

Developing a Framework To Support Undergraduate Students on Placement

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requirements of Nottingham Trent University for
the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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PREFACE

This preface is written at the suggestion of my examiners. It is written following my viva voce at the completion of my Phd, but not the completion of my research. As you read this thesis you will find that it is not written in a 'traditional' Phd structure. I explain the reasons for this in chapter one where I draw on the experience of Davies (2007), both the writing of her thesis and the feedback from her examiners.

To consider starting a Phd, whether full-time or part-time is a fundamental step to take in terms of your professional and personal development. Researchers talk about a 'journey'. My journey has at times been challenging and painful but overall a rewarding one. As I reflect back on the journey of my Phd I have mixed emotions but am now able to recognise how much I have grown and developed as an action researcher and also as a person.

What I do in this preface is explain that as part of my journey I have completed my Phd but it is not an end to my research journey, it is another step and it is important that you, the reader, know that my research is not finished. For example in chapter one you will be introduced to the notion of my developing living educational theory. A living educational theory is a theory that is tested against rigorous evidence and the critical feedback of others. Action researchers, such as Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead (2006 and 2009) write that living educational theories are not ground in certainty as propositional theories are, but continue to grow and develop as the researcher continues to develop. This is true of my experience. It was not until the final year of my research and after much critical reflection that I was able to recognise that I had developed a living educational theory. This is a theory that develops through the thesis and is articulated in chapter 7, but will continue to change as I change and develop.

At the start of my Phd journey I gave little thought to the viva voce, which is possibly true of many Phd students. It is often too far removed at the outset to consider. Reflecting on my experience as an action researcher I have come to value that the viva voce is an integral part of the examination process. It is not separate.

The discussions and conversations with the examiners of my thesis provided an opportunity for me to explain aspects of my research. I found this to be a significant part of action research; to open your evidence to the critical feedback of others, in this case the examiners.

My advice to new action researchers is to continue to reflect throughout your research and in particular at the point where you are ready to submit your Phd. It took me a long time to recognise the importance of reflection as part of the action research process which I speak of in this thesis. As this process of my critical reflection has developed I have come to recognise how my ontological and epistemological values were an intrinsic part of my research and the importance of being able to identify and articulate my living educational theory. I was also able to recognise the importance of articulating how my ontological and epistemological values transformed through my research into standards of judgement against which my research could be tested.

As my reflections have matured, I have grown in confidence as a researcher and now recognise that I am able to ground my research in the scholarship of my own authority. The viva voce has been a significant and integral part of the process and I welcome the opportunity I was given to open my evidence to the critical feedback of the examiners.

The process of my development as an action researcher is still on-going and what you are about to read is a thesis that is unfinished. You may come to things in the thesis that I no longer think because as I continue to theorise and develop my living educational theory I find my thinking has changed. My research continues as I continue to develop as an action researcher. My reflections are further developed in chapter eight. My journey continues.

Abstract

This research sets out to explore the role of work-based learning within non-vocational under-graduate programmes. It is based on a longitudinal study focussing on three degree programmes within the School of Education at Nottingham Trent University. The focus for this research is on a short period of WBL experience, that is, a maximum of forty five days in length, organised by the student and approved and supported by Nottingham Trent University.

The claim that I am making is the development of a framework for work-based learning for non-vocational undergraduate students within the School of Education at Nottingham Trent University, and the development of a living educational theory of practice. This is an original contribution to knowledge through investigating and improving my practice. A distinctive feature of my thesis is my explanation of how my ontological values of justice, respect and caring, have transformed into the living critical standards of judgement by which I wish my work to be evaluated.

The research began as part of my journey as work-based learning co-ordinator to improve the quality of students' experience, and ensure the curriculum underpinning the placement was appropriate. Action research was the chosen methodology. The key issues of this research have been to examine the difficulties experienced by stakeholders, namely students, mentors and colleagues, and then to develop, through yearly cycles, a framework for WBL whereby students have a quality experience. This framework has been tested, is sufficiently flexible to be appropriate in a variety of contexts, and incorporates new understandings about ideas and practices. The research evolved over a period of three cycles of action research during which time evaluation of evidence led to incremental and measurable enhancements to the student learning experience.

Following the initial three cycles and the developed framework which is articulated in this thesis, in the true ethos of action research further cycles have emerged. These later cycles utilise Web 2.0 technology to support students while on work-based learning and are reported within this thesis. I have now started to share the framework both internally and externally to Nottingham Trent University.

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Lastly, but not least, I am grateful to my parents, Pat and Alan Richardson, and my daughter Holly, who have helped me to maintain my perspective, and keep my life balanced during this research.

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Acronyms

AGR	Association of Graduate Recruiters
ASQC	Academic Standards and Quality Committee
BAT	BSc (Hons) Business and Technology
BICT	BSc (Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology
BLSE	BA (Hons) Business, Leisure, and Sports Education
CAP	Centre for Academic Practice
CASQ	Centre for Academic Standards and Quality
CHERI	Centre for Higher Education Research and Information
CL	Course Leader
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
ELCE	Experiential Learning and Community