

## Validation

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## Mission

“We are creating opportunity for those for whom university does not fit, we are making learning & teaching more fulfilling and more delightful, we are looking to widen participation in higher education and promote life-long learning, we are making learning meaningful in people's lives.”

Not everyone can fit the demands of place, time, learning approach nor assessment method favoured at university.

Learning can and should be fulfilling and delightful, as John Heron analyses ‘delight’:

Appreciation - a delight that springs from the love of aesthetic form

“The emotions of a fulfilled imaginal sensibility are of a range and subtlety that outstrip the power of language to symbolize them. Hence they are conveyed by the non-discursive symbolism of drawing, painting, sculpture, music and dance.”

Interest - a delight that springs from the love of knowledge

“When the need to understand is realized, we experience interest, extending into curiosity and fascination, the passion for truth, excitement in intellectual discovery, pleasure in the clear communication of ideas.”

Zest - a delight that springs from the love of action

“the emotions involved in the fulfilment of free choice and effective action” including “relish, gusto, exhilaration, achievement and work satisfaction”

Heron, J, *Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in another key*. London and Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992.

Leitch has recommended a widening of participation beyond 18-30 - see next slide.

Learners crave meaningful learning - we want to promote and deliver it.

## Background (1)

- Oleg Liber responsible for online modules on MEd at Bangor University from 1994 - 2002
- Oleg Liber developed, validated and managed delivery of 100% online degree at Bangor University 2000
- Stephen Heppell and Richard Millwood developed, validated and managed online MA in Education at Anglia Polytechnic University 1994 - 2002
- Ultraversity Project at Ultralab 2003 - present

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## Background (2)

- A research & development project from 2003-2006 undertaken at Anglia Ruskin University
- Successfully developed & delivered degree
- Focus on learners' action to improve 'work' context
- 3 years, part-time but full-time
- Located in the discipline of action research
- 100% online, no face-to-face, no subjects, no exams
- Model adopted for MA Creative Media Practice at Bournemouth University

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The Ultraversity Project identified a need for higher education for working people, who could not afford to be at university due to financial, family or access issues.

The development began in earnest in January 2003, accelerated to recruit before July 2003 in order to satisfy the university's need to fulfil HEFCE targets.

The major work of the project has been the development of the BA (Hons) Learning Technology Research.

The motivation to improve the 'work' context is the students' driver and the degree is intended to equip students to do this whilst learning and throughout life. No subject is specified, but action research is the core discipline in this fully online course. The first face-to-face meeting for many is the graduation ceremony - 120 of 140 turned up for the first major ceremony in November 2006. The degree was first validated in May 2003 and then a second time in 2005, due to the university deciding to re-validate all programmes.

In July 2006, the first cohort of 148 student researchers graduated, as a part of a pathway of around 300.

This first product was the BA programme, but in 2005/6 Ultralab acted as consultants to Bournemouth University in the development of an MA in Creative Media Practice, intended for professionals in the broadcast, film and other entertainment industries, whose workplace was the essential place to learn and for whom attendance could be difficult.



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This television report on BBC's regional news programme, Look East, surprised me with how well it summarised some major aspects of our Ultraversity project's degree programme. Here is a transcript and the features which are so cleverly articulated. Well done to the BBC, their reporter John Halford, Jane Day our successful student and to my colleague Malcolm Moss in Ultralab for masterminding the whole thing! My comments in red:

"A Teaching Assistant in Essex has just gained an honours degree after studying entirely over the Internet." Quick summary of the whole thing! Identifies workforce, learning outcome, medium.

"She did it in three years without meeting any of her tutors or fellow students." Its as quick as a face-to-face degree, no travel necessary.

"Jane Day is 46." It fits a life-long learning agenda.

"She left school with just three O-levels." It has an open admissions policy and thus fits a widening participation agenda.

"Exams weren't her thing." Innovation in assessment has been a key factor.

