

Overcoming ‘Culture’ Shocks: Learning to do things differently

Moira Laidlaw, Open University, UK

Moira Laidlaw

*The Open University,
Milton Keynes
MK7 6BJ
United Kingdom*

*Professor for Life at
Ningxia Teachers
University, China*

Abstract

This paper charts the journey over the last five and a half years to find ways to teach at the Open University in the light of a painful disability and the changes in circumstances this has brought. My paper focuses in particular on coming to grips with technology designed for distance learning courses for which I am currently running modules on international development for Masters certification. The paper details the difficulties I had in overcoming my own technophobia and assumptions that virtual learning spaces could not aspire to the educational quality of face-to-face teaching and learning. It likens the coming to terms with pain and with new technologies to culture shock that renders the sufferer isolated and without bearings. Students' and colleagues written feedback offer a helpful way of monitoring my own educational development. Overcoming the shortcomings has become an opportunity for greater creativity and engagement with unforeseen possibilities in the pursuit of responsible freedoms and the revitalisation of educational processes.

Keywords: ‘Culture’ shocks; Chronic pain; Educational technology; Distance learning; Masters teaching.

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Preface:

Since 1978 I have been an educator working in both schools and Higher Education in England, and as a voluntary educational development worker in a university in North-western China from August 2001 – January 2007. In 2004 I had been given the State Friendship Award by the Beijing government for services to rural education in northwest China, and in 2006 was made a Professor for Life at Ningxia Teachers University, which is where I had spent most of my placement. My time in China came to an abrupt end when both feet became extremely painful to walk on. I spent 2007-2009 entirely housebound in England without a reliable diagnosis. The pain and subsequent restrictions on my mobility have had a profound effect on the course of my life. Being housebound for two years was not only the result of the pain, but of the sense of trauma and ensuing agoraphobia that accompanied the dislocation from the past and my sense of self. I was experiencing 24-hour-a-day excruciating pain, various counter-culture shocks, the loss (as I thought) of my vocation, my mother's death, financial problems and loss of sleep to contend with all at once. I had to rethink my life.

The circumstances of my disability have forced me to find new ways of continuing my work as an educator. Once I became more inured to the pain I began to get bored. In 2009 I began to work with the Open University as a distance-learning tutor on a Masters module in Development Management. I eventually received the diagnosis of enthesopathy (a rare form of rheumatoid arthritis) in both feet, but was told I should recover most of my mobility and a significant lessening of the pain.

This paper is organised in terms of the various aspects of technological media I have come to terms with, and the progress of the disease. I feel it's important to structure the writing with an emphasis on the educational aspects, as I aim to make a contribution to educational knowledge and practice. The pain has played a significant role in my life but the emphasis throughout is on showing in what ways the changes have impacted on my educational theorising and practices. This paper is also written in the aftermath of the Paralympics held in London, in which the point is made that physical or mental disability should not automatically preclude people from

full participation in the areas of life of their choice. I believe it is significant for practitioner research as well to explore the importance of levelling the playing fields, so to speak, so that the voices of all those who want to contribute may do so. This paper is written as a tribute to all the athletes who took part.

Introduction:

I believe – and my educational life testifies to this belief over time (Laidlaw, 2008) – that educational endeavours are those whose process and outcomes enable people to learn something of value. This isn't, however, a *carte-blanche* recipe. Just because someone identifies something as worthwhile doesn't automatically make it so. A process is *educational* in my experience only if it brings all or some of the values of harmony, clarity, truth, love, emancipation and hope more fully into the world. Whitehead, (2011, 2012) writes extensively about this. I am also assuming that readers of this paper will be familiar with my idea of values as living standards of judgement which are alive and evolving just as we are alive and evolve (Laidlaw, 1996). I believe for a process to be educational it must offer opportunities to reflect and act on issues to do with personal responsibility, and to learn more about one's own potential for good in the world. This would necessarily result in the learner gaining a greater access to the world and the other way round. In other words, what is educational involves principled frameworks for the realisation of individual and collective potentials and responsibilities, in ways that increase human well-being.

Since the early nineties I have consciously chosen to take pathways leading to greater democratisation in my educational practices. All my educational research writings have involved themselves in increasingly conscious dialectics through the development of my value of democracy from within living relationships (Laidlaw, 2008). I focused on the equalisation of relationships during the educational processes of trying to improve our practice as I realised that there was a strong link between this democratisation of relationships and their educational value. As a part of my Ph.D. studies at the University of Bath with Dr. Jack Whitehead as supervisor, I wrote an article (Laidlaw, 1994) on democratising my educative relationships through dialogue, which outlined the necessity of my melding processes, values and

goals into purposive actions with others in ways that transformed the educational relationship into one of mutual enquiry. That article marked my first publication explaining the pursuit of humanising processes (rather than conforming to externally-applied rules that might not promote human potential) as a way of living out my educational values.

I admit to a former prejudice about the dehumanising effects of mediating educational relationships through technological processes. As someone who has always relied on her ability to facilitate a developing engagement with the other in our mutual quests for improving learning (Li & Laidlaw, 2006), I was certain that relying on technology would interfere with the authenticity of the contact and render it less educational. I had yet to learn that my perspective was taking for granted that I would become subject to the technology as opposed to the other way round. I have always struggled against the technologisation of human interactions exemplified by grid-tables of pre-ordained standards and targets, which, in my opinion are in danger of rendering teachers into technicians, who are trained to extract data from human beings in pre-codified ways¹. A system that doesn't accord the individual with the respect due to that individuality (Sen, 1999) is, to my mind, more likely to be about training than education. In this paper I will show how, whilst still concerned about the processes of education being turned into technologies, I have changed my mind about the potential educational value of working with media that facilitate communication and open up chances for study that might, without such media, not exist at all.

'Culture' Shocks

I am going to explore three apparently dissimilar aspects of my life between 2007 -2009 and show why linking them is a helpful explanation of my educational

¹ I cite the former National Curriculum for English in England and Wales as a prime example of how pre-defined standards of accomplishment drive the curriculum for students in schools. Teachers become technicians in an examination machine, and students are its fodder.

development since working with the Open University (OU). Marie Huxtable, a colleague and friend from Bath where I lived before going to China in 2001, gave me the way into the writing of this paper by talking about my early work with the OU being experienced as a form of 'culture shock'. This has proved a very helpful way for me to be able to articulate about all my initial experiences relating to this paper constituting the effects of varying forms of alienation. I like the definition of 'culture shock' as defined at www.dictionary.com² as, 'a state of bewilderment and distress experienced by an individual who is suddenly exposed to a new, strange, or foreign social and cultural environment'. I think the following fulfill all three categories. The first deals with the effects of chronic pain, the second with the loss of my past life, and the third with the new educational technologies that forced me to find new ways of teaching.

First, feeling chronic pain isn't something that's easy to describe meaningfully to someone who isn't suffering from chronic pain. It is disorientating and can render the sufferer isolated and withdrawn. It isn't only not being able to get out and about that is debilitating, it is also the psychological effect of not being able to communicate authentically something, which is of genuine significance to the sufferer. Emily Dickinson wrote something that speaks exactly to my feelings about the pain at the time:

Pain has an element of blank.
It cannot recollect
When it began, or if there were
A day when it was not.
It has no future but itself.
Its infinite realms contain
Its past, enlightened to perceive
New periods of pain.

I was also experiencing fear at the volume of pain and whether it was going to get worse if I did the wrong thing. Doctors and specialists seemed fairly unsympathetic because (I believe) they didn't know what was wrong with me for those two years and therefore minimised the pain and the effects I was experiencing.

² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/culture+shock?s=t>

My GP³ promised me I would be better in six months. I tried to believe him. I felt disregarded, disrespected and very lonely.

Secondly, in 2007 when I came back from my six-year stint in China I felt the same kind of counter-culture shock I had experienced in 2004 when I was repatriated to England by Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) because of the SARS⁴ epidemic. I didn't feel I fitted in anymore and that I had little in common with the people around me. I felt disdain for the corporate greed I perceived, and became very disenchanted as I listened to the constant 'whingeing' (as I experienced it) of people in general; they seemed to be complaining that life wasn't fair because they couldn't afford a second holiday that year, or that it wasn't fair because their property was not appreciating in the current financial climate in the way they'd expected (and by implication 'deserved'). I objected to the expectation that life *ought* to be fair when I'd spent the last six years living in the poorer parts of China with the proof of the fact it wasn't every single day. And of course I was feeling that life wasn't fair to *me*, having been visited with this affliction. I also noticed the inherent waste of food and water, resources that were at a premium in Guyuan, where there were two rainy seasons in a lucky year: one for nine days, the other for four! I found myself tearful at the inequity of it all and remembered the family living downstairs from me in my campus accommodation in Guyuan, an extended family who made music together of an evening, celebrating the birth of twin-sons, telling stories, playing drinking games, eating out in the tiny courtyard, hardly room to swing a cat, yet all I saw and heard were human beings giving all the appearance of living in plenty.

Making such judgements about others and about one's own country is often in part a consequence of having assimilated some of the values of the newly-understood culture and reacting to the contrast in the old one (VSO, 2012). Deflecting an inner self-awareness by focusing that anger outwards is also a common response to counter culture shock (op. cit.). I felt out of step with the

³ G.P. stands for General Practitioner. In the UK each town/village has a number of doctors who run surgeries 5 days a week. Patients attend by appointment and payment is made centrally through taxation. Prescriptions are charged in England and Wales, but not in Scotland.

⁴ SARS is short for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, and was endemic in China for several months of that year.

prevailing attitudes and opportunities in England relating to fairness, choice and wealth.

Thirdly, in coming to terms with the technology (more later) in the first months of my appointment with the OU I felt constantly out of my depth and alienated both from my environment and to an extent from the system and therefore the people I was working with. I was biased before I had any experience of the technology, but believed without any doubt that it would always constitute an insuperable barrier to authentic communication. I believed I would let the students down and wouldn't be able to create the kinds of educational relationships that have always been of central importance to me (and invariably to the students) in the educational processes I facilitated (Laidlaw, 2008). I felt then – and believe still – that the quality of the educational relationship between educator and student can have a far-reaching influence on the quality of learning and can impact for the good on a person's life in general. As a result of what I perceived then as having to operate in a substitute environment for the real thing, I felt isolated and incompetent, which I had never experienced so acutely in face-to-face teaching. I had always trusted to my ability to create spaces within which individuals felt respected and regarded with 'unconditional positive regard' (Rogers, 1983; Laidlaw, 1996; 1998 – 2006; 2008).

