Enacting Metalearning

Using *Performance Based Research* in conjunction with Meyer's *Reflections on Learning Inventory* to raise HND/FD students' awareness of the self as learner in the context of level six (final year) undergraduate study

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Project Title
Using *Performance Based Research* in conjunction with Meyer's *Reflections on Learning Inventory* to raise HND/FD students' awareness of the self as learner in the context of level six (final year) undergraduate study

Definition
The concept of metalearning, as defined by Biggs (1985), encapsulates two complementary features of deep level, self-regulated learning capacity: 1) an awareness of self as learner in some specified context and 2) control over self as learner in that context (see Meyer, Ward & Latreille, 2009). Metalearning is thus concerned with increasing students' capacity for self-regulation and thereby making them aware of the projected likely consequences of a particular study orchestration (Meyer, 2004) in a given context.

Research Aim
To explore how developing HND/ FD students' metalearning capacity might aid their transition onto a BA Honours Drama programme.

Research Sample
The study was conducted with ten direct entry level three students who had transferred from HND and FD programmes to a BA Honours Drama Programme. To preserve their anonymity, students are referred to as student S1-S10.

Value of Study
This study seeks to contribute to the literature on, and discussion about, how to:
• Encourage students to reflect upon their learning strategies;
• Enhance the progression experience of HND/FD students;
• Enhance dialogue about learning between teachers and students;
• Improve study support strategies.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on an interdisciplinary, collaborative research project between the School of Education at Durham University and the Drama Department at the University of Sunderland concerned with the progression of Higher National Diploma (HND) and Foundation Degree (FD) students on to the third year of a BA Honours Drama programme. The project sought to investigate attitudes towards learning among these students by engaging them with the process of their own learning (metalearning). In doing so, the project had at its heart a practical concern with the 'bridging' experience of HND and FD students. Specifically, it explored:

• How emphasising reflexivity about learning might aid students in developing learning strategies suited to the demands of final year undergraduate study;

• How to develop study support mechanisms that will support the progression of HND /FD students to undergraduate study and enhance the experience of these students for the duration of level six study.

This paper is divided into four sections. *Section One* provides a discussion of HND/FDs and the 'bridging problem'. *Section Two* explains what metalearning is and details the methodologies employed during the course of the project. *Section Three* describes the metalearning work undertaken with students. *Section Four* provides an analysis of the metalearning materials produced by students, summarises the insights derived from these materials, and the impact of these insights on study support strategies.

SECTION ONE: Higher National Diplomas, Foundation Degrees and the 'bridging problem'

A Higher National Diploma (HND) is a work-related qualification that has been running in HEIs for several decades and which continues to be provided by over 400 HEIs and FECs in the UK. Foundation Degrees were introduced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in September 2001 and currently cater to over 87,000 students. This number is set to increase in the near future as the Government has set a target of recruiting 100,000 students to Foundation Degree programmes by the end of 2010 (in large part as a means of fulfilling New Labour's commitment to placing 50% of 18-30 year olds in Higher Education by 2010 and the Leitch Review of Skills' (2006) target of ensuring 40% of the adult population are qualified at level 4 or above by 2020).

Bridging from HNDs/FDs to final year BA Honours

The Academic Infrastructure places the skill level of HND and FD graduates at level five, and the third year of undergraduate study at level six (QAA, 2010), and thus identifies that students who have completed HND/FD qualifications are eligible for entry to the final year of honours degree programmes. However, although completing an HND/FD is held to be equivalent to completing two years of honours degree study, it is widely acknowledged (cf:

Greenbank, 2007, Reid, 2005, QAA, 2005, Tysome, 2003) that the skill sets of HND/FD students can be incompatible with some aspects of final year undergraduate work. Several recent empirical studies (Greenbank, 2007, Reid, 2005, QAA, 2005) have attributed this incompatibility to causes such as:

i. The academic qualifications of HND/FD students. The level of academic achievement required for entry to HND/FD programmes is, for example, less demanding than for entry to honours degree programmes, i.e. usually equivalent to one A level, and these students therefore usually have less experience of traditional academic skills;

ii. Incompatibility of focus in FECs (where the majority of HNDs/FDs are run) and HEIs: the former prioritising practice, the latter 'academic knowledge and theory' (QAA, 2005: 2);

iii. A deficit of emphasis on higher level skills of analysis, critical evaluation, research and independent work in HNDs/FDs (QAA, 2005: 10; Greenbank, 2007: 1);

iv. Incompatibility in forms of output preferred on HNDs/FDs and BA Honours programmes: the former demanding projects and logbooks, the latter independent work and critical analyses (QAA, 2005: 2);

v. Levels of scholarship among staff in FECs (QAA, 2005: 2);

vi. Differences in the learning cultures prevalent in FECs and HEIs (cf: Greenbank; 2007, QAA, 2005; Reid, 2005).

In summary, the emphasis of HNDs/FDs on practice-based and work-related learning suggests that HND/FD students have less opportunity to develop traditional academic skills (e.g. in the areas of research, critical writing, analysis and independent learning). Furthermore, the academic focus of HNDs/FDs can be bound up with encouraging accumulative and/or detail-based learning processes with, for example, students being required to 'maintain daily logbooks, write reports or seek solutions to an identified practice problem' (QAA, 2005: 11).

Bridging strategies: content-based bridging

When FDs were introduced there was implicit acknowledgement of these differences and how they were manifest in the culture of FECs and HEIs. As a consequence, initial *bridging strategies* were established offering additional credits - usually between 20 and 60 - that recapitulated elements of second level undergraduate study. However, variance in understanding of the content of FD programmes among staff at HEIs (QAA, 2005: 13) resulted in inconsistency in how institutions managed the transition for students from FD to BA honours programmes: for example, some institutions required three to four months of additional bridging while others incorporated bridging into FD and/or undergraduate study (QAA, 2005: 8). This meant that in some cases up to 300 HE credits were required to gain access to some undergraduate programmes (60 more than is now officially necessary), but in other cases only 240 credits were required, and FECs and HEIs were thus increasingly advised to develop strategies that allowed students to exit FDs already prepared for BA

Honours study (QAA, 2005: 8).

Alignment of HNDs/FDs and BA Honours Degrees

In light of these issues, one idea that is gaining in popularity is altering either HNDs/FDs or honours degrees to make them more alike. There is, though, contention over whether it is HNDs/FDs or honours degrees that need to change. Suggestions that approaches to teaching and learning are modified in honours programmes to accommodate a more diverse student body by, for example, making content more vocational, altering teaching style and developing new forms of assessment, have been met with little enthusiasm on the grounds that such changes would undermine the academic credibility of honours degree programmes (Greenbank, 2007: 98). Equally, proposals that HNDs/FDs should become more like honours degrees by introducing more emphasis on independent study and academic content have been met with reservation because these changes would undermine the purpose and appeal of HNDs/FDs both for non-traditional students and employers (Greenbank, 2007: 98).

SECTION TWO: Metalearning

The 'bridging problem' and metalearning

The 'bridging problem', then, has causes which are bound up with a number of academic and political tensions. As institutions jettison bridging modules, yet encourage HND/FD students to enter the final year of undergraduate programmes, the 'bridging problem' threatens to become more acute. Pressure to provide progression opportunities for HND and FD students nevertheless seems set to increase. HEIs are thus faced with a difficult challenge: how to develop strategies that will support students to succeed in HE so that neither the students nor the values of HE are compromised, and furthermore how to embed such strategies within a 360 credit curriculum.

