Learning Highlights

University of East Anglia

Autumn 2012

Christmas is a Time For ~~Giving~~ Marking

A Christmas Dream....

A tutor marked some scripts by night
while drinking lots of gin,
an angel from the hub came down
and put them in the bin,

'Oh thank you HUB' the tutor said
'I really was quite stressed,
and now I'll join the Christmas fun
and may be get some rest'.

~

Jolly Marking Carol

Tis the season to be marking
Fa la la la laaa la la la la

Essays, tests, they all need grading
Fa la la la laaa, la la la la

Remember, students like their feedback
Fa la la la laaa, la la la la

Hopes of festive cheer all fading
Fa la la la laaa, la la la la

UEA Teaching Excellence Award Winners 2012

We asked this year's Teach Excellence Award winners to tell us about some aspects of their teaching, their achievements, what they find most rewarding and what they spent their prize money on. The following articles include some words from four of the winners of this years awards.

Helping Students Facing Failure in MED

"Although medicine is a wonderful career for most students, it can also be challenging and difficult. It is not for everyone and certainly is not for people who lack insight and the ability to seek advice and develop coping skills"

Richard Hays chair of medical education and head of school, School of Medicine, Keele University, 2009

It was an honour to be awarded, jointly with Dr Nilesh Patel, this recognition for our work with students finding medicine "challenging and difficult". It is a privilege to meet students at a relative low point so early in their professional life and share some of their journey towards a fulfilling career in medicine.

With the encouragement of Prof Richard Holland and Dr Lesley Bowker, in 2009 I took responsibility for developing and delivering a new remedial programme for students facing the challenge of re-sitting Finals; we are now in the fourth year. After initial work to address the disappointment and emotional reaction to failing, we developed a student-led programme of revision and clinical skills tutorials. We encourage and support the students to explore the specific individual reasons for failing, with an emphasis on the student taking personal responsibility for his/her learning and development. Evaluation in 2010 led to increased emphasis on student directed, interactive learning with more opportunities to demonstrate competence and build confidence by presenting knowledge and demonstrating skills.

Dr Patel and I also developed a programme of coaching to provide challenging individual support and guidance to the students.

In 2010 collaboration with Norwich Medical School (NMS) we identified students at risk based on previous exam performance. I developed and delivered new proactive

If you would like to contribute please contact the editor Sarah Yeates directly at s.yeates@uea.ac.uk, x2182

Next issue: Submission deadline 28th February

workshops to help students recognise and address potential obstacles to performance in Finals, and develop plans to address them; the workshops are now incorporated into the curriculum for all medical students

Early recognition of concerns is a key principle of management of a student in difficulty. With the encouragement of Dr Dominique Hubble (NMS) I developed and delivered workshops for all Practice Based Learning tutors on the identification and management of a student causing concerns. Feedback shows these have been well received and influenced the approach to struggling students.

In summary, we have challenged, supported and facilitated the students to understand the reasons for their performance, leading to a well-received programme of remedial work in which the students take personal responsibility for their learning, development and performance.

This is linked to proactive work with Year 5 students and Medical School tutors to recognise issues and concerns as early as possible and provide support before, rather than after, the Final examination.

Michael Lambert (MED)

What did I do with my share of the award money? I spent it last summer on 2 pieces of hand crafted glass bought from one of my favourite art galleries, in Ambleside in the Lake District. I also saw a film (Salmon fishing in the Yemen), went for a nice meal with my wife and drank a decent bottle of wine. The day was a reminder that, despite its' frustrations, working with students who are going through a difficult time also brings many rewards. Looking at the objects brings me pleasure, reminds me that there is enormous potential is everyone and our role is to help our students to re-discover it when it seems as if they've lost it. The glass bottle in the picture radiates an optimistic glow as it sweeps up in a wave. The movement is upwards and forwards rather than focused in the past....

