

Rethinking personal tutoring systems: the need to build on a foundation of epistemological beliefs.

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Abstract

This paper explores the changing nature of higher education provision and questions whether the existing 'traditional' model of personal tutoring remains appropriate to the contemporary landscape. It details the elements of change that render obsolete the traditional view of personal tutoring as institutions move from being campus-based residential communities of learning to commuter non-residential communities. The literature base informing retention and success in the student journey is reviewed and comes to the conclusion that foundations in epistemological self-belief are fundamental in under-pinning the relationship between academic guidance and student. It describes an attempt at facilitating dialogue between student and academic mentors around epistemological beliefs as part of the POISE Project and concludes that student support mechanisms must be more closely tailored to the nature of the institution and the lifestyle of the student.

Introduction

European Universities can trace their origins to medieval guilds in which Masters provided instructions and support to apprentices in the development of skills. They might equally see their antecedents in the monasteries in Europe, ancient Indian religious centres or China's Taixue or Imperial Academy. Whichever 'roots' are chosen what emerges are largely residential centres of learning. A range of institutions, of public and private universities and colleges, provide contemporary higher education in the UK, and collectively they represent an incredibly diverse range of provision referred to as higher education institutions (HEIs). They vary in size and subject focus and many have strong associations with their historical missions. One might expect this diversity in provision to be reflected in the personal tutoring support provided; however, this paper suggests that there is remarkably little difference in the way in which support for students is organised and delivered. It goes on to suggest that there is value in unshackling support systems from existing language and historical practices.

The terminology used in describing the supportive relationship between staff and students is incredibly diverse. Literature searches reveal terms such as personal tutor, pastoral tutor, academic tutor, learning support, mentor, guide and others. In addition to the identification, by some name or other, of an individual there are other forms of student support including peer relationships and increasingly intelligent tutoring systems (Carolis, 2005). There are variations in the terminology used according to country, nature of the institution, and indeed discipline. Mentoring and 'pastoral care' appears to be the preferred term in nursing and medicine where as

academic 'tutor' takes precedence in humanities disciplines. Much of the UK literature insists on contrasting institutional tutoring systems against the benchmark of the 'Oxbridge model'. Other terminology is equally pejorative, with the term mentor reminiscent of old craft apprenticeships now returning into fashion. There is a need to clarify the language used in supporting students in whatever relationships are to be defined. One clear motivation for looking at personal tutor systems is the clearly changing nature of the student, as an individual, and the student body. Since the concept of a personal tutor was introduced into higher education, indeed around which it was constructed, students have become a less homogenous body.

The Changing Context of Provision

Students can no longer be assumed to be resident. Recent figures from the Santander group suggest that more than 22 per cent of students choose to remain living in the family home with 66 per cent citing cost as the main reason. Increase in tuition fees in the UK and the rising cost of rented accommodation has forced students undertaking full-time study to choose institutions close to where they live (Marsh, 2014). Another recent survey of 1000 students by Education Phase puts the figure of those at home at 23 per cent, and suggests that on average students travelled 91 miles between home and University to attend studies. The study goes on to identify at least 30 per cent of students travelling at least 100 miles to study. The same study identifies that 73 per cent of students chose to study away from home in order to be able to choose a particular institution although there remains evidence that the desire to move away from home and study in a different city or town remains a powerful motivation with 60 per cent citing this as a key reason (Arnett, 2014). This suggests that the idea of the non-residential commuter institution is becoming more common with a consequence of increased 'blended-learning' delivery.

Increasing proportions of students who remain in the family home and undertake significant travel to attend university should suggest that the kind of support required is evolving. One of the oft-cited motivations for attending university is beyond achieving a qualification but to learn 'life skills'. Whilst many faculty consider the incidental maturing of students as a happy consequence, others regard documentation of extra-curricula activity or structuring such activity as crucial (Brown & Schrader, 2008). There remains evidence to suggest that university students do need support in simply 'growing up' with a 2013 report suggesting the number of university students seeking the support of counselling services has risen 33 per cent since 2008. An NUS report in October 2013 also suggested that 2 per cent of students had sought counselling services in the previous year but 20 per cent of students consider themselves to have a mental health issue with 13 per cent having had

suicidal thoughts. A total of 92 per cent of respondents in the NUS survey suggested they had experienced 'mental distress' with the main causes cited as coursework related (65 per cent), exams (54 per cent) and financial difficulties (47 per cent). Over 25 per cent of those surveyed had not shared their concerns with anyone and only 10 per cent accessed the services provided by their institution (Froio, 2013).