"Then, three years ago she saw that Anglia Ruskin University was offering a degree course." It is a 'kosher' degree from a proper university.

"I wanted to do the degree, because I wanted to do something for myself. Obviously I have looked after my family, over the last twenty-odd years, and I just felt I wanted to do something for myself." It provides personal fulfilment.

"Jane's course was called Learning, Technology and Research," The title (not sure about that!) so others can find it.

"...and so that she could carry on working, she did it entirely over the Internet." It doesn't require you to give up the day job or ask for time off.

"On the computer we had our own filing cabinets where we could submit our work," It organises an e-portfolio.

"...and it was sent and collected at the other end," It was a reliable mechanism.

"...it was then marked and sent back to us via the Internet with our marks on." Assessment for learning.

"Of course there's another distance learning specialist in this region. Is the Open University concerned about a possible rival? No, I don't think we're worried. We may learn something from Anglia Ruskin, but I don't think that we feel threatened by them, we're pleased with what they've done." The competition rate it.

"Until now, Jane Day has only been able to get to know her fellow students through the computer, but that's about to change. Made quite a few friends, and it's going to be really exciting when we meet up in November for our graduation to put faces to names." The social element has not been missing and mutual support is important.

"As a learning support assistant, Jane earns about ten thousand pounds a year." This degree helps those on lower salaries ...

"With a 2.1 honours degree in the bank," ... to get a good degree ...

"she's now thinking about getting a postgraduate teaching qualification." ... to continue the life-long learning adventure ...

"Her earnings could more than double," ... and increase earning power and career prospects!

"John Halford, BBC Look East." Stonking!

## Widening participation

- Values around concepts of social justice
- National economic arguments
- University of Bolton strategic plan

This project is based upon the premise that conventional models of study at university fail to meet the needs of a significant number of potential students, their employers and society.

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On 5 December 2006, Lord Leitch published his final report, 'Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World Class Skills'. It examines the UK's long-term skills needs and sets out ambitious goals for 2020 which, if achieved, would make the UK a world leader in skills.

The Report's Key Recommendations:

The report recommends that the UK commits to become a world leader in skills by 2020. This means increasing skills attainment at all levels by 2020 so that:

- 95% of working age adults have basic skills in both functional literacy and numeracy – rising from 85% and 79% respectively in 2005;
- more than 90% of adults are skilled to GCSE level or to vocational equivalents – rising from 69% in 2005;
- the number of apprentices in the UK is increased to 500,000 by 2020, with improved quantity and quality; and
- more than 40% of adults are skilled to graduate level and above – up from 29% in 2005.

Lord Leitch recommendations of particular importance to the HE sector:

- Launching a new 'pledge' for employers to train more employees at work (particularly important bearing in mind that more than 70% of the 2020 workforce is already in the workforce today). If insufficient progress has been made by 2010, introducing a statutory right for employees to access workplace training;
- Increasing employer investment in higher level qualifications, especially in Apprenticeships and in degree and postgraduate levels;
- Significantly increasing training in the workplace;