The alienation and confusion I felt in those 30 months after the onset of my feet-pain were not experienced in isolation, but all mixed together. The pressure showed itself in an inability to go outside without a panic-attack. I felt intensely self-conscious when I did so which wasn't helped by being stared or laughed at, or cajoled to try harder for the Paralympics. I would cry at sudden loud noises, had an enduring inability to fall asleep before 3 am (because of course I was using little physical energy during the day), and I developed a fear of anyone calling at the house or on the telephone. I was prescribed Librium for short periods during these two years and tried hard not to use up my allotted tablets: I was afraid of what being on such a drug meant about my psychological condition. I knew it was a symbol of not being in control of my life and that was something I wanted to avoid at all costs.

Being visible in China for six years had been difficult enough for an introvert like me⁵ and now I was perceived as 'other' in a new way as well. My response to the sense of being invaded every time I was visible was to cut myself off as much as possible and stay in the confines of my cottage. I survived like this for two years before going for psychological help for a few months in July 2009⁶. I spent the time at home writing and revising novels, one of which was published in 2010⁷.

Transition

From 2007 to 2010 I was on state benefits related to my condition. I felt grateful after China to be living in a welfare state, but was aware of the increased lack of autonomy in my life. This also felt alienating to me. In August 2009 I applied to the Open University. I read online that a new module, Education for Development for the Masters qualification was opening up at the OU, which would be run entirely over the internet, so I applied online and was invited to a telephone interview. The questions about the technology, how to use it and what it was for, were daunting and when I got the job I wasn't entirely pleased! I was, however, extremely surprised. I had supposed my ignorance about working with synchronous media systems would have precluded me from being appointed. Apparently I was successful because of my varied experience⁸ – teaching both in Secondary and Higher Education as well as my six-year stint in China. I had been able to talk about my experience with the Moodle (asynchronous) systems I had used when I was chair of the editorial committee at EJOLTS. But now I had a practical problem: how was I going to facilitate learning over the internet, i.e. how could I live out my educational values when (in my opinion at the time) many of the processes I had always relied on, all involving face-to-face teaching, appeared to be denied me?

⁵ Meyers Briggs personality testing at: <http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/the-16-mbti-types.asp#INFJ> I am an Introvert-Intuition-Feeling-Judgement type.

⁶ I am grateful again to Marie Huxtable who paid for my psychological treatment as I was in financial difficulties at that time. Earning £170 a month for six years doesn't lead to a big savings account!

⁷ 'The Festival Stories' about rural China was published in English and German by the Akademischer Verlag in Munich. See http://www.amazon.de/The-Festival-Stories-Northwest-China/dp/3869240261/ref=sr_1_28?ie=UTF8&qid=1346232320&sr=8-28 for details.

⁸ I was told this by my line-manager afterwards.

Introduction to the technology and subject-matter

The knowledge-base for the module was on an OU website, customised for students registered for the module. Although I had worked in the field of development I had never theorised about it, or read much literature on the subject. Thus before the module started I had a frantic four weeks reading all the material I could lay my hands on and trying to familiarise myself with the module's standardisation methods and ways to negotiate the website for the fullest benefit of the students' learning. I was vividly aware that the kind of knowledge I would be dealing with wouldn't be the dialectical focus of previous educational processes with students. This was also a kind of culture shock for me. Living educational theorising had become second-nature after my post-doctoral work in the Bath secondary school and then in China for six years as a teacher-educator and development worker. I was used to negotiating knowledge with students rather than referring to a set of resources that contained largely propositional knowledge. In schools I had been expected to teach subjects, but developed this into the facilitation of students' taking increasing responsibility for their own learning, and therefore developing their potential as human beings (Laidlaw, 1997-2001; 2006; 2008). My usual strategy in teaching has been to transform the required syllabus into a tool for students' personal development (Laidlaw, 2008). It is always for this reason that I concentrate so much on individuals and take their feedback very seriously (see Appendices for examples of their feedback). In my new job I would be required to teach content whose theories I was initially unfamiliar with. I was not sure how much I would be able to facilitate students' own educational development. This was a moral dilemma for me and a powerful aspect of my 'culture-shock' because empowering students to take more responsibility and control of their own learning is for me at the core of what I consider to be educational. I didn't want to be involved in static processes but in dynamic and evolving ones, as these contain, in my experience, the potential to transform lives for the better.

Before beginning the tutoring, I read the OU's documents on the use of Elluminate, distance-learning norms for new Associate Lecturers and various codes

of conduct. The documentation was thorough and helpful. The ET821 (Education for Development) homepage looked like this:

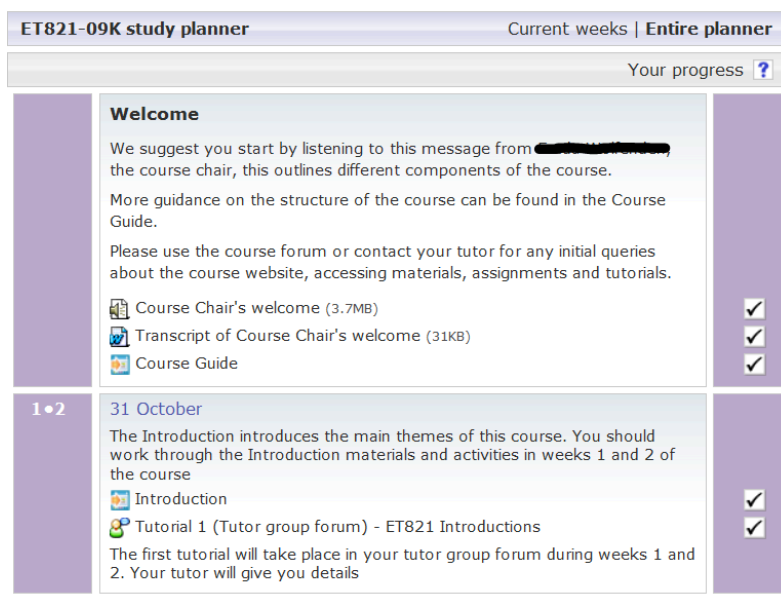


Image 1: Part of the Module's Homepage

There was – as you can see in the image above - provision for a tutor group, which included both synchronous and asynchronous methods of tuition. In other words I would be teaching online in real time and would also run tutorials via a moodle forum:

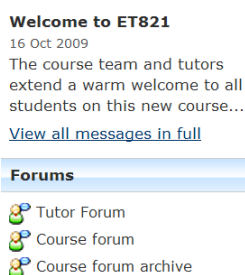


Image 2. Tutorial Forum link⁹

⁹ I can no longer access the forum itself as its time-limit has expired.

The OU uses various media for communication and for teaching. A First Class online conferencing system¹⁰ is used extensively, but I was to use their Elluminate system:

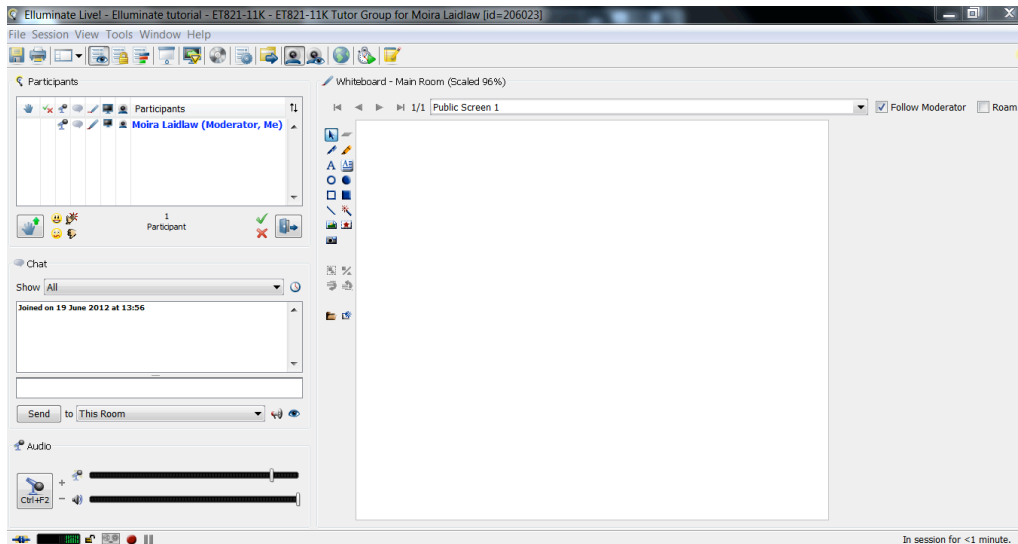


Image 2. Elluminate Window

Elluminate Live! is a real-time eLearning and web collaboration environment that enables participants to synchronously communicate using audio, written messages and an on-screen whiteboard; and to share software applications. Elluminate Live! sessions are held in virtual 'rooms' and can be used for small group tutorials, lectures, meetings, or drop-in events. Users enter rooms either as a 'participant' or 'moderator'. Moderators have more privileges than participants and typically run the session (OU Elluminate Guidelines, 2011).

Because some of my students were working in areas of the world often with low-bandwidths there was audio only, plus use of the whiteboard and a chat facility for added sharing of information. I was expected to run tutorials via the system, using whiteboard files created from a PowerPoint demonstration which would act as a springboard for discussion. All tutorials are voluntary for the students. After the first couple of Elluminate tutorials I would then be expected to facilitate students to use the system themselves as moderators in order to present findings from their case-file research.

