

## Report on 10<sup>th</sup> [EDEN Research Workshop](#), Oct 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>, Barcelona

### Towards Personalized Guidance and Support for Learning

Eight OU colleagues were able to attend this year's Eden workshop in sunny Barcelona. Three eSTeEM projects were represented by Hilary MacQueen and Fiona Aiken, Diane Butler and Louise MacBrayne and Ann Walsh. It was also good to meet up with wider OU colleagues, Mark Nichols, Stefanie Simpson and John Maiden.



L-R: Diane Butler, Louise MacBrayne, Mark Nicols, Hilary MacQueen, John Maiden, Fiona Aiken and Stefanie Sinclair.

#### Day 1

This consisted of a PhD student symposium, which was apparently well attended and very successful.

A welcome reception for the main conference was held at the [Universitat Oberta de Catalunya](#), in the north of the city. This was in a grand building; there was music, wine and wonderful tapas. We were welcomed by the hosts, and were invited to participate in a 'Design an educational BOT' activity. This was a good ice-breaker and got us talking to each other. The great and the good of distance education were there and joined in enthusiastically.

#### Day 2

The rest of the conference was held at the Science Museum, the Cosmocaixa, a beautiful modern building constructed on the side of a steep hill.

The opening keynote was given by [Sanna Jarvela](#) from University of Oulu, Finland. She discussed the importance of the learning environment in teaching school age students learning skills. Sanna introduced the idea of Self-regulated learning (SRL) stressing that learning is not just about remembering things but it involves being a strategic and adaptive agent. It involves active minds and deep learning is always hard. Self-regulated learning

(SRL) strategies help us to understand the complex process of learning. Strong learners are constantly monitoring and evaluating their learning. Conversely weaker learners have the following characteristics,

- Have poor task understanding
- Vague goals and plans
- Weak strategies
- Lack of monitoring
- Inaccurate self-evaluation.



Sanna Jarvela presentation

Sanna argued that self-regulation is needed for life and it can be developed through education. SRL is reflected in the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills and is essential for success in both learning and life.

She ended by summarising the challenges we face in all education settings:

- How do we enable those who are not yet engaged to develop their will and skill for living?
- What can be done for supporting students' active learning and designing engaging living environments? Bigger challenge for wholly online learning.
- How can we encourage students to collaborate with each other?

The programme then diverged into parallel sessions.

Several of us attended the session on MOOCs, which presented some new ideas from Australia (teaching Maths at a distance; an iterative design allowing student feedback to drive modifications). In this case the MOOC was used as a vehicle to allow students to develop their basic mathematical skills alongside an education programme. This looked like a good idea but there has been poor take-up from the students. Next, two talks from Dublin City University, Ireland: using 'fake' robots to teach language and culture – very successfully,

with >10,000 learners (on FutureLearn). In this case the academics who supported the forums in the MOOC all took on the persona of two 'bots' (with appropriate Irish names) in dealing with student queries. This served to maintain a consistent voice and tone on the forums and the students related well to these two 'people'. The second study from the group (that eventually won the Best Talk prize) used this MOOC to study emotions during study. Student volunteers were asked at 18 points during the MOOC about their feelings. Particular emotions emerged at different points and this can be used to inform future course design. It was interesting to hear the point of view of a FutureLearn user and apparent that FL hadn't been as accommodating of their project to embed surveys into the platform as we might have hoped.

The next parallel session kicked off with Mark Brown, an Australian who was brought in to develop a research culture at Dublin City University. His approach was robust but with some nice ideas (Top 10 reads of the month; Turkey of the week award) it seems to have paid off. Next was 'our' Mark Nichols, discussing the ethics of using AI as teaching tool. They are building a Bot to analyse SEaM data. The session ended with a view from South Africa, talking about the massification of learning and how it can be fairly deployed in developing countries that don't even have electricity.