## Which students?

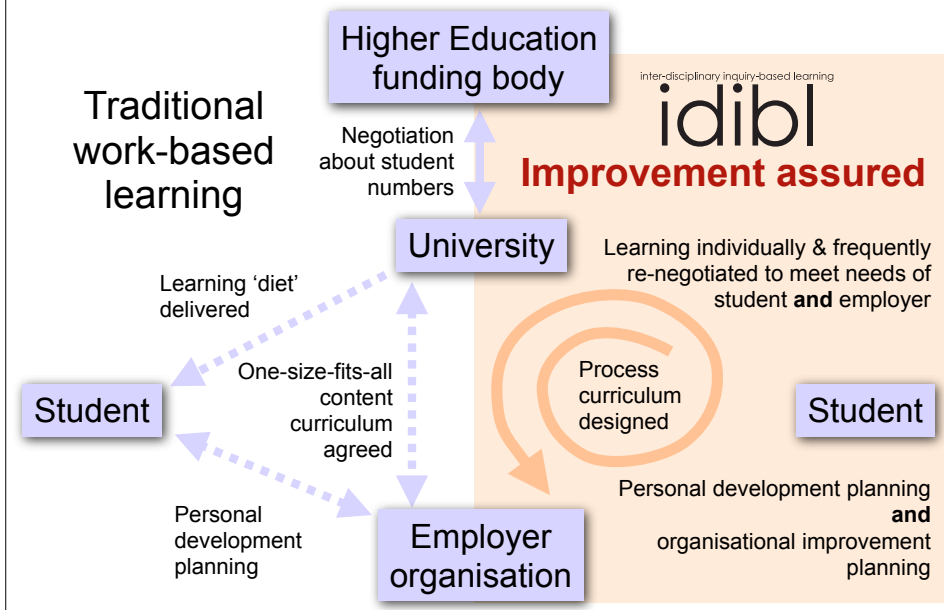
1. Need to continue in full-time paid employment;
2. Wish to make their study directly relevant to work;
3. Family commitments prevent their on-campus attendance;
4. Campus attendance difficult;
5. Develop further their communicative creativity & technological understanding as a complete professional;
6. Traditional examinations and academic essay writing are either intimidating or uninviting;
7. Seeking the company, support and intellectual challenge of fellow students rather than studying alone and the possibility to work on joint ventures and study collaboratively.

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	Benefits for:		
Flexibility in:	Student	University	Employer
<b>Time</b>	Full time work, family, best time for learning	Timetable, staffing	No release needed
<b>Place</b>	As above and best place to study	No rooms, no car parking	As above
<b>Assessment</b>	Finding voice, creativity, technology	Retention, graduate competencies	Communicative employees
<b>Negotiated curriculum</b>	Motivation, perseverance, meaningfulness.	Retention, focus on process quality, relevance to society.	Relevance
<b>Action Inquiry</b>	Basis in 'delight' - zest and interest	Practitioner data eg collection of case studies	Effective improvement

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# Organisational improvement



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A caricature of the development of Foundation Degrees would suggest that it is a 'stitch-up' between employer and university, which is slow to develop and is then applied to the 'patient' after a protracted development. The curriculum suffers from being difficult to up-date and inflexible if oriented towards content in fast-moving professional contexts.

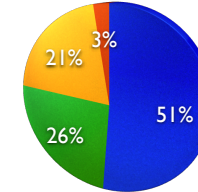
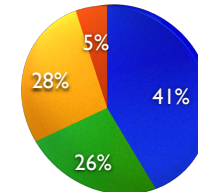
IDIBL has developed a process curriculum, which does not define any detailed content, focussing instead on the disciplines of action enquiry, organisational change, digital creativity and exhibition.

It is contended that these disciplines, when linked to the twin drivers of personal fulfilment and organisational improvement set up the learner for lifelong learning and the organisation for considerable assurance of improvement.

# Market research

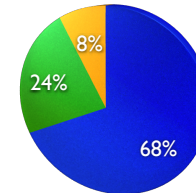
A questionnaire completed by 39 students indicated that some of the reasons for choosing this course are:

Concerned with 'ability to learn', not previous academic ability  
Based on the work people do, as opposed to a specific subject

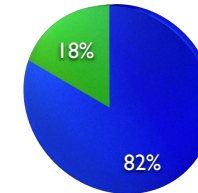


● Very important  
● Important  
● Not that important  
● Not important at all

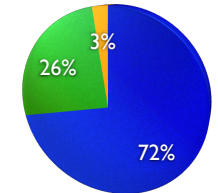
Only three years duration



The ability to work and study



The way the course is work-based and flexible



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Additional data supports the view that students undertook this degree because they wanted to develop themselves in their current profession and job, rather than primarily as a means of 'escaping' somewhere else!

