

## Developing technology-enhanced work-focussed learning - a Pattern Language Approach

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This television report on BBC's regional news programme, Look East, surprised me with how well it summarised some major aspects of our Ultraversity project's degree programme. Here is a transcript and the features which are so cleverly articulated. Well done to the BBC, their reporter John Halford, Jane Day our successful student and to my colleague Malcolm Moss in Ultralab for masterminding the whole thing! My comments in red:

"A Teaching Assistant in Essex has just gained an honours degree after studying entirely over the Internet." Quick summary of the whole thing! Identifies workforce, learning outcome, medium.

"She did it in three years without meeting any of her tutors or fellow students." Its as quick as a face-to-face degree, no travel necessary.

"Jane Day is 46." It fits a life-long learning agenda.

"She left school with just three O-levels." It has an open admissions policy and thus fits a widening participation agenda.

"Exams weren't her thing." Innovation in assessment has been a key factor.

"Then, three years ago she saw that Anglia Ruskin University was offering a degree course." It is a 'kosher' degree from a proper university.

"I wanted to do the degree, because I wanted to do something for myself. Obviously I have looked after my family, over the last twenty-odd years, and I just felt I wanted to do something for myself." It provides personal fulfilment.

"Jane's course was called Learning, Technology and Research," The title (not sure about that!) so others can find it.

"...and so that she could carry on working, she did it entirely over the Internet." It doesn't require you to give up the day job or ask for time off.

"On the computer we had our own filing cabinets where we could submit our work," It organises an e-portfolio.

"...and it was sent and collected at the other end," It was a reliable mechanism.

"...it was then marked and sent back to us via the Internet with our marks on." Assessment for learning.

"Of course there's another distance learning specialist in this region. Is the Open University concerned about a possible rival? No, I don't think we're worried. We may learn something from Anglia Ruskin, but I don't think that we feel threatened by them, we're pleased with what they've done." The competition rate it.

"Until now, Jane Day has only been able to get to know her fellow students through the computer, but that's about to change. Made quite a few friends, and it's going to be really exciting when we meet up in November for our graduation to put faces to names." The social element has not been missing and mutual support is important.

"As a learning support assistant, Jane earns about ten thousand pounds a year." This degree helps those on lower salaries ...

"With a 2.1 honours degree in the bank," ... to get a good degree ...

"she's now thinking about getting a postgraduate teaching qualification." ... to continue the life-long learning adventure ...

"Her earnings could more than double." ... and increase earning power and career prospects!

"John Halford, BBC Look East." Stonking!

# Background

- A research & development project from 2003-2006 undertaken at Anglia Ruskin University
- Successfully developed & delivered degree
- Focus on learners' action to improve 'work' context
- Located in the discipline of action research
- Self-organised learning at work and home
- Collaboration in an online community of inquiry
- 3 years full-time
- 100% online, no face-to-face, no exams

The Ultraversity Project identified a need for higher education for working people, who could not afford to be at university due to financial, family or access issues.

The development began in earnest in January 2003, accelerated to recruit before July 2003 in order to satisfy the university's need to fulfil HEFCE targets.

The major work of the project has been the development of the BA (Hons) Learning Technology Research.

The motivation to improve the 'work' context is the students' driver and the degree is intended to equip students to do this whilst learning and throughout life. No subject is specified, but action research is the core discipline in this fully online course. The first face-to-face meeting for many is the graduation ceremony - 120 of 140 turned up for the first major ceremony in November 2006. The degree was first validated in May 2003 and then a second time in 2005, due to the university deciding to re-validate all programmes.

In July 2006, the first cohort of 148 student researchers graduated, as a part of a pathway of around 300.

This first product was the BA programme, but in 2005/6 Ultralab acted as consultants to Bournemouth University in the development of an MA in Creative Media Practice, intended for professionals in the broadcast, film and other entertainment industries, whose workplace was the essential place to learn and for whom attendance could be difficult.

	<b>Benefits for:</b>		
<b>Flexibility in:</b>	<b>Student</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Employer</b>
<b>Time</b>	Full time work, family, best time for learning	Timetable, staffing flexibility	No release needed
<b>Place</b>	As above and best place to study	No rooms, no car parking	As above
<b>Assessment</b>	Finding voice, creativity, technology	Retention, graduate competencies	Communicative employees
<b>Negotiated curriculum</b>	Motivation, perseverance, meaningfulness.	Retention, focus on process quality, relevance to society.	Relevance
<b>Action Inquiry</b>	Basis in 'delight' - zest and interest	Practitioner data eg collection of case studies	Effective improvement

# 'Work' in its broadest definition

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## 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 strug-

### WOMEN

gles 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 (D7833LF)

'Work' is defined broadly and includes voluntary and domestic activity. The activity needs to be capable of improvement and research.

