# Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning
## Essays and Studies

Bringing Research and Teaching Together

Dr Bill Hutchings, The University of Manchester

## Summary

The Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning at the University of Manchester is committed to the development of Enquiry-Based Learning at all levels of the student experience. A central principle of Enquiry-Based Learning is that teaching methods should be consistent with the research attitude to learning that informs all academic activity. An Enquiry-Based Learning process follows closely the stages of advanced research, including the analysis of a problem, the formulation of appropriate questions, the identification of key issues, the search for valid evidence and the presentation of outcomes. This paper briefly describes the Enquiry-Based approach, outlines its principles and offers two brief examples from Literary Studies, one at an elementary and one at an advanced level.

A more advanced example using the poem referred to in the elementary example may be found in the essay, *Facilitating Enquiry-Based Learning: Some Digressions*, on the CEEBL web-site. For a fuller account of the issues involved in the advanced task in the present paper, see *Problems: Defining Learning Outcomes* on the CEEBL web-site.

The Centre for Excellence in **Enquiry**-Based Learning (CEEBL) is housed at the University of Manchester, a proudly **research**-intensive university.

CEEBL's aim in terms of developing Enquiry-Based Learning within the institution is to seek to have definitive impact on School and Faculty teaching and learning strategies by demonstrating, through specific innovations at local level, both the effectiveness of Enquiry-Based Learning as a teaching method *and* the key role that Enquiry-Based Learning can have in building a holistic research community (that is, one dedicated to research attitudes at all levels). This is to use the word 'holistic' in its proper sense of the production of a whole from the ordered grouping of unit structures. The motor must be at the ground level, that of individual courses and modules, both because these provide the tangible evidence of effectiveness and because it is only the academic experts themselves who can properly assess *how* Enquiry-Based Learning can best be applied to their discipline.

CEEBL is, therefore, generic, not subject-specific, and is engaged in developing projects at all levels of Higher Education experience, from first-year undergraduate to Professional Doctorate students. Indeed, we go beyond these parameters, as we are also involved in work with potential university students currently in secondary education.

Our function is shared between the practical and the theoretical. We offer hands-on support with specific aspects of a wide range of teaching projects. We are also running a series of seminars and producing a set of publications that will, we hope, provide both assistance with implementation and an intellectual and academic substructure for a conceptual paradigm of Enquiry-Based Learning. CEEBL itself therefore links research with teaching and learning.

This conceptual paradigm is founded on the comparability of Enquiry-Based Learning and research procedures.

- What does 'research' mean, at its root? The word derives from the Late Latin 'circare', meaning to seek, to look for. This is the same root as for the modern French 'chercher'. The root of 'circare' is the classical Latin word 'circus', meaning a circle. 'Re-search' therefore has at its root the idea of circling round a physical place/a mental space again

and again. It is a process of reiterated investigation, with implications of thoroughness of procedure and re-testing of discoveries.

- What does 'enquiry' mean, at its root? The word derives from the Latin 'inquaerere', meaning to ask. This is the root also of the modern word 'query'. Enquiry is thus fundamentally about questioning. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'enquiry' as 'the action of seeking…search, research', thus proposing that the words research and enquiry are synonymous.

This closeness, indeed identification, between the two terms suggests that Enquiry-Based Learning is not so much research-led learning as research-like learning. What, then, do research and Enquiry-Based Learning have in common? They are about questioning, seeking, circling. They are about repeatedly returning to the question we began with, now (we hope) informed and illuminated afresh by new learning, but always initiating new enquiries.

The metaphors that can best express the spirit of this process are those connected with journey, with travel. These lines from "Little Gidding", the last of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, are as good as we could ask for:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

And that place where we began becomes the starting-point for a new journey.

We could, in outline, describe the journey thus:

**Research**

- Identification of the area of research, the point of departure;
- Identification of key issues and appropriate questions;
- Investigation of sources and evidence;
- Formulation of provisional conclusions and reporting to one's peer community;

- Reflection on the process, a return to the place where we started in order to re-assess and identify gaps and further areas for research.

## An Enquiry-Based Learning group activity

- Establishment of the area of investigation, a stimulus to questioning usually in the form of a scenario, a task or a problem;
- Identification by the student group of key issues and appropriate questions;
- Investigation of sources and evidence by individuals or sub-groups;
- Reporting outcomes to the whole group;
- Group reflection on the process so far, identifying remaining gaps and analysing the scenario afresh in the light of new learning;
- A process reiterated, re-circling until a provisional halt is called by the exigencies of assessment deadlines.

Thus the paradigm for the Enquiry-Based Learning process is closely modelled on research methodology.

Our contention is that, because of the fundamental generic alignment in process, this paradigm is that which is appropriate for all productive learning, whether at the level of advanced creative research or at the level of introductory engagement with a subject. Thus it can apply to disciplines and courses that do not, *prima facie*, appear to be the natural habitat of Enquiry-Based procedures. Courses that are open to a conventional project or field-work elements already contain implicit Enquiry-Based Learning methods, whether recognized as such or not. But what of other disciplines? A test-case is my own area, English Literature, and even more so my own 'specialist' area, eighteenth-century poetry. There are no natural field-work or case-study elements here; no ongoing exciting research projects to which students can contribute. Instead, we just have a load of old poems. But, if we adhere to the idea of research as a process on which all learning can be modelled, then possibilities open out. I shall look briefly at two examples of how we might proceed, one at an elementary (first-year undergraduate) level and one at a more advanced (third-year undergraduate) level.