Enabled me to change my career direction (%):

Very important - 7 (18)  
 Important - 12 (31)  
 Not that important - 13 (33)  
 Not important at all - 6 (15)

Help me find the specific job I wanted (%):

Very important - 8 (21)  
 Important - 13 (33)  
 Not that important - 13 (33)  
 Not important at all - 5 (13)

The way the course is work-based and flexible (%):

Very important - 28 (72)  
 Important - 10 (26)  
 Not that important - 1 (3)  
 Not important at all - 0 (0)

The ability to work and study (%):

Very important - 32 (82)  
 Important - 7 (18)  
 Not that important - 0 (3)  
 Not important at all - 0 (0)

## 'Work' in its broadest definition

30 Thursday, August 3rd, 2006

www.doncastertoday.co.uk

DONCASTER FREE PRESS

# Using life's challenges to learn

EVE Thirkle was just three months into a degree course when her son was diagnosed as autistic.

But Eve didn't panic and abandon the course. Instead she used her studies to find out more about ten-year-old Jonathan's condition and how she could help him.

"The degree, a BA (Hons) in Learning, Technology and Research, is based around your work," said Eve, 47.

"When I started the course, I was working as a teaching assistant at Kingfisher Primary School."

"But when Jonathan was diagnosed, I gave up my job to look after him and was able to base my coursework around him."

Jonathan, a pupil at Canon Popham Primary School, has high-functioning autism. He is excellent at maths but strug-

## WOMEN

gles with some everyday situations.

"When I'm cross with him, he just doesn't pick up on it at all," explained Eve. "I have to tell him I'm cross and how cross I am on a scale of one to ten because he is very mathematical."

The degree course allowed her to carry out a year-long study looking at how she and husband, David, 45, an accountant at DMBC, could improve their parenting skills and change the home environment to best help Jonathan.

"It gave me a focus at a time when it was very easy to get depressed," said Eve, who recently became chairman of Doncaster Autistic Society. "It

was something for me to do that made me step outside the day-to-day situation and made me feel I was doing something about it."

The qualification, offered by Anglia Ruskin University, is available for study online which was ideal for Eve in her changed circumstances.

Although the former radiographer does admit it was a steep learning curve getting to grips with the IT skills.

She said: "I started out with only slightly more than basic computer knowledge but, by the end of the course, I could produce video, web pages and sound clips."

Another bonus of the course was the virtual friends she made along the way.

"I have made some good friends online and I am looking forward to meeting them at the graduation ceremony."



Eve Thirkle, 47, of Langfield Drive, Edenthorpe, celebrates after achieving a first class degree in Learning Technology and Research. She used her work with her autistic son Jonathan, ten, as a basis for her research. (D7633LP)

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'Work' is defined broadly and includes voluntary and domestic activity. The activity needs to be capable of improvement and research.

An interesting example from Ultraversity was Eve Thirkle who started the degree as a Teaching Assistant, but her son was diagnosed with autism three months later. Eve switched to studying his development needs and her role in as a parent raising him.

Eve graduated with a First Class honours degree in July 2006.

From her local newspaper, Doncaster Today:

"It gave me a focus at a time when it was very easy to get depressed," said Eve, who recently became chair of the Doncaster Autistic Society.

In this cohort of Ultraversity, the average age of students was 40 and 80% were women. The age and gender profile matches teaching assistants, but there are significant 'outliers' aged as young as 18 and as old as 60.

One student researcher, aged 18, left school with three A-levels to take up a post as a Teaching Assistant. He subsequently signed up for the degree and graduated in July 2006, having studied full-time and worked full-time in the job he loved.

## The offer to students

- The course is built around you and your 'work'
- Your aim is to improve your workplace and life for those around you
- You learn to apply some research and rigour
- You build on your expertise and on that of your fellow students
- The online learning environment is a palpable and extensive one
- You are no longer alone but will join a community of like-minded improvers and make friends

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The learning facilitator engages in a process of negotiation and contract setting to identify the focus of an inquiry around the students' 'work' and the opportunity to improve some aspect.