Nilesh Patel (MED)

Excellence in Teaching in Nursing

After three consecutive nominations for the Award 2006-09 John Clancy (Senior Lecturer in Applied Human Physiology, NSC) was awarded a UEA Excellence in Teaching Award this year. John has managed to combine his research activities and ever increasing admin duties with an enthusiasm and dedication to teaching. He has written that: 'Basically in this world with teaching demands and research being driven by league tables and research assessment framework respectively, together with increasing administrative duties and the expectancy of engagement and enterprise activities, you can either just do the job, or something has to give; in my case it was research. I have published just a handful of research publications highlighting my research findings of the existence of the 'bioscience problem in nursing' and how the curricula can address it.' John has, however, produced large amounts of teaching material, embracing new technologies, to enhance his teaching and attempt to make student life easier. Most of his publications (i.e. 6 books, 5 chapters and over 50 articles) are based on a teaching-healthcare framework he has developed, which makes the analogy between the components of 'homeodynamism' and the 'healthcare process' utilising nature-nurture interactions as a basis for individualising care.

One of John's key strengths in teaching is in the support and encouragement he gives his students. A Specialist Nurse Practitioner wrote this year that "John has the ability to ensure the reticent student feels supported, adapting his teaching to connect with students who may feel overwhelmed.' John concluded by saying 'I have many years experience of lecturing and can honestly say my enthusiasm and dedication for teaching is the same today as it was when I first started, and this passion is generated by comments from students and colleagues who have nominated me for this award. Receiving the award was the 'icing on the cake.''

John Clancy (NSC)

Preparing Students for Study Abroad in LAW

I was very honoured to have been nominated by Law students for a Teaching Excellence Award. Their supporting statements over the past three years have noted the support I provide to students in their preparations for and during their Year Abroad. I am a strong believer in the benefits of the Erasmus exchange programme which offers students the opportunity to grow both academically and personally, enhancing their transferable skills and cultural intelligence. I consider that good organisation and communication is important for students to make the most of their experience, providing them with the reassurance they need to take the next big step in developing their independence and confidence. As with all teaching, creating the environment in which students can flourish is key, and this is what I have tried to do as Erasmus Director in the Law School. This semester, it has been very rewarding to have an increased number of students contacting me to learn more about the programme, all excited about the prospect of studying at one of our partner law faculties next academic year.

Claudina Richards (LAW)

Using Blikbook to Enhance Peer-to-Peer Learning and Communication

Blikbook is a Web 2.0 tool that enables better communication between students and their lecturers. It also enhances peer-to-peer learning. I decided to try and use Blikbook to answer questions relating to the summative assessment of laboratory reports. The idea was to build up a 'bank' of questions and answers which could be used by all students, to enable better understanding of scientific writing and report construction. The module I chose to try this with is a large first year module on Molecular Biology and Genetics that currently has 235 students enrolled. With this number of students, it isn't always easy to respond quickly to individual queries, and I was hoping that Blikbook would be a way to reach the majority of students on the module. Another distinct advantage was that the site was open all the time, which meant that students would be able to find answers to questions, no matter when they were writing their reports.

The process of setting up the site was easy. The Blikbook administrators set up a site with the module name. This site was then e-mailed to all the students on the module, inviting them to enrol. I then talked to the students about the usefulness of the site, and that I would commit to answering the questions posted within 24 hours. The students were also encouraged to answer the questions they knew the answers to.

I was very pleased with the response. For the first summative item, over 100 questions were posted, with the most popular questions being viewed 200 times. The types of questions asked fell into two categories (1) relating to format (2) relating to scientific content. There was some repetition with the questions, but the Blikbook administrators were very helpful and alerted the students to the search facility, which enabled them to use search terms to pull out relevant questions.

When it came to marking the reports, I was very pleased with the standard, the majority of students had really paid attention to the details and I had very few of the errors I had seen in previous years. I had very few failing reports, with the majority of students achieving a 2:1/1st classification. For many, this was their first summative piece at university, and I believe that the use of Blikbook really helped them with the higher level of work that we expect at university.

