

feedback should be avoided, praise – a feature of positive feedback – may be delivered if tailored to clear learning goals.

A useful technique for improving the message component of feedback is carefully to structure specific learning goals for the feedback session. Different types of feedback can be employed to achieve different goals. If one goal is to reduce a student's anxiety, directed informational feedback – which is designed to give students a quantity of information above and beyond what they already know – might be effective. The goal of instructive feedback is to encourage and guide growth without particular focus on past performance or specific knowledge.

Feedback can convey different types of affective information to the recipient. The three general categories of affective information to the feedback recipient are: maintaining a sense of competence; maintaining a sense of control; and believing that their efforts will result in extrinsic rewards or positive results. When these three elements are met, intrinsic motivation will remain high and a student or employee will maintain a strong level of task commitment.

Goal orientation is an important feature of effective feedback. Credibility is a characteristic that most clinical teachers possess and maintain throughout their relationship with their students. Since credibility is based in large part on the teacher's expertise and knowledge, clinical teachers are seen by their students as being experienced and adept at their craft.

Researchers have been trying to discover the exact combination of factors to create the optimal feedback message. Armed with this new knowledge, managers and supervisors would be prepared to address the age-old problem of enhancing communication, particularly across barriers of power and authority that have historically been the focal point of conflict and misunderstanding. Despite their efforts and thousands of studies, the inescapable conclusion is that effective feedback is by far more process than product.

The clinical legal education movement fortunately was developing at a time when new theories in feedback delivery were emerging, and by adopting basic feedback theories and practices from humanistic psychology, the clinical process established itself on very solid ground that has shifted little in the past thirty years.

CURRICULUM

Access courses: meeting the needs of the adult learner

P Carter

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Colleges of Further Education in the United Kingdom have always offered a broad curriculum, providing both academic and vocational courses. While many of these courses are aimed at the 16-19 age group there is also considerable attention paid to the needs of the adult learner. The Kennedy Report recommended that there should be a lifetime entitlement to education to 'A' level standard with free courses for people from deprived areas or with no qualifications. Access courses provide one way of giving educational opportunities to such groups. They provide an alternative route to the more traditional 'A' levels for adults with no formal qualifications who wish to progress into higher education. The last decade has seen a growth in Access provision, assisted by a greater willingness on the part of universities to take students who have successfully completed such courses.

Bexley College first introduced an Access programme in 1989 and Law has been offered since 1992. The target group is identified as including the following: adults who have been unable to take full advantage of educational opportunities; members of groups under-represented in Higher Education; adults not having the necessary qualifications to meet normal entry; and adults who need a degree of language support and/or pastoral support not normally available on traditional courses. All students have to be over the age of 21 and show potential for develop-

ing the necessary academic skills needed for higher education.

One of the first challenges for the team of three law lecturers was the drawing up of an appropriate syllabus for the Access to Law group. The difficulties included trying to identify the needs of a body of students with different educational and cultural backgrounds and devising a curriculum which could meet those needs and at the same time satisfy the conditions laid down by the London Open College Network. With this in mind the teaching team decided on a combination of substantive areas of law together with legal methodology. Some Access courses do not include substantive law on the basis that this will merely be repeated at degree level but they believed that student confidence would be increased by having some basic understanding of underlying principles of areas, such as Criminal Law and the Law of Obligations, which could then be built on in higher education. The emphasis is, however, placed on using material to develop legal skills rather than merely enabling the student to accumulate knowledge. Units on Politics and Historical and Social Studies completed the units on offer. The team also tried to incorporate some flexibility into the content so that account could be taken of the previous experiences of the students.

This element of flexibility is an acknowledgment that teaching adults requires some difference in approach to that of teaching younger students. If Access is to be a real alternative to conventional routes to higher education, then the needs of the particular client group must be recognised and a test of success could be the extent to which the course differs from more traditional study.