In what follows, we explore the impact of addressing this problem by focussing on the development of students' metalearning capacity, i.e. students' awareness of the learning methods that they employ, and how they might take control of their learning (Biggs, 1985). The literature on metalearning certainly suggests that metalearning is an ideal candidate for offering the kind of framework for personal development that HND/FD students require. In this regard, a number of recent metalearning studies propose a causal relationship between increasing students' metacognitive awareness of themselves as learners in the HE context and students' ability to adopt study orchestrations suited to this context, i.e. their ability to develop and self-regulate study strategies that will help improve their functionality; make learning more effective (Lindblom-Ylänne, 2004; Norton et al, 2004), and assist matching motive with strategy (Meyer & Norton, 2004: 388). In this respect, Meyer and Norton argue that metalearning is more than just 'another study skill' (Meyer & Norton, 2004: 387):

> A student who has a high level of metalearning awareness is able to assess the effectiveness of her/his learning approach and regulate it according to the demands of the learning task. Conversely, a student who is low in metalearning awareness will

not be able to reflect on her/his learning approach or the nature of the learning task set. In consequence, s/he will be unable to adapt successfully when studying becomes more difficult and demanding. (Norton et al, 2004: 424)

Metalearning does not promise to act as a substitute for disciplinary content but does promise to provide a significant means of enhancing students' engagement with disciplinary content by increasing criticality, capacity for reflection and sense of purpose. For Meyer and Norton this is a matter of considerable urgency:

Building capacity in metalearning is . . . an important area of student success and one, we would argue, that is as important as mastery of specific subject content, epistemologies and discipline mores if we are to produce graduates . . . who are enabled to function effectively in what Bennett has called the 'super complex world' where the way we understand ourselves and how we act in the world is crucial. (Meyer & Norton, 2004: 389)

The literature on metalearning thus suggests that increasing students' metalearning capacity has a considerable contribution to make to students' personal development and engagement with learning.

What follows, offers an overview of the metalearning project undertaken at a university in the North East of England at the beginning of the academic year for 2009/10 with 10 HND and FD graduates.

Metalearning methodology

This project sought to increase students' metalearning capacity through use of:

a) Performance Based Research;

b) Meyer's (2004) Reflections on Learning Inventory (RoLI).

a) Performance Based Research.

Performance Based Research (PBR) (cf Leavey, 2009; Llamputtong & Rumbold, 2008; Garoian, 1999) is rooted in the tradition of Participatory Action Research. PBR employs performance as 'a way of creating and fostering understanding' about everyday life (Pelias, 2008: 185-6). Using PBR, knowledge is not simply called up and 'expressed in discursive statements by informants' but represented through 'action, enactment or performance' (Fabian, 1990 cited in Leavey, 2009:168). The project made use of PBR in such a spirit, deploying students as researchers into their own learning (Lincoln, 1995); allowing them to 'create their own knowledge from their own experiences' (Llamputtong & Rumbold, 2008: 18) and providing a means for them to bring into focus ideas that may otherwise have been difficult to explore.

At one level, PBR provides an effective means of data collection and analysis, with performance serving as an incisive and democratic means of drawing out and examining experiences and conveying ideas, feelings and intuitions about these experiences:

Norris likens the dramatic process to the qualitative practice of focus groups. Similar

> to a focus group, a cast gathers to examine a particular topic or question; however, differing from the "moderator" role researchers adopt in focus groups, within the context of a dramatic "collective creation", there is no division between researcher and participants. The cast... provide the initial data out of which a performance emerges via a drama-based process of analysis and dissemination. (Leavey, 2009: 142)

At a deeper level, PBR might also be seen as a means of fostering personal growth, raising consciousness and/or empowerment by providing a means for participants to explore identity and agency, and how identities are constructed in social contexts. The knowledge produced is 'socially heard, legitimized and added to people's collective knowledge, empowering them to solve their own problems' (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991 cited in Leavey, 2009: 166). As such, it has been argued that PBR allows participants to position institutional discourses 'from the perspective of their personal memories and personal histories' (Garoian, 1999: 1):

> Performing personal narrative reclaims and proclaims both body and voice. The personal gives a body to narrative and narrative gives voice to experience. (Langellier & Peterson, 2006: 156)

In addition, PBR is also held to be particularly valuable because it provides deep access to 'raw data' and thus allows qualitative researchers to get at and explore the dimensionality and tonality of 'rich, textured, descriptive, situated contextual experiences' (Leavey, 2009, 145).

In developing the project reported here, we were particularly influenced by the literature on *dialogical performance* (Conquergood, 1985) and *autoethnography* (Denzin, 2003):

- *dialogical performance* is a means of constructing work via the exchange of oral narrative, with participants encountering and negotiating each other's ideas via a recursive process and collectively responding to, and creating work, from these ideas;

- *autoethnography* is a form of autobiographical self-reflection in which the individual is the primary subject of research and in which narrative is constructed from the perspective of the individual.

b) Reflections on Learning Inventory (RoLI)

The Reflections on Learning Inventory (RoLI) is a peer reviewed diagnostic tool for undergraduates that generates a personal learning profile based on Meyer's (2004) psychometric operationalization of phenomenographically derived categories of description of conceptions of learning. The RoLI 'operationalizes motivations, intentions, conceptions and processes of learning that traverse an accumulative (surface)-transformative (deep) emphasis' (Lucas & Meyer, 2004: 460) and provides a graphic representation of these learning tendencies in the form of a colour-coded learning profile (for a sample profile, see www.rolisps.com). The RoLI has the capacity to reveal key features of students' approaches to learning and to raise students' '*awareness of the self as learner'* by highlighting both un-interrogated assumptions about what constitutes good learning and unconscious habits of learning. Furthermore, it provides a basis for increasing students' awareness of how their learning strategies correspond, or fail to correspond, to those strategies considered to be

effective in Higher Education. As such, the RoLI provides a stimulus that has potentially both meaningful and far-reaching effects (Meyer et al 2009).

SECTION THREE: Work undertaken with students

As the metalearning project would begin during 'Welcome Week' for HND/FD students and involve HND/FD students' first encounter with an honours degree context (and as the project, and its outcomes, were an unknown quantity), we agreed that it might be counterproductive to allow it to displace the established strategies that we had previously employed to support students' induction experience. We therefore concluded that the project should be integrated with traditional teaching and learning and study support strategies and combine a range of components that would:

i. meet students' expectations about what they would be doing on an honours degree drama programme i.e. use drama based teaching strategies that would to some extent cohere with and draw upon students' previous experiences;

ii. embed the project in a meaningful study experience and incorporate many elements of traditional induction procedures e.g. employ seminar discussion, workshop, independent group work, research, self evaluation, essay writing, personal tuition and feedback sessions;

iii. give students a sufficiently rich pool of resources from which to develop performance work.

The format we employed involved four days of activity during a one-week period which presented students with a number of seminar and workshop based tasks:

Introductory seminar

At the outset of the project, two propositions from the literature on metalearning were particularly important to our approach:

i. *Emphasis on learning as a context-bound activity* i.e. on noting that learning cannot be understood in isolation from the environment in which it takes place, and that 'subject disciplines exert their own requirements in terms of studying and of disciplinary differences in teaching' (Lindblom-Ylänne, 2004: 406).

This proposition made it important for us to stress how knowledge, teaching strategies, learning processes and the curriculum employed in HE associated with drama are a discourse rather than absolute phenomena, and further to seek to identify how undergraduate learning criteria in drama are both overt in the literature of the QAA and EWNI framework, and learning outcomes, and implicit in what Turner (1986) has called the hidden curriculum associated with individual disciplines i.e. the implicit values and assumptions associated with the working practices of a given subject area.

ii. The idea that 'knowing more about students' preconceptions is a precursor for pedagogical interventions to support them in developing a clearer understanding of themselves as learners' (Meyer & Norton, 2004: 389), and that 'students enter their studies with quite

different preconceptions . . . and that these different preconceptions can be differentially linked with transformative, accumulative and pathological learning processes' (Meyer, 2000: 9).

This proposition made it important for us to begin with the students' perspective. In order to elicit the student voice, we thus foregrounded our initial intentions as:

* *to encourage students to talk openly about how they go about learning;*

* *to help them develop a vocabulary (i.e. the right words and concepts) to describe their learning.*

In order to emphasise these points, rather than approach the first session with students didactically, we drafted a series of propositions about undergraduate teaching and learning and, in light of these propositions, invited students to take part in a seminar discussion in which they interrogated the dynamic between their own preconceptions, attitudes and assumptions about learning and what they perceived to be the preconceptions, attitudes and assumptions of HE.