In addition I would also be required to mark the three continuous-assessments documents and the final mini-dissertation assignments online. A diagram of the system can be seen in the following table:

¹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FirstClass>

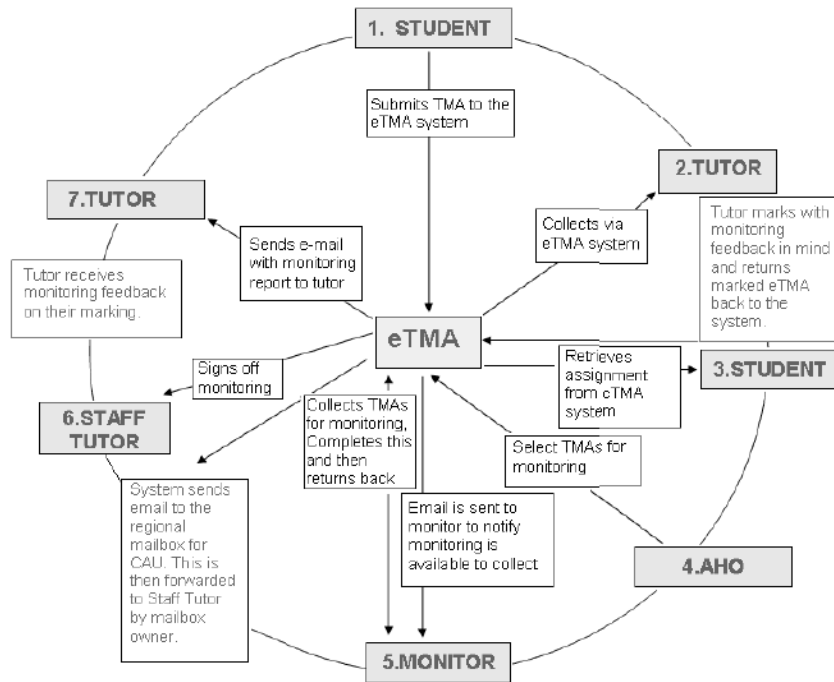


Image 3: The Assignment Handling Process¹¹

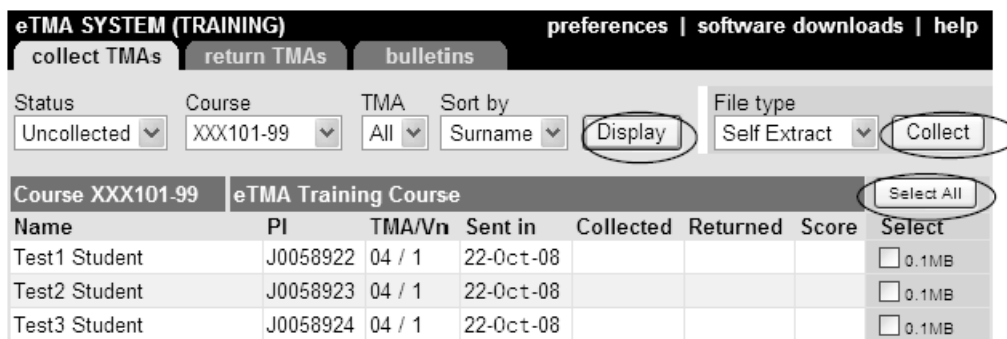


Image 4: The Submission and Retrieval System for Assignments

As a new lecturer with the OU I would be placed on probation for two years, my tutorial forum would be overseen and my assignments moderated (see Appendix 1 for details). It had been a long time since my educational processes had been open to such scrutiny in a management system and as they were all dependent on mediation through the technology as well I was fairly apprehensive. I was engaging

¹¹ The eTMA stands for electronic tutor-marked assignment. See overleaf for submission and collection system

in new realms: use of communications media, subject-matter, epistemologies, OU professional-appraisal schemes and working whilst in extreme pain. The part-time nature of the work would, however, give me flexibility so that if on some days I was experiencing too much pain I could keep my work to answering enquiries from students only.

Starting Work

My first tutor-group with the OU consisted of 16 students studying a module for six months counting for 30 marks out of a full Masters complement of 180. They came from all parts of the globe, and were mostly working in fields related to education and/or development. Such professional jobs were, however, not a prerequisite for enrolling on the module. Some students were studying out of interest rather than as a form of professional development.

I would be required to hold seven Elluminate-based tutorials during that time on four case-studies which represent issues in the links between international development and education. The synchronous tutorials were introduced on the asynchronous forum. I knew that technophobia wasn't only my problem. It was important, I felt, to be confident in its use so that the students would feel it was a medium to learning and not a barrier. In other words I couldn't pass on my own doubts and insecurities. In addition I had to mark my first online assignments using criteria that were new to me, in a system that seemed to delight in not obeying the instruction manual! I marked assignments that then weren't located in the right place in the system for me to be able to send them back. Christmas in 2009 was spent almost entirely lost in the system and worriedly trying to find my way out the other end without giving up my job. Fun it wasn't! It was winter as well and the rheumatic pain raged to new heights. I had no adequate pain medication so that sometimes I would beat my fists into the wall in order to distract the pain away from my feet. There were times when I thought I wouldn't be able to continue. I had to find a better balance than I was managing.

Luckily I had learnt in China something of the importance of perseverance and dedication in the face of difficulties. The rewards may not be appearing to balance

the books, but I had to believe in what I was doing. I had an instinct that the belief itself would carry me through if I gave it a chance. It felt like jumping off a cliff without a safety-net.

I wasn't enjoying the job at all because I felt I wasn't myself doing it. Skevington (1995) writes vividly about the alienation effects of pain, not only to one's surroundings but to oneself as well. This dislocation lasted for months. So I forced myself to make contact with the students by telephone and Skype, although this didn't always feel like authentic contact because it was outside my comfort zone. Not seeing body-language in telephone-conversations has always felt alienating to me. I remember shaking before both types of call, because I felt the onus of responsibility to function constructively for the other and wasn't sure I was up to the task. Hitherto I had always felt up to the task and trusted both my experience and instincts. The whole of my educational development was predicated on that innate confidence (Laidlaw, 2008). This experience was showing me how deeply the pain and immobility were impacting on a sense of professional self I hadn't had to question before: I knew I'd always made mistakes, but I had never questioned my ability to work cogently with others before; if I tried hard enough I believed I'd manage it in the end. Craig (1985) writes about how pain can eat away at a sense of self, and cause, 'reactions [that] can range from impassive stoical forbearance to highly dramatic and hysterical behaviour' (p. 1). I was in the dramatic and hysterical behaviour-range for the first nearly three years of the condition, to which the first few months of employment were no exception!

Thus I was still a very long way now from my comfort-zone during those first six months with the OU, but my sense of ontological coherence meant that I couldn't let the students down. I had worked in education for over thirty years with the assumption that life is meaningful, that individuals can make a difference and that teaching is a highly significant profession. My assumption has always been that a teacher plays a role both of social engineer and as a source of inspiration to individuals and groups. How could I perform either role when I felt distant from joy? Although I wanted to retreat again and felt out of control, my accumulated insights about the wonders that education could produce forced me not to give in. I am aware that ultimately there is no single reason that I can point to that explains why I didn't

go under entirely. I think having lived amongst people with severe problems in terms of earning enough money simply to eat every day, or even finding housing and employment at all, had something to do with it. What I had learned in China shouldn't be unlearned. I had to be true to what I knew to be the case: life is unfair and I had to deal with it as it was, rather than how I wanted it to be. I'd seen hundreds of people in Guyuan managing just that every day. How could I not still know this? Yet I understand more profoundly these days that to know something intellectually is not to know it somatically or spiritually.

So I wrote letters to students that made a point of alluding to the person and not just the thinking processes. I wanted to make contact with the individual as a way of enabling them to trust me and to be able to ask questions and feel safe in doing so. I couldn't perceive moods, character, learning needs and enthusiasms or fears in the ways that I had been used to doing before, but responses to students in the past has shown me that I pick up clues about, and the intentions of, writers from their prose¹² (Tian, 2006). I had to find ways of reaching the individual in ways that enabled greater transparency, and a dissipation of the distances between us: in the words of an anonymous poem, 'Before I teach you, I must first reach you.'

My experiences in working with people have shown me how central to *educational* relationships are the establishment of trust and a sense of shared humanity. I believed that by overtly opening my values and hopes for teaching to their 'gaze' would likely result in feelings of warmth on both sides.

An early letter to a student during the first two weeks of the module will serve to illustrate my general tone in those preliminary days.

Dear Amalie^{13, 14} good to hear from you again. I loved the pictures you sent of your family. Charlie looks like a right handful. Good luck with trying to stop him pulling your hair!! He's obviously getting a lot of fun out of it! I thought you might like a look at the area where I live [I included a url¹⁵ [of pictures of the east coast in the UK]. It's

¹² In the 2011 presentation of ET821 (Education for Development) I picked up on a case of plagiarism in the first piece of written work I marked from a particular student. I simply 'knew' that it wasn't their own work although I had had nothing of theirs before. That the internal logic was inconsistent is the nearest I can come to a rationale for it.

¹³ Names of students in this paper are changed.

¹⁴ In accordance with the OU's data-protection policy, I have deleted all the students' files from 2009-2011 from my computer and memory sticks. However, I have kept some data – name protected – in my own data-archive from those times. All personal and identifying material has been deleted.

¹⁵ <http://www.docbrown.info/docspics/wolds/index>.

one of the loveliest areas of England in my opinion. I'd love to see where you are at the moment. I've never been to [***] in Africa and would really enjoy seeing the kinds of sights you're seeing every day.

I very much liked the ideas you put forward in your letter but I think you need to look carefully at my annotations. It's important at this stage of the module to become clear about the ways in which you are using terms like 'education' and 'development'. What Sen writes about capabilities would seem to me where you are coming from in terms of values, but you need to see the differing and sometimes even conflicting ideas that are currently being written about. Make sure that you pay the most attention to the Commentary Diary Prompts¹⁶ throughout the module. One of the things you're expected to do in Masters level assignments is to discriminate in ways that lead you to a synthesis that is educationally and academically sound. We've corresponded about this already, but it'll be helpful for you if you bear these ideas in mind as you build up a knowledge-base in this field. I suggest you get back to me when you've gone through some of the Learning Outcomes and Framing Questions for the module¹⁷ particularly the following at: <http://learn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=276625§ion=2.1> If you have any questions don't hesitate to write. Remember my preliminary letter: "No question too big, too small, or silly!" All the best, Moira.

Of course I didn't push students into any disclosures, and responded as individually as I could to each one. I used my developing understanding of each to reach their individual learning needs through a basis of contact that sought to be both warm and intellectually challenging.

Illuminate Tutorials

In November 2009 I was due to facilitate my first tutorial via Illuminate. The subject-matter was Teacher Education and Supply in Sub-Saharan Africa. I had read all the module materials, made notes, compiled lists of themes, contentious areas, ethical and moral boundaries, approaches and so on. My diary at the time:

Early November, 2009. I can't prepare anymore in terms of knowledge of the subject-matter, but all of my knowledge is going to be meaningless if I can't use the system with aplomb. There are simply no excuses. The students have paid for their tuition and I'm being paid to give it. It's a binding contract and at the moment, I feel like a fraud....No point in pretending I'm au fait with this. I'm not... I can work with the students as we all familiarize ourselves with the technology. Some of the students have studied modules already. They've given me some tips. I'm going to organise a couple of informal sessions so that we can get to know each other a little bit as well

¹⁶ Commentary Diary Prompts refer to the articles most central to the understanding of the four case-studies and whose use becomes cumulative throughout the module.