Another significant emerging trend is for students to be working as an increased proportion of their time alongside study. A survey of 2128 students found 45 per cent having a part-time job and 13 per cent in full-time employment, much of which continues during term time as well as vacations. Most cite the need to earn money, although it is interesting that 53 per cent suggest that students identify their future employment prospects as a prime motivation (Gil, 2014). Universities typically suggest a limit between 10 and 15 hours of part-time work a week during term time, though some institutions attempt to prohibit students from working at all. Other restrictions on work are faced by the increasing proportion of international students (UKCISA, 2013). This is an area worthy of further research, given the suggestion that necessary accommodations to the curricula and teaching practices are needed to cope with the changing reality of increased work participation on the part of students (Manthei & Gilmore, 2005).

In 2012-13, the gender split of the HEI student population was 56.2 per cent female and 43.8 per cent male. Even a cursory glance at the data begins to suggest the need for different models of support. The gender balance for part-time students were 60.5 per cent female and 39.5 per cent male, for full-time and sandwich students the split was 54.5 per cent female and 45.5 per cent male. We might expect there to be significant differences in the support provided for part-time students and that this might also address gender differences. For non-EU domiciled students, often referred to as 'international' students, the overall gender gap is less significant 49.2 per cent female and 50.8 per cent male. However if we look at other undergraduate study (other than towards achievement of a degree) there are interesting variations; female students make up 65.3 per cent of those studying part-time as opposed to 34.7 per cent of male students. Even before we explore the differences in age and domestic circumstance, it is clear that there will be differences in the needs of students at different levels. Added to that complexity, we might also include the 598,000 students who are studying wholly overseas but either registered at UK HEI or working towards an award given by a UK HEI in 2012-13 (www.hesa.ac.uk).

International students are often identified as needing specific support needs. A recent survey of six EU countries identified a sophistication in customized provision of support services with often national standards to rely on, as well as a wealth of

experience of transnational student movement to build upon (Akli, 2012). Whilst there risks some complacency in thinking 'we do everything we can', there appears to be some limits to any single institution's ability to service the diverse needs of specific international cohorts. There are emerging models of support that include partnerships between institutions to support specific cohorts of students, notably from Australia, where there are suggestions of the pooling of support resources between geographically proximate institutions which offers alternative options worth considering (Burdett & Crossman, 2012).

Clearly our HEIs represent incredibly diverse communities of learning and existing mechanisms for socialization and support are challenged by this heterogeneity. The 'ideal' of the Oxbridge College Tutor has persisted and much effort and resource is committed to try and replicate it regardless of contextual realities.

How do institutions respond?

Following a review of institutional websites in October 2014, it is clear that the vast majority of UK higher education institutions have explicit policy statements relating to the provision of personal tutoring (80 per cent), with the remainder stating such support in more obtuse references or in delegated documents at faculty or departmental level. Whilst the overwhelming preference is to use the term 'personal tutors', other refinements such as 'personal academic tutors' are also used alongside aligned roles such as 'year tutor' and 'Dean of students'. Approximately 50 per cent UK HEIs on their public webpages reference the use of personal development planning (PDP) alongside personal tutor support. At least 75 per cent provide detailed web support for students defining the role of personal tutors alongside a range of other support services. It is noticeable that this is an active area of policy development with over 80 per cent of policy statements having been updated in 2013 or 2014. The preference for over 90 per cent of institutions is for a fairly traditional blend of personal guidance usually under the guise of:

- Academic guidance
- Academic support
- Career planning
- Pastoral support

This closely follows the benchmarking documents issued by Watts in 1999, when arguably there was more homogeneity in provision. Following an analysis of the role of personal advisers in post-compulsory education, Watts stated the purpose of effective provision was to:

- Provide ongoing support in an established relationship;
- Provide ongoing support in an established relationship;
- Provide holistic guidance incorporating both academic and personal information advice and guidance;
- Referral to other support specialists;
- Provide personal advocacy in the form of references and representation.

(Watts, 1999)

Higher Education Academy, in its work on widening participation, outlined a similar set of benchmarks with increasingly diverse communities in mind. The resulting recommendations suggest that personal tutoring comprises:

- Providing a stable point of contact within the University;
- Providing guidance on higher education processes and procedures and expectations;
- Providing academic feedback and development aimed at orientation of new students to academic demands;
- Providing personal welfare support;
- Providing referral to sources of further information;
- Building the institutional relationship and the sense of belonging.