This seminar produced two striking findings:

i. It indicated that the topic of reflecting upon learning was *not* something with which many students had previously engaged or which they considered important. This finding was not in itself problematic as, we were aware that self-regulatory learning strategies can sometimes be implicit. As Jackson (2004: 398) notes, for proactive self-regulators, deliberate self-regulated study can be a way of life and thus for some students there is no necessity to consciously articulate the processes in which they engage.

ii. It seemed relatively common for students to see learning as bound up with fixed ability rather than as something flexible in relation to which different study strategies might be adopted. This finding was more of a concern. For students for whom learning was not bound up with personal agency, metalearning would be a meaningless term and concept. If we could not make students see academic performance as a consequence of learning strategies, the metalearning project would fall at the first hurdle. It thus became evident that the project might face some challenges.

Deepening learning engagement through the RoLI

The next stage of the project involved moving from generalised reflection on learning to attempting to uncover specific issues that were pertinent to individual students and seeking to increase their personal engagement with these issues. In order to accomplish this, at the end of *day one* of the project, the students were set a homework task inviting them to generate a self-reported and contextualised learning profile via the completion of Meyer's (2004) online Reflections on Learning Inventory (RoLI). The students were asked to think about their learning experiences during their HND/FD studies and, with these experiences in mind, to complete an 80-item inventory concerned with beliefs about learning, motivations to learn,

and study practices. Responses to the Inventory then formed the basis of a personal learning profile/self-report (see Meyer, 2004).

The student profiles/self-reports

The following presents a conceptually interpreted summary of the self-reports of the students that took part in the study under three headings:

i. 'at risk'/surface-level learning self-report;

ii. 'mixed-level' learning self-report;

iii. transformative learning self-report.

The headings and information below were not given to the students, but are offered here for illustrative purposes. It is also emphasized that what had been categorized were not the students themselves, but transient snapshots of what students had said. Rather than receiving this information, the students were provided with an explanatory document and a tutorial which sought to unpack the profiles in a sensitive manner. In this document and tutorial, we stressed to students that their self-reports were to be used as an aid to help them develop insight into their learning and that they were not fixed accounts of their abilities. We also reminded the students that the self-reports were simply a temporal account of what they had said about their learning, rather than a definitive statement. We thus made it clear to students that the self-report was something to take control of and/or to address, rather than something to position, as an indication of, and explanation for, learning problems.

i. 'At risk'/surface-level learning self-reports

Of the 10 students that completed the RoLI, three students produced self-reports that suggested they might need to review their learning strategies, and that they might require considerable support with their studies to succeed on the programme. These self-reports displayed a tendency towards 'surface' learning (Norton et al, 2004: 426). For example, one of these students had a high score for 'Fragmentation' which is an observable associated with viewing knowledge as fragments of information that do not cohere with a larger sense of purpose. Another student had a high score for 'Learning is fact based' and 'Memorising as rehearsal' which are observables that suggest a view of learning as collecting and memorising facts, and employing a repetitive process to commit material to memory without understanding it.

ii. Mixed-level learning self-report

Five students produced self-reports that suggested that they would benefit from re-evaluating the effectiveness of their learning strategies: for example, two students produced high scores for 'Rereading a text'. This is an observable associated, in some contexts, with a tendency to read a text repeatedly to derive meaning from the text and unwittingly memorising material without understanding it. One of these students also produced a high score for 'Repetition

aids understanding' which is an observable associated, in some contexts, with students forming the belief that they have understood material, when in fact they are only able to recall that material.

iii. Transformative learning self-report:

Two students produced self-reports that suggested a tendency towards transformative, 'deep' level learning engagement (Norton et al, 2004: 426) and, therefore, a good predisposition for study in HE. These students had high scores for 'Relating ideas' to what they already know and 'Seeing things differently', which are observables associated with a holistic approach to knowledge, developing integrated understanding by comparing new knowledge with existing knowledge and developing new perspectives as a result.

The students were asked to print-off two copies of their learning profile, one of which they kept and one which they gave to their tutor.

Deepening learning engagement through PBR

The next stage of the project involved attempting to deepen students' metalearning engagement through performance based work. This allowed us to give the metalearning project greater disciplinary specificity as we were aware that the seminar discussion and completing the RoLI self-reports were both rather abstract activities. It also allowed us to ground the week's work in students' skills and interests. The students all had experience of devising and developing performance work through improvisation and workshop activities and, in addition, many students had a familiarity with the notion of using drama to explore issues of identity or social concern (most of the students, for example, had some knowledge of the work of Augusto Boal, or of forms of applied theatre).

The process of developing performance work began with a number of preparatory workshop activities that focused on group-building and developing an atmosphere of trust and mutual support. Students were then split into groups and asked to brainstorm ideas about their personal and collective conceptions of learning; to offer a poster presentation about these conceptions, and eventually to develop short, group improvisations from the posters. These exercises were set as icebreaking activities, and were run relatively quickly during the course of one afternoon. At the end of the day, students were given the homework task of writing a short monologue about a breakthrough in their learning or a learning experience that had been particularly meaningful to them. On day two of the project, students were asked to share these monologues with the rest of their group and to begin a process of taking on roles and acting out incidents from the monologues, and then telling new stories or sharing ideas that the monologues provoked. This part of the process continued for the next three days. Via this strategy, students were asked to develop both a form and content for their work. In order to support the work, students were assigned a tutor whom they could consult throughout the

week and with whom they could exchange ideas, but this tutor did not intervene in shaping the work, other than imposing a guide time on the performance of 20 minutes. When asked for advice, the tutor's strategy was to remind the students of the various tasks that they had engaged in at the beginning of the project and to instruct them to continue with a similar process of exchanging ideas, writing, developing improvised work and reflecting upon their RoLI profiles/self-reports.

The students presented their performance work to one another on the morning of the final day of induction week. The performances that emerged combined story telling, monologue, and dramatisation, and focused on experiences of learning in the classroom, within work-related contexts and through personal experiences. Below is a detailed description of the performances and what the students said about their work during a post-show debriefing.

Summary of performance work
i. Group one performance (students: S2; S9;S6 ;S8)
Three girls stand close to one another in a semi-circle wearing near identical black clothing. Student S2 faces the audience. Students S8 and S6 stand to her left and right, facing one another. Silence. The girls repeat the words 'Conflict, fear, risk, inspiration': at first they speak in a whisper and the volume increases until they are shouting the words. Recording of gentle piano music begins to play. Student S2 addresses the audience, describing her experience of learning about Augusto Boal and carrying out a mirroring exercise on her first day at college. Students S8 and S9 begin to slowly raise their arms in synchronised movements. S2 asks the audience to 'imagine standing in a room full of strangers, copying another's movement... No leading, no following, just pure mirroring. It's surprisingly easy'. S2 describes this experience of learning as 'communication' and 'the breaking down of barriers'. S2 then switches topic to talk about music. She says that when she hears the *Road to Perdition* theme a huge range of emotions bubble up inside her. S2 talks about her emotional response to music, saying that 'soft, slow music brings up feelings of love, joy, friendship' and that 'up tempo' music can suggest 'happiness' but also that 'music brings up hurt and betrayal'. S2 says she enjoys drama work and that after taking part in her first drama workshop she was hooked, 'I wanted to learn more, to break down my barriers, to be more open with my classmates'. She indeed describes learning as 'breaking down barriers and getting rid of fear'. Music stops. Students exit, left and right. Student S9 enters; sits on a chair and addresses the audience in a conversational manner. S9 describes her anxiety over preparing for a job interview and says 'I'd like to blame them for my crisis in confidence, but that would be too easy...I never really expected to get the interview, yet alone the job'. S9 recalls that 'as a youngster', nothing fazed her but that as she had become older fear of failure had made her 'play safe'. The lights change from white to red and students S2, S8 and S6 appear onto the stage. They speak with an American accent, and recommend a self-help book, *Feel the fear and do it anyway*. They tap S9 over the head with the book, then exit. S9 flicks through book, and says 'Easier said

