**Escalate funding**

**final report 2005-6-7**

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**Background and Introduction**

My team and I were awarded Escalate funding of something short of £5,000 in late 2005 to complete a project focusing on postgraduate learning and supervisory practices. By the time of the first report in June 2006, we had only just begun to ‘spend’ the funding money as I moved posts and needed to transfer it, get established and sort out how moving money back and forth between the Anglia Ruskin team and the developing University of Brighton team could be organised. By the end of the financial year we had actually completed a lot of the projected work, and by the end of the funding period we have achieved most of the intended outcomes, and contributed towards the ongoing research towards another larger bid for funding.

The work for the Escalate project is linked for me to my work on the NTFS project which lasts longer (due to job changes the NTFS money and main project activities are starting as from July 2006- 2009) so initially although there are some differences of scale and focus, the Escalate work started up is dovetailing into NTFS work and shifting focus a little. Its success has also contributed towards our development of the first bid towards the NTFS project strand, success in the first stage and work towards the second stage bid, to be delivered March 14, the results of which we will know in June for a September start should we be lucky.

It has only been possible to continue with our project research work with the support of Escalate, and then the NTFS, and the credibility which this has lent the project, a credibility which persuaded the University of Brighton to make further investment in the research team, and Anglia Ruskin to continue to work with myself and the now multi-campus collaborative project team.

Since December 2005 until December 2006 and now March 2007, I and the team have carried out the following:

**Meetings and planning**

Met several times to discuss the research plans and findings to date-

December 2005, February, May, July, October, December 2006, February 2007

on both Anglia Ruskin sites, and in Brighton where I have been establishing a team, at the SEDA conference and HEA conference (for colleagues outside these two universities ie Profs Hartley and Meyer), SRHE conference where all disseminated some of the developments to date from the ESCALATE funded project.

**Research processes**

1. Carried out the analysis and re -analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from several years 1998- 2006 to focus on finding when and if we can determine through changes in the Reflections on Learning in inventory scores whether students who are successful in their PhDs have developed more meaningful and less accumulative learning approaches, and narrowed any gaps between approaches and intentions/intended outcomes –specifically between accumulation approaches and transformational outcomes.
2. Re analysed earlier interview data and continued to interview students and supervisors about identification of the moments when conceptual threshold (Meyer, Land and Cousin 2004, 2006; Wisker and Kiley 2006)) crossing takes place ; how they can determine students are working at a conceptual level, and how supervisors ‘nudge’ student cross these thresholds.
3. Interviewed-asked students questions to determine how they identify their working at a conceptual level in terms of the research question, research design including the choice of methodology and methods, analysis and their own meta learning (Flavell 1979), communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 2004) as learners, and what supports them in this.

Very focused data was gathered through interview, group processes and discussion in the February 2006 workshop with PhD students, and subsequently from the supervisors in June, July. This has now been transcribed and analysed and has formed the basis for several further conference papers.

Students and staff colleagues were given copies of the CD Rom *Interviewer Postgraduate viva* to pilot for our improvement at February 2006 and February 2007 research development programme workshops.

**Product development**

Updated the CD Rom ‘*Interviewer: Postgraduate viva’* so that it can now run on an ordinary laptop with a very cheap webcam in sync thus making it more accessible to more students. The future intention is to rewrite and re shoot it with more culturally sensitive interviewer examples (4 interviewers not 2)

**Dissemination**

* Gina Wisker and Gillian Robinson delivered a paper on PhD students and communities of practice at the Quality in Postgraduate Research conference (QPR) Adelaide, April 2006(published on the QPR website papers)
* Gina Wisker delivered a paper on early thoughts about PHD and MA students and conceptual thresholds with Margaret Kiley and Sarah Aiston at the QPR conference ( published on the QPR website papers)
* Gina Wisker delivered a paper on nurturing communities of practice among research students (PhD RHD and masters) at the HERDSA conference Perth July 2006
* The communities of practice work was first discussed in a conference in July 2005 at EARLI and the paper, updated in the light of these recent pieces of work and further findings, is to be published in a special half issue of *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* in 2007.
* Gina Wisker gave a paper on crossing conceptual threshold in graduate work in feminist related and women’s studies at the Threshold Concepts conference Glasgow September 2006
* Gina Wisker and Margaret Kiley gave a paper on conceptual threshold crossing at the SRHE conference December 2006

Further conference paper construction and writing up is underway.

Papers will be delivered and research co developed and co written at the postgraduate conference /symposium in Montreal, McGill university April 2007

A symposium has been offered to the EARLI conference in Budapest August 2007- for full dissemination of the work funded by ESCALAT and some of the NTFS.This will comprise papers by the team Prof Gina Wisker and Dr Gillian Robinson;Prof Vernon Trafford and Dr Shosh Leshem; Dr Miri Shacham and Dr Yehudit od-Cohen ,

Much of the fiunding will be used on supporitng colleagues to disseminate at these conferences.

**Unexpected outcomes and expenditure**

The support for their work from the whole project team has brought us together as a international community of practice able to work cohesively across teams and to push forward research and the development of good practice in terms of postgraduate learning, supervisory practices, and research development programme materials. It is hard it capture the momentum of this because of the dovetailing in with the NTFS project and the generosity and commitment of all involved but it is certainly the case that ESCALATE funding has given us credibility and a base from which to grow our work and make it known to others, The EARLI symposium is a significant product and will be funded by ESCALATE monies since another unexpected spin off from the success of the project is the generosity of the University of Brighton in appointing a part time researcher and some research administrative support all of which has helped us in our work and has meant that project money could be marshalled for dissemination rather than research time.

A projects officer is being partly covered byESCALATE funding to help the admin of the project.

The time of researchers on the project was contributed at a cost only rate covered by the universities, and expenditure then is related to the costs of the dissemination at conferences. And associated costs.

 **Plans for further developments**

 Because of the dovetailing in with my NTFS project, joint outcomes and conference presentations have resulted.

We are going to update the content and re shoot the video for the CD Rom during 2007 following comments from students involved in the pilot stages.

The project team comprising UK, Australasia and Israeli colleagues have put forward a symposium to the EARLI conference August 2007. This symposium will give us the opportunity to pull together our joint work on (i) threshold concepts, (ii) communities of practice , (iii) conceptual working at PhD level and (iv) student awareness of the sustainability and impact of their work following its conceptualised level achievement.

**Expenditure**

 Although we stated that the money would be spent on:

“Funding for two of the research team and a transcriber –

To protect job security, ongoing costs and the full cost of these posts will be covered by the NTFS award beyond the life of this Escalate project.

1 day a week each (a) researcher B mid point (b) admin/editorial assistant (acting as researcher) and that

the money for (a) was transferred directly into ARU’s UCLT

the money for (b) is a contract from CLT Brighton for an ARU staff member

some more of the funding will pay/is paying for transcription.

Travel costs etc are still to be claimed.”

This is historical in relation to my move and the financial support already received form the university of Brighton.

Because of the financial commitment of the two universities and particularly the University of Brighton, funding will now be directed at dissemination costs in the most part the EARLI conference, the postgraduate conference in Canada April 2007, and ongoing work towards the introduction of the CD Rom and the publications on which we are working and on my research and writing work towards the second edn of The Postgraduate research handbook. .

We are grateful to ESCALATE for the support for the buoyant project which has made solid and original contributions to our knowledge and understanding of postgraduate learning and supervisory practices, and which lives on beyond the funding.

Gina Wisker

Project Director

March 2007

University of Brighton