"I found Blikbook very useful as it meant I could find answers to some questions easily. This was because someone had already asked you a question that I needed an answer to and your reply was there for everyone to access".

"I have found it very useful as it allows the students to ask, what they may think is a silly or obvious question but in fact a few of us are all thinking it too. It allows quick communication for little things that do not require much explanation or warrant setting up a meeting, and can be used to quickly clarify things that may confuse us. I think it is a really good resource."

"Blikbook has been fantastic, it's great to be able to communicate with your lecturer out of lectures to clarify any points and ask any questions which are bothering you, with relative ease. It's also great to see that any questions you have there is almost always a colleague that has a similar query. Without the advice I got from my lecturer through Blikbook I wouldn't have achieved such a good mark on my first lab report".

Why not give it a go?
http://www.blikbook.com/

Kay Yeoman (BIO)

2013 HEA STEM Conference

The Higher Education Academy's second annual learning and teaching STEM conference entitled "Where practice and pedagogy meet" will take place on 17-18 April 2013 at The University of Birmingham.

The Conference will explore the relationship between pedagogy and practice across the full range of HEA STEM disciplines.

Areas for consideration at the conference will include, but are not limited to;

- Improving the employability skills of STEM graduates;
- Innovative approaches to teaching and assessing large classes;
- Giving effective feedback to students;
- Growing diversity in the student population;
- Practices in peer mentoring;
- Impact of information technology in learning and teaching;
- Students as partners.

A wealth of excellent posters, oral presentations and workshops have been submitted. For more information and to register see: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/detail/2012/17_18_Apr_HEA_STEM_2013_Conf_Bham

Or email catherine.redfern@heacademy.ac.uk

Employing QR Codes to Facilitate Blended Learning

Quick response (QR) codes are two-dimensional bar codes, used to encode information, which can be read by a smartphone. This article provides examples of their application to create links between the physical and digital teaching resources available to students. It describes both practice developed in Chemistry at UEA and implementations elsewhere in academia and discusses the ease of both the preparation and reading of QR codes.

Applications of QR codes

QR codes encode information. Typically this information is a URL for an internet resource, taking the user to a web page or starting a YouTube video. However, it might be an instruction to subscribe to an RSS feed or to submit an SMS or email message. The QR code thus provides a link between the physical world and the realm of digital communication. Making this connection is referred to as 'hardlinking' or 'object hyperlinking'. The ability to link quickly from a physical object such as a poster, flyer, soft drinks bottle, even an image on a television screen has endeared QR codes to the marketing industry. Whether we recognise them or not, they are becoming ubiquitous.

QR code on the side of a bottle of Pepsi Max

Institutional QR code use

The first bastion of academia to embrace QR technology has been the libraries and it is in this field where the majority of scholarly accounts have been published. In libraries too, QR codes play a largely promotional role, advertising special events and collections, making services more discoverable. They have also been used as navigation aids within libraries and museums. The facile way in which they present additional information makes them useful for associating digital resources with physical items like books, but also by providing descriptions for exhibits in museums, whereby the smartphone can take the role of the virtual tour guide.

QR codes in higher education

The University of Bath coordinated a trial of QR codes in higher education between 2008 and 2010, for which UEA was a partner institution and it is at this point that we were introduced to the technology. There might be an initial inclination to dismiss QR codes as a technology looking for an essential ('killer') application. The Bath study identified several educational applications in which QR codes might be valuable.

The first of these potential applications was subscription to an RSS news feed. Blogging platforms are becoming increasingly popular ways of providing resources to students. The easiest way to stay in touch with a blog is to subscribe via the RSS feed. However, the RSS feed is a long series of unintelligible characters, which is very difficult to type without error, even if the student was sufficiently motivated to attempt it. Simply scanning the QR code and linking directly or pasting the link into an RSS aggregator is a much more attractive approach.

QR codes can of course be incorporated into printed media, thus facilitating connections between bookwork and online activity. The QR code can also be used to connect physical presentations with just-in-time lecture support materials. As well as a link to the resource being discussed, this might also be used as a feedback mechanism through submission of a pre-programmed SMS.