than done!' S9 says 'It wasn't until I was ten foot out of depth, struggling to tread water that these words suddenly clicked...it was like a light switching on': she stands up and the stage lights change from red to white. S9 stands with her feet apart and continues to address the audience, saying that after reading the self-help book she stayed up until 5 am with 'a fire in her stomach for the first time in ages'. She recalls that the work she did the next day in her interview was nothing exceptional, but that this did not matter, the point was 'she had done it; she had taken a risk'. S9 exits. The girls return to the stage and arrange the chairs into a row. Students S2, S8 and S9 sit with books. Student S6 stands to one side and narrates an account of her experience of a biology lesson at secondary school, and recalls 'Knowing that I'm the only one that doesn't know what's going on' feeling 'too stupid to understand it' and wondering 'what's wrong with me'. While S6 narrates, S8 plays her character in class, and raises her hand to ask a question. S6 continues to narrate and says 'I did what everyone else did: I asked the teacher. The teacher might as well have been talking another language... I thought maybe I'm un-teachable... maybe I'm destined never to know anything else... maybe there's something wrong with me'. S6 says 'So I took a chance. I went along to the study support session'. S8 raises her hand as though asking a question. S6 says 'The words stuck in my throat as I asked, "can we do the kidneys"'. She explains how the teacher used comparisons, and says it was as though 'a light was switched on...I felt a sudden rush...I was empowered to think outside the box..I realised there are different ways of studying, different ways of learning too. It's all about finding a new perspective'. The girls get up and exit. Student S8 sits amid the audience, reading silently from a book. S8 begins to talk about her experience of being a lifeguard and writing songs, and says 'I always wanted to create something people would enjoy... I wanted to create something that will show what music means to me'. Students S2, S6 and S9 enter the stage and lie on chairs and mime swimming using synchronised movements. S8 blows a whistle. The swimmers exit. S8 says that 'let the music take you there' is an inspirational phrase for her, and that 'when you hear a song you love it takes you to a new world'. S8 stands up and enters the main stage alone. She recounts her experience of going to a jazz cafe to perform. She recalls being 'so nervous'. S8 holds her stomach and takes a deep breath. She, however, says that she felt 'such a passion for the song' that she enjoyed 'every note and breath'. Guitar music begins, S8 sits centre stage alone. A recording of her singing plays and she sways gently in her seat. S8 stands up. Offstage, students S6, S2 and S9 provide the voices of the audience in the jazz cafe, praising S8's song saying 'I can't get the words out of my head'; 'The words of the song really took me somewhere'. S8 says 'people had enjoyed my song...I had accomplished what I wanted'. S8's song continues to play in the background. Enter students S2, S6 and S9. The four girls form a line and chant 'Conflict, fear, risk, inspiration'. Music ends.

Group one debriefing (students: S2; S9;S6 ;S8)

S8 identified that she found working on the monologue tough, but said 'Finding it tough made me think harder'. S8 said 'I am quite an open person' and 'I really enjoyed this week'. S8 said

(of the RoLI learning profile) that, at first she had 'wanted to be a visual learner', but saw from her profile there was more to her learning than that.

S6 identified that because the monologue was personal, she had felt vulnerable, but that the exercise had made her aware that she responds to a range of teaching styles. S6 noted that the group had been 'close knit', which made it easier to be open with one another.

S9 identified that writing the monologue and performing provided 'quite a rounded process', and that it involved taking the same kind of risk as the one she referred to in her performance. S9 felt they had created an environment where they could be open, and said that her own monologue became *more* personal than it had been originally. S9 said that the RoLI learning profile confirmed 'I need to understand something' and that 'depending on what I'm learning, I learn differently'.

S2 said that the RoLI learning profile confirmed what she knew, saying 'I am a visual learner'. *(Student S10 did not take part in the performance.)*

ii. Group two performance: (students: S4, S3; S5; S7; S1)

A circle of chairs are on stage. Student S4 stands in middle of the circle, and the other students join her, one by one. S4 addresses the audience, saying 'after leaving drama school I worked with different theatre companies'. S4 describes her method of learning scripts, saying 'I like to get up on the floor with the script in my hands and block through scenes' so that the play 'registers more in my memory'. S4 recalls getting a part with *the David Glass Ensemble*, and being 'Over the moon'. S4 says that the company had five and a half weeks to rehearse, rather than the usual three, and notes her concern when Glass told the company to put down their scripts: 'I thought oh my god, I mean for me my script was my clutch, my security blanket...I felt nervous and a bit sick'. S4 describes 'trust exercises' that 'made the group gel' and says that 'we were told to start thinking about our characters and playing with them' and to think about whether they were 'aggressive, passionate or cool' and how these traits might 'effect our speech patterns, the way we walk'. S4 recalls that when the company finally picked up the text their 'preconceived ideas were all gone', and were replaced by 'solid knowledge of real people... it was absolutely amazing: everything clicked into place'. S4 says the Glass technique 'fascinates me; I nearly always learn something about myself as well as the character... I was glad I had this opportunity to learn something new... because it works'. S4 says she has used this method ever since, but that 'everyone has different ways of learning'. Student S3 sits alone on the stage and describes her experience of being in a maths lesson at school. She says, 'I was sitting at the back of the class, trying not to draw attention to myself...it just wouldn't sink in...Then I heard a thunderous voice say my name'. S3 impersonates her teacher, asking her a maths question. S3 says she had 'drifted off into my own little world where no one needed numbers, and I stared at my teacher...with a sudden rush of embarrassment... I tried to hold back the tears: I didn't have an answer to that question. Why didn't I? I didn't understand it. I wasn't used to feeling the idiot in class...The bell rang and the feelings of dread disappeared'. S3 recalls that as she was leaving the maths

lesson 'I felt a tap on my shoulder' and the teacher held her back for a personal study session. S3 recalls 'I just couldn't get my head around it and then the penny dropped; the cloud lifted'. She says that she realised that she *could* understand maths, and came to realise that 'communication is key to my learning'. She says 'All it took was to swallow my pride' and that from now on if she cannot understand something she will ask someone to explain it to her. S3 exits. Student S5 enters and the other students form a semicircle behind her. Student S5 recites a passage of text. The passage describes the importance of being 'open to the urges that motivate you' and not blocking your unique experience, because if you hold it back, 'the world will not have it'. The passage also refers to the 'queer, divine dissatisfaction' that artists feel with their work and their 'blessed unrest'. She says, however, that dissatisfaction should not be allowed to inhibit artists because it is not for them to judge the quality of their work. The students sit down on the floor. Student S7 stands up alone in the spotlight and recites repeatedly 'Constantin Stanislavski', shaking her head as she does so. S7 says 'That is all I've heard through my dramatic journey: his name is etched in my mind, pinned to the walls of my brain, gazing down at my creative exploits'. S7 recalls leaving behind 'the comfort of comedy' to undertake a more serious role, but finding that 'There was nothing, not me, not a character, just words that held no meaning'. S7 describes her audience's boredom, which she found 'obvious from their blank expression and dead eyes'. S7 recalls that 'one bleak day a beacon of light' came into her life and names a teacher. She says the teacher 'tore her eyes open to Stanislavsky....compares her subsequent relationship with Stanislavsky to the relationship between Romeo and Juliet. She notes: 'I jumped head first into the exercise and I got it'. S7 recalls her subsequent performance, saying she saw a 'Canvas of eyes staring back at me...I was crying real tears...feeling my character's pain'. She ends with the affirmation 'I get you Stan the man. I get you'. S7 exits. Student S1 stands up. He turns the chairs upside down, and the girls crouch beside the chairs. Student S1 begins his performance with the words 'I'm here'. His performance takes the form of conversations with his Uncle while in India at the Festival of Lights. He also focuses on conversations with his father and recalls searching the internet to find out more about his genealogy. S1 recalls taking his father's ashes to his homeland. The other students play the role of S1's uncle, and shout in unison 'Why do you want to leave your father here?' S1 says 'I go outside and the sky is ablaze with light'. He stands on a chair and addresses the audience, asking 'Why would I want to leave my father here in a strange place?' S1 then mentions partition: 'a land devastated ...partition is a divide between my life and my father's; it is a bond we share'. S1 then addresses his father and says 'Dad, you told me little about partition but when I Googled it I realised that fifteen million people had to uproot their true identity...their true home...my home was where they were, where their ancestors were'. S1 says 'I was on a journey' and makes reference to lost histories. S1 and the other students mime raising a glass and drinking a toast to S1's father. They form a line, bow, and dance off stage as upbeat music plays.

