



6.2 Written Reflective Account of Practice

I left school with just two low grade 'A' levels, and a very powerful sense of failure and inferiority as an academic scholar, yet now I am a higher education academic working to develop and extend the teaching practice of lecturers throughout the University and Chair of a National Association with over 1150 HE members.

I remember clearly that my written work did not match my classroom contributions. I was a valued and useful contributor to classroom debate, making insightful and original comments, but my written work lacked depth of analysis and sustained argument. I quickly became bored working on my own with books and paper but was inspired by live discussion on any subject. Sadly, this kind of engagement was not valued through any measurement of academic success. My learning style was not valued or catered for (**K3**). (Kolb 1984, Robinson 2006)

Following a 10 year career as an actor and despite huge trepidation regarding a return to academic writing, I took a degree in BSL/English Interpreting at Wolverhampton. As it happened, I selected two L4 modules on critical thinking. The foundations these modules laid regarding how to create and structure arguments in essay form were enlightening to me and in combination with my life experience which helped significantly in 'fixing' and processing learning in context, enabled me to achieve a 2:1. They were a personal lesson in how important it is to demystify the rubric and cultural language that confuses and excludes so many people from the HE environment (**V1**) (Chanock 2000). Even more significantly, I had become passionate about access and widening participation in higher education. (**V2**)

In 1998, I secured full time employment at Sheffield Hallam as an interpreter and service manager.

Interpreting gave me access to a wide range of classroom environments and enabled me to observe at close quarters, differing teaching styles. I became painfully aware how well some lecturers could employ techniques and strategies to engage students and keep them interested, in alarming contrast to others who wouldn't or couldn't. Alongside this I had the privilege of observing students working together outside the classroom grappling with teamwork and their understanding of what was required of them academically.

The skills I had learned as an actor that enabled me to empathise with and understand individual motivations, subtleties of message meaning and intention and how to deliver these in different ways, I had already discovered were directly transferable to the role of interpreter. I now understood how critical they were to the skillset of the successful teacher (Scott 2007). This area is something I returned to later in my career and will be the subject of my second case study.

It was also my responsibility to develop teaching practice to be more accessible. I designed, planned and delivered workshops across the University and wrote a wide variety of materials to raise awareness and enhance teaching practice **(A1)**. Initially, this was pre-discrimination legislation (SENDA 2001) in education and I found myself having to persuade staff to change their teaching to facilitate learning for those at a disadvantage **(V2)**. All staff knew enough to be supportive of the principles of equality of access but were surprisingly adept at finding reasons why it could not work in their context. A variety of arguments were put forward: unfairness to other students through inconsistency; undermining academic integrity; impracticality due to lack of resources; external or internal constraints regarding professional standards or University quality regulations, all potentially valid in certain circumstances but which, in my view, frequently boiled down to a lack of willingness to, or fear of, change.

Given the resistance I was experiencing, I realised that I needed to develop an authority and credibility based on something other than equality and diversity knowledge. I therefore enrolled on and successfully completed the PGCert in Learning and Teaching in HE in 2003/4 **(A5)**. Not having an academic contract or formal teaching role I undertook to write and have validated a module entitled 'An Introduction to Deaf Studies' which I marketed, recruited and taught to completion **(A1)**.

I gained much from the course over and above learning and teaching theory. Through networking with course peers drawn from right across the University, I was able to understand the pressures on academics more clearly: how some had been thrown in at the deep end; the difficulties of handling large cohort sizes; having to deliver course content handed down to them by others with no scope for alteration; were just some of the issues I noted **(K2)**.

This new knowledge and my interest in teaching as a whole, combined with my ongoing determination to enhance the experience of disabled students led me to develop a greater interest in the idea of inclusive practice (Waterfield & West, 2003; Griffiths 2010; Hockings 2010).

I rapidly became seen as the champion of this work within Sheffield Hallam such that by the time the Disabled Student Support Team was restructured in 2008, I was made Head of Inclusive Practice (Disability). I had already become a regular contributor to the PGCertLTHE delivering a session on Disability and Learning Contracts and I now gradually changed it to focus on Inclusive Practice **(K1)**. Key to the success of teaching teachers is modelling good practice as well as describing it. Following inclusive practice principles such as providing materials in advance, using accessible materials and employing a range of activities is a form of experiential learning (Jarvis et al, 2010) that is critical to the success of encouraging good practice. For tutors to argue that they can't do something when they can see it being delivered to them becomes much harder. I recall one student tutor arguing that to provide a menu of assessment methods for students to choose from would make the experience too easy, until they were reminded of their own choice on the course.

Utilising consistent feedback from students (staff) on the course, I persuaded the course leader to restructure the course and place my session in the first module in order for it to influence thinking throughout! This session has received some excellent feedback: *"By the way, I wanted to share with you both the wonderful experience of Paddy's session last Friday. It was amazing!"* and a frequent number of group presentations each year select Inclusive Practice as the focus **(K5)**. I am regularly contacted by staff following the course

wanting further advice on developing practices for their teaching. Examples include changing assessments to prevent targeting extra time at disabled students (English Lit), how to ensure inclusion of those from a variety of cultural backgrounds by using a range of case study examples that relate to all (Computing), changing the materials used for all students rather than producing separate materials for some (e.g. cream paper) and how to make field trips inclusive (Geography)(**A4**).

