

I don't know where to start in my praise for the course. I have enjoyed every aspect of it - beyond my expectations even at the start of the semester. From a very personal standpoint - the structure of the course & the working relationship I had developed with my peers through the very nature of PBL enabled me to continue working through illness (I failed to do so in my other courses). The course has been a source of inspiration & enjoyment when other aspects of my life have seemed difficult.

I have felt that this course has given me the freedom to structure my own ideas and responses to work with the confidence that they will be considered seriously. I have not felt framed in critical material - lacking a voice of my own.

The friends I have made on the course have raised my opinion of students beyond belief - I have been privileged to meet and work with students who are both inspirational and intelligent. I have enjoyed their friendship over the semester so much - and hope to work with them in the future - by carrying on the skills I have learnt to other courses.

I feel I have been inspired, guided and moved by the teaching, structure & poetry on this course. Thankyou.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Please write general comments in this space. Feel free to comment on any aspect of the course unit or the programme as a whole (continue overleaf if necessary)

The PBL Setup of this course, I can honestly say, has led to this course being the most rewarding and interesting unit I have done in my time at university, even to the extent that I am considering MA work in the subject. If I have to voice any criticisms about the course, it is only that if ~~you~~^{a student} ends up in a group with other students who do not work as hard, or do not have the same intentions, it could possibly be detrimental to the mark. However, this ~~is~~ disadvantage is hugely outweighed by the advantages of PBL. The group work allows the student to draw not only from tutors and written resources, but the learning experiences, methods and knowledge of peers. I have found this extremely useful and would recommend this course, or any course taught by this method to anyone considering it.

The authors of this article are immensely indebted to Jo, Tom, Lyndsey and Rachel, both for their readiness to allow their work to be quoted and discussed and for the excitement that working with them generated. It was a privilege to be present.

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Website references:

Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning www.manchester.ac.uk/ceeb/

The Quality Assurance Agency www.qaa.ac.uk