Group 2 debriefing (students S4, S3; S5; S7; S1)

S4 identified that she found the monologue difficult because it was personal. Most of her learning experiences were too personal to share, so choosing something appropriate was difficult. Having written the monologue, she found it difficult to learn, which she found ironic given that it was about learning. S4 said it would be interesting to do the RoLI again in a year's time, because it's too early to tell if she will change the way she learns in the light of her profile.

S7 said that she had originally written her monologue as an essay, and decided to try to make it more interesting after hearing the other students' monologues. She tried to make it more conversational, like a poem, and said that that made it easier to perform as well as learn. The tutor asked why she had expressed a desire to rely on comedy yet introduced comedy into her performance. S7 responded by saying she was 'a bit tiddly' when she wrote the monologue.

S3 said that because the monologue 'related to me' it was easier to remember, it was already inside her. S3 said that she had never thought about the way that she learned, but thinking about her problem with maths made her realise *how* she had overcome the problem. S5 said 'It's interesting to think about the way you learn'. S3 said the RoLI confirmed what she already knew, and that she knew that she responded better to visual material. However, she admitted that she had never consciously thought about how she learns, and said she is now 'more aware' and more open to things she has not tried before.

S1 said that, as a group, they had wanted to make their performance as simple as possible. When asked about the RoLI, S1 said 'Shit- what's going on? I got really confused. I started to play mind games with myself'.

S5 said the process had been 'very democratic' and they had decided as a group which ideas to 'discard'. S5 explained that she had chosen not to write a monologue. Instead, she recited a quotation, given to her by a friend, which she said had taught her about herself. She said that she did this because she felt it was too early in the course to share her personal experiences with strangers, and when listening to the other monologues she thought, 'Thank God I didn't do that'. S5 said she found the quotation 'incredibly difficult to learn' and mentioned the possibility of 'avoidance'.

iii. Post performance reflection: essays

Following the performance work the students were asked to write 1500 word reflective essays about *what they had learnt about their own learning strategies during the course of the project.* The reflective essays were submitted several weeks after the initial mealearning activities (which took place during a one week period). In the essays, we briefed the students to reflect further on the various exercises in which they had taken part (i.e. group discussion, creating a poster, writing a monologue, completing the RoLI, creating performance), to identify any insights the project had given them into their own learning and to note any impact of this on their future learning strategy. In setting this task, we were interested in deepening our understanding (and the students' understanding) of students' conceptions of learning,

conceptions of drama as an academic subject, motivation for study and study strategies. The findings from the essays are discussed in conjunction with the students' performance work in the following section.

SECTION FOUR: Analysis of the students' work

Procedure

Each student's metalearning materials were analysed qualitatively, using criteria devised by Meyer, Ward & Latreille (2009). The categorisation of the data produced a range of themes and tendencies (for example, 'reference to influence of teachers'; 'reference to influence of peers'; 'references to success or failure'). These themes and tendencies were then analysed for evidence of potentially effective or ineffective learning engagement in the context of level six study, using Meyer's (1991) concept of 'study orchestration' i.e. 'how students direct their resources in a specific learning context' (Lindblom-Ylänne, 2004: 406). According to Meyer (1991), study orchestrations can display both:

- conceptual consonance - which involves consistency between students' approaches to learning and the demands of the learning task/environment, and;
- conceptual dissonance - which involves 'a conflict between what students prefer to do, wish to do or are actually capable of doing (in terms of versatility) and what the learning environment supports, demands or can accommodate' (Meyer, 2000: 9).

Overview of performances and essays

The performances and essays dramatised and/or made reference to things such as motivation for learning, study strategies, attitudes towards feedback, and emotional engagement with learning. Amid this material we found both encouraging and less encouraging data. The performance narratives shared quite a common structure. In most cases, they were constructed around a 'triumph over adversity' arc, with students enacting the journey from being trapped in a situation to overcoming their problems in one fashion or another. We were aware that this element of the narratives was largely a consequence of the brief we had supplied and the group work situation we had established, and thus were not interested in the narratives per se but rather in the insight these gave us into students' conceptions of learning, the kind of study strategies that they employed and how conscious they were of these strategies.

Dramatisation of and/or reference to learning strategies consistent with the context of study (i.e. Level 6 Drama). In the performance work and essays, we found a focus on; enactment of, or reference to:

- *The importance of autonomous and independent learning.* Several dramatisations foregrounded self-reliance and self-regulation, and delineated a process where individual learning involved accepting a high degree of personal responsibility, with, for example, the individual identifying a gap in their knowledge or a problem with their learning

process; developing a strategy to address this gap/problem, and carrying out appropriate action to bring resolution. This work implied high levels of metalearning awareness and suggested deep/transformative learning engagement.

- *Intrinsic motivation.* Many of the students expressed enthusiasm about subject content and spoke of their inherent interest in drama and performance. Some students also highlighted how they saw drama as a source of self-development and personal growth and expressed a commitment to getting the most out of their learning experience.

- *Discipline specific aptitude.* Virtually all the students spoke highly of group-work and positioned themselves as part of an academic community. They spoke positively about exchanging ideas with others and about the emotional support and validation that came through working with their peers, and drew an association between group-working practices and successful learning outcomes. Several students also noted that, in their experience, even when encountering conflict in group-work situations, their work was ultimately enriched through being developed collectively.

- *Attitude to feedback.* There was also a professed responsiveness to study advice and feedback. Some students articulated how they managed the feelings associated with learning and sought to obtain a degree of mastery over these feelings. Several students, for example, noted that they considered confronting and overcoming negative emotions (e.g. feelings of hurt, fear and loneliness) to be an implicit part of the learning process.

ii. Dramatisation of and/or reference to learning strategies inconsistent with/ dysfunctional in the context of study (i.e. Level 6 Drama). In the performance work and essays, we found a focus on; enactment of, or reference to:

- *Passive and dependent learning processes and/or feelings of a lack of control.* Some students attributed breakthroughs in learning less to their own efforts, hard work or strategy than to the interventions of others. There was reference to feelings of powerlessness in the face of academic curricula and the expression of a need for rescue. There were also indications of some potentially problematic attitudes towards teachers with, on the one hand, the suggestion of over-reliance on teachers and, on the other, hostility towards authority figures. Some students also did not articulate, or seem to perceive, a primary relationship between learning and agency. There was thus some evidence of deferral of responsibility for learning or *attribution* i.e. the erroneous conviction that successful and unsuccessful learning is bound up with external causes, is beyond control, or a matter of good or bad fortune (Jackson, 2004: 397).

- *Incongruity in learning process.* Although some students identified their awareness of shortcomings with their learning engagement, they were unable to articulate a strategy for dealing with these shortcomings. There was also the expression of the view that problems in learning might be intrinsic to the subject of study rather than a consequence of the individual's engagement with the subject (e.g. the subject being spuriously or unnecessarily complicated). Some students also demonstrated reluctance, or confusion

about, how to complete tasks and identified dealing with their work by targeting their efforts in an idiosyncratic or inefficient fashion. In some cases, this manifested itself in students making reference to things such as 'thinking outside the box' and 'taking risks' without a coherent explanation of to what these phrases referred. There was thus some conceptual conflict between learning intentions and learning processes, and difficulty for some students in matching declared intentions to congruent forms of learning process (Meyer, 2000: 9).