Students are required to justify data collection methods, use relevant literature, employ best practice and engage with theoretical concepts & analysis informed by critical reflection, based on their and found evidence.

The course is founded on a purposeful online community with the inclusion of experts to offer knowledge & peer review and facilitators modelling criticality & assuring 'graduateness'.

Eve Thirkle's Learning Contract for  
module UNB2602 'Investigating the  
Work Setting'

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Activity	Learning Contract
I	<p>“Although I feel that I already know a lot about my job, there are a number of things I could do to find out more. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- creating a list using my own experience of what I need to be able to do</li><li>- review my job description</li><li>- use metasearch engine (dogpile)to search for background information from online newspapers</li><li>- use the Internet to go to specific government websites that have information about the work I do</li><li>- use the Internet to go to teaching assistant websites</li><li>- develop a questionnaire with a colleague which will be given to our line manager, the teaching staff we work with and other colleagues working in similar jobs within our organisation - the questions will relate to what we should know and be able to do</li><li>- get in touch with another organisation, or expert and ask them what they think they key things are that someone in my work role needs to be able to do”</li></ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Completed 5/10/2003</b></p>

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Activity	Learning Contract
2	<p>“The steps for carrying out my self assessment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- constructing a list of 10 things that are important in my job</li> <li>- listing them in order of importance</li> <li>- marking myself on each of the points on the list. I think that 4 or 5 levels would be enough from confident through to know little, but this will be trial and error until I find out what works for me.</li> <li>- talking through my self-assessment with a colleague at work</li> <li>- discussing any major issues in the online community with other researchers</li> <li>- produce a list of things I wish to research further”</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Completed 26/10/2003</b></p>

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Activity	Learning Contract
3	<p>“Our school is one of the pilot schools for the Government initiative "Remodelling the Workforce", regarding the change to be introduced to school assistants' roles to relieve the teaching staff workloads. I will attend the meeting to introduce it to the school on 20th October.</p> <p>There will be a School Change Team (SCT) set up consisting of staff from various disciplines. I hope to become a member of this team. The SCT will be looking at the way the school is set up at present, the job roles and possible changes in working patterns.</p> <p>I hope to be able to identify the way the school is organised and illustrate on a JellyOS page. I have arranged to attend a First Aid course via INSET training in November.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Completed 16/11/2003</b></p>

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Activity	Learning Contract
4	<p>“I hope to set up a discussion board on behaviour management in the research community and also see whether any other researchers have information available that I may use. I will also investigate the possibility of undertaking some study on this via the school or LEA, although the ‘Remodelling the workforce’ initiative will be taking the priority for training needs this year.</p> <p>I need to find out more information on the National Curriculum relevant to my role – I will do this on line – via the DfES website and links. I will also arrange to have a discussion with my line manager regarding relevant publications available within the school.</p> <p>I will look at further research into learning styles, building on the initial Ultraversity exercises from the summer of 2003. I will use search engines to identify useful websites. I will also use the Athens system to identify articles for further reading.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Completed 30/11/2003</b></p>

### Learning Facilitator feedback:

Eve re LAI: Yes that is a good modification to the suggested tasks and should give you plenty to keep you busy! Remember about backup of your Word Docs...essential activity that we all usually learn the hard way! Make sure to keep all the details of how you completed these tasks as the process of doing these things is just as important as the findings. Maybe you could share some of the results of your labours late next week with me? I don't expect you'll have done them all! All the interviews could be recorded of course and uploaded to JellyOS when it becomes fully functional. Just tell me when you have done them. We can talk about how to do this then. I'll produce a crib sheet and walk you through how to save them as Wav. files. Well done.

