Dimensions of Open and Distance Learning: A Case Study on Developments at the School of Health Studies, University of Bradford, UK

Authors: a number of authors from the University of Bradford, with a contribution in collaboration with the University of Huddersfield

Abstract
Changing context
The Dearing Report
Research & Evaluation
Contributions to this Special Issue
References

© 1999

Abstract

This paper aims to bring together a selection of works, both position papers and research reports, authored by various members of a small department at the University of Bradford, UK. Each of the papers discusses a response to the changes that have evolved in Health Care Education in recent years. The School of Health Care Studies was created in April 1996 adding a new dimension to the University of Bradford. Not only were programmes such as health care management, nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy and radiography new to the University's portfolio, but in some cases the methods of delivery also signalled the emergence of a changing culture within the organisation. The Division of Health Care Studies is a small, but expanding, department within the School of Health Studies. It has a unique role within the school in that it is responsible for *multi-professional* education to a diverse group of *post-registration* students from many areas of the health care sector, rather than for one specific group such as nurses or radiographers.

Changing context

Changing environmental, professional and technological conditions have led to increasing demands upon and from our clients within the National Health Service (NHS) (DOH 1997). In turn, these demands have led to the development of a flexible provision including open and distance learning delivered at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The changing demands upon our customers have included the technological advances that are discussed by Benson et al (1998); these have also changed the demands made upon teaching staff within the division. A changing clientele of mature students, predominantly women of middle age (Kenworthy & Dearnley 1998), who are already professionals and have practised for many years, has also contributed to the growth of our flexible provision. This has placed demands upon staff for changing and developing the skills required to support such students. It is hardly surprising therefore, that staff need supporting too, to ease them through these transitions and their uncertainties. Developmental work within the division has not overlooked them.

The Dearing Report

The Dearing Report (1997) identified a need to encourage a society committed to life long learning (DFEE 1998, ENB 1998). Open and distance learning methodologies promote the notions of autonomy and independence, sentiments that underpin the skills of life long learning. However, such intent is not only to be encouraged in students. In pursuit of lifelong learning ourselves, we have each become involved in various developmental projects within the department that contribute to the quality of our provision and our own professional development. One such project is an ongoing action research study into support systems for the supporters of open and distance learning students (Dearnley and Gatecliffe 1998).

Research & Evaluation

Action Research (Elliot 1991, McNiff 1988) has become integral to our role as tutors, its reflective and evaluative nature allows its easy application and contributes to the ongoing quality review of the programmes offered. A second action research study currently ongoing within the division is an evaluation of telephone assessment schedules that have been incorporated into the distance learning programmes (Benson & Cassidy 1998). Telephone assessments are one form of response to the growing range of delivery systems operating within the division. To reflect these changes, assessment methods had to be reviewed for their suitability to the courses in which they were ensconced. As the departmental philosophy of education evolved into one of increasing openness, flexibility and equality, so the assessment methods employed had to be examined with a view to these underpinning dimensions. Telephone assessments were a product of that review.

Further changes to assessment which have occurred as a direct result of the changing nature of our

provision are described by Benson et al (1998) in their account of introducing work based projects into health care management programmes. It has become evident that this form of assessment contributes to organisational development in addition to the personal growth experienced by the student. It would therefore seem that changes in the provision of health care education are having a direct and positive effect on health care delivery.

The contributions to this special issue

The positive effects of our open learning provisions are supported by feedback from service managers. They offer clear indications that students who have undertaken programmes delivered by these flexible approaches are indeed taking the skills of independent learners back into the workplace. The following collection of works suggest that the challenges of a changing world are being discovered and embraced both by health care professionals and those employed to facilitate their professional development. Read the following contributions to get informed about the specific work done in our field:

- Keeping the customer satisfied: responding to changing social demands at the university of Bradford.
  Lynda Gatecliffe & Annie Persaud
- Women taking health care education forwards
  Doreen Kenworthy and Christine Dearnley University of Bradford. UK.
- Human resource development using work based projects in open learning programmes in UK health care.
  Lawrence Benson, University of Bradford, Lynda Gatecliffe, University of Bradford and Graham Thurgood, University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom
- Converging traditional assessment philosophies with open assessment philosophies - introducing a low tech. Solution through action research
  Andrea Cassidy - Lecturer and Lawrence Benson - Lecturer - School of Health Studies, University of Bradford, United Kingdom
- Supporting supporters in open and distance learning
  Christine Dearnley and Lynda Gatecliffe, The University of Bradford, UK
- Preparing a web site to support pedogogical content for health service managers and nurses.
  Lawrence Benson, Andrea Cassidy and Nick Bowles, Lecturers, School of Health Studies, University of Bradford, United Kingdom

References

Benson L., Gatecliffe L., Thurgood G., (1998) *Human resource development using work based projects in open learning programmes in UK health care*. European Distance Education Network Conference, University of Bologna, June 24-26. Pp627-630

Benson L, Cassidy A Bowles N., *Preparing a web site to support pedogogical content for health service managers and nurses.* European Distance Education Network Conference, University of Bologna, June 24-26. *Pp631-634*

Cassidy A., Benson L., (1998) *Converging traditional assessment philosophies with open assessment philosophies - introducing a low tech. Solution through action research.* European Distance Education Network Conference, University of Bologna, June 24-26. Pp 635 - 641

Department of Health (1997) *The New NHS Modern and Dependable*. London, Stationary Office

Dearnley C.A., Gatecliffe L., (1998). *Supporting Supporters in Open and Distance Learning.* European Distance Education Network Conference, University of Bologna, June 24-26. pp 645-648

Department for Education and Employment (1998) The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain (Green Paper), London, the Stationary Office

Elliot J.,(1991), *Action Research for Educational Change.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

ENB (1998) *International Life Long Learning in Europe,* London, ENB

Kenworthy D., Dearnley C.A., (1998), *Women taking health care education forwards.* European Distance Education Network Conference, University of Bologna, June 24-26. Pp 653-657

McNiff J., (1988) *Action Research, Principles and Practice.* Macmillan Education Ltd. London.