• *Detached learning processes.* For some students, there was also a degree of detachment from their subject of study, with students identifying their motivation residing in peripheral concerns (i.e. they expressed a focus on getting through the course, how others perceived them, or achieving grades). For these students, learning goals were not necessarily bound up with engagement with, or interest in, their discipline. As such, they displayed a tendency towards what Lucas and Meyer identify as dissonant, surface and even anti-learning learning engagement (Lucas & Meyer, 2004: 461; Meyer, 2000: 9)

• *Feelings of vulnerability in the learning environment.* One of the most striking characteristics of the students' performance work was its focus on anxiety and self-esteem. Students dramatised their leaning experiences as dominated by feelings of intimidation and fear, feelings of vulnerability, feelings of being 'out of their depth', and even feeling stupid and 'un-teachable'. Students also noted feeling 'nervous' and 'sick' when encountering new learning methods, depicted strategies of avoidance, articulated their tendency to 'play safe' in their work even though they knew that this restricted the possibilities of their achievement, and in some cases characterised a sense of resentment and antagonism towards their topic of study. The many feelings of being intimidated and overwhelmed appeared to present a significant concern.

By carrying out this overarching analysis, we became aware of the range and variety of issues bound up with the students' learning engagement. This provided us with an informed frame of reference in relation to which we could develop our thinking about study support and furthermore a frame of reference that had come entirely from the students and that was grounded in their lived experiences. We also noted that students had consistently focused on issues that were personally important to them and bound up with their self-esteem. None of the students appeared to have tried to second-guess the curriculum or what they thought tutors might expect of them. As a consequence of this exercise, we were also now alert to many students' sensitivity to evaluation and to a corresponding need to develop sensitive and individualised study support strategies.

To examine these issues in more detail, and capture a more nuanced account of what we were learning about the students, in the next section of the report, we move from offering general observation to looking at students individually via several case studies. This demonstrates that while some students were entering the programme with a good

predisposition towards undergraduate study, other students had some significant challenges to overcome. The next section of the report will perhaps also provide the best insight so far into the strategy via which we sought to progress our dialogue with the students.

Case studies

(In order to further preserve the anonymity of the students, in the following section of the report we dispense with the designations S1-S10 and instead refer to students as FDG1, HND1 and FDG2.)

i. Student FDG1 (Foundation Degree Graduate)

Learning profile/self-report

FDG1 had a particularly high score for 'Fragmentation', which is a category that can indicate the conceptualization of knowledge as a collection of unrelated pieces of information. The student also had a high score for 'Knowledge objects', which is a category related to viewing information as mental images. The RoLI literature suggests that individuals who display these tendencies together can sometimes experience problems because they confuse their ability to visually recall information with understanding that information. FDG1 also had a high score for 'Rereading a text', which can be a concern as it can signal inadvertently committing material to memory without understanding it, and confusing an ability to recall information with understanding that information. FDG1 also displayed a high score for 'Learning by example': this is not always a problematic observable, but in some cases it can signal being overly concerned with following the example set by others and thus not developing a sense of oneself as an autonomous learner.

Performance work and reflective essay

In her performance work, FDG1 drew upon her learning experiences while working in a part-time job and creating material for performance. She described learning with a high degree of subjectivity; focused upon offering examples of the emotional states that had accompanied her learning experiences, and discussed what these experiences had meant to her. FDG1 identified her learning breakthrough as the moment when she fulfilled her ambition to become a performer and posited this learning as successful because it had been accompanied by affirmation (i.e. receiving a positive response from an audience). FDG1 noted that she had enjoyed this leaning experience and that she felt satisfied with what she had accomplished. In her reflective essay, FDG1 entered into a considerable amount of self analysis about her learning. She acknowledged that there was room for improvement in her work; recognised the importance of employing multiple learning strategies, and spoke of being open minded, thinking outside the box, and the value of group work. Throughout her essay she placed emphasis on attending to detail and description. In doing so, she reflected not only on her sense of her learning strategies, but also on those elements of the project that had increased her sense of subject specialism:

> I have learned a number of strategies about my learning from the completion of the first week's project. I have learned that I am able to take an experience of my own and put it into words to create a speech to develop into a monologue...I am also able to take on advice given to me by my peers to help develop my monologue and put my words into a monologue style. I have lastly realised that you should only use speech which is necessary to tell the story.

FDG1 also identified that she had mixed feelings about how best to approach her learning and used the essay to work through some of these feelings, indicating that, on the one hand, she did not think she 'needed to change [her] learning strategy', and that, on the other, she was conscious that she needed to 'let go' of previous learning strategies that were holding her back. There were some clear indications of areas of self-awareness about learning that might be cultivated further with the student. For example, FDG1 identified the importance of approaching her work with a degree of flexibility:

> I have learned that you do not always have to have a particular strategy of learning sometimes you can have several strategies and some can be specific to different genres of learning.

In addition, FDG1 spoke of her awareness of how applying her energies more efficiently might increase her study success:

> I also need to start a task and complete it, this would help me learn more as I would not be rushing off to do another task, then I would reflect on the task at hand in more depth.

Perhaps most significantly, she noted her growing awareness that a designation that had previously been applied to her as a 'kinaesthetic learner' now seemed unhelpful.

FDG1's metalearning materials led us to reflect upon developing an initial study support strategy that would help the student to continue to work through her feelings about learning and her sense of how to take control of her learning process. In this respect, we began by asking the student to consider whether she perceived any benefits in introducing more critical distance between herself and her work, and to reconsider her designated 'learning breakthrough' from the perspective of not only 'what' she had achieved, but also 'how' she had achieved the breakthrough. As the year progressed, FDG1 identified that she found some assessment tasks challenging. In her study support sessions, we thus continued to focus on helping the student develop strategies for approaching her work from a critical distance, and with a focus on context and purpose rather than upon detail. In this, the metalearning project provided a helpful point of reference for initiating and focusing discussion with this student.

Student HNDG1 (a HND graduate)
Learning profile/self-report
Student HNDG1 produced a learning profile/self-report that indicated deep-learning engagement. HNDG1 scored highly for 'Seeing things differently'; 'Memorise with understanding' and 'Relating ideas'. These are complementary areas that refer to transformative learning, and suggest a student who relates new concepts to existing

knowledge in order to understand those concepts, and consequently transforms their existing knowledge, with understanding of new concepts providing the structure for remembering what has been learnt. Overall, HNDG1's self-report pointed towards a student that is able to reflect on her learning and is able to consciously develop successful strategies for negotiating learning problems.

Performance work and reflective essay

HNDG1's performance work was consistent with her learning profile/self-report. It was suggestive of a focused and motivated individual with a highly developed metalearning capacity. In her performance work, HNDG1 drew upon her experience of preparing for a job interview and her feelings of apprehension and self-doubt, and depicted how she had taken control of her situation by consulting a self-help book and applying the advice to 'feel the fear and do it anyway'. HNDG1 demonstrated self-reflexivity, noting that her subsequent performance in the job interview was 'not my best work' but that 'this did not matter', the point was 'I'd done it; I'd taken a risk'. HNDG1's performance work, however, contextualised her self-report by making reference to a recent decline in her self-confidence. She began her performance by noting that although 'as a youngster, nothing had fazed me', as she had grown older fear of failure had increasingly made her 'play safe'. In her post-performance reflective essay, HNDG1 accepted a large degree of personal responsibility for her learning, and identified a link between positive learning experiences and a sense of agency, stating for example:

> I think that to give people the tools to learn and for individuals to reach their own conclusions is a far more powerful way of learning than to bombard them with facts to retain.

HNDG1 explained that she had reached this perspective on learning through the help of a school teacher who had encouraged her to draw her own conclusions and to 'try to see things differently'. HNDG1 also referred to self-doubt in her essay, and claimed that she had benefited from the metalearning activity because it had helped her recognise the strengths in her learning engagement, and had therefore given her the confidence to press ahead with these learning strategies. In addition, HNDG1 explained how the metalearning activity had made her aware of the value of group work:

> I did not feel intimidated by the experience of others but instead felt that I could embrace it and learn more as a result of working collaboratively...when I heard the rest of the group's work, I felt inspired to re-write my piece, which, as a result, I felt had more depth and meaning...seeing how much my work improved as a result of feedback from peers and working in a motivational and inspiring environment, I feel encouraged about ongoing development in all areas of my Drama studies.