## Patchwork

1. Students negotiate a learning contract in the light of module learning outcomes and assessment criteria
2. They carry out planned learning activities producing 'patches' in genre and media which are creative and effective for them
3. The last activity is to create a 'stitching piece' which accounts for the learning journey, referencing learning outcomes for the module
4. The work is marked and moderated by the team for rigour, quality and level against the assessment criteria

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Instead of exams, students' successes and attainments are documented, exhibited and evaluated by stakeholders and peers.

The innovation in assessment in this project is founded on the Patchwork Text model of Professor Richard Winter ( <http://web.apu.ac.uk/richardwinter/pt.html> ).

In this model, students are encouraged to communicate often, in relatively small pieces, using a range of genre and media.

The key element is the stitching of these pieces, reflecting on the learning journey made.

Students are finally expected to develop and 'mount' an exhibition to an audience of peers and stakeholders. This carefully constructed exhibition leads to findings and conclusions validated by practitioners and assures confident dissemination.

## Exhibition

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## What did they study?

### Action Enquiry titles analysed by principal theme and workforce for 148 researchers in their final year, 2006

		total in each workforce							
		1	2	10	1	13	3	1	117
total in each theme	workforces themes	care	charity	early years	HE	health	LEA	research	school
4	assessment					1			3
3	behaviour								3
17	communication			3		1	3		10
2	community				1			1	
2	CPD								2
8	environment	1							7
6	inclusion					1			5
28	learning			3		4			21
19	literacy								19
13	management					5			8
1	multicultural								1
2	numeracy			1					1
9	parents			3		1			5
17	pastoral		1						16
5	resources		1						4
7	special needs								7
5	teaching								5

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Data from the Ultraversity Project.

The school workforce (final column, numbering 117) dominates in the first cohort, but in subsequent cohorts the diversity has increased.

The majority of actions (highlighted in red) were on themes of learning, literacy, pastoral care and communication.

I believe this reassures employers that left to their own devices, together with a commitment to improve the workplace, students will research the issues that are current and relevant.

## Confidence

- The degree works - 140 graduates in 2006 above average proportion of First Class honours
- 86% of students agreed that there had been significant personalisation of the learning experience
- 71% reported significant workplace impact
- See publications from [idibl.bolton.ac.uk](http://idibl.bolton.ac.uk)



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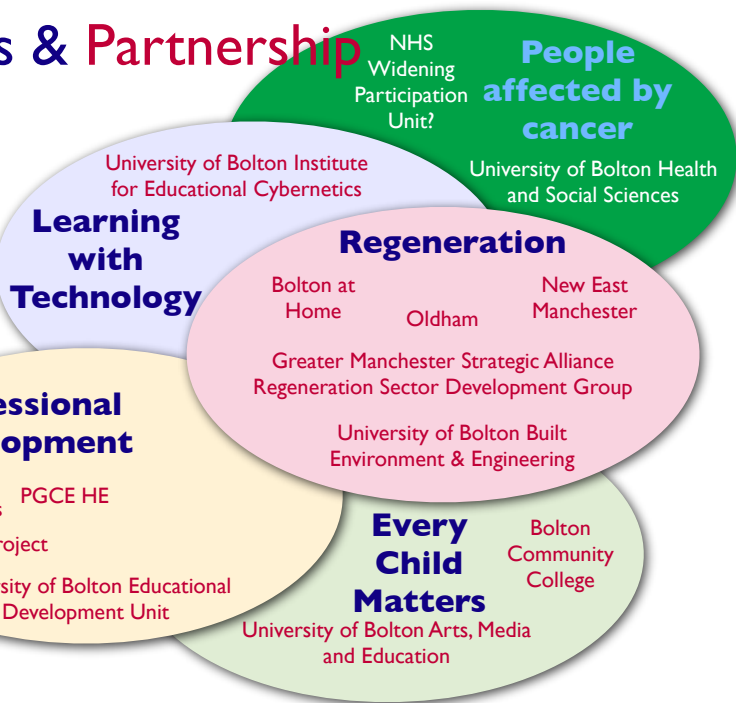
These statistics and the papers we have written based on student evidence have given us great confidence in the approach.

