

# Centre For Promoting Learner Autonomy Newsletter

Issue 1  
January 2009



## Welcome To The New CPLA Newsletter

Welcome to the first newsletter from the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy. We aim to provide a monthly update on the work of the CPLA CETL as well as introduce some of the key aspects of Learner Autonomy and the CPLA strategy.

If you are interested in the work we do, watch out for issue 2, which will focus on our poster exhibition on January 14th. We will also be capturing videocasts of our project leaders for our website.

Ivan Moore, Director, CPLA CETL

## Conceptualising Learner Autonomy in Higher Education

Conceptualising Learner Autonomy involves two factors:

1. An autonomous learner has developed the capacity to take at least some control over their learning.
2. The learning environment provides opportunities for the learner to take control of their learning.

Developing capacity requires a set of personal qualities that include developing confidence, increased motivation, the ability to take and accept responsibility, and the ability to take the initiative. It also requires academic, intellectual, personal and interpersonal skills.

Within the context of Higher Education, effective autonomous learning requires the learner to have an appropriate conceptual stance towards their learning, which leads to an appropriate orientation to learning. In addition, learning is a social activity, and socialising their learning requires learners to recognise the benefits of working with others and to be able to share and negotiate with other learners. The employability agenda within HE requires learners to develop appropriate professional skills and the diverse nature of the

student body requires learners to recognise difference; develop tolerance, empathy and understanding of other values and cultures; and to be able to explain, discuss and negotiate in an acceptable manner.

The Sheffield Hallam definition of learner autonomy starts with the premise that an autonomous learner takes responsibility for his/her own learning. In doing this:

- They can identify their learning goals (what they need to learn), their learning processes (how they will learn it) and how they will evaluate and use their learning
- They have well-founded conceptions of learning
- They have a range of learning approaches and skills
- They can organize their learning
- They have good information processing skills
- They are well motivated to learn



<p><b>STANCE TOWARDS LEARNING</b></p> <p>Orientation to learning Appropriate conceptions of learning Deep approach to learning A range of appropriate learning strategies</p>	<p><b>WILLINGNESS TO LEARN</b></p> <p>Balance of vocational, academic, personal and social motivations to learn Intrinsic motivation Extrinsic motivation Goals Short-Medium-Long Confidence</p>
<p><b>INFORMATION SKILLS</b></p> <p>Recognise information need Addressed information 'gap' Construct strategies for locating information Locate and access information Compare and evaluate information Organise, apply and communicate information</p>	<p><b>MANAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Study skills Planning and problem solving Evaluation &amp; Metacognition Self-assessment Focus &amp; 'stickability' Time and project management Balancing social, work and learning needs Assessment</p>

## 1 Developing a conceptual stance towards Higher Learning

Students come to University from diverse social, cultural and educational backgrounds, which influence their expectations of Higher Education. One factor that can inhibit their learning and success is the mismatch between their expectations and those of the programme. It is important that students develop an appropriate conceptual stance towards their learning. This involves understanding what is meant by 'higher learning', as well as accepting responsibility for their own learning, developing high level intellectual skills, including reflection and metacognition, and understanding and developing their own approaches to learning.

Although it is necessary for students to reflect continuously on their learning and conceptions, a key time to engage with students on these is on arrival into university, so as to encourage effective orientations and deep approaches to learning, and to develop a culture of reflection and engagement which will support them through their university studies.

## 2 Motivation and engagement

Engaged learners are active in their learning, in both formal and informal environments. They have a natural sense of curiosity about their subject and its wider context. They demonstrate a balance of vocational, academic, personal and social motivations to learn, and can distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to learn. Motivation can be encouraged by socialising the learning; developing effective working relationships; offering choice in learning goals and processes; providing positive feedback; introducing realistic challenges and offering the opportunities to develop self-confidence.

## 3 Information skills

The Standing Conference of University Librarians (SCONUL) describes the seven pillars of information literacy as the ability to:

- Recognize a need for information
- Distinguish ways in which the information 'gap' may be addressed
- Construct strategies for locating information
- Locate and access information
- Compare and evaluate information obtained from different sources
- Organize, apply and communicate information to others in ways appropriate
- Synthesize and build upon existing information, contributing to the creation of new knowledge

## 4 Managing learning

In order for students to be able to operate autonomously, it is important for them to develop an approach to managing their learning; managing themselves; and managing relationships in ways that maximise their ability to succeed in their academic lives. This can be encapsulated intuitively in the notions of personal effectiveness; reflections on the nature and degree of personal autonomy; and informed agency in the context of a complex academic environment. For many students, this can be seen as an evolving capability in relation to the different demands and challenges presented by their learning experiences and learning goals.

Specifically, this will involve students developing effective study, planning, problem solving and time and project management skills; demonstrating focus and resilience; being able to balance social, work and learning needs; and having the metacognition to balance the demands of assessment, self-assessment and evaluation of their learning.

The CPLA Team		
Name	Position	E-Mail
Ivan Moore	CPLA Director	i.moore@shu.ac.uk
Ranald Macdonald	Associate Director	R.Macdonald@shu.ac.uk
Mike Bramhall	Associate Director ACES	M.D.Bramhall@shu.ac.uk
Roger Lloyd-Jones	Associate Director D&S	R.Lloyd-Jones@shu.ac.uk
Sue Walsh	Associate Director HWB	S.E.Walsh@shu.ac.uk
Christine O'Leary	Associate Director O&M	C.T.OLeary@shu.ac.uk
Joanna Elfving-Hwang	Researcher / Developer	j.k.elfving-hwang@shu.ac.uk
Kenisha Garnett	Researcher / Developer	k.garnett@shu.ac.uk
Diane Foster	CETL Manager	d.t.foster@shu.ac.uk
Richard French	CETL Administrator	r.french@shu.ac.uk
Jason Bailey	Resources Development Assistant	j.bailey@shu.ac.uk
Chris Corker	CETL Student Intern	Chris.Corker@shu.ac.uk

For more information on CPLA visit <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/cetl/cplahome.html>

The next CPLA Newsletter will be available early February and will cover the poster exhibition

Editor: Chris Corker