Lecturers have to be supportive and find ways of building up students' self-confidence, while at the same time equipping them for the realities of studying at degree level. Such considerations also influenced the quest for workable assessment criteria. The teachers felt there had to be a constant emphasis on student participation. As a result, assessment has been based on written assignments, re-

search tasks and oral presentations, including the holding of a moot, which is put on video and played back to the students to allow them to comment on, and learn from, their own and each other's performances.

Consideration of both the shared characteristics of adult learners and individual differences enables the tutors involved in delivering the program to develop more understanding of problems which may arise and consequently meet the needs of the students more effectively. Access courses acknowledge competing interests by timing classes to fit in with school hours and holidays and making provision for part time study. Students are encouraged to use past relevant experiences and are offered practical support to enhance their learning.

The role of the personal tutor is a central one not only in forming a link between the student and other services which may be required, but also in terms of what such an individual can offer to a student. A lecturer performing the role of personal tutor has to have a high level of commitment to the task and must be able to give emotional as well as practical support.

Giving students a voice, not just to air personal problems but also to express their opinions on the course itself, has also been seen as an essential ingredient of the program. Involving the students in discussions and decisions relating to their course is of particular importance when dealing with the adult learner. Retention can be improved if students have an active role in the monitoring of their courses and feel that their opinions and suggestions are valued.

Access students and widening participation

S Owen & W Foy

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In the context of the UK Government's commitment to widening participation in Higher Education (HE) among under-represented groups, it is important not to forget Access students, who are often drawn from more working-class backgrounds

than the general intake of 18-year-olds fresh from school or college.

Over the past two decades, there has been a vast expansion of Access provision nationally, in order to help mature students without the standard qualifications to enter higher education. In the case of Law, some students are entering the LLB through special 'Access to Law' courses, while others are coming through the more general 'three subject' route. In both types of program, Access courses contain compulsory, assessed elements which help students develop study skills, like note taking, essay writing, research methods and the delivery of seminar presentations. Recently, basic maths and IT skills have also become mandatory.

Manchester Adult Education Service has for many years offered a wide range of provision and qualifications, much of it far removed from the popular 'flower arranging' image. It works on a relatively small scale at local centres right across the city, most sites being open throughout the day and not just for evening classes. The main Access courses, sending more than thirty students to university, serve three very deprived, working class areas of high unemployment. The students are very diverse and come from many different ethnic and social backgrounds. Probably the single most noticeable characteristic of all the Access students is their strong motivation and will to succeed.

The apparent success in preparing these mature students academically for university probably stems from high standards and expectations from course tutors, on the one hand, and the large amount of personal support given to students in terms of regular individual tutorials (both subject and general) on the other. There is also a great deal of small group and discussion work, with emphasis on active participation by all students in the class. These elements appear to bring positive and confidence-building results.

A Law degree seems to be still perceived by our students as more difficult and academic than many other subjects,

and Law is definitely seen as a high status subject and profession. This is probably to do with its strong association in the public mind with the upper middle classes. From the evidence of class discussions, it seems our students have an impression of both barristers and judges, in particular, as white, male, elderly and public school educated stereotypes, which is, of course, still largely the reality. Students do not seem as aware of the fact that so many Law undergraduates today are female.

On the Access courses, teachers help students to gain the confidence to apply for university and we have a very high rate of acceptance. However, there are problems for students when they arrive in the higher education institutions which often seem huge, impersonal, unwelcoming and indifferent to them. Some mature students are so discouraged and demoralised by this that they drop out within a few weeks. Another recurring problem occurs in seminars, where mature students (who are used to participating in discussion and speaking up) are placed with silent, reticent eighteen year olds.

Amongst suggestions for improvements are the following: appoint someone at each university to be responsible each year for new mature students and introduce a mentoring system in each institution, allowing second-year mature students to link up with first-years on a regular basis to offer support. New mature students should have a personal tutor in their department who actually makes a point of seeking them out and making an appointment with them at the start of the first term. Summer bridging courses between Access programs and their local universities should be much more widely available.

Training in group work teaching methods for all university lecturers who take seminar groups would be very helpful. These are all ways in which more students from non-traditional backgrounds can more effectively be brought into higher education, including LLB courses, and, once there, prevented from drop-