(Liz Thomas, 2006)

This 'model' of personal tutorial support was born at a time when institutions were largely 'residential campus-based' with the vast majority of students living in student halls. It also originates in a highly selective environment when significantly less than the current target of 50 per cent of school leavers attended further or higher education. The reality of plurality in provision surely requires equally diverse responses. Ultimately, institutions may need to relinquish ownership of its custodial relationship with the students and instead replace it with a system that empowers students to search for relevant support. The increasing diversity of the student body, drawn from all sections of society, regions, countries, nationality and ages, as well as differing modes of study from online participation and distance study, to workplace and off-campus programs, surely questions the models of support but have stood scrutiny for so long. Given there is nearly universal agreement of the need for students to have access to 'learning support', this is the logical place to begin to assess provision.

Theoretical Models of Learning Support

The role of the personal tutor, under what name and guise, has been the subject of extensive writings although there has been relatively little empirical research with some subject or domain specific exceptions (Burk & Bender, 2005; Powell & Mason, 2013; Symonds, Lawson, & Robinson, 2007). Research focuses on cohort studies and deals primarily with subject skills specific support. There has been little research linking motivational and psychological factors with the operation of tutor support. Burke and Bender (2005) found that, despite the formal support mechanisms in place, students frequently relied on themselves and their informal peer networks. They also noted a gender difference with female students going outside the institution more frequently than their male counterparts. Studies addressing the needs of a particular demographic are frequently too generic to be of value in policy planning, although some large international comparison studies provide useful insights. Whilst the importance of student support services as a measure of institutional attractiveness alongside its academic, teaching and research profile is highlighted by studies (Kelo & Rogers, 2010), the actual uptake of services contradicts this assertion.

Studies relating to student support mechanisms have tended to focus on the question of retention and progress. One notable theoretical position by Vincent Tinto, described as 'interactionist theory', is concerned with the early departure of students from colleges and universities. This work focuses primarily on the fear of failure by students and the failure of the institution to create a sense of community of belonging (Tinto, 1993). This work has been influential, particularly in the US, in influencing norms of student support but its emphasis has been on a traditional campus community, despite the fact that one empirical study could find only a single institution and that only supported five of Tinto's original 13 propositions (Berger & Braxton, 1998).

More recent attempts by Ormond Simpson to develop theory of learner support in the context of distance learning is invaluable in basing its conclusion in the fields of learning and motivational psychology. Summoning Dweck's self theory and Anderson's advocacy for proactive support, Simpson suggests that there is a noticeable institutional benefit in the retention of students through development of alternative models of learning skills development and support. We should exercise caution however, since Anderson suggests that remediation (intervention to support failing study skills) risks demotivating learners over time (Clifton & Anderson, 2002) and there is evidence that even learners who are made familiar with their personal learning style may not find any correlation with their motivation for learning (Jelfs, Richardson, & Price, 2009). There is broad agreement that study skills alone are insufficient and that student motivation proves a critical feature, with notable US research with school leavers identifying that students who

receive self efficacy training have a higher retention rate than those receiving learning skills alone (Barrios, 1997).

Anderson and Clifton have advocated a 'strengths approach' in researching the importance of self-esteem in the learning process. The premise is that individuals do best when they focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses and, therefore, focusing on those weaknesses may not be a particularly effective way of improving success. Rather, they suggest that the identification and support for existing strengths, and understanding the means to transfer those skills for effective study, proves long-term gains. Anderson and Clifton identify some 30 strengths which can be explored in a face-to-face programme of encounters over a number of weeks (Clifton & Anderson, 2002); however, Boniwell has suggested a nine-point approach for the relevant member of staff to use with individual students. This nine-point approach is as follows:

1. Emphasising the positive dimension is crucial during initial contact;
2. Focusing on existing strengths and competencies;
3. Identifying past success and achievement;
4. Encourage 'positive affect', building on hope and aspiration;
5. Identify underlying values, goals and motivations;
6. Exploring personal stories, then rating one's own life story;
7. Identifying resources and support;
8. Validating effort rather than achievement;
9. Finally: exploring uncertainties and lack of skills.

(Cited in Simpson, 2008)

Whilst Boniwell suggests some means to facilitate these conversations between staff and students should be enabled by institutions, the reality is many faculty would find such empathic discussions difficult.

Work by Vansteenkiste resulting in a 'self-determination theory' identified that students performed best when they felt autonomous in their study choices (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006), with evidence from the Open University UK that students who have a choice of study material and participation options have the maximum student retention (Tresman, 2002). Most programmes of study, however, have been designed with deadlines, fixed content and rigid assessment processes making such findings difficult to implement in most institutions. Other theoretical models that explore notions of students self-identity include 'achievement

goal theory', in which one of three goals identifies students' self orientation, namely 1) mastery goals - to reach genuine competence, 2) performance goals - to demonstrate competence to others, 3) performance avoidance goals - to ensure avoiding perception of inadequacies (Skaalvik, 1997). Other researchers have concluded that there are complex social motivational factors involved and that there are reasons to pursue strategies that support performance goals as well as mastery goals (Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002).

