

**PBPL**

Practice-based Professional  
Learning Centre



The Open  
University

**Final report from the PBPL funded project:**

# Piloting **PIVOT**: the **P**rofessional **I**ntity and **V**alues **O**rganisation **T**ool

Project Principals:

Barry Cooper and Maggie Pickering

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Barry Cooper  
b.cooper@open.ac.uk

Maggie Pickering  
mp6265@tutor.open.ac.uk

**Practice-based Professional Learning  
Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning**

**FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

**Project title:**

Piloting **PIVOT**: the **P**rofessional **I**dentify and **V**alues **O**rganisation **T**ool

**Date: 30/06/2009**

**Barry Cooper**      [b.cooper@open.ac.uk](mailto:b.cooper@open.ac.uk)

**Maggie Pickering**      [mp6265@tutor.open.ac.uk](mailto:mp6265@tutor.open.ac.uk)

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*Gill Walker, Staff Tutor*

*Shama Ahmed, Monika Hynes, Lesley Parrish, Mick Powis, Clive Wright - Social work programme tutors*

## Executive Summary

PIVOT was piloted between March and September 2008 with a small number of tutors and students on the social work programme in one region in England. The project involved the creation and trialling of a suite of reflective activities based upon Personal Construct Psychology. The project and activities had a number of aims:

1. to help students to access their own constructs of learning
2. to facilitate an individual enquiry into personal and professional values
3. to offer an opportunity to identify and envision a desired future of specific learning aims arising from these explorations
4. to develop a scale of movement and action plan to realise these learning aims
5. to explore the potential for enhancement of the programme tutor role

The PIVOT activities were successfully piloted and evaluated and are being developed in different forms to be further available to students and tutors.

## Activities and Outcomes

### ***Aims and scope of project***

- *What were the main aims of the project?*
- *What were the more specific goals?*

The main aim of the project was to devise and test out reflective activities, based upon Personal Construct Psychology [PCP], with students and tutors on the professional social work degree programme. PCP has an extensive evidence base of research application in many spheres of professional activity but little recent use in social work. PCP's main advantage is that it has a constructivist theoretical basis and the techniques that have been developed facilitate participants to generate and explore their own evolving perspectives. Through a series of activities within structured interviews, learners are enabled to:

- Draw out their own personal observations and interpretations within their practice
- Progressively refine and develop these constructs to reflect and highlight their own core values
- Systematically score these values as learning aims use these learning aims as a basis for an action plan to develop their own professional practice.

A further aim was to gauge the extent to which the activities could be reflexively 'taught' to programme tutors so that they could, in turn, offer them to and use them with a volunteer sample of students from their group. Feedback from tutors and students was gained from these activities and used as the basis for evaluation.

## Activities

- *What was the overall methodology adopted?*
- *What were the planned activities of the project?*

The plan is set out in the table below:

Produce training materials and process guidance for programme tutors. Invite students to participate in research.  First training workshop with tutors 11 <sup>th</sup> March 2008	March 2008
Programme tutors undertake first testing of PIVOT as part of mid-point review contact with student.	April-May 2008
Second, review and feedback, workshop with programme tutors.	June 2008
Programme tutors undertake second application of PIVOT as part of end-point review contact with student.	July-August 2008
Third evaluation workshop. Tutors complete written evaluation sheet.  Students invited to complete evaluation.	September 2008

PIVOT was comprised of three interconnected sets of reflective activities:

1. personal construct elicitation on a provided 'grid' template
2. values exploration on a provided 'ladder' template
3. learning aims scaling and action plan on a provided template

These are set out in the deliverables section below.

- *What changes did you have to make to these plan (aims, project activities, etc.) and why (e.g. technical problems, difficulties in involving users/stakeholders, etc)?*

No changes were needed as the planned timescale fitted in with tutor-student activities and meetings as part of the Programme Tutor role.

- *What data and evidence did you gather and how did you gather it (e.g. survey, interviews, focus groups etc.).*

Feedback and evaluation sheets were completed by the participating tutors in collaboration with the students. Tutors were being reimbursed for their time and it was reasonable to expect them to complete evaluation forms. The students were volunteering to participate and it was not reasonable to place further expectations upon them during a very busy ECA and practice learning assessment period. However, a number of students volunteered to be contacted after the 'exam' period and a telephone conversation was undertaken with them.