Other members of our party attending other sessions from Dublin City University (they were very well represented!) 'Can you give me sanctuary?' focused on supported a number of refugees in Ireland through U/G and Masters Programmes. The issues that arose were around access to laptops and maintenance of them. The difficulties in providing books, prompted the presenters to look for relevant open source materials; clearly this can be a challenge at higher levels. Covering travel costs and the students having a quiet space to study in was seen to be important. The team reported that students felt a sense of belonging in their study world opposed to asylum world with their studies motivating them giving them an identity. Also from DCU was a look at 'Support Holes'. In Ireland more of the working class are distance learners and come to their studies later in life. We were told (rather alarmingly for us) that 49% of distance learners come to DCU as they don't want their degree to be identified as being from a distance learning organisation. The main support for these students comes from:-

- Families and their social networks.
- Tutors, help to foster student engagement.
- Other students and friends on the course as less time to socialise outside of it.
- Self-motivation to complete the degree.

But the team identified support issues as follows;

- Time, there is a need to target students earlier and younger, before they have family/demanding jobs.
- Isolation – absence of discourse opportunities, lack of a cohort if they study different modules.
- Institutional support – needed more careers guidance for mature students to help them progress into graduate level jobs.
- Work is the priority for these students rather than their studies.

Our hosts, UOC, were well represented in other parallel session focusing on University teachers' skills and attitudes towards the creation of Open educational resources (OER), everyone agreed that the main obstacles to this were time, skills and incentives to do it but were keen to develop a suitable framework. UOC participants also presented on 'Scholars Changing Social media use: Implications for Teaching and Learning in HE'. This talk focused on scholars feeling the pressure to engage in social media to advance their careers. Both personal experiences and professional experiences influence use of social media and engagement is ongoing and impacted by past, current and future events.

We learned about the [EuroDualE](#) project aimed at matching student learning with what employers want by involving them in tutoring.

The final session of the day was on Methodology. We heard about Maturity modelling to improve teaching quality – results not really in yet. Then eSTeEM's very own Ann Walsh, Hilary MacQueen and Fiona Aiken, Diane Butler and Louise MacBrayne presented their scholarship projects with OU colleagues John Maiden & Stefanie Sinclair (FASS) also giving very interesting talks.

The day finished with the Conference Dinner, held at the Palau Requesens, a splendid medieval building. We enjoyed a fabulous dinner and a great networking opportunity. The awards were presented during dinner, but that didn't stop the fun.

### Day 3

Today began with an interesting Roundtable discussion on 'From data use for guidance to guidance for data use' featuring eSTeEM's Diane Butler as one of the panel. Here she is wired for sound!



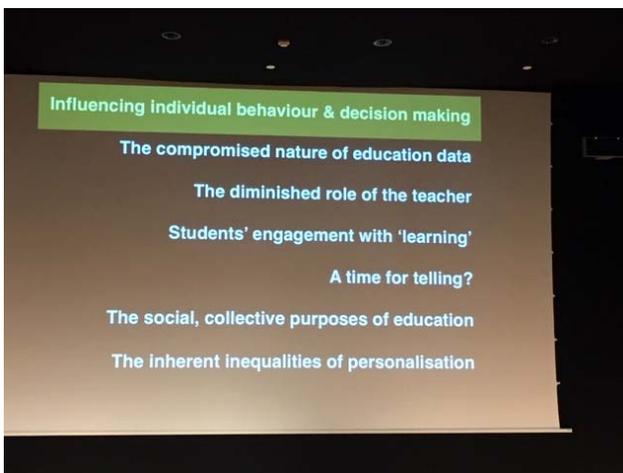
Roundtable discussion panellists, Diane Butler 3<sup>rd</sup> from left.

One more round of parallel sessions focusing on social justice and education followed the Round Table and several of us attended a very sobering talk on cyber-bullying and the need to deter it, this was followed by was a really interesting talk by [Frank Senyo Loglo](#) about teaching at a multi-site university in Ghana.

The final keynote was by [Neil Selwyn](#), who was very though provoking and highly controversial, but in a good way, discussing technology and its sometimes malign influence on distance learning.



Closing Keynote presentation by Neil Selwyn



Closing Keynote presentation by Neil Selwyn

So all in all a very successful conference, plenty of food for thought and some very useful links made with other distance learning institutions in Europe.