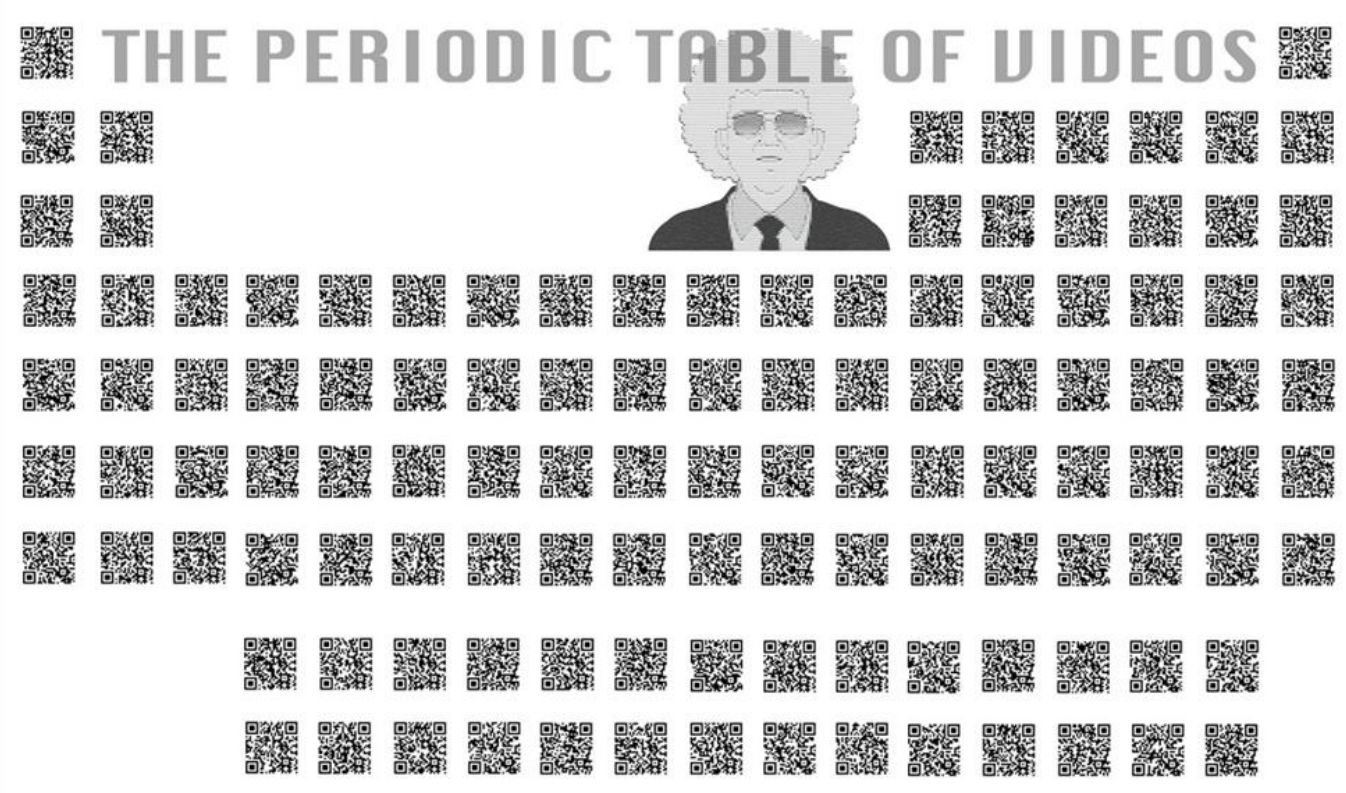
The final application outlined by the Bath study is a little more esoteric and revolves around an alternative reality game. Alternative reality games might have many elements including challenges overcome by a collaborative community. It is this connection between activities in physical locations and clues, tips and online resources that the QR code allows. Perhaps, with a little creativity, there is an analogy to be drawn with the teaching laboratory.