¹⁷ See Appendix 1

as familiarizing ourselves with the technology... I want us to be in this together, all trying to improve the quality of learning.

21st November. We had our first tutorial today and it seemed successful. It was physically difficult for me because I had to sit up with cushions to keep my feet off the bed, the laptop on my lap and earphones whose sound-quality isn't good, with the pain raging, probably partly because of stress. I was so nervous and worried I wouldn't cope with feeling so precarious, but once I started and realised the technology was working, I felt better and relaxed more. The physical circumstances could almost be forgotten. It was a question of listening to the students and putting them first. 9 ... attended out of 16. Most who couldn't attend wrote to say why. I've written to each student to thank them for their attendance and contributions. I emphasised in my letter to all the students on the Tutorial Forum afterwards how delighted I was with their questions. Some students have written back to their individual letter to say they were nervous or worried before, and now they aren't.

From Jane:

'I don't like working online very much, but you made me feel relaxed and that matters in learning I always think. Thank you for making it (relatively) painless!' 😊

So now I need to find a way to encourage more students, who could have attended but who might have been put off by the technology, or by a sense that it wasn't necessarily going to aid their learning. (Moira Laidlaw, Journal).

By the end of the module, I had learnt how to set up different chat-rooms for groups to discuss ideas separately from the main tutorial room and worked out how to enable them to take a Moderator's control¹⁸ to present their findings. Two of the seven Elluminate tutorials relied on students presenting their own ideas and engaging in peer-teaching. After the last such tutorial, a student whose participation on the asynchronous forum had been sporadic at best - and this, she told me, was partly due to poor band-width and internet connection than any desire not to participate - presented for 20 minutes on the final case-file subject-matter, Financing Secondary Education. She wrote to me straightaway afterwards:

27th February 2010. I can't believe I did it! I was **so** nervous. I've been teaching for years, but never in this kind of situation. And the tutorial group is full of experts as well. They all seem to know so much more than I do. I'm on a real high at the moment, because I've done something I didn't think I could do. Thank you for making it possible. (Martha, email correspondence)

¹⁸ A moderator can work all the communications tools in Elluminate (conversation, leafing through whiteboard pages, icons (raised or clapping hand, thumbs down etc.), as well as writing onto the whiteboard directly) and override their use by any of the participants. Conferring Moderator privileges means enabling students to utilize a lot of these facilities for themselves.

I profoundly believe that education is about people developing their own potentials, thus revealing them to be capable of more than they realised before. Martha was reflecting back to me some of my most deeply held beliefs and values about education, and my previous practice (Laidlaw, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2008) has shown me that the more students can reflect back to me the ways in which my values have impacted on their learning, the more likely it is that that the processes have been educational. Typical responses to the voluntary feedback¹⁹ made by students at the end of that first module included the following:

The subject was so big that it would have been impossible for the tutor to be an expert in all areas. Where Maira excelled was in her expert people skills, particularly her communication and motivation skills. She made the whole experience truly memorable!

Maira is a truly inspirational tutor and particularly responsive to the students' needs and aware of the course requirements. She has been dedicated beyond the 'call of duty' (and probably hours expected and \$ received). Learning in this tutor group has been a rich and rewarding experience and through debate and discussion we have learned from others' viewpoints and backgrounds. As well as the many ideas I will take from this course, Maira's touching humanity is what will probably remain with me the longest.

I felt largely gratified by this feedback, as well as by the moderation of my marking²⁰ for this module, which had shown improvements from 'good' for some categories in the initial assignment to 'excellent' across the board for tutor-marked assignment (TMA) 2 and TMA3. I wasn't as concerned as perhaps I should have been at the implication that I wasn't expert in the knowledge-base of the module – which I fully agree with by the way. Rather, I was relieved that my appeals to our equal humanity had apparently had a positive impact²¹. For me it has always been the case that I teach people rather than ideas, and the subject-matter is only the medium through which that contact is made. I had still to learn that paying attention to the complexities of the knowledge-base in my communications with the students would both help to facilitate their understanding, *and* establish trusting relationships. My painful condition and personal circumstances did not seem to have impacted

¹⁹ See Appendix One for the full feedback from the first group in 2009.

²⁰ I cannot, however, produce details of this early marking moderation.

²¹ In my journal at the time I wrote, 'it seems I've got away with it this time!' which I suppose meant that I thought some of what I had achieved wasn't actually educational, simply appeared like it!

negatively on my ability to make meaningful contact with the students, but in my journal I wrote this:

July, 2010. Something's not working in my tutoring. My subject-knowledge is partly the problem, but there's something not communicating. I believe I need to find metaphors and ways of relating that enable people to feel that they are working with another human being who is simply like them. In face-to-face relationships my body-language, my delighted expressions explain themselves. Now I have only language and the spaces I facilitate in which these necessary aspects of the educational relationship can happen. I've been able to do this since I was 21 when I first walked into a classroom. It was like falling off a log²². This isn't. An artist friend of mine explained the process of seeing to me once: that when he's teaching art, he needs first to help the student to see, and disconnect the brain's habitual channeling of the visible into pre-conceived shapes and meanings and help it find new ways that illuminate connections between objects and the psyche. I feel I need to do that here: to provide something that isn't the same as I had in face-to-face teaching, but feels like it. I don't know how to do that. Instinctively I feel it's something to do with making my processes more transparent... And this means I have to be so relaxed with all the technology that the students not only *don't* pick up any of my concerns, but acclimatize themselves easily to using the spaces for embedding their learning. (M. Laidlaw, Journal)

Development

In April 2011, my Income Support was stopped as I had had some employment during the financial year and the loss meant I needed to find more work. Sleeplessness was still a problem and I was going weekly for acupuncture treatment at the local general hospital in Bridlington. It had very little benefit for the ten months I was entitled to it on the NHS. The pain was at times prohibitive and although I now had a self-propelling wheelchair I found outside trips to be very difficult because of the staring and often off-putting comments²³ about how to treat someone in a wheelchair. I knew I had simply to get on with it, but I was always very uncomfortable.

²² In my first journal as a new teacher, *Diary of a Frog Lover*, I wrote this in my second year of teaching in 1978. 'Teaching's just the best thing in the world. If it didn't exist, I'd have to manufacture it and put it in the water supply. Walking into a classroom gives me goose-bumps every time. How do people get bored with this? The children are so eager to learn, such fun to be with, and when a kid does something s/he couldn't do before and is beaming with pride, that's an even better feeling for me. I'd do this job for nothing.'

²³ This is evidenced through the fact that most of the interactions I have with people when outside are about being in a wheelchair. Even the pleasanter people cannot stop referring to the wheelchair as the central subject-matter of any casual interaction. People don't seem to see me coming, only the wheelchair. I've been cajoled, bullied, laughed at, mocked, derided and have been the target of physical aggression on two occasions, simply because I'm in a wheelchair.

After discussions with my line-manager, I submitted an application for the module TU870, Capacities for Managing Development, which was further out of my comfort zone in terms of subject-knowledge, although in one sense I had been doing exactly that in China for nearly six years as a professional development volunteer at Ningxia Teachers University. The epistemology of the new module was less familiar to me than it had been when I was working on the Education for Development module. Much of the new epistemology was predicated on the idea of the value of applying knowledge to something and thereby becoming familiar with the theories of development management, rather than developing the knowledge directly oneself through the process of doing, which characterizes my own living educational theorizing (Laidlaw, 1996, 2010). Again there was an intense period of reading, reflection and panic!

In addition one of the things I most relied on in terms of creating meaningful relationships with students was not possible in this module: tutorials were open to all the students rather than being closed to outside groups. In addition the asynchronous forum was similarly open to all-comers. I had a tutor group, but this was as much for administrative as teaching purposes and this felt uncomfortable to me.

I don't count my first time with the new module as particularly successful in terms of the values I wanted to bring into the learning context. I felt a contradiction between my sense of working closely with individuals and an identified group through which I was able to live out my values, with the new system whose scaffolding was missing. This would be a greater test of my mediation through the technology than I felt comfortable handling.

Whilst understanding that I wanted to create a greater transparency (Pedersen, 2010) with the processes we were working on in order for greater educational impact, I was now in a position in which the conditions for doing that seemed to me to have been vastly reduced. I had learnt from ET821 that my greater clarity about media and purposes with the students would both enhance our educational relationship and enable deeper learning to take place.

I struggled with the first presentation of this module. The homepage and media tools I would be using were almost identical to the previous module's facilities, but the content and the barriers (as I saw them) placed between me and my own tutor group, felt inhibiting. I rarely felt relaxed during our communications. I only had ten students in my tutor group, whose background and interests were similar to the students in the 'Education for Development' module. I was required to run four open²⁴ Elluminate tutorials during the six-month presentation, which would take place towards the end of the module in order to help me develop some experience with the content first. I ran three tutorials on the final section of the module with a fourth one having specific tips for the examination²⁵.

My marking of the module's three TMAs progressed through the helpful feedback after TMA1 from the moderator. The following feedback was sent to me after marking the first assignment:

I can see you put a great deal of work into the script comments but I did not find them altogether helpful. In my view the role of script comments should be first to engage with the content of the essay (structure and argument), secondly to comment on presentation and thirdly to draw attention to minor errors of punctuation, vocabulary etc. In your comments, this order or importance seems reversed and the commentary on the content gets lost in the crowd. Moreover not all the detailed comments were, in my view, correct and appropriate. Of course, each tutor develops their own individual style and usage of script comments. But I would try to reduce the number of comments to allow the student to focus on your perceptive comments on the content of their essay. Some points to consider are:

- Be careful to be correct;
- Avoid being pedantic'
- Avoid unnecessary repetition;
- Make sure the advice you give is consistent with advice to students in the Assignment Booklet.

I felt these comments to be entirely valid and took pains to amend the way in which I gave feedback subsequently. After my third TMA, the moderator wrote:

Compared to TMA01 your commentary is more focused and less cluttered - making your useful feedback easily accessible to the student. This is a model of how it

²⁴ Open refers to the fact that the tutorials were accessible to all students who were studying on that particular module at the time. Notice was given at the moodle forum of the schedule of the tutorial and students were asked to register their interest in attending. At one tutorial I had 17 students. Usually I had about 8. Tutorials for TU870 are available to be listened to by all, whereas the ones for ET821 are made available to the single tutor group.

²⁵ Examinations for OU Masters modules are run in British Council offices throughout the world. This sometimes necessitates long journeys, depending on the location of the offices from the students' homes.

should be done! This narrative commentary complements the clearly set out summary feedback on the PT3²⁶ form. One of the challenges we face in using the eTMA format is to find a way to differentiate between these two spaces for feedback, so that they are both distinct and complementary. Your approach to this works very well indeed.