Vansteenkiste and colleagues carried out empirical studies that have shown that intrinsic goal framing (relative to extrinsic goal framing and no-goal framing) produces deeper engagement in learning activities. These orientations also ensure better conceptual learning and higher persistence at learning activities (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Within certain highly competitive disciplines and understanding of student motivation, this theoretical construct might prove valuable. Similarly, work by Pajares argues that self-belief and self-comprehension are important determinates in study success but cautions that students' own self-conceptions are frequently faulty (Pajares, 1996). Empirical studies examined students' awareness of their own relative competence or incompetence and identified that whilst 60 per cent of students had a realistic expectation of their own competence, 20 per cent were excessively unrealistic in terms of their competence and 20 per cent a negatively soft judgement regarding their competence (cited in Simpson, 2008).

Study skills have become associated with an add-on provision based on an historical assumption that students enter university already equipped with the appropriate skills in order to undertake higher learning (N. Bennett, Dunne, & Carre, 2000). In an environment in which study skills are framed as remedial provision, students who arrive without the assumed skills, notably international students and 'non-traditional' students, are immediately disadvantaged (Cottrell, 2001). Most UK universities provide, usually through specialist study support centres situated within learning and teaching centres or within library services, opportunities for students to undertake writing enhancement programmes and individual tuition. Ursula Wingate argues that separating study skills from subject content and the process of learning is ineffective and that study skills should be more fully integrated within modules and programmes (Wingate, 2006). There is an argument to suggest that a full range of literacies should be integrated into the learning experience in order that universities can prepare individuals to be 'fully literate' for a knowledge driven world; ...literacy can be taken from a wealth of dimensions other than reading and writing ability or numeracy: media literacy, active citizenship empowerment, financial literacy, basic technological skills, social and values (ethical) literacy, intercultural dialogue aptitude, health literacy, to mention just some. (Carneiro & Gordon, 2013, p. 476)

Unless as institutions we opt to educate to the syllabus without ambition, we must surely consider the ways in which plural literacies in our disciplines should be framed. I have argued elsewhere that effectively designed learning outcomes using a full range of educational objective taxonomies should enable all the full range of higher education skills. Use of knowledge, affective, psychomotor and cognitive learning outcomes, identified with a full range of literacies, to be acquired within modules and programmes would be the most meaningful way to allow students broad metacognition (Atkinson, 2013).

Starting with Foundations

Distributed institutions cannot afford, or deliver efficiently, the central services to meet diverse student needs. Changing contexts, notably the move towards the notion of the lifelong learner, means changing support structures and given the limitations of costs it becomes clear that foundations matter (Field, Gallacher, & Ingram, 2009).

Any review undertaken to inform the student support strategies identified a need for epistemological orientation in learning and teaching activities and assessment practices. The most common language used terms are 'orientation' or 'induction' and the focus has tended to be on the 'first-year experience' (Nelson, Quinn, Marrington, & Clarke, 2012). Also highlighted were the range of excellent opportunities for greater international and culturally diverse insights to be contributed by staff and students from different backgrounds into the curriculum (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). This need for enhancement was particularly relevant to the stages of pre-arrival support, pre-sessional support and induction within the Student Lifecycle.

Effective induction, orientation and retention require an appropriate epistemological foundation for all students a number of ways:

- To enable students to achieve a more effective transition regarding pedagogical methodology from previous educational experiences to their experiences in UK higher education;
- To facilitate the more effective integration of students into relevant learning communities;
- To develop faculty awareness, skills and teaching strategies by the more effective application of epistemological orientations (evidenced notably as 'cultural sensitivity') into their teaching practice which will thereby develop the effectiveness of student learning environments.

A focus on epistemological orientation in the contemporary context of UK higher education must surely be to regard all students as 'international students', in that they are operating within a global context regardless of their discipline, nationality or status, and the increasingly diverse nature of students should also necessarily force us to consider all students as 'transitional students'. This approach will also mitigate the feeling of 'otherness' experienced by many international students in focusing on the positive aspects of each individual's unique contribution to the learning community.