Applications at UEA Chemistry

In chemistry at UEA, we are developing a blended learning environment in which traditional lectures and practicals are supported by extensive digital resources delivered through our learning management system. The true blending of the physical and digital is the greatest challenge to this approach but it is the one to which the QR code is ideally suited.

Our students must complete prelaboratory VLE exercises as preparation for laboratory sessions. QR codes are printed within the laboratory manual and provide a facile (and unavoidable) link to these questions. Powerpoint presentations are displayed during the practical sessions with embedded QR codes that offer links to complementary and supplementary information and technique demonstration videos.

We have an extensive set of screencast captures of first year chemistry lectures. The inclusion of a QR code in printed lecture notes allows students to link directly to the digital version of a lecture. Just-in-time provision of



QR codes allows students to save links to demonstrations and further multimedia resources that might need to be truncated or skipped in the lecture.

The popular periodic table of videos, maintained at the University of Nottingham, has an associated poster in which each of the elements is represented by a QR code (see above). This is designed to be printed and displayed in classrooms so that students can scan their element of choice and link to the corresponding video. In a similar fashion we are preparing a table of QR codes linking to descriptive chemistry vignettes.

A QR code for the URL http://www.teachingchemistry.net/home

Methodology

Since Denso Wave has chosen to waive its patent rights over QR codes, there are no licensing issues and there are many websites that will generate QR codes. The one we use at UEA is www.i-nigma.com, which is associated with the consortium that initially popularised QR codes and is free. The QR code is a fairly coarse image and can therefore be integrated into any document format that will accept images. The larger the image the further the distance from which the user will be able to successfully scan it. This distance will also depend on the quality of printing / projection and the smartphone camera.

Any smartphone with a camera is likely to have at least one app that is capable of reading and decoding QR codes. There are native apps for the Symbian Nokia phones. The iPhone does not have a native app, but there are a great variety of third party applications, many of them free that will read QR codes and execute the embedded instruction seamlessly within the application or by launching the appropriate app. Searching for the term 'QR' within the respective app markets will reveal several hits on the Android and Blackberry platforms.

Increasingly the technology is familiar to students, but there are likely to be a number who are underutilising their smartphones and might benefit from advance warning to install the application. To this end the campus treasure hunt, which is a common part of many induction programmes can be augmented by QR codes and serve as an excellent introduction.

Conclusions

In summary, the QR code is more than a gimmick, but somewhat short of being an indispensable tool. Their strength lies in convenience - whenever there is a need to provide a facile link between physical and digital teaching elements, they present the best available option. The profile of QR codes will continue to grow, fuelled by the dawning recognition that their error tolerance can be exploited to allow the inclusion of graphics and branding. As QR codes become more mainstream, students will be more prepared to embrace their use to support blended learning.

Simon J. Lancaster
(CHE)