As gratifying as this was, I still felt that on this module I was not facilitating a learning space that was inclusional enough (Huxtable, 2008; Whitehead, 2006). With ET821 I was managing more one-to-one contact and tutorials that appeared to be enabling significant learning for the students (see Appendix Two for details). I was aware that my weakness in content-knowledge on the Capacities for Managing Develop (TU870 module was seriously undermining my ability to facilitate confident educational relationships with students. A comment from a student on their evaluation form (Appendix Three) offered voluntarily ran thus:

Maira made contact early in the course, responded very quickly to queries and marked work very quickly - all of which were greatly appreciated. She also send frequent emails which I am sure were intended to be helpful, and while I appreciate that all students have differing expectations of their tutors, I felt there were just too many, tipping the balance a bit too much towards information overload. In most instances I found her feedback helpful, although on occasions a little patronising for students at post-graduate level. Her tutorials were very good and helpful in revising for the exam. Overall, while it is obvious that she has enormous commitment to her role as a tutor, I did find her use of endearments, (love from, x, etc) quite disconcerting and I think creates an unprofessional image. As in my comments above about communication, I think it is about getting the balance right.

I felt the student might have been picking up on my own unease. Other comments from the tutor group were almost entirely positive, but this one seemed significant, because it spoke to my own unease about getting the balance right. If a student felt disconcerted by my approach, this could suggest a possible miscalculation in my attempts to enable students to feel safe as well as challenged in order to be able to learn most productively. I decided, as far as the signing-off from my emails was concerned, I would use 'Best Wishes' as the standard and then follow the students' preferred ways of signing off on their own emails. It is a small point, perhaps, but a significant one. My overriding aims in teaching have been to enable

²⁶ This refers to the 'top-sheet' of electronic feedback to the student.

students to feel both safe and challenged in the learning environment and as the tutor I remain largely responsible for doing that.

Becoming more creative with the technology

From April to October, 2011 I believe I made the biggest breakthrough in terms of tutoring students using the required media. I was to teach on the modules ET821 and TU870 simultaneously. I varied my introductory letters based on students' experience with the OU, and highlighted in the letters to students who had already studied with us specific issues that I felt were likely to be important in terms of their developing learning²⁷. I facilitated the exchange of email addresses within the tutor groups on both modules by outlining in their individualised initial letter the value of learning partners for the journey they were on. For students new to the OU I set up preliminary and exclusive Elluminate tutorials open only to those specific students. I knew from my own experience how daunting the technology could seem. One student wrote after her preliminary tutorial in which there were three students:

It was really helpful for me, Moira. Thank you. I was really nervous about the technology and having just me and two other students there meant the audience wasn't very big!! I am just at the beginning of my studies and this was the bit I was most worried about. L. and I have already exchanged a few emails, and we're going to be learning partners. That was a great idea and I feel it will help us both. Thank you again. I'm sure you'll get tired of me writing a lot of letters to you if I'm stuck, but you *did* say we could... 😊

It had been suggested by the TU870 module team that the tutor run a first tutorial as an introduction to the module as a whole and that this would be accessible only to the tutor's specific tutorial group! I was pleased by that development. In this solely tutor group-based tutorial I was able to talk to the students about the value of learning partners as well. I don't have specific evidence about how useful or otherwise this was with this modular group. With ET821, two pairs of students kept in touch throughout the module and are, I believe, still in touch.

²⁷ All lecturers are given details of education prior to the particular module so that the tutor can gauge something of their current experience compared to previous studies.

For the TU870 tutorials, this time four of them spaced out throughout the module, I trawled through the open tutorial forum for ppt files by other tutors to give me my bearings and wrote to two other lecturers in order to ask permission to use some of their ideas. Before each session I put up a partially constructed ppt demonstration file for the students to think about before the session, and then presented, with their help, a completed tutorial-session. I made it clear that I didn't want to do all the talking and encouraged participants to talk about their own related experience. I had learnt how important it was from the two previous presentations of ET821 to substantiate more thoroughly the knowledge-base of the module. In addition, after each tutorial (both the closed ET821 and the open TU870 tutorials) I wrote to individual students who had contributed, going into more detail about some of the issues they had raised and pointing them towards useful follow-up reading. One student from TU870 who was not in my tutor group, wrote about my (third) tutorial on advocacy, evaluation and strategy. In this I had interspersed details from my own experiences in China as a case-study (a tool of development management dealt with in Part Two of the module):

I really enjoyed the tutorial, Maira. Thank you. I was a bit stuck, though, on what you were getting at when you talked about how evaluation-systems affected outcomes when you were working with VSO in China. Would it be too much trouble to ask you to tell me what else I might read to help me understand better? (Jane, email-correspondence)

I wrote back immediately:

No problem, Jane. I enjoyed the tutorial as well and your comments were always helpful. If you look at Taylor and Soal and van Ufford et al in Part Three of the Readings, you'll find some of their ideas very useful. Sorgenfrei on log-framing is astute in his understanding of the relationship between methods and outcomes. Your own work in the NGO²⁸ will have shown you how very difficult it is to separate the various factions that are always present in any development management work. If you're at all interested – and not simply for the qualifying aspect of your learning – then the French philosopher Michel Foucault is amazing on issues of power and truth. I'll send you a url later this afternoon. Because people are involved in every aspect of development management, and different power issues hold ascendancy at any given time, then it is often the faction with the most power that gets to decide what is evaluated and how it should be done. That makes the whole issue of evaluation extremely complex. See www.actionresearch.net/maira.shtml for details of how I tried to tackle this in China. (M. Laidlaw, email-correspondence)

²⁸ Jane talked about her work in an NGO in our tutorial.

Other innovations in those presentations consisted of sending the TU870 group a ppt-file with the words 'good luck!' in every one of their first languages and a similar file to the ET821 group wishing them the same in their final piece of continuous assessment writing (a mini-dissertation).

I often wrote relevant issues from my own experience of development work in China onto the various tutorial forums, and tied them into the literature from the different module where possible. This forced me to be more focused on content-knowledge, whilst at the same time making sure that I was paying attention to individuals. I encouraged any feedback from the tutorials to be written onto the forums so that all the students could have the benefit, although I offered my email address to those students who didn't have it if they preferred a dialogue with me.

Pushing back the boundaries again:

Halfway through the presentations, I had an appointment with my rheumatologist. Apparently my blood-work showed that the condition had increased in severity and that I was not going to make the kind of recovery that he had initially expected. I had been increasing my use of the wheelchair and my general fitness. For example my BMI²⁹ was perfect for my age, gender and build. I had worked hard to achieve this. However, the news was depressing, but by then I was used to the volume of pain (for the most part) and had integrated my acceptance of it into my daily life, such that I felt much more energy to cope with my professional work and more confidence in my ability to do it well. Therefore, it didn't seem to have any adverse effect on my OU work. I cannot entirely account for the fact that it didn't prevent me from living out the values I wrote about in the introduction, in particular the democratization of educational processes with students. I do know, however, that I learned something about resilience and getting on with it regardless. This also illuminates for me the amazing courage of the paralympians, who had, so many of

²⁹ BMI means Body Mass Index, which is a fairly crude but effective way of determining whether or not someone is at their right weight. My BMI had, through judicious dieting and strenuous exercise, become precisely appropriate for my age, gender and body-shape.

them, far more than I had to cope with physically, and surpassed so far beyond anything I achieved in my physical fitness regime in the wheelchair, that I could only watch the Paralympics and feel wonder.

When I established the idea of living standards of judgement in my doctoral thesis (Laidlaw, 1996) I hadn't perceived some of its dimensions in the way I do now. Confronting adversity has shown me how much I truly care about equalizing power in the educational relationship. The force of this belief, which has become a living theory to me, is one of the factors that enabled me to believe that there were parameters more significant than my own individual pain. I realized that working with others in productive educational relationships congruent with my values was related to my ability to transcend the pain. I knew it instinctively, and at this time I tested it out. I can only say it worked. I cannot entirely explain it.

Indeed in July 2012, I received the feedback from the students from both modules and was delighted with the sense of satisfaction that the writers offered. In particular the following comment (from a student in TU870) reflected back to me precisely the kind of values I had been struggling to render more transparent in my practice:

Maira ... start[ed] by getting to know her students at the very beginning. Her introductory email was so friendly and thorough that I felt we were having a conversation face-to-face, it was so informative and open. Her communication skills are excellent, I never felt for a moment that I was doing a distance education course and I felt that she was really interested in getting to know her students, so she could cater best to their needs...Her attitude kept me very motivated throughout the course and also to continue my studies with the OU...Her approach is really innovative and one does not feel like just a name on an email, but one could say one builds the kind of relationship one has in a classroom environment.

I felt I'd struck gold with this comment. I realised I had come a long way from the beginnings three years before in terms of confidence in using the technology, but also a greater understanding of its potential if used creatively and as a medium rather than as an inevitable barrier to learning.

New Beginnings

In the months leading up to August this year, I exercised far more using the self-propelling wheelchair and travelling for about 25 miles a week. Pain levels had remained stable, although there was now evidence of the condition spreading to elbows and knees as well. This was predicted by my consultant at the previous appointment. Being more mobile became more of a way of life and I was no longer content to limit myself to my immediate neighbourhood. My greater fitness regime had a positive influence on my psychological and emotional health as well. I took up photography so that going outside wasn't simply a matter of exercise but an attempt to see and do things differently. Visual stimuli had never inspired me before as musical ones tend to (Laidlaw, 2012), but I became more responsive to the world around me. I started using Facebook every day, and have in three months put over 5,000 pictures up at my account at: <http://www.facebook.com/moira.frog>



Figure 1: a local view

It may be a reflection on the success of my work with the OU over the last year that I was asked to lead two peer-group sessions on teaching students whose first language is not English. I felt that by doing it, I might be able to gain a critical eye on my practice in this respect. I also benefited from a peer-session given by a colleague on the use of wikis in distance learning. I introduced that way of working into my last presentation of ET821, which proved very helpful in consolidating plans and ideas for seminars partially run by the students.