Overall, HNDG1's self-report, performance work and reflective essay pointed towards a student who is thoughtful, self-reflective and a deep/transformative learner. The focus in her metalearning materials on the issue of declining self-confidence was, nevertheless, a cause for concern, and the student did, indeed, exhibit issues with self-confidence in the context of

study at the start of the year. These issues were, however, largely resolved by the end of semester one. The student was proactive in seeking study advice, responded effectively and creatively to this advice and achieved a first class mark in her first undergraduate assignment. Of all the students who took part in the project, student HNDG1 went on to demonstrate the best aptitude for undergraduate study.

Student FDG2 (a Foundation Degree Graduate)
Learning profile/self-report:

Student FDG2 did not submit her RoLI self-report to her tutor. We therefore provide a discussion of this student based on her performance work and reflective essay.

Performance work and reflective essay

In her performance work, FDG2 discussed learning through reference to her negative and positive experiences in the classroom. FDG2 highlighted feelings of initially being intimidated and overwhelmed in her work, and experiencing a sense of embarrassment because of this. She began her performance by repeating Stanislavski's name and noted the sense of burden she had felt studying Stanislavski's ideas and her sense that Stanislavski loomed over and looked down on her 'creative exploits'. FDG2 also noted that she had become used to employing comedy as a defence mechanism in her work, and that she felt the need to escape this strategy and undertake more serious work. FDG2 described her frustration with acting and noted this was confirmed for her by her perception that an audience had found one of her performances boring. FDG2 described feeling trapped and unable to control her learning situation until eventually a tutor intervened and rescued her. She depicted this rescue with dramatic language stating how 'one bleak day a beacon of light' had come came into her life. FDG2 also used violent imagery to capture this moment, identifying that the teacher 'tore her eyes open to Stanislavski'. FDG2 identified that her work improved as a result of her teacher's intervention, and recalled 'crying real tears and feeling a character's pain' in performance. Although FDG2 identified an improvement in her work, she did not celebrate her own role in turning things around or indicate how she would be able to repeat this success without future intervention. FDG2 noted that she eventually began to *like* Stanislavski, in doing this, she again dramatised her encounter with romantic language. She however ended her performance by characterising her relationship with Stanislavski in a more reductive manner: 'I get you Stan the man. I get you'. In her post-performance reflective essay, FDG2 suggested a tendency to view learning as a form of 'drilling', stating:

> I had my own ideas of what the first week was going to entail; however, I was surprised when I was informed of the work we would be doing...I struggled with this exercise [writing a monologue], because it was based on how we learn, I immediately saw it as an academic document, I think this is just because of the years of reflective writing drilled into my brain and I had connected this monologue with that type of writing.

Continuing the theme touched upon in her performance work, FDG2 also referred to feelings of insecurity, stating that she felt 'uncomfortable with the piece she had written' and that a

fellow student had written 'a beautiful piece' that made her 'look down' on her own work with a degree of 'disgust'. FDG2 described feeling 'confused' and being unable to 'think outside the box' and blamed her rigid approach to learning for this, stating 'my brain automatically went into an academic mode' when she was told the activity was about 'learning'. FDG2 nevertheless identified that she found the solution to developing her work in comedy, stating that after she had decided to adopt a comic approach, 'my monologue breezed' ahead. Although FDG2 acknowledged the benefits of group work, she did not credit herself with contributing to her group's overall success, stating instead that her performance was successful 'because I was working with passionate and professional people'.

In summary, FDG2's performance work and reflective essay raised some issues of potential concern. The student seemed to need encouragement and support in order to develop her self-confidence, to value the work that she produced and to align this work to the learning requirements of level six study. In thinking about how best to support this student, we were mindful of Kember's (2001) assessment of the difficulties faced by students who begin higher education with under-confident and under-developed study strategies. Kember (2001: 217) notes that for such students, adjusting to the learning environment of university is not just hard work: it is 'traumatic'. We therefore sought to adopt a strategy of 'precise' study support and 'careful' feedback with this student. As the year progressed, this student struggled to come to terms with the level of work required of her in the undergraduate context, and following consultation with tutors decided, at the end of the first semester, that it would be in her best interest to take a *Leave of Absence.*

Conclusion to section

Overall, there was a high degree of correspondence between the RoLI learning profile/self-reports, the students' performance work and the students' essays and these findings were also borne out by students' initial performance in assessment. This seemed to confirm the RoLI's effectiveness as a diagnostic tool when employed in conjunction with other data such as essays and performance work, and as a means of instigating dialogue with students about their approach to learning. Reflecting upon the metalearning materials produced by students also led us to take account of the difficulties in raising students' awareness of the self as learner, and of how, even when students *do demonstrate* emergent self-awareness and insight (e.g. as in the case of FDG1 and FDG2), it can still be difficult for them to apply this awareness and insight to the development of their learning strategies.

Study support

The final stage of the project involved holding a series of study support sessions with students that drew together the various aspects of the metalearning project for discussion and further reflection. The principal aim of the study support sessions was to explore with students their understanding of their learning profile/self-report and their study strategies and the

compatibility of their learning profile/self-report and these study strategies with the expectations and demands of the undergraduate context, and in light of this to assist students in developing an action plan that would help them improve consonance between their study strategies and the learning context.

Strategy for study support session

We sought to exercise considerable sensitivity when feeding back to students on their work as we were conscious of the anxiety that some students felt when confronted with feedback and we were aware we could easily create a barrier between teachers and learners and/or encourage hostility to the learning environment. Thus rather than base the study support sessions on didactic or evaluative feedback, we used the metalearning materials to highlight issues and questions for discussion with the students, and explored various plans of action, study strategies and the positive or negative consequence of these practices. We also sought to facilitate continuation of the students' engagement with a process of self-evaluation by attempting to reflect back to the students their own points of view. These sessions were thus exploratory and varied according to the student's individual circumstance. The sessions were based around a *Discussion Sheet* which students could take away from the session and which contained comments about issues focused on, or raised by, their self-reports, performance work and essays. Following discussion, we concluded the session by asking students to identify study strategies that they felt they would benefit from developing and/or employing during the forthcoming semester and to construct an action plan to support the development of these strategies. In addition, students were instructed to continue to seek study support throughout the period of their study and to regularly contact their support tutor for further discussions about their study strategies throughout the academic year.

Student feedback on the project

For most students, there was a sense of clarity about the purpose of the metalearning exercises, the suggestion that engaging in the project had been enjoyable and beneficial, and that it had helped them to acquire some self-insight. Students noted that the project had generated a transparent dialogue about learning between staff and students and that the exercises as a whole had helped them reposition their thinking about their purpose in studying and/or drew their attention to issues they would not have otherwise considered. One student noted: 'Before this week I had not given much thought to how I learn'. Another student summed up what they perceived to be the views of the cohort:

> It was interesting to see that the class was divided between two predominant opinions (on learning), either that it was more or less entirely down to us as students, to ensure that we fulfil our potential as individuals, or, the alternative view that we can only develop as far as the teacher is willing to go with us, as a class.

Students also commented favourably on the effectiveness of the project as an introduction to their studies at university:

> Having been out of active learning for a few months now it was a good way to ease

us back into it and also helped build bonds with people in the class and get used to the way they work in groups and how I work with them (S3).

Most significantly, nearly all of the students identified a need to alter some aspects of their learning as a result of the project, and, furthermore, positioned making changes to their learning not as a cause for anxiety, but, rather, as something positive:

S10: I think [the metalearning project] has made me aware of just how pro-active I need to be over the course of the year and how I should open my mind to new ideas and perspectives, which will broaden my knowledge and enable me to progress in all aspects of the programme.

S3: We learn throughout our whole lives and I felt that this was a stepping stone in the right direction and would help me start to think about my learning in a more active way. I will no longer use the basic learning techniques that have now become stale and will open my mind to a more fresh outlook on learning.