Interest in how students learn extends into the field of metacognition, student's self-awareness and motivation for how they learn; this in turn is founded on the notion of 'personal epistemological beliefs'. Research in this area is based in part on the assumption that students have discernible beliefs about the nature of knowledge and that these assumptions, or conceptions, affect their performance in learning activities. Schommer developed a questionnaire used to establish epistemological beliefs amongst college students in the United States and this instrument has been used in other studies to justify a number of cultural differences (Schommer, 1990, 1993). The question as to whether the instrument developed by Schommer is contextually specific, in other words whether it can be used outside of the context for which it was developed, is itself the subject of research (Clarebout, Elen, Luyten, & Bamps, 2001); however, a review of epistemological beliefs instruments, drawing on the work of Bennett (1986), Magolda (1992), Schommer (1990, 1993), Schoenfeld (1983), Dweck & Leggett (1988) and Perry (1968) suggested there are fundamental questions students can and should be asked to establish their beliefs about learning. For example, Dweck explores the need for individuals to identify themselves as being 'entity' theorists or 'incremental' theorists, where in the first instance one believes that intelligence is largely fixed and cannot be changed through effort, and in the second where the incremental theorist believes they can increase their intelligence through effort (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

The empirical data to support correlations between student success and epistemological beliefs is contested. In their review of epistemological beliefs survey instruments and their theoretical underpinnings, Hofer and Pintrich conclude that there is little consensus amongst researchers about the construction of epistemological belief and their relationships with other factors impacting on student attitude and approaches (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). They express a particular concern with the conflation of very different concepts in a single survey instrument, particularly the mixing of questions related to intelligence and to learning. In this early evaluation of the field they have already identified the difficulties of ambiguous language and assumptions being made by researchers about the clarity of underlying constructs. Schommer positions her own work as an attempt to diversify the dimensional aspects of earlier work by Perry who, she argues, produced a

unique dimensional and fixed notion of personal epistemological development (Perry, 1968; Schommer, 1990). Schommer attempted to create more complex matrices of interdependent values recognising that beliefs may develop along different dimensions at different rates. She proposes five epistemological dimensions, the first three of which relate to knowledge itself, namely structure, certainty, and source and to others which relate to the acquisition of knowledge, namely control and speed. For each of these dimensions Schommer proposes subsets of questions, 63 in all, creating a complex array of questions.

Recent attempts to explore the relationship between epistemological beliefs and metacognition, particularly the issue of how and why epistemological beliefs have an impact on learning, have explored the COPES model (Bromme, Pieschl, & Stahl, 2010). The COPES model conceptualises epistemological beliefs as 'internal conditions of learning', suggesting that beliefs are part of an internal self-regulation system (Greene & Azevedo, 2007). This system provides an internal conceptual framework about the nature of what is to be learnt and how such learning occurs. The justification for the study of epistemological beliefs and metacognition, and their relationship to self-regulated learning, is important if one accepts the premise that beliefs both scaffold and constrain the learners' assumptions about both learning content and context. Epistemological beliefs can be seen as a lens through which the learner perceives the substance to be learnt as well as the landscape in which learning is to take place. The system the student puts in place to cope is represented by the notion of 'self-regulated learning' (Winne, 2005).

Educational psychology frameworks consisting of four identifiable and interrelated dimensions of belief provide a useful exploratory framework for epistemological beliefs (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). The first two-dimensions, or binary juxtaposition, explore the nature of knowledge through the concept of certainty and structure. Certainty of knowledge is concerned with perceptions of the stability of knowledge and the strength of supporting evidence and structure, or simplicity, of knowledge seeks to define the complexity or connectedness of knowledge. The second binary juxtaposition is concerned with the nature of knowing, rather than knowledge itself, and contrasts the justification of knowledge and the source of knowledge. Justification of knowledge is concerned with the process by which individuals evaluate and validate knowledge claims and the source of knowledge is concerned with notions of place and origin, where knowledge resides. There remains a debate as to the extent to which these dimensions are universal or whether there are domain or subject differences (Buehl & Alexander, 2001).

A core principle emerging from the educational psychology literature is that learners' epistemological beliefs develop over time as a result of educational processes from the 'naïve'

towards the 'sophisticated' (Bromme et al., 2010). A naïve epistemological framework would be one in which an individual sees knowledge as fixed and canonical, a collection of certain facts whose source is guaranteed by the authority of the person declaring the knowledge. A sophisticated perspective might be described as one in which any knowledge claim is regarded as dependent on context and which is continuously challenged and re-evaluated through a process of social interaction. Whilst a naïve view might suggest that knowledge is unchanging, a sophisticated view defines knowledge as uncertain and continuously reconstructed. It is worth noting perhaps that the very language itself describing these two different epistemological beliefs could be regarded as pejorative, since the terms naïve and sophisticated carry significance in the English-language. Convinced, as I am, that a profound shift in focus in our institutional support mechanisms for effective learning requires an engagement with the epistemological belief foundations of learners, perhaps a bigger problem is that such educational language, of psychology and metacognition, indeed of epistemology, is alien to the majority of teaching faculty and certainly beyond many students. A solution is necessary to reconcile the complicated notion of epistemological beliefs with practical implementation support mechanisms.