S.Lancaster@uea.ac.uk

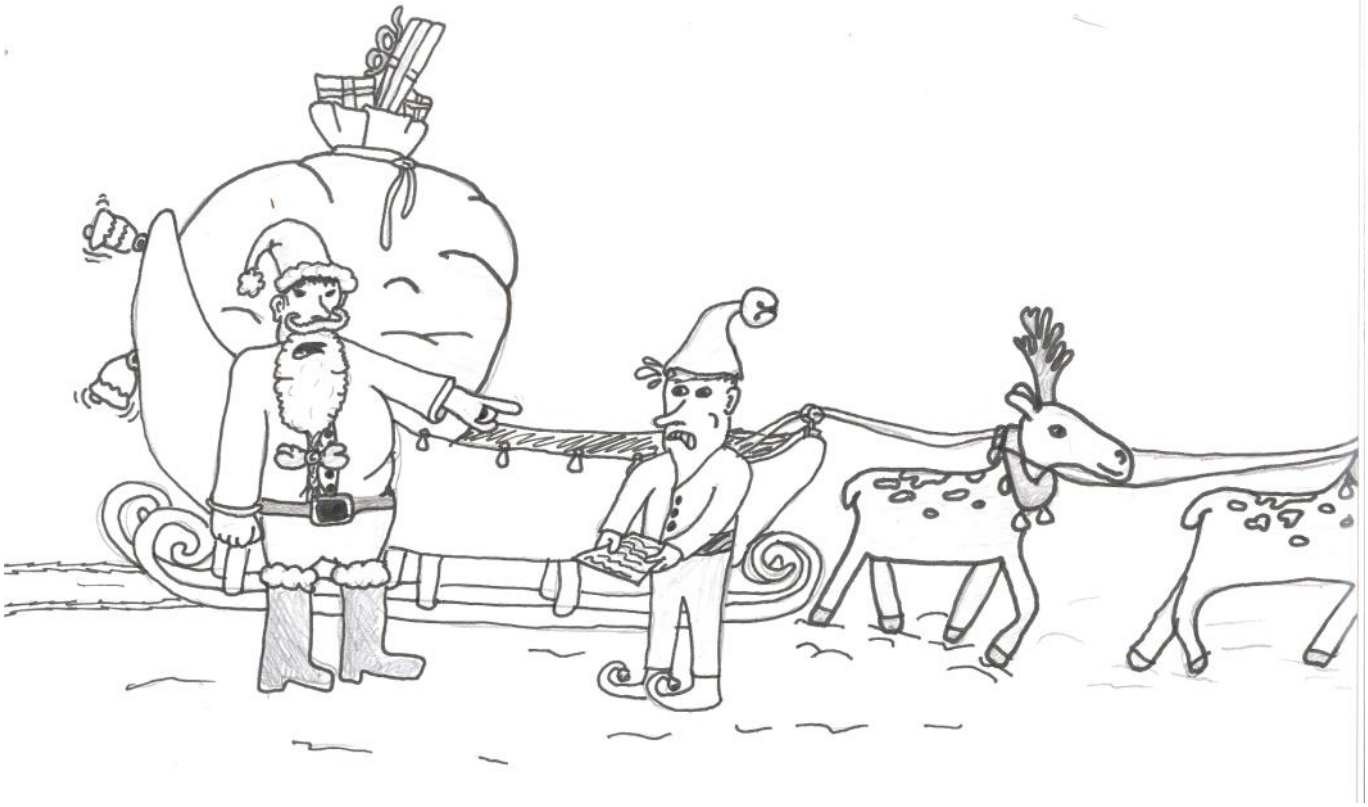
Reading Aloud

Teaching Literature, and, in fact, teaching most subjects in the Humanities, requires close critical engagement with textual material. This means for lecturers and seminar leaders that small fragments and, indeed, large chunks of texts have to be read out loud from time to time. But how, exactly, are we to do that? Should Iago's voice be laced with menace? And does the Duchess of Malfi require an Italian accent? These questions aren't just significant to dramatic works. I recently found myself in a large lecture to first-year students on Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* rendering the death of Little Nell – that apogee of Victorian sentimentalism – in a distinctly silly voice, which struck me as the only way to draw out what might now seem Dickens's manipulative tugging at the heart strings. Nor do these questions simply concern literary texts – how does the voice capture Socrates' insistent questioning, for instance, or the combination of undiminished hauteur and regret in Charles Stuart's speech from the scaffold?

Reading out loud isn't just a pretext for trying out a silly voice in a lecture or a seminar. How a text – a historical, philosophical, or political text, as much as a literary one – is to be voiced involves a whole range of important critical questions. And our students need help with reading aloud too. The moment when a child can read silently to her- or himself is taken to be the moment at which she or he becomes a confident reader, but we shouldn't forget that reading aloud is a vital skill too. Often, real difficulties of meaning – or simple misunderstandings – only become apparent in the audible voicing of a text. Reading aloud isn't a step back into the infant school, or just a routine necessity, but a significant and vital part of our teaching and learning.

Ross Wilson (LDC)

Ross.M.Wilson@uea.ac.uk



'You know where you can put your risk assessment!' by Owen Senior