An interesting example from Ultraversity was Eve Thirkle who started the degree as a Teaching Assistant, but her son was diagnosed with autism three months later. Eve switched to studying his development needs and her role in as a parent raising him.

Eve graduated with a First Class honours degree in July 2006.

From her local newspaper, Doncaster Today:

"It gave me a focus at a time when it was very easy to get depressed," said Eve, who recently became chair of the Doncaster Autistic Society.

In this cohort of Ultraversity, the average age of students was 40 and 80% were women. The age and gender profile matches teaching assistants, but there are significant 'outliers' aged as young as 18 and as old as 60. One student researcher, aged 18, left school with three A-levels to take up a post as a Teaching Assistant. He subsequently signed up for the degree and graduated in July 2006, having studied full-time and worked full-time in the job he loved.

Activity	Learning Contract
3	<p>Our school is one of the pilot schools for the Government initiative "Remodelling the Workforce", regarding the change to be introduced to school assistants' roles to relieve the teaching staff workloads. I will attend the meeting to introduce it to the school on 20th October.</p> <p>There will be a School Change Team (SCT) set up consisting of staff from various disciplines. I hope to become a member of this team. The SCT will be looking at the way the school is set up at present, the job roles and possible changes in working patterns.</p> <p>I hope to be able to identify the way the school is organised and illustrate on a JellyOS page.</p> <p>I have arranged to attend a First Aid course via INSET training in November.</p>

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
In house purpose built	JellyOS - online community				
	Portfolio tool - e-portfolio resource delivery				
Proprietary		FirstClass - community conversation, resource delivery			
			WebCT - as above		
Tailored OSS		Drupal - weblog aggregation, course induction			
			Plone - e-portfolio, resource delivery and community conversation		
			Gearbox - structured reflection		
Libre web services			Ultrastudents - student run website		
				KEEPToolkit - e-portfolio	

# Aim

Our experience was of some challenges from the diversity of approaches by individual learning facilitators, so we set out to:

- identify the issues raised by learning facilitators, by uncovering tacit ideas
- clarify coherent, consensual and successful practices and concepts
- communicate these clearly to learning facilitators and student researchers.

# Methodology

The findings in this paper are based upon research using an adapted form of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

In this approach, data collection and analysis goes through a number of detailed stages in order derive meaning.

“An attempt to unravel the meanings contained in accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the text and transcripts.”

# Findings

- Evolution in use of Virtual Learning Environments and other software frustrated pedagogical aims
- Developing a common pedagogy in a team teaching approach was challenging but fruitful
- The flexibility of learning conflicts with the inflexibility demanded by fair assessment
- Students valued 'patchwork' assessment, but this challenged markers

# Measures recommended:

- Improve staff induction mechanisms
- Clarify team teaching approach
- Put a clear system in place - define parameters of freedom and control
- Organise an aligned team with an adequate scope of skills and specialisms
- Inspire collaboration and trust at the heart of the team to ensure viable team teaching
- Systematically facilitate community learning

# Conclusions / next steps

- Develop a Pattern Language for Online Community!

# Patterns

"Each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again in our environment, and then describes the core of the solution to that problem, in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice."

(Alexander et al., 1977)

1. Nurture  
Online  
Community of  
Inquiry

**1.1 Work Together**  
Collaboration of staff, team  
teaching, cooperation  
amongst students.

**1.2 Actively Facilitate.**  
Establish shared goals  
and expectations  
inspiring mutual respect  
and valuing others.

**1.7 Model the Reflective  
practitioner.** Outward self  
critique, critiquing others and  
taking responsibility to be a  
reflective action researcher.

**1.3 Organise Community.**  
Many to many  
communication, confidence  
and competence in using  
technologies.

**1.6 Value Practitioner  
Knowledge alongside academic  
knowledge.**  
Peer learning, expert input and  
applying theory in practice.

**1.4 Create motivation and  
Perseverance.** Acting to  
improve retention, providing  
moral support, creating  
delight.