S1: I think once you have learned what are your strengths and what your weaknesses are, you can really open your heart and broaden your horizons, start thinking outside the box, welcoming things you might have not even thought of, I think that's what learning is all about. CHANGE.

CONCLUSION

In the final section of this report, we consider the findings that arise from the metalearning project. We begin with what we consider to be pragmatic outcomes before moving onto the claims surrounding how developing students' metalearning capacity and providing insight into their conceptions and motivations for learning provides a means of empowering them to take control of their learning. In considering the issue of metalearning and empowerment, we reflect upon some of the barriers to this type of learning engagement and the implications for study support.

Pragmatic outcomes

At a pragmatic level, this project had a range of positive outcomes. It provided:

a) An effective bridging strategy. The project offered an effective bridging/ Welcome Week experience for HND/FD students. It offered a means of introducing students to third year, honours level study and a strategy for highlighting to students what the undergraduate context expected of them, while cohering with and drawing upon students' previous studies experiences. It also allowed tutors to introduce students to a number of undergraduate teaching strategies (seminar discussion; workshop activities; independent group work; research; self evaluation; essay writing; personal tuition and feedback sessions). Furthermore, it offered a fresh perspective on the 'bridging problem' by providing an alternative to bridging strategies that focus on deficiencies in HND/FD students' subject knowledge and that seek to address these deficiencies by immersing students in subject content derived from second level honours degree study.

b) A model of induction that may be applied at other institutions or *assist other institutions in developing strategies to support HND/FD students entering level six of honours degree programmes.* The strategy underpinning the teaching and learning tasks and study support sessions that we employed lend themselves to adoption, modification or development in other drama departments, disciplinary contexts and/or levels in HE.

c) An opportunity for students to act as researchers into their own learning and to position themselves not only as the target of the curriculum but also as interrogators of the curriculum. The project provided a means for students to engage with, and reflect upon, the context of undergraduate study and to engage in dialogue about this context with teaching staff. The project correspondingly alerted teaching staff to the contribution students have to make to institutional discourse about teaching and learning.

d) An effective study support diagnostic. The metalearning project provided a significant insight into the learning experience of students. The Reflections on Learning Inventory and performance work offered a detailed, nuanced and contextualised account of individuals' learning engagement and learning needs. Furthermore, these tools provided a mechanism for raising, and instigating dialogue about, issues that might otherwise have been difficult to discuss. Thus, the metalearning tasks provided a particularly effective means of uncovering a range of learning issues that invited a response in terms of study support.

e) A means of founding study support, assessment and feedback upon dialogue with the student. The philosophy underpinning metalearning proposes that you cannot support students if you do not know what their beliefs about learning and consequential activities are. In line with this, metalearning places emphasis on the ongoing development of the individual student's learning, and providing a context for this learning. The tutor is obliged to acknowledge the distinctiveness of student experience and tailor feedback to this experience. This perhaps leads to an invigoration of student-centred learning strategies and the role that feedback plays in such learning as it removes emphasis from outcomes being achieved in discreet tasks. At a practical level, a consequence of metalearning may be integrating student feedback, reflection on learning and Personal Development Planning, e.g. using the RoLI profile/self-report to generate a context for the student's engagement with their learning and developing a single self-reflexive feedback narrative for each student throughout the period of their study which is updated as each assessment is completed. Under such a process, feedback would become positioned not as object-centred but within the ongoing context of the student's development in 'a spiral of cycles of critical and self-critical action and reflection' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988: 567).

f) The compulsion that tutors (as well as students) reflect upon teaching and learning. As will be evident, the emphasis throughout this report has been upon the instigation of dialogue,

and during this project we found that the effect of this dialogue is as significant for teachers as for learners. Engaging students with how they learn by default engages tutors with how they teach. Thus metalearning repositions not only students' engagement with learning but tutors' engagement with the mechanisms via which they pursue their teaching - and in particular mechanisms that employ feedback or involve evaluation, assessment, and critique. In alerting tutors to the distinctive features of individual students' learning engagement, metalearning arguably makes it a duty of care for tutors to work with this distinctiveness and correspondingly to re-evaluate procedural approaches to tuition.

Concluding remarks: metalearning and empowerment

Ascertaining a relationship between developing students' metalearning capacity and their empowerment involves capturing outcomes that are difficult to measure. We would argue that this project allowed us to make the discourse of HE relatively transparent. The RoLI profile/self-report drew attention to the dynamic between individual students' perspectives/assumptions and the perspectives/assumptions of the academy. The performance work provided a means for a nuanced and contextualised personal perspective on learning to emerge. The study support sessions presented an opportunity to raise and explore learning issues; the students' attitudes towards these issues, and to consider strategies for addressing them; and, in addition, many of the students identified in these sessions that the project had given them insight into their learning and expressed a commitment to act upon these insights and re-evaluate their study strategies.

While this was encouraging, the metalearning project also made us aware of some challenges. In particular, it alerted us to the importance of not proposing an overly simplistic or linear model of the relationship between increasing students' awareness about learning and students responding by taking control of their learning. In this regard, we would acknowledge Barab et al's (in Jackson, 2004), argument against the dangers of operationalizing knowledge and drifting towards an information processing model of student learning. He reminds us:

> Knowledge is not some ontological substance that lies in people's heads (or in the pages of text books) waiting to be actualised through cognitive processes. Instead...it is a term that delineates a person's potential to act in a certain fashion. (Barab et al, cited in Jackson, 2004: 398)

The project also made us aware that the relationship between self-awareness and acts of self-regulation is complicated by the implicit and intuitive nature of many students' learning engagement. As we have already identified, 'good' learning is not necessarily synonymous with reflecting upon learning or having consciousness of one's learning strategies. Correspondingly, poor learning strategies can be deeply embedded and therefore difficult to manipulate. On these terms, a recent metalearning study by Lindblom-Ylänne (2004) draws attention to how problematic learners do not necessarily improve their study strategies just because they are alerted to these strategies and how, in many cases, problematic learners

lack the very awareness of how to go about study in a more effective fashion. Lindblom-Ylänne's study, thus, produces the potentially destabilising finding that good students *do not need* metalearning because they adopt effective study strategies as a matter of course, while poor students *cannot use* it because they lack sufficient metacognitive awareness to self-regulate. Beyond this, we also would note that there can be an unwillingness among some students to interrogate their learning because they do not wish to demystify the learning process. In the early part of the project reported here, we experienced such an unwillingness, when one student noted her reluctance to self-analyse because of a fear that this would interfere with her learning processes or reduce the value of her learning experience, and another student noted that he feared thinking too much about his learning in case it became 'immobilising'.

This report does not attempt to elide these matters. Nor however does it consider their implication to undermine the practice of encouraging students to reflect upon their learning. What Lindblom-Ylänne, and the students referenced above, rather highlight for us is that metalearning's utility is very much predicated on the context of study support that surrounds it. In this report, our strategy has thus been to seek to address learning by looking at what is going on at the level of the individual student and to bring the student's experience to light for further exploration. In doing this, we have found that it is possible to gain some insight into the very learning processes that might frustrate or stand between developing students' metalearning capacity and students taking effective control of their learning. Under our account, developing students' metalearning capacity is neither a panacea nor a quick-fix. It is rather a 'commitment' that must form part of a long-term strategy underpinned by a context of study support. Metalearning ultimately, however, promises to reward this commitment by equipping students with the critical tools that will allow them to effectively manage their own learning and personal development. While it is difficult to access and engage with the range of variables that inform the learning process, and while metalearning cannot claim to address all study support problems, metalearning nevertheless raises some interesting possibilities for student learning. Furthermore, at an ideological level, it contributes to promoting a learning culture in which students' perspectives and preconceptions are not viewed as 'irrational, unreasonable or something to be "overcome", but as something to be "acknowledged" within the classroom' (Lucas & Meyer, 2004: 467) and, as such (to paraphrase Garoian, 1999), it encourages the creation of a space for students and teachers to re-learn the curriculum of academic culture from the perspective of the student's experience.

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