# Themes & Partnership



Institute for Educational Cybernetics

Inter-disciplinary inquiry-based learning  
**idibl**



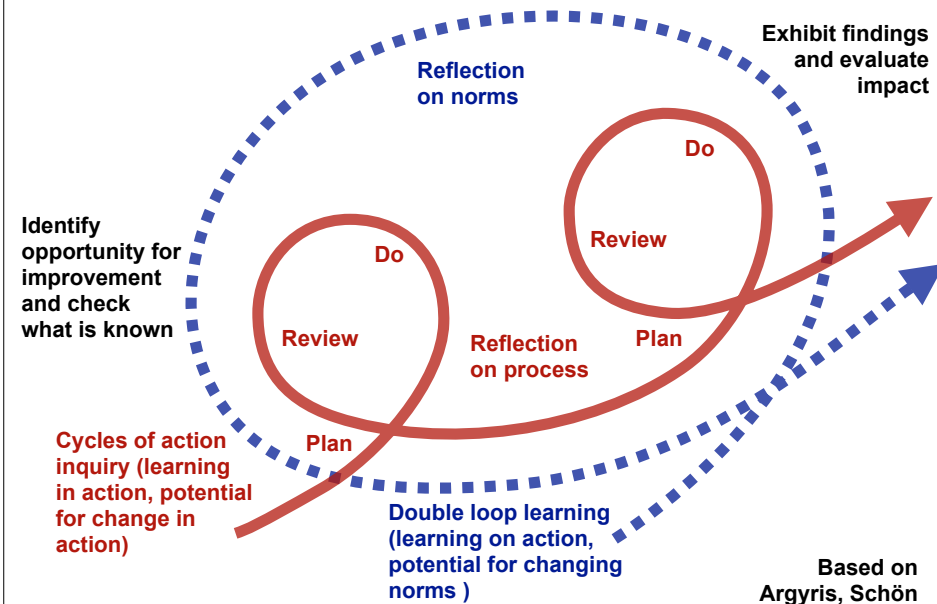
As part of the Institute for Educational Cybernetics, IDIBL is partnering with organisations within and without the University of Bolton. These partnerships will help us fulfil our and their aims, bring funding, help recruit students or simply add value to the degrees' recognition. The partnerships are organised into themes which will provide the glue between groups of students. Each theme is a contemporary shared concern for improvement around which professionals are collaborating.

level 3	level 4 Certificate of HE	level 5 Diploma / Foundation	level 6 Bachelors	level 7 Masters	level 8 Doctorate
	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4+</b>	<b>Year 6+</b>
	Investigating the professional context	Organisational Impact	Review and Planning	Analysing the Professional Context	Professional Studies
	Understanding reflective practice	Reflection on Practice	Action Inquiry Project Preparation	Organisational Improvement	
	Technology for Communication & Organisation	Independent Lifelong Learning	Implement Action Inquiry Project	Action Research	
	Understanding action inquiry	Action in the Work Context	Exhibition, Validation and Synthesis	Action Research Preparation	
	<b>120 credits</b>	<b>120 credits</b>	<b>120 credits</b>	Action, Research Exhibition, Validation and Synthesis	
<b>Access</b>			<b>Access</b>		
Improvement in the Work Context			Improvement in the Work Context		
<b>20 credits</b>			<b>20 credits</b>	<b>180 credits</b>	<b>360 credits</b>

Inter-disciplinary inquiry-based learning  
**idibl Framework**

This is a proposed framework for defining the process curriculum. In addition, implementation plans and professional development will need to be developed and enacted, and a particular challenge is the issue of negotiated award titles.

# Inquiry-based learning



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An Action Research model is the basis for this version of Inquiry Based Learning.

Initially student researchers identify where improvement can be made in their workplace.