## Elementary level

We set as our research topic a single, short poem, Samuel Johnson's "On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet":

> Condemned to Hope's delusive mine,
>  As on we toil from day to day,
> By sudden blasts or slow decline,
>  Our social comforts drop away.
>
> Well tried through many a varying year,
>  See Levet to the grave descend;
> Officious, innocent, sincere,
>  Of every friendless name the friend.
>
> Yet still he fills Affection's eye,
>  Obscurely wise, and coarsely kind;
> Nor, lettered Arrogance, deny
>  Thy praise to merit unrefined.
>
> When fainting Nature called for aid,
>  And hovering Death prepared the blow,
> His vig'rous remedy displayed
>  The power of art without the show.
>
> In Misery's darkest caverns known,
>  His useful care was ever nigh,
> Where hopeless Anguish poured his groan,
>  And lonely Want retired to die.
>
> No summons mocked by chill delay,
>  No petty gain disdained by pride,
> The modest wants of every day
>  The toil of every day supplied.

His virtues walked their narrow round,
 Nor made a pause, nor left a void;
And sure th'Eternal master found
 The single talent well employed.

The busy day, the peaceful night,
 Unfelt, uncounted, glided by;
His frame was firm, his powers were bright,
 Though now his eightieth year was nigh.

Then with no throbbing fiery pain,
 No cold gradations of decay,
Death broke at once the vital chain,
 And freed his soul the nearest way.

At this stage, we do not make possibly excessive demands on students by making them formulate their own research questions. Instead, we short-cut the process by providing the focus probably needed by the less experienced student. The aim is to enable students to discover for themselves key research issues and tools, so that these can become embedded in their own later, more experienced, enquiries.

The task is to consider how far it is appropriate for elegiac writing to be praising and/or critical about the person who is the subject of the elegy, using this poem as the test-case. A sub-group of the whole group is given this task, with the remit of sharing their conclusions in a five-minute presentation, which will be followed by questions from the audience. This audience is the whole student group and the academic facilitator.

Among the lines of the poem clearly relevant is line seven, which consists of a succession of three adjectives to describe Robert Levet: "Officious, innocent, sincere". At some stage of the process, most probably by the sub-group themselves, but failing that by the questioning audience, the implications of the word 'officious' will inevitably need to be addressed.

We know that at least one of Johnson's contemporaries, his first biographer, Hester Thrale, took the word 'officious' in the modern derogatory sense of over-zealous, interfering. But

the word etymologically has the complimentary sense of doing one's duty properly, the root being the Latin 'officium' meaning duty. This is a not uncommon instance of a word becoming tainted with negative meanings through time. In the eighteenth century, crucially, the complimentary sense was still in use, so that 'officious' does not sit oddly alongside 'innocent, sincere'.

The research idea we have brought students to engage with is that language is not a stable, static entity, but shifts its meanings through time. The evident need is for a research tool that will assist students to discriminate between meanings and locate them historically. This tool has already been identified in this paper: the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The discovery of these research needs will take the students back to the poem, the point of departure, for re-examination. And it will also enable students to address their next task with enriched knowledge and research equipment. The process is under way.

A more advanced example using the same poem may be found in the essay, *Facilitating Enquiry-Based Learning: Some Digressions*, on the CEEBL web-site.

## Advanced

Now we complete the research paradigm by requiring students themselves to formulate the research questions in response to an open-ended stimulus.

## PUBLISHING A BOOKLET

ASSESSMENT OUTCOME: WRITTEN

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### ADVERTISEMENT

The English Tourist Board is initiating a campaign to attract people back into the countryside after the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. As part of this campaign, it is sponsoring an exhibition documenting and demonstrating the responses of writers and visitors to the English countryside through the ages. The exhibition is to be called,

"The eye of the beholder: landscape description, 1700-2000"

The English Tourist Board is also sponsoring a booklet (18000 words) to accompany the exhibition. This booklet will complement the exhibition by providing representative examples of landscape description in poetry from the three centuries, together with explanatory commentary and notes. The booklet will be aimed at a wide public, but is intended to be scholarly and informed.

The English Tourist Board invites teams to apply for a contract to compile the booklet. Applicants should submit a rationale for the selection of passages from the eighteenth century and a specimen example / specimen examples (also from the eighteenth century) with commentary and notes.

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*[Note: the word-length will vary depending on the number of people in the group]*

The task is to prepare a specimen sample of eighteenth-century descriptive poetry to accompany an exhibition entitled "The Eye of the Beholder", which is about responses to the English landscape through the ages. The research activity is modelled closely on the actuality of the editorial task of preparing a new selection or anthology of poetry.

The stimulus raises a whole series of issues relating to this kind of task. Let me take just one. All selections are partial and are therefore explicitly (or, more insidiously, implicitly) based on a set of assumptions or preconceptions about the nature of the poetry itself and the purposes and target audience of the publication. By engaging students in this task, we create a situation in which the problems of selection are inevitably confronted *by the students themselves*, obliging them to assess and interrogate their own assumptions and

preconceptions. For a fuller account of the issues involved in this task, see *Problems: Defining Learning Outcomes*[1] on the CEEBL web-site.

To arrive where we started. CEEBL is a generic Centre. We want to provide practising academics with the means by which they can discover learning strategies that are modelled on their own research paradigms. These will inevitably differ in substantial detail from subject to subject, from course to course. But, by refining and re-examining enquiry processes and by demonstrating the essential elements of all our work that we hold in common, we hope to create a holistic academic community, one in which we all, from the most inexperienced undergraduate through to the most advanced researcher, share a commitment to the questioning journey that is learning.

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[1] Available from: http://www.manchester.ac.uk/ceebl/resources/