POISE Project: an institutional response

In the belief that student success in learning requires an awareness of one's own epistemological belief structures one recent initiative, the POISE project, sought to acknowledge and reinforce the diverse cultural contexts in which learning occurs. It aimed to provide a toolkit to enable a consistent, supportive and transformative orientation to study, as a core provision for ALL students across ALL programmes of study. POISE was an institutional-wide change initiative, in partnership with the Higher Education Academy Change Initiative, which reflects the global nature of the professional education BPP University offers to its undergraduate and postgraduate students in Business, Law and Health.

The original aim of POISE was to facilitate engagement with a POISE 'toolkit' by each student, and each member of faculty, in order that they 'hear their own voice'. In doing so, they become aware of their own unique epistemological belief structure and, therefore, of the uniqueness of others' equally valid perspectives. This is vital for a higher education institution to actively demonstrate interest in individuals as learners and that such interest is fundamental to facilitating successful educational experiences. Each individual voice is as valid as anybody else's and, when heard, students will be able to shape the delivery of teaching and learning activities. This happens because faculty becomes increasingly aware of diverse perspectives and students' ability and develop a willingness for greater engagement with fellow students' unique frameworks. Given this lofty ambition the project team, a

mixture of faculty and students, began identifying the themes in the epistemological literature and linking these to those areas of student 'need' of which we were already aware. We felt it was essential to develop a framework for student and faculty engagement based on the literature in order that future materials or issues would be theoretically grounded. We were seeking to avoid the development of diverse and disconnected resources. The aim was to produce a 'framework' that would allow opportunities to engage in a 'dialogue about beliefs'.

The notion of binaries presents an opportunity to engage in a 'dialogue about beliefs'. We suggest that it is appropriate to establish the beliefs about learning that underpin a student's (or faculty member's) approach to learning and teaching, rather than to identify a 'problem' and tackle it with an intervention in isolation. For example, if it is believed that a student is not fully aware, or in tune with, the institution's guidance on plagiarism, it would be useful to introduce this dimension of academic practice by first exploring the question of whether knowledge is based on authority or reason. Without a fundamental understanding that the western academic tradition expects students to develop their own reasoning skills and to acknowledge pre-existing authority in a particular way, one cannot effectively explore the detailed nature of academic referencing, citations and intellectual ownership. Based around five dominant themes in the epistemological literature, it was decided that we would use POISE (as an aide memoir or mnemonic) and follow a similar pattern; this resulted in the following matrix:

Binary concept	Belief statements (after (Schommer, 1990))	Scholarship roots	Pneumonic
Quick or not at all	Learning is quick or not at all (Quick Learning)	(Schoenfeld, 1983)	Pace
Authority or Reason	Knowledge is handed down by authority (Omniscient Authority)	(Perry, 1968)	Ownership
Innate or Acquired	The ability to learn is innate rather than acquired (Innate Ability)	(Dweck & Leggett, 1988)	Innateness
Simple or Complex	Knowledge is simple rather than complex (Simple Knowledge)	(Perry, 1968)	Simplicity
Certain or Tentative	Knowledge is certain rather than tentative (Certain Knowledge)	(Perry, 1968)	Exactness

Table 1 - Five Dimensions of Epistemological Belief

After a series of internal workshops, complemented by thought-provoking events arranged by the Higher Education Academy as part of the HEA Internationalisation Change Programme, the team began to generate an expansive and highly ambitious 'cradle to grave' approach, which required production of comprehensive learning support resources. However, at an

internal design workshop in January 2013 we realised that our enthusiasm to support the student experience in every way possible, although laudable, had created unrealistic expectations for our initiative. We determined that we needed to regain our focus on the original project aims, concentrating on creating a solid foundation from which to build effective resources which relate to specific parts of the student experience (i.e. those concerning learning transitions, successful integration into learning communities and improvement of the effectiveness of student learning environments). Through further staff and student focus groups these ideas were developed and refined. It was determined that the original framework grounded in the literature was inaccessible to students, and perhaps the majority of faculty, and so the five dimensions of epistemological belief were re-cast as 'open questions'

Pneumonic	Binary concept	POISE Questions	Scholarship roots
Pace	Quick or not at all	Is hard work enough?	(Schoenfeld, 1983)
Ownership	Authority or Reason	Who has the answers?	(Perry, 1968)
Innateness	Innate or Acquired	Who is responsible for my learning?	(Dweck & Leggett, 1988)
Simplicity	Simple or Complex	Is there a simple answer?	(Perry, 1968)
Exactness	Certain or Tentative	Is there always a right answer?	(Perry, 1968)