I was also invited to become a regular in the teaching team, supporting Micro-teach sessions, co-delivering a number of sessions on assessment, delivering sessions on voice work and confidence in the classroom and supporting the assessment presentations. I was also acting as support for some of the team outside teaching and became a mentor for one 'student' at their request, meeting them regularly on a one-to-one basis.

Alongside this teaching I also initiated work with Faculty staff to enhance inclusion, both with individuals and sitting on various E&D and LTA Committees regularly across all four Faculties. For example, I had meetings with the then Head of Student Experience in D&S and produced a series of three Occasional Papers addressing a variety of 'quick wins' for inclusive practice (**K4**). These papers were supported and signed off by the Executive Dean and we then met with subject groups to encourage take up. I co-presented this work with the Faculty colleague outside the University at the World Universities Forum in Rhodes; a RAISE Conference in Southampton and our own LTA Conference 2012.

During this period my growing influence on academic teaching was recognised by the unusual practice of being transitioned from a professional services post to an academic role in the new QESS Directorate (2011) successfully achieving HEA Fellowship at the same time. Here I drafted the University's Inclusive Practice Framework in collaboration with my manager which I presented to the Student Experience Learning and Teaching Committee (SELTC) and which was approved. This framework sat under and was linked to the University's LTA Strategy. I also led on the development of the Inclusive Practice page content for the new Teaching Essentials website developing a number of case study examples through interviews with academic staff across the institution.

My work has been further recognised in this area through being invited to present workshops at a number of Conferences and delivering a keynote on Inclusive Practice at the University of Bolton's LTA Conference. I was also invited to sit on the RAISE Inclusive Practice SIG.

All this time, however, I was aware of a disconnect between the claims for inclusive practice implementation in high level institutional policies (such as Corporate and LTA Strategies), within and across national bodies such as the HEA and the QAA and the experience I had, regarding the limited amount that was actually changing in the classroom (**V4**).

I therefore determined to try a different approach by creating my own case study to produce evidence of success which could be modelled and produce a ripple-effect of change through direct experience. (See Case Study 1) (**V3**).

The work continues through newer projects I have initiated. For example: using research from the US (Ofiesh, Mather and Russell (2005)) to extend the exam time for all students to reduce the need for extra time specifically for disabled students (**V3**). I have already garnered support through initiating meetings with Registry, DSS and the Director of T&L and written and presented a paper to the RAPF. The paper was supported in principle with some minor changes and the next step is to begin a pilot and evaluate impact.

Most recently, I have become involved with the University's Professional Recognition scheme. I support the TALENT Framework which incorporates the HEA Fellowship scheme **(K6)**. I lead workshops with staff from across the institution, advise and coach them on a one-to-one basis during day-long writing retreats, sit on decision-making Recognition Panels both as a member and as Panel Chair, as well as engaging in moderation for the scheme across all pathways to accreditation. The University has set a challenging KPI target and thus many academics attend workshops and retreats at the behest of their managers. To meet the target I must promote Recognition in the face of some cynicism which takes considerable skill and sensitivity, accepting and allowing the cynicism whilst gently, honestly and with quiet conviction reinforcing the considerable developmental positives of the scheme. Additionally, this work puts me in the privileged position of reading about and discussing academic practice with individual lecturers. Identifying and encouraging their good practice is important as is enthusing them with the positives of good teaching. Talking to those who initially aim at Fellow level and helping them to recognise the full extent of their contribution so that they apply for Senior Fellow is a rewarding but important aspect of the role **(A3)**.

In parallel with my work at SHU, I have also been very active externally. I was Convenor of CHEADS (the Consortium of HE Support Services for Deaf Students) for over 3yrs and took it through a reorganisation in order for it to survive without funding. In 1999 I became involved in a HEFCE funded project to establish an Association to support disability officers. In 2005, I was elected onto the Board as a Director of the association, now entitled the National Association of Disability Practitioners, and in 2012 became Chair. It now boasts a membership of over 1150 with representatives from well over 90% of all HEIs. **(V4)** As Chair, I lead a Board of twelve Directors who have a variety of substantive roles in the HE sector. As such I am responsible for ensuring that the organisation fulfils its aims to support and develop, through conferences and development sessions, those working with disabled students across the sector. This includes sharing and developing innovative practice in student support both practical and academic, as well as promoting Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The work impacts directly on the educational experience, retention and success of disabled students and on the overall experience of students in HEIs and thus their NSS scores. **(V2)**

I represent the organisation in key Government and funding body stakeholder groups looking at both policy development and operational implementation alongside other major sector organisations such as UUK. **(V4)** I have led on the development of an Accreditation Scheme for NADP members, built on the same lines as the original ILT Fellowship, and have actively supported the development of a service accreditation scheme to be piloted shortly. This aims to ensure the quality and consistency of provision across the sector to ensure disabled students can choose their HEI based on course rather than support related matters. **(K6)**

I was also invited to represent NADP on the LINK Steering Group (Learning Inclusively, Network and Knowhow) a network of European organisations aiming to develop, share and enhance the provision of inclusive practice for students across Europe. In comparing the development of support and accessibility in the UK with other nations it is ironic to see how well the targeted support practices for disabled students have developed here as a result of a student-centred funding stream (DSAs) and how envied they are by our European

neighbours when this is the very same reason why many European countries, lacking such funding streams, have more focus and success in the development of UDL and which we can learn from in turn. I was able to develop and use the International contacts made through working within the LINK network to enable high quality presentations on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) at the 3-day NADP International Conference in Manchester in July 2015 attended by over 230 delegates from all parts of the globe which I Chaired and facilitated.

Word count: 2340