In the last few months I have been working on the M.Sc. module, TU874, The Final Project, in which students conduct a small piece of development management research on a subject of their own choosing. There are no tutorials and all tuition is handled through email, telephone and Skype conversations. There are 4 TMAs and

a final dissertation of 10,000 words. I feel it is in this module that I am at last coming to terms more with the necessary fusion between thoroughness in content-knowledge with carefully crafted educational relationships with students. My marking for the module has been more problematic for me than in previous modules (see Appendix 6). Instead of making rapid progress through the comments from my moderator, my development has been mixed in quality. Given my experiences with the OU over the last three years, I feel this is due to an imbalance between my focus on the educational relationships and my lack of experience in facilitating this kind of research.

The place of written feedback is also emphasised more than in previously tutored modules (four TMAs instead of three, and a longer dissertation). This means that yet again I need to find ways of writing feedback that engage the students' learning-needs more accurately than before. In other words, using the artist's metaphor, I have to envisage the educational relationship in new ways with writing as my major medium. Written feedback has to constitute a major form of educational communication between us. That will require time to develop. I hope that I will teach on this module again, so that I can improve on this aspect of my practice.

My physical condition has also entered a new phase. About a month ago I noticed a lessening of the pain in both feet and a slightly more robust ability to bear weight. In the last two weeks I have been able to walk outside for up to an hour at a time. On 4th September 2012 my consultant informed me that there is no reason to suppose that my mobility should not continue, that although the pain will most likely always be a part of my life, I have both mastered the pain psychologically and am experiencing a physical remission at the same time. My consultant cannot fully account for the change, but is reasonably certain that my remission will endure.



Figure 2: Celebrating a walk to the local cliffs

Every day walking outside feels like an invitation to dance from the gods. After about six years of very poor mobility, little travel outside my village, and only keeping in touch with the world through technology, I can now walk on the nearby cliffs, travel by train to different places, and have the experiences that were impossible before. These include going by myself to see friends³⁰, having the potential to attend staff meetings with colleagues from the OU, and simply exercising the freedoms that before the pain I took for granted. I might also therefore become eligible to teach on other modules, which require face-to-face tutorials.

Earlier I wrote that, 'overcoming the shortcomings has become an opportunity for greater creativity and engagement with unforeseen possibilities in the pursuit of responsible freedoms and the revitalisation of educational processes', and that 'the pain has played a significant role in my life as an educator but the emphasis [in this paper] ... is on showing in what ways the changes in my life have impacted on my educational theorising and practices.' I hope that in this paper I have substantiated these claims to your satisfaction.

Having said that however, I'm not really in a position to speculate accurately about my future at the moment. My present circumstances weren't supposed to happen and I will need time to adjust myself to them. I realize, again in the light of

³⁰ Friends have come to see me, but I haven't been able to see them without calling on the kindness of family to take me there, as travelling by train has been too taxing. I was also discouraged from air-travel because of the air-pressure and its effects on the pain. Now I am free to take short trips by plane. I plan to go to Germany in the near future to visit friends there.

the Paralympic Games this year that I have been given so much. I feel inordinately lucky to have become able to walk again, and, given my understanding of the finiteness of this life, and the meanings I have chosen to give to it, I know I won't be wasting the time I have. If there's one thing I've learned it's that life is infinitely precious, fragile and short.

It is because of that, that I *am* going to say my commitment and sense of responsibility to enhance my educational influence as an educator and knowledge-creator will continue. These aspects will then reveal themselves in the future development of my own living educational theory that explains my educational influences in my own learning, the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we all live and work.

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Appendix One

ET821 2009 module student feedback

Course/Pres: ET821 09K

Total number of surveys returned: 8 out of 12 invited

DALS Survey Responses

Number Agrees Strongly Agrees	Number of Number or Disagrees Strongly Disagrees	of or Question Text
8	0	Overall I was very satisfied with the tutor
8	0	The tutor made a very positive impact on my progress

DALs Survey Responses

Number Agrees Strongly Agrees	of Number or Disagrees Strongly Disagrees	of or Question Text
8	0	I would very much welcome having this tutor for another course
8	0	The tutor met my expectations
8	0	The tutor's comments on my assignments were understandable
8	0	The tutor clearly explained why I got the grades I did
6	0	The feedback I got on assignments helped me to understand specific topics better
7	0	The tutor's comments helped me improve
8	0	It was easy to contact the tutor
8	0	The tutor responded promptly to contact from me
8	0	The tutor really encouraged me
8	0	The tutor responded well to my particular needs for support
8	0	The tutor had a comprehensive knowledge of the OU course material
8	0	The tutor made good use of their knowledge of the OU course material
8	0	The tutor had a comprehensive knowledge of the subject as a whole
6	0	The tutor helped me understand OU systems and regulations and referred me appropriately when needed
8	0	The tutor was responsive to individual student requests
8	0	The tutor was sensitive to my needs

Moira, thanks for your enthusiasm! It was a pleasure to have you as a tutor. The only thing I doubt about is how it is really beneficial to have presentations from students in the tutorials. I think it needs more specific preparation and/or division of tasks as was done this time. But this is just a thought.

Moira is a truly inspirational tutor and particularly responsive to the students needs and aware of the course requirements. She has been dedicated beyond the 'call of duty' (and probably hours expected and \$ received). Learning in this tutor group has been a rich and rewarding experience and through debate and discussion we have

learned from others viewpoints and backgrounds. As well as the many ideas I will take from this course, Maira's touching humanity is what will probably remain with me the longest.

As you can see from the evaluation I found Maira to be very inspiring and a lovely person, which made the online studying less cold and individual. She brought the group together and we were able to really share. It felt we were in a classroom sometimes. Studying online can be a lonely business and it wasn't this time around. I had trouble with all the online material though. I found the amount of resources overwhelming sometimes and had the feeling that it was difficult to go deep. Reflecting on material while staring at a screen didn't work for me that well. It is thanks to Maira that I saw it through. I found the lightness and humor very refreshing. This was a lovely course thanks to the tutor.

I was extremely impressed by the quality of tuition provided by Maira Laidlaw. As a newcomer to the Open University, I did not expect a high level of support given that the tuition is at a distance, but received better support than I have been offered on any traditional university course. She gave a really good impression of the university and I have been recommending it to lots of people as a result! I was particularly impressed that Maira phoned me more than once towards the beginning of the course to check that I was coping with the work ok. She was very encouraging and her style in the seminars made us feel comfortable and able to contribute. She gave very useful and encouraging feedback on my work including recommending further reading, and returned marked assignments quickly so that we could incorporate the comments into our next essays. I felt very individually and personally supported despite the distance.

I would like to add that Maira Laidlaw was one of the 2 best tutors I have had during my 5 courses with the OU. She helped me through some very difficult times when I thought I would be unable to continue my studies due to overloads in my work & managed to help me complete assignments by encouraging me. This has made all the difference in my course and I wish more tutors were like her. She added a human touch to what can be moments of great solitude in distance learning and would consider her an enormous asset to the OU. I would go so far as saying that she is the reason I enjoyed this course so much and this demonstrates how important the role of the tutor is on the quality of the course experience.

The subject was so big that it would have been impossible for the tutor to be an expert in all areas, where Maira excelled was in her expert people skills, particularly her communication and motivation skills. She made the whole experience truly memorable!

Appendix Two:

ET821 Module 2010 Student Feedback

Total number of surveys returned: 11 out of 14 invited

DALS Survey Responses

Number Agrees Strongly Agrees	of Number or Disagrees Strongly Disagrees	of or Question Text
11	0	Overall I was very satisfied with the tutor
10	0	The tutor made a very positive impact on my progress
11	0	I would very much welcome having this tutor for another course
11	0	The tutor met my expectations
11	0	The tutor's comments on my assignments were understandable
11	0	The tutor clearly explained why I got the grades I did
9	0	The feedback I got on assignments helped me to understand specific topics better
11	0	The tutor's comments helped me improve
11	0	It was easy to contact the tutor
11	0	The tutor responded promptly to contact from me
11	0	The tutor really encouraged me
11	0	The tutor responded well to my particular needs for support
11	0	The tutor had a comprehensive knowledge of the OU course material
11	0	The tutor made good use of their knowledge of the OU course material
11	0	The tutor had a comprehensive knowledge of the subject as a whole
10	0	The tutor helped me understand OU systems and regulations and referred me appropriately when needed
10	0	The tutor was responsive to individual student requests
10	0	The tutor was sensitive to my needs

This is my first OU course and therefore I did not really know what to expect with my tutor. What has become apparent to me, however, is how important the tutor's

interaction is with the students individually and as a group. I really like the atmosphere that has been created within my group and acknowledge Maira's considerable skill in navigating this. On the individual level, Maira has challenged me academically and encouraged me to make the most of my willingness to participate. I particularly value the way she has contacted me in my globally remote location through telephone and email. I thank Maira for the way in which she has supported and extended my first OU experience. She really is a wonderful tutor and a fantastic human being.

Maira was a fantastic tutor and her support, encouragement and constructive and insightful feedback benefited me hugely as a student. I feel I got so much more from the course and improved in my assignments thanks to her feedback which was detailed, focused and comprehensive. She always responded to any queries extremely promptly. I have never experienced such good teaching.

I have particularly appreciated Maira's enthusiasm when dealing with course content and issues. She has gone out of her way to make personal contact with me and presumably all the students. She has a positive and constructive approach but she can be firm when necessary. What has impressed me is that she responds quickly to emails and I always have the feeling that there is a contact, that she is working for us.

I have honestly never had such a positive experience studying. I found the course interesting and challenging. Her approach was both enthusiastic and encouraging when I needed it. Her genuine interest in the subject made the learning experience most relevant and worthwhile. Her response to every email I sent was immediate and always helpful. I hope to continue beyond this course and perhaps pursue a career in the area.

I was constantly amazed at the promptness of response to questions! Compared with other OU courses I've taken, Maira is a cut above all the others! While offering much encouragement, she also takes time to fully explain areas that need attention.

I have found Maira to be an exceptionally supportive and helpful tutor with an infectious enthusiasm for the subject. She provided very detailed and focused feedback for TMAs and was an invaluable support to me in getting through submitting my EMA. I hope to have the pleasure of having her as a tutor again.

I found Maira to be a very constructive and supportive tutor who took the time to engage with her students both on an individual as well as group level. This went a long way to providing a sense of community within the tutor group which is so important in a distance learning course. Her prompt responses to any queries were also much appreciated especially when study time is restricted as it is for most OU students. Many thanks Maira and more power to your elbow!

Marking Feedback from OU monitors of my marking for the ET821 2010 presentation.