After checking what is known about the potential, they plan action, do it and review, reviewing their process as the cycle is repeated to improve.

Student researchers are guided to a double loop of reflection, looking outside the action's scope to the surrounding organisation and questioning its norms as part of the context for action.

# Online community of inquiry



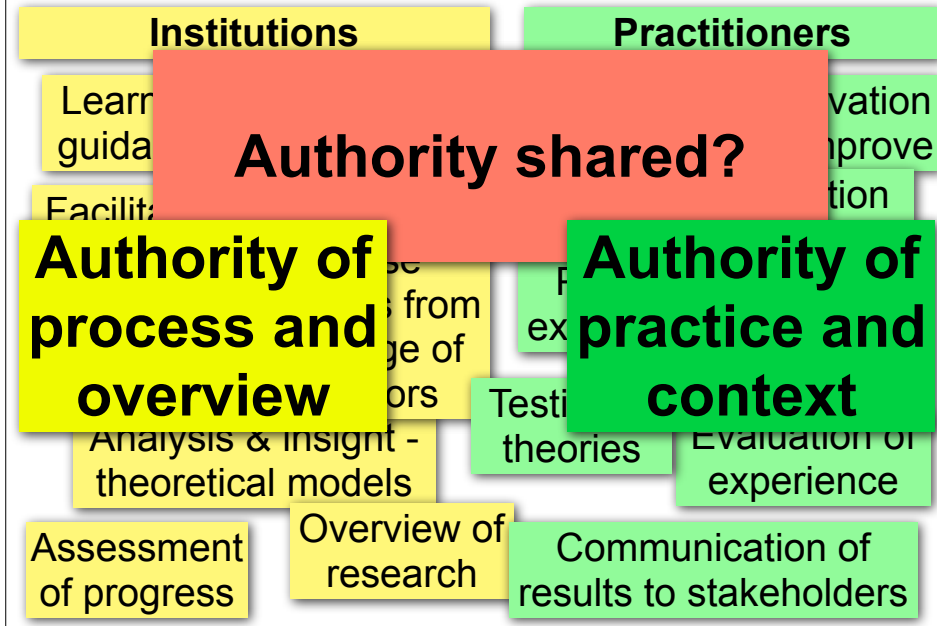
## In Pursuit of Change and Understanding

Bob Dick is an Australian academic who has done pioneering work in both action research and developing 'learning' websites. Born a Presbyterian, and by nature rational and skeptical, he has come to value metaphor and story. He feels the later complements the former, or is it the other way around? As an action researcher, coming from a scientific background, Bob is well placed to lead this dialogue on action research and other methods.

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This is just one example of the rich learning experience for students in the online community of inquiry. Hotseat guests provide both process and subject expertise to push forward students thinking and research abilities exposing them to expert practitioners and leading edge thinking in a particular field.

## New rôles



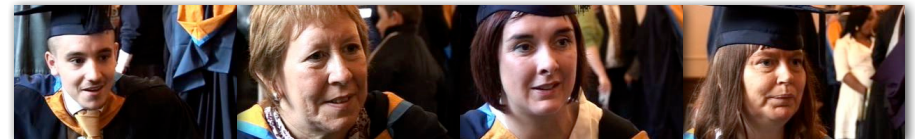
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It is important to identify the rôle of the institution when the focus is on the student researcher and on their workplace.

In our view, although there are authoritative strengths in both university and workplace, this is a case of sharing authority, blurring the boundaries and extending the university into the workplace.

## Students to become mature professional practitioners

- Comfortable with innovation as an **innovator**
- A **contributor** to knowledge
- Confident to be a critical **questioner**
- An **initiator** of proposals
- A competent **exploiter** of emerging technologies



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The outcome is a mature professional practitioner comfortable with innovation, contributing to knowledge in the workplace and beyond, confident to critically question initiatives and initiate proposals. Furthermore, the graduate should maintain competence to exploit emerging technologies in a world which is rapidly moving into an information age.