Table 2 - Five POISE Questions built on dimensions

The project also benefited from external feedback given by other higher education institutions during the HEA Internationalisation Change Programme and at the HEA sponsored workshop held by Newman University in February 2013 entitled Developing Culturally Capable Staff. This feedback related to the foundation, but also the proposed framework, and delivery of POISE. We concluded that mnemonic designed to recall Pace, Ownership, Innateness, Simplicity and Exactness also served as a project title making POISE about producing effective resources built on the following foundation:

- PERSONAL - focussed on the individual;
- ORIENTATION - not 'cradle to grave' solutions;
- To the INTERNATIONAL - we define this as everyone's context rather than a question of nationality;
- STUDENT EXPERIENCE - focussed primarily on their learning and awareness of the self as learner.

The original concept had aimed at facilitation of the dialogue between the individual personal tutor and student. It was

also recognised that these questions would equally serve to frame staff development efforts for all tutors in order that they would benefit from a greater personal insight into their own epistemological belief and be better able to support the transition from naïve to sophisticated belief systems held by students. The internal School structure of the institution mitigated against an institutional implementation and the project resorted to developing a standalone web-based resource. The five themes have emerged as a series of five web pages, each containing a dialogue between two different perspectives, which explore each of the binary opposites outlined above. Each short video (less than three minutes) introduces the broad concept through opposing dialogue.

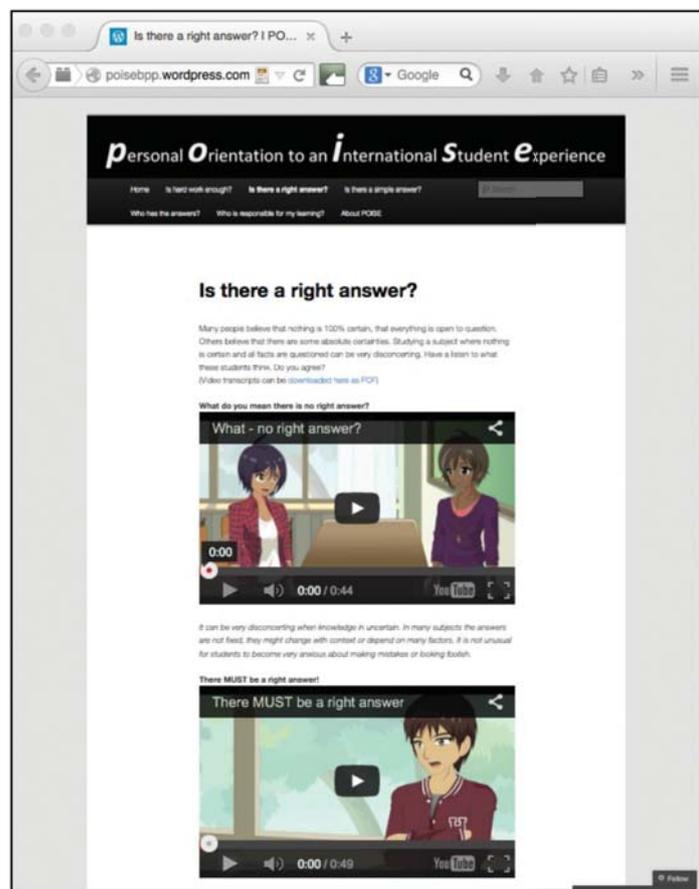


Figure 1 - Webpage for POISE Resources

A search on YouTube reveals dozens of international students talking about their experiences and as part of the project many excellent 'talking heads' resources were considered. Our original intention had been to add to this body of sharable testimonies and commentaries with similar live videos of individuals talking. However, as the project developed it became clear that the most powerful evidence was not an individual's statements but what emerged in dialogue with others, and so a series of short vignettes of two or more students discussing

their learning was deemed more appropriate. Understandably, some of the participants in our developmental workshops were concerned that their honest declarations would be judged by others negatively and early attempts to have individuals act out previously heard dialogues were unconvincing. We also identified that every individual will make a 'judgement' on seeing and hearing someone speak as we bring all our own personal histories and assumptions to bear. So we wanted to find a way of sharing these valuable insights, short snippets of students' conversations about the POISE questions, without the person watching 'jumping to conclusions'. We sought to avoid a tendency to say, 'ah, yes, Japanese students would say that', or 'that's what British students always say about maths'. So we decided to use cartoons. The voices are not as natural as one would like, but they are 'neutral'. It is obvious that they are not 'real people', but the dialogue is. The words spoken are students' words. In our workshops we have found that students and faculty watching the videos laugh a little at the 'digital' voices on the first clip but soon acclimatize and start to listen to the actual dialogue. The dialogue between students has been only lightly edited and a transcript is therefore available for each video. This also means that as the technology improves we can always redo the cartoons for more and more natural voices.