Tutor	Appt Region	New Tutor	Present Level	Monitoring
02301688 Moira Jean Laidlaw	R05	No	C	
Monitor	Course	Pres	Assignment Number	
M.C.	ET821	10K	01	

Available to Monitor	Collected by Monitor	Returned by Monitor	Sent to Tutor
20 Dec 2010	02 Jan 2011	04 Jan 2011	03 Feb 2011

Monitor's assessment of grade and comments

Student	Grade	Summary/feedback	Script Comments
1)		Good (G)	Good (G)
2)	Appropriate	Excellent (E)	Excellent (E)
3)	Appropriate	Excellent (E)	Excellent (E)

Check List - In the script(s) selected for monitoring this tutor:

Summary and Feedback (PT3)	Script comments
1) Acknowledges good work	Y 7) Comments positively on good points Y
2) Uses a friendly/personal tone	Y 8) Corrects and explains errors or omissions
3) Provides encouragement and support	Y 9) Identifies and explains irrelevant material
4) Provides a summary of strengths and weaknesses	Y 10) Makes clear and constructive comments Y
5) Suggests ways of improving future work	Y 11) Directs student to course materials and/or other relevant materials
6) Course specific criteria	12) Clearly explains where marks were gained or lost Y
	13) Identifies excessive or insufficient length Y
	14) Comments on communication skills
	15) Course specific criteria

Comments and advice from Monitor

Dear Moira,

Many thanks for such prompt marking of your students' work - particularly given they

were submitted just before Christmas. I do apologise for the slightly longer length of time it has taken for me to return this monitoring!

What is most striking about your marking is the individual attention you have given each student and how well you have been able to get to know their individual interests and needs right from the start of the course. This is impressive and has allowed you to tailor your comments well and open up space for genuine dialogue and learning. You strike a good balance between recognising students' strengths and giving them clear guidance on where they could have improved their work and gained higher grades. Correspondence tuition of a very high standard - well done!

The specific scripts here are quite a mixed bag and all, in their own way, fairly challenging to mark and comment on. From my perspective as a new member of the presentation course team, they provide a useful insight into the range of aptitudes and abilities of students on the course. They have also highlighted the disparate ways in which the assignment guidelines can be interpreted by students. Prior to looking at these I was of the impression we were being quite prescriptive, but the different perspectives taken here rather prove me wrong. I have made some specific comments on the scripts. These, in the main, reinforce the comments you have made to the student.

More general comments on the scripts and marking include:

Student 1: I think I would be rather more generous with my marking of this script as I do think there is much of merit in her work. I would suggest at least a higher clear pass mark, perhaps even a lower B grade. She does demonstrate confidence and clarity in engaging with the material and in presenting her ideas logically and coherently and, I felt, provides evidence of having met, to a large extent, the four assessment criteria. I agree with the comments you raise in the 'pay attention to' section of the PT3, but perhaps would not mark her down quite so much as a result. Compared with the other two scripts, I felt this PT3 was perhaps a little less encouraging and engaging in tone. This is, of course, relative: It is still a very good piece of correspondence tuition.

Student 2: A difficult script to mark - you've done a good job here. I think you have struck the right balance of encouragement and highlighting areas that really do need further attention. Your PT3 comments are spot-on and strike a critical but encouraging tone. I do hope she takes up your offer of additional support and is able to build on the skills she does have. In part, it could be a case of helping her understand the expectations of the particular style of writing required of the assignment. In this TMA she does seem to oscillate between developing a briefing note and presenting ideas in more of a standard essay style. She clearly has an interest in the subject area and it would be good to offer her further support - perhaps this may be a case where offering a special session could be appropriate?

Student 3:

As you say, an exemplary piece of work. If the course team does decide to make 'model' answers available to students, this could be a good choice. I think your

comments are excellent, offering suggestions and provocative points which will encourage the student to further extend her engagement with the topic, rather than sit back and feel she has 'done it'. The PT3 [top sheet summarising the main ideas in the feedback] comments here are excellent, opening up real space for the student to engage further with you and with the course material.

Overall, I am really impressed with the support you have been able to offer students with very different abilities. You demonstrate a real flair for engaging with students and for opening up dialogue with them (through the references to your own experience, for example). Thanks for all your efforts!

Do get in touch if you've any questions or comments on any of this. With best wishes, MC 4th Jan. 2011

Comments and advice from Staff Tutor/Regional Manager

Hi Moira

All looks really good here! Your high standards are much appreciated by me and the course team.

Best wishes, D.B. 3rd Feb. 2011.

Appendix Three:

TU870 'Capacities for Managing Development'

2010 Student Feedback:

DALS Survey Responses

Number Agrees Strongly Agrees	of Number or Disagrees Strongly Disagrees	of or Question Text
9	0	Overall I was very satisfied with the tutor
8	0	The tutor made a very positive impact on my progress
7	0	I would very much welcome having this tutor for another course
8	0	The tutor met my expectations
9	0	The tutor's comments on my assignments were understandable
9	0	The tutor clearly explained why I got the grades I did
9	0	The feedback I got on assignments helped me to understand specific topics better
9	0	The tutor's comments helped me improve
9	0	It was easy to contact the tutor
9	0	The tutor responded promptly to contact from me
8	0	The tutor really encouraged me
8	0	The tutor responded well to my particular needs for support
8	0	The tutor had a comprehensive knowledge of the OU course material
8	0	The tutor made good use of their knowledge of the OU course material
8	0	The tutor had a comprehensive knowledge of the subject as a whole
5	0	The tutor helped me understand OU systems and regulations and referred me appropriately when needed
9	0	The tutor was responsive to individual student requests
7	0	The tutor was sensitive to my needs

It was a pleasure to work with Moira. I was surprised how interested and helpful Moira approached me and my questions. I profited a lot from her comments and advice and I'm glad to work with her again.

I appreciate the attention the tutor gave me all through the module. It is really helpful to feel the tutor is available for you and who is interested on your progress.

Moira made contact early in the course, responded very quickly to queries and marked work very quickly - all of which were greatly appreciated. She also send frequent emails which I am sure were intended to be helpful, and while I appreciate that all students have differing expectations of their tutors, I felt there were just too many, tipping the balance a bit too much towards information overload. In most instances I found her feedback helpful, although on occasions a little patronising for students at post-graduate level. Her tutorials were very good and helpful in revising for the exam. Overall, while it is obvious that she has enormous commitment to her role as a tutor, I did find her use of endearments, (love from, x, etc) quite disconcerting and I think creates an unprofessional image. As in my comments above about communication, I think it is about getting the balance right.

I would very much like to emphasise the role of Moira not only to keeping me motivated and interested but to contribute to my personal development beside the OU module. I learned about how to learn and how to express myself as for a level of a master. I would love to have her for my next modules with OU!

Moira has been an excellent tutor. She had a very direct way to address every issue. What is more, she was able to be direct, precise and motivate me with my assignments. I want to remark how serious did she take my emails every time I wrote her as she replied me to each of them after a very short period of time. Her comments and suggestions were an invaluable motivational tool for me.

Appendix Four

TU870 2011 Student Feedback

Total number of surveys returned: 10 out of 14 invited

DALS Survey Responses

Number Agrees Strongly Agrees	of Number or Disagrees Strongly Disagrees	of or Question Text
10	0	Overall I was very satisfied with the tutor
8	0	The tutor made a very positive impact on my progress
10	0	I would very much welcome having this tutor for another course
10	0	The tutor met my expectations
10	0	The tutor's comments on my assignments were understandable
10	0	The tutor clearly explained why I got the grades I did
10	0	The feedback I got on assignments helped me to understand specific topics better
10	0	The tutor's comments helped me improve
10	0	It was easy to contact the tutor
10	0	The tutor responded promptly to contact from me
9	0	The tutor really encouraged me
9	0	The tutor responded well to my particular needs for support
10	0	The tutor had a comprehensive knowledge of the OU course material
10	0	The tutor made good use of their knowledge of the OU course material
10	0	The tutor had a comprehensive knowledge of the subject as a whole
6	0	The tutor helped me understand OU systems and regulations and referred me appropriately when needed
10	0	The tutor was responsive to individual student requests
9	0	The tutor was sensitive to my needs

Excellent tutor who was always available - extremely rapid in responding to mails and marking assignments. Her online tutorials have been some of the most helpful. She explains clearly and has high expectations, encouraging her students to aim for a master's level and explaining the criteria which she expects.

Brilliant. Could not have asked for a better tutor, very approachable and encouraging.

Moira was my second tutor with the OU and she made the difference between me staying or leaving the Course. She is personable and really engages the student with a fine sense of where the student is at. I highly recommend her.

Moira has been outstanding as a tutor! Not only did she meet all the essential requirements of an OU tutor but she surpassed them. I felt as if there was someone always there watching over me and wanting me to be even better. As a part-time student with many other demands, it was great to know that Moira was always there to offer that extra bit of support when I needed it. Her contact never faltered whether it was through the online forums, emails, phone calls or even Christmas cards! If I could select my tutors for upcoming modules, Moira would definitely be first choice. It has been an absolute pleasure to have worked with her over the last 5-6 months and would welcome the opportunity again. Many thanks and best wishes Moira!

Her dedication is overwhelming. Every time I have emailed her she has responded in under 30 minutes average. And she has done everything possible to answer my questions, no matter how odd or silly they may seem. On occasion she even telephoned me to comment on my TMA. I would not mind studying with her in future, if needs be.

I have been so very grateful for all of Moira's support and encouragement. At every stage in the module her support, advice and guidance has anticipated my requirements. The depth and detail on the assignment feedback and turnaround should be commended. I have found this has contributed immensely to my motivation and confidence. Accessing the online tutorials has been an issue, grateful particularly for the circulated presentations and the speed with which the session has been posted. I have contacted Moira for advice on assignment which has been well balanced and helped my thought process and also to request an extension due to work pressures. All made so much easier by having such an approachable and supportive tutor, made such a difference. I feel very fortunate to have had Moira as a tutor, with such an extensive background in development and to be so very engaged and interested in her students I feel this has given me the best and most encouraging start I could have hoped for.

A wonderful tutor with a real passion for the subject and tutoring!

Moira did an outstanding job overall, starting from getting to know her students at the very beginning. Her introductory email was so friendly and thorough that I felt we were having a conversation face-to-face, it was so informative and open. Her communication skills are excellent, I never felt for a moment that I was doing a distance education course and I felt that she was really interested in getting to know her students, so she could cater best to their needs. I have not really felt this way

with any other OU tutors I have had and I think that her attitude kept me very motivated throughout the course and also to continue my studies with the OU. I just wish that other tutors could learn from her approach, so that there is a more standardised approach - her approach is really innovative and one does not feel like just a name on an email, but one could say one builds the kind of relationship one has in a classroom environment. I wish there were more like her!!