## Findings

*Please provide sufficient detail for readers who are interested in learning from this project and adapting it for their own teaching.*

- *What are your main findings? What evidence supports these findings?*

1. The PIVOT suite of exercises was experienced as effective and engaging by both tutors and students and fulfilled the aims of providing reflective activities to explore participants' perspectives upon their practice-based professional learning paths.
2. However, they were hard work and took longer than expected.
3. The programme tutors valued an opportunity to have an in depth discussion with their students that went beyond the usual instrumental nature of the role and tasks.
4. The students similarly reported that the activities enabled them to develop a more meaningful relationship with their programme tutor.
5. Some students and tutors struggled with the open and reflexive nature of the activities which are facilitative as opposed to directive. As such, the construct and values laddering parts of the PIVOT trilogy are also intensely reflective requiring self-generated responses from the student to complete the activity.
6. However, for most students the activities were viewed as particularly helpful and a welcome, albeit challenging, opportunity to engage in self-generated reflections.
7. The feedback helped us to recognize that the three different activities would be more effective as stand-alone, though connected, reflective techniques to be used by students and tutors.

- *Do you have you any particular successes to report?*

- The positive feedback from the project was used for a successful bid for funding from PBPL/CETL to produce the materials in a more 'generalisable' form [i.e., not specifically for social work students] to OU production standards and be made available to course teams.
- A version of the activities was disseminated at JSWEC, a large social work education conference, July 2009 as part of a Workshop – *Personalisation: Interpersonal skills for practitioners using personal construct psychology.*

## Impact

### **a) Student experience**

- *In what ways has/will your project impacted on student learning?*

The main advantage of PIVOT will be in its effectiveness for professional programme students in producing reflective learners that are able to 'enquire within' and interrogate their own sets of values and assumptions. The materials from this pilot project are usable and will be available on the project work space.

The 'PIVOT2' materials are being produced this year and will be made available on the PBPL project web pages.

- *How is your project contributing to increasing student success (i.e. retention, employability, etc.)?*

Difficult to say really – retention on the social work programme is very high at around 98% so unlikely to make much difference there. I think any difference is likely to be much more subtle through increased student ability and confidence to interrogate themselves and their personal, internal and interpersonal processes rather than feeling that the 'right' answers are all to be found in sources external to them. Measuring such differences would require a longitudinal and sophisticated enquiry project.

### **b) Teaching**

- *How have you affected the practice of both yourself and others within the OU? If you have changed course/activity/programme designs, please include examples if possible.*

PIVOT has been disseminated through a number of seminars and workshops: PBPL Fellows workshop; Social Work Research Group seminar; HSC Research seminar; Open CETL conference 2008.

The project has strengthened my already solid belief that professional education and training, if it is to fulfill the aims and requirements of continuing practice-based development, has to incorporate a significant aspect of experiential, self-generated learning aims and pathways.

- *What has been the impact of your project outside the OU?*

The workshop at JSWEC, a large social work education conference, in July 2009 – *Personalisation: Interpersonal skills for practitioners using personal construct psychology*, was well received by participants. I made efforts to draw people's attention to the links between the common observation that students struggle to fully understand professional values and critical reflection and the potential of PIVOT-type activities to enabling experiential discovery of what these concepts actually *mean* to individuals.

The workshop was delivered in collaboration with a colleague from the University of Hertfordshire.

### **c) Strategic change and learning design**

- *What impact has your work had on your Unit's or the University's policies and practices?*

Too early to say but the intention is to make the PIVOT2 materials more widely available and accessible to course teams within HSC. This will require continued dissemination over a number of years.

### **d) National or sectoral impact**

- *Has your project had wider impact on the sector or on policy? What impact has it had?*

PCP as a theoretical approach and a practical application to self-generated learning is very much in tune with the espoused principles of higher education and professional development. However, this is not the same as the current regulatory frameworks that attempt to describe and prescribe practice, or the current predilection for transitory approaches to surface learning. Although the techniques are flexible and effective to practice they are not simple to describe. They offer opportunities for enhanced reflection and ask questions of participants that do not provoke quick or easy answers. In this respect PCP, despite being extensively researched since the 1960's, may remain either ahead of its time or resolutely out of fashion. I tend towards the former view in that eventually it will be recognized that deep, as opposed to surface, learning requires both time and concentrated reflective thought. The techniques have stood the test of time over fifty years and the zeitgeist of reflective analysis to meaningfully link individuals with organizations, systems and structures is likely to re-occur at some point in the future. In order to maintain accessibility to the exercises, they are being produced in downloadable format with accompanying notes and a filmed demonstration as part of the PIVOT2 project.

## **Deliverables**

The following can be found on the project work space:

[www.open.ac.uk/pbpl/projects/pivot](http://www.open.ac.uk/pbpl/projects/pivot)

1. PIVOT - Instructions and guidance booklet for student and tutor
2. PIVOT - Personal construct grid
3. PIVOT - Values ladder
4. PIVOT – Learning aims scale
5. Question card
6. Numbers card
7. Power point presentations