It was anticipated that this would illuminate some well-documented (but evolving) cultural differences in expectations of study at higher levels and provide the student with a comprehensive personal 'audit', which they would use as the basis for discussion with their tutorial support. Faculty, having also engaged with the resource would be enabled with a common frame of reference and be encouraged to explore the similarities and differences in epistemological approaches of their approach with students, highlighting the impact this might have on learning practices. Faculty, the majority of whom are also personal tutors, would consequently be exposed to a greater range of supported and documented perspectives, moving beyond the anecdotal 'challenges posed by International Students' to a greater, and transparent, acknowledgement of the richness of learning and teaching opportunities contained within these different epistemological perspectives. It was also intended that existing institutional coaching and mentoring skills development for faculty would be used to support staff engagement with the POISE change initiative.

Conclusion

Given the increasingly diverse nature of the student population, a long way away from the selected and 'ever ready' school graduates, it is unsurprising that institutions now provide a myriad of support services. In some institutions there is clarity between study support and student welfare services and in others these can be found bundled together in 'student services'. In some institutions these services are aligned alongside library provision and in others provided wholly or jointly with student union organisations. There is a need for institutions to recognise the evolutionary nature of this provision and to question whether there is not now a need to wipe the slate clean. There is an obligation on institutions to provide students what they need but also what they want and the onus is then on us to ask students new questions.

Students are clearly a diverse group of individuals and we must provide individually tailored solutions if we wish to maintain the diversity within our learning communities. Clearly it is impractical, not least from a financial perspective, to design solutions targeted for each individual but it is surely possible to provide mechanisms that enable students to pull down services as and when they require them in a more meaningful way. Whilst there are certainly faculty members who are heroic in their endeavours to service both the academic needs of their students and provide welfare and personal guidance, this is an unrealistic expectation. While in some disciplines, notably in health, such personal tutorial support focused on the affective development of students, clearly is a requirement imposed on faculty, this is not universally true. We should re-evaluate the need for personal tutorial support and where appropriate differentiate academic guidance and mentoring from welfare duties. I believe with correct epistemological orientation and the embedding of skills within courses, the academic role should be largely limited to academic 'mentoring' in reviewing choices, strengths and weaknesses, and academic progression.

The degree to which support for the affective development of students is provided will then depend largely on the nature of the learning community itself. The ability of faculty and students to create a supportive community able to furnish appropriate aid on demand will depend on the extent to which students operate within a closed system. In a non-residential commuter institution, and in distance provision, the enormity of diverse needs simply cannot be sustained within our existing tutorial systems. Instead, we should provide students with the maturity to understand their own needs and facilitate their access to appropriate support most probably sourced from outside the institution. Partnerships, both formal and informal, with welfare services (counselling services, financial advisers, spiritual services, housing support and other) can be paid for by the institution, itself based on use or delegated to the individual student. A more formal arrangement of the division of academic

mentoring and effective support is more likely to ensure quality advice and guidance is more universally accessible. Institutions must recognise, however, that instituting such a division of labour may appear to disenfranchise those tutors whose strengths include the personal, human touch, support which they've become accustomed to providing their students. It may even prove realistic to offer a range of services that differentiates teaching, assessment, learning support and other support services. Can we envisage a time when a student who purchases assessment and validation services but asks for no teaching and support? This raises a fundamental question as to what the purpose of the HEI might be. Do we exist to teach or to validate that learning has occurred?

I believe this begins with an orientation to individual epistemological beliefs, a conversation that can begin before students even begin their formal programme of study, to ensure not that we are all on the same page but that we understand the page we are on. POISE is one attempt at this meaningful orientation that can be integrated into online materials or initiated in face-to-face individual or group interactions. I believe we should also re-evaluate our course designs to ensure that a full range of skills are built into intended learning outcomes to which constructively aligned teaching activity is targeted. Ensuring that all the domains of educational objectives are embedded within course designs, with supplemental teaching integrated into course delivery if necessary, will enable students to best help themselves on their study journey.

Better prepared students will lighten the burden on academic guidance services and 'reduce' the role of the traditional personal tutor. Where students identify needs they must be able to find clearly signposted support services, internal to the institution or increasingly externally, available on demand. This is not an abdication of responsibility on the behalf of institutions, quite the opposite. It is a recognition that increasingly higher education approximates more closely to the world of work than it does to the closeted environment of school. In reality, most of our modern universities never had cloisters and students living around the quad, it is time for our support services to students to reflect that truth.

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