Appendix 5: Learning Outcomes and Framing Questions for ET821

ET821 Learning Outcomes and Knowledge understanding of:

Key concepts and issues involved in the field of education for development and their application to case studies in a range of contexts.

The contexts, from local to global, in which education supports development and the current challenges in these settings.

The different disciplines and interdisciplinary discussions that contribute to writing in this area.

The implications of current debates and research linking

ET821 Framing questions

What visions of development are created and supported by current policies, processes and practices in education?

How can education help to shape new visions of society and development?

Across different contexts what kind of education is needed and how can it be provided?

What are the ideas, values and beliefs that shape access to education and its intended outcomes?

What material factors, international and national policies promote or inhibit education for development?

How can global and local action be aligned to support the production and provision of high quality education at all levels?

What disciplines and discussions are you drawing on from your own experience and background?

How are you engaging with the debates in the course in terms of reflecting on your own views and practices?

Who are the key actors involved in education for

education and development for one's own professional practice. development and what roles do they play?

Where do you stand with respect to the debates on education for development?

How will you use what you have learnt in this course in your own work and professional field?

Through the course you will be working individually and collaboratively to explore these questions, identifying related issues and dilemmas that will help address them and navigating your own pathway through this field of study and practice. As this is a masters-level course, you need to adopt an independent approach to your own learning and are encouraged to read around the issues and focus on those aspects of particular interest and relevance to you.

Appendix Six:

eTMA SYSTEM		help	
Tutor			
	Appt Region	New Tutor	Present Monitoring Level
02301688 Moira Jean Laidlaw	R05	No	C
Monitor			
	Course	Pres	Assignment Number
00318495: R.P.	TU874	12E	02
Available to Monitor			
	Collected by Monitor	Returned by Monitor	Sent to Tutor
17 Jul 2012	20 Jul 2012	24 Jul 2012	26 Jul 2012
Monitor's assessment of grade and comments			
Student	Grade	Summary/feedback	Script comments
Student 1	Severe	Good (G)	Good (G)
Student 2	Appropriate	Excellent (E)	Excellent (E)
Student 3	Appropriate	Excellent (E)	Excellent (E)
Click here to view marked files and files annotated by the monitor			
Check List - In the script(s) selected for monitoring this tutor:			
Summary and Feedback (PT3)		Script comments	
1) Acknowledges good work	G	7) Comments positively on good points	G
2) Uses a friendly/personal tone	G	8) Corrects and explains errors or omissions	G

		omissions	
3) Provides encouragement and support	E	9) Identifies and explains irrelevant material	E
4) Provides a summary of strengths and weaknesses	E	10) Makes clear and constructive comments	E
5) Suggests ways of improving future work	E	11) Directs student to course materials and/or other relevant materials	E
6) Course specific criteria		12) Clearly explains where marks were gained or lost	
		13) Identifies excessive or insufficient length	
		14) Comments on communication skills	
		15) Course specific criteria	

Comments and advice from Monitor

Dear Maira

This is going to be a bit sketchy - don't want to leave it till I'm back from leave! Hope it's still useful.

Student 1: Both the report and your response to it are highly stimulating. And this is certainly development management! But, as the research questions most obviously demonstrate, it's a hugely ambitious project. Or, to put it more negatively, I don't think she can do what she's planning to do within the timeframe, particularly when the implications of Ramadan are taken into account. So I think she needs to be reined in a little. I do note that her research questions are set up with "I wonder how to". It would be interesting to see this as a 'how can critically reflective practice best be developed?', with a really rigorous exploration of perhaps a more limited number of the issues (all of which are huge) that she sets out in the list. That could be good. But it would have to be 'rigorous' - and cautious in its conclusions.

Student 2: A perfect response. I would perhaps have had an opening paragraph to the PT3 which signalled what was to come in summary form: "I think you have not grasped what is required by this assignment, and as a result have presented a report which fails on all the set criteria." But the message does become clear enough! Did you expect this kind of submission?

Student 3: This is an impressively detailed response to the report. And I think pretty much all (I hesitate to be absolute!) your comments are valid and potentially useful. I do wonder, though, if it might be a little overwhelming - over 70 comments on the script and almost 1300 words on the PT3 - and might induce an at best somewhat mechanical corrective response. I think I might have looked to identify, say, half a dozen categories of bad practice, illustrate each once or twice and suggest he look for the many other examples himself. It is frustrating to see them - particularly when you have previously identified good practice - but I think we have to let quite a lot lie. My other concern is with the score. Strictly speaking you are right. Indeed 33 might even be judged 'lenient', given that he misses both the 'reflection' and the 'looking forward sections', and that the literature review is badly judged. On the other hand, he does have a good-ish problem definition (the main concern of the assignment) and a pretty good set of research questions which should guide the investigation well. I would have made more of these on the script, with some positive comments. I might also (confession time) have 'vired' marks and turned 22/60 (a Fail) into 34/80 (a Pass!) and 11/40 into 6/20. The resultant 40 would recognised the work put in, the insights, and the useful outputs - whilst also demonstrating how unsatisfactory it was when set against what was expected.

My 'off message' comments re Student 3 shouldn't obscure my judgment that overall this is excellent assessment, that takes the students and their work impressively seriously. I would be interested to have your reactions.

With best wishes,

RP.

Date: 24-Jul-2012

Comments and advice from Staff Tutor/Regional Manager

This all looks great Moira displaying an excellent standard of assessment. You are clearly well into the "swing" of TU874! Do drop me a line if you'd like to talk anything through. Many thanks for all your hard work.

Kind regards – J.

Date: 26 Jul 2012

eTMA SYSTEM				help
Tutor				
	Appt Region	New Tutor	Present Monitoring Level	
02301688 Maira Jean Laidlaw	R05	No	C	
Monitor				
	Course	Pres	Assignment Number	
00318495 R.P.	TU874	12E	03	
Available to Monitor				
	Collected by Monitor	Returned by Monitor	Sent to Tutor	
14 Aug 2012	17 Aug 2012	27 Aug 2012	29 Aug 2012	
Monitor's assessment of grade and comments				
Student	Grade	Summary/feedback	Script comments	
Student 1	Lenient	Good (G)	Good (G)	
Student 2	Appropriate	Good (G)	Good (G)	
Student 3	Lenient	Good (G)	Good (G)	
Click here to view marked files and files annotated by the monitor				
Check List - In the script(s) selected for monitoring this tutor:				

Summary and Feedback (PT3)		Script comments	
1) Acknowledges good work	E	7) Comments positively on good points	E
2) Uses a friendly/personal tone	E	8) Corrects and explains errors or omissions	S
3) Provides encouragement and support	E	9) Identifies and explains irrelevant material	
4) Provides a summary of strengths and weaknesses	S	10) Makes clear and constructive comments	G
5) Suggests ways of improving future work	G	11) Directs student to course materials and/or other relevant materials	
6) Course specific criteria		12) Clearly explains where marks were gained or lost	
		13) Identifies excessive or insufficient length	
		14) Comments on communication skills	
		15) Course specific criteria	

Comments and advice from Monitor

Dear Moira

you will see some comments from me on the script that indicate I don't think he's got his thinking sorted!) But he's also got to produce for this assignment a methodology that will serve to get him some good answers to good questions. I don't think he's done that. The absence of a heading leaves me unsure as to what his research problem is, and the key research tool (the interview schedule) doesn't clear up the mystery. It doesn't seem to me have a focus, and it doesn't work through issues in the way it should. There is no tool for the focus groups. No less importantly, there's nothing specific about what and who the sample is going to be. I get the impression that he is going to be talking only to local citizens. But there's no indication that he will be identifying and interviewing people who can give him the data he needs. And there is no indication as to how the troublesome politics are going to be negotiated, save for the use of the introductory letter. He talks of a methodology that is "expected to generate splendid qualitative and quantitative data". I don't think it will! So I think he needs more direct guidance about the nitty gritty of the methodology to set alongside the affirmation.

Student 2: This report is so difficult to get a grip on, not least for the factor you rightly highlight, the over-production of lists. There are times - indicated on the script - when I see them a little more positively than you. But the overall effect is to make extremely difficult any sense of where the project is going. I think this is compounded by the weakness of the development management dimension, the lack of clarity as to what constitutes a 'development perspective', and the impression given that there can be an uncontested output. All this, and the troubling (as you note) lack of references, does not make for a strong report. Your 50 reflects this reasonably appropriately (though it should actually be 52, as the last set of marks add up to 11 rather than 9/20). I would probably give a few more marks, partly because of the amount of work he's put in, partly because there is a structure to the design of the research, and one that does make some sense. Also, I should say, because I don't think Student 1's is that much better than this report.

Student 3: I might well have been a bit sharper here, and said there is very little methodology here in the sense of setting out how some good answers to good questions will be arrived at. It's not just that there is little development management material (though you're right to point this out). As the References make clear - or, perhaps, confirm - there has been no recourse to explicitly methodological material. At the very least, if use of an 'exemplary case study' is to be the methodology there should be an identification of that case study (or the parameters for identifying it) and use made of Thomas's chapter on the case study. And, given that this is to be a documentary-based study, use should also be made of the Barrientos, O'Laughlin and (possibly) Roche chapters in Research Skills. I would also have asked what case study (studies) would provide answers to the huge research questions being posed. Like you, I'm delighted that Student 3 has studied Freire and clearly got something from it! But that has come at a cost. I would have made that the central, perhaps the sole, point of the PT3.

That last point leads me to a cliché: that sometimes less is more. I wonder if there is so much detail on your PT3s that the short, sharp shocks that are sometimes necessary don't emerge. That's got a hint of devil's advocacy to it, but there is a serious question there. It perhaps also connects with a question about how close contact, with how much detail, we should offer. You quite deliberately set out your conviction that being and keeping in close touch is important. I think that principle is brilliant, and am constantly impressed by the extent to which you put it into practice. But both Student 2 and Student 3 (you indicate) show a disinclination to fall in with this. Maybe there is a need for Plan/Principle Plan B in such cases!?

I hope this is interesting and helpful for you, Maira. As I say, I get a great deal from these 'encounters'. R.

PS The 'S' on item 8 above refers specifically to Student 1's report, where I think he gets some things seriously wrong - and these need pointing out, without undermining the affirmation of course.

Comments and advice from Staff Tutor/Regional Manager

Many thanks for your close, multi-level engagement with these scripts Moira. I'm sure you'll find R's comments provide food for thought. Your students are indeed very well served. Do feel free to contact myself or R. to talk through any issues. Kind regards – J.