Open Workshop on Service Oriented Approaches and Lifelong Competence Development Infrastructures
Manchester GMEX, 11th – 12th January 2007

The Ultraversity Project
Richard Millwood,
Director Core Education UK,
formerly directing Ultra Lab at Anglia Ruskin University

Marion Cope, Ultraversity Student
Researcher graduating in February 2008 and Community Nurse

Richard Millwood
Director Core Education UK,
formerly directing Ultra Lab at Anglia Ruskin University
A case study of ‘Fred’ and friends
(Stiles 2007)
An action research project to develop higher education courses which **fit the needs of ‘working’ people** who wish to (or need to) continue working and studying full time

- Begun in January 2003, recruited in July 2003
- Developed BA Learning Technology Research at Anglia Ruskin University
- Supported development of MA Creative Media Practice at Bournemouth University
BA (Hons) Learning Technology Research

- Focus on **action to improve ‘work’ context**
- ‘**Learn while you earn**’ - 3 years, part time but full time credit weighting
- Not located in any subject discipline, but in a methodological discipline of **action research**
- **100% online**, no face-to-face
- Validated twice, and **QA by Anglia Ruskin University**
‘Work’ in its broadest definition

Using life’s challenges to learn

Eve Thirkle was just three months into a degree course when her son was diagnosed as autistic.

But Eve didn’t panic and abandon the course. Instead she used her studies to find out more about ten-year-old Jonathan’s condition and how she could help him.

“The degree, a BA (Hons) in Learning, Technology and Research, is based around your work,” said Eve, 47.

“When I started the course, I was working as a teaching assistant at Kingfisher Primary School.

“But when Jonathan was diagnosed, I gave up my job to look after him and was able to base my coursework around him.”

Jonathan, a pupil at Canon Popham Primary School, has high-functioning autism. He is excellent at maths but struggles with some everyday situations.

“When I’m cross with him, he just doesn’t pick up on it at all,” explained Eve. “I have to tell him I’m cross and how cross I am on a scale of one to ten because he is very mathematical.”

The degree course allowed her to carry out a year-long study looking at how she and husband, David, 45, an accountant at DMBC, could improve their parenting skills and change the home environment to best help Jonathan.

“It gave me a focus at a time when it was very easy to get depressed,” said Eve, who recently became chairman of Doncaster Autistic Society. “It was something for me to do that made me step outside the day-to-day situation and made me feel I was doing something about it.”

The qualification, offered by Anglia Ruskin University, is available for study online which was ideal for Eve in her changed circumstances.

Although the former radiographer does admit it was a steep learning curve getting to grips with the IT skills.

She said: “I started out with only slightly more than basic computer knowledge but, by the end of the course, I could produce video, web pages and sound clips.”

Another bonus of the course was the virtual friends she made along the way.

“I have made some good friends online and I am looking forward to meeting them at the graduation ceremony.”

Eve Thirkle, 47, of Langfield Drive, Edenthorpe, celebrates after achieving a first class degree in Learning Technology and Research. She used her work with her autistic son Jonathan, ten, as a basis for her research (E7833LF)
Student researchers

- Candidates for **widening participation & lifelong learning** - often low income, can’t stop working or raising families
- About **300** in 6 cohorts from July 2003
- Scattered **all over the UK**
- Teaching assistants, ICT technicians, bursars **from schools**
- **Health service**, managers, retail, **parents**
- Recruited in two **cohorts** each year
## Cohort 1 Work Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin support</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHS</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT Technician</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Nurse</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unqualified teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notschool</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT Education</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Education support staff</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other technicians</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Support Worker</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school supervisor</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bursar</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Media Arts Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusion co ordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Mentor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach Practitioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>RNIB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning support assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching ECDL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-education sector</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Sports Co-Ordinator</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Average age 40
80% women

Outliers aged 18 and 60
Combining innovations

Personalised learning
Negotiation of study focus through individual learning plan, inquiry proposal

Inquiry-based learning
Action research methodology, critical reflection, learning at and through work, workplace advocate

Online community of inquiry
Expert witnesses, challenge and debate, support, sharing findings, critical feedback, access to online library

Exhibition for dissertation
Shared inquiry findings to stakeholders, evaluated for impact

Assessment for learning
No exams, patchwork presentation, e-portfolio, peer review

Confident, lifelong eLearner
Technology

- skills and knowledge in online services
- developing autonomy and independence
- need to be an online practitioner beyond qualification
- private space as a launch pad for public identity as confidence increases
Inquiry-based learning

Cycles of action inquiry (learning in action, potential for change in action)

Double loop learning (learning on action, potential for changing norms)

Plan

Do

Review

Reflection on process

Reflection on norms

Identify opportunity for improvement and check what is known

Exhibit findings and evaluate impact

Based on Argyris, Schön
Relevance and evidence

“I have enjoyed doing this action enquiry because it is relevant to my daily duties and it has made huge improvements to the way I record and reflect. The child has improved tremendously and I have evidence to prove it!”
Impact and confidence

“I still think this is the best opportunity of higher education I'm ever likely to have and the fact that it ties in with work makes it more interesting and certainly has changed my practice for the better.

I find I question situations more and if things aren't working, I feel confident enough to suggest alternatives.”
Sources of authority

• **work** - own experience, practice, evidence, work & professional documents

• **the online community** - of others on the degree from a range of workforces

• **the internet** - online journals, library

• ‘hotseat’ **experts**, publicly answering contextualised queries, using knowledge of best practice and theoretical concepts
Online community of inquiry

Evidence from Talking Heads (UK headteachers online community of practice) and Virtual Heads (UK trainee headteachers)

**community**

a. Me & my school - discussing an individual or individual school

b. We & us - discussing schools or participants collectively

c. Disclosure, venting, humour & passion

d. Agreement with, or reference to, other participants or contributions

e. Discussion & dialogue, mentoring

f. Ownership - lobbying or proposing action

**learning**

h. Offering info, ideas, resources and inviting critique - as an initiation

i. Asking challenging questions.

j. Articulating, explaining & supporting positions on issues - raising

k. Reflecting on previous contributions

l. Exploring & supporting issues by explanations & examples. Also critiquing, challenging, discussing & expanding others ideas. (Feedback)

m. New insight, conceptual change, re-evaluation

n. Impact - proposing action, summarising.

Community and expression

“Why is it I feel the community is a safe haven for my thoughts? Something has changed and it's not just the increase in confidence where dealings with the community is concerned. I'm taking it for granted this year that I can express my thoughts, views, complaints, suggestions frankly with no qualms or fear of ridicule. What has happened? It is as if the floodgates of my thoughts have flung themselves open and I am allowed to bring forth all those ideas that have been hiding away in dusky corners of my mind.”

- Amanda Smith, Cohort 3
Community and expertise

“At first I was very sceptical about the use of community for learning. I did not trust the concept of learning from other ‘ordinary’ people. I wanted my Learning Facilitator to validate all information for me. Soon I realised that these [students] were ‘extraordinary’ people, with a wealth of knowledge and especially experience among them. They were people who were conquering their struggle to juggle home, family, work and study and far from doubting their contribution to my learning I began to be in awe of their expertise.”
'Community and affect

“I do feel that *individuals emotions* have not been taken into consideration. e.g. I didn't expect on-line learning to be so 'addictive'. I was never comfortable with using chat rooms before, but First Class is an excellent meeting place for advice, support or just a chat. I also didn't feel that the [Guardian] article put across the very deep bond our cohort has forged. I look upon my fellow researchers and LF's, not just as peers but good friends - not bad for being complete strangers 18 months ago. I can't remember life before Ultraversity and I am wondering what life is going to be like when we all graduate.”

- Lynn, Cohort 3
NO EXAMS
Year 1 Module
“Reflection in the work setting”
Submitted as part of the patchwork assessment
QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.
Personalised learning

Year 1
- Investigating the Work Setting
- Introduction to Online Communication
- Reflection on the Work Setting 1
- Understanding Action Inquiry
- Certificate

Year 2
- Reflection on the Work Setting 2
- Action Inquiry
- Learning in the Work Setting
- Independent Learning or Language
- Diploma

Year 3
- Review and Planning
- Exhibition Preparation
- Implementing Action Inquiry and Exhibition
- Exhibition Validation and Defence
- Honours Degree
To what extent has there been personalisation of the learning experience?

- None: 2%
- Some: 12%
- Significant: 86%

n = 65
Source: Graduation Exit Survey July 2006
Individual fulfilment

I wanted to do the degree, because I wanted to do something for myself.
Organisational improvement

To what extent has there been workplace impact?

- Significant: 71%
- Some: 25%
- None: 5%

n = 65
Source: Graduation Exit Survey July 2006
Individual fulfilment and organisational improvement

“I am getting so much from this degree, everything I have done up to date has enabled me to move forward, gave me food for thought, and gave me direction. My line manager has used everything I have done to the full. I am now able to relay a particular message within a training session because of the research I have done. E.G. Learning Styles. I was able just today talk to 20 TA's regarding the LS they use and how they support the children. I referred to websites, literature and research. This gave me a great sense of achievement.”
Individual fulfilment and organisational improvement

“I am doing this degree for myself but it's nice to see that the teachers at school are starting to value my opinions”

Lesley Sheppard, ICT Higher Level Teaching Assistant and the ICT coordinator
Organisational improvement

Traditional work-based learning

Higher Education funding body

Negotiation about student numbers

University

Learning ‘diet’ delivered

One-size-fits-all content curriculum agreed

Student

Personal development planning

Employer organisation

Process curriculum designed

Student

Learning individually & frequently re-negotiated to meet needs of student and employer

Personal development planning and organisational improvement planning

ultraversity
Rôle of the HEI

HE Institutions

Practitioners

Analysis & insight - theoretical models

Global data

Methodology of action enquiry

Case studies from a range of sectors

Facilitation of community

Learning guidance

Assessment of progress

Overview of research

Motivation to improve

Action enquiry

Communication of results to stakeholders

Local data

Evaluation of experience

Testing of theories

Rôle of the HEI

Authority shared?

Authority of process and overview

Authority of practice and context

Communication of results to stakeholders

Overview of research
HOT NEWS

140 graduates in 2006
62 First Class Honours
57 Upper Second

That is 44% Firsts
Oxbridge award about 25%
The rest award about 10-11%

Would you invest in an institution which hits all these buttons and with this success?
Ultralab team dismantled

Delivery of BA continues in the Faculty of Education

... but ambition still alive to develop on a global scale

Is this a case of HE rejecting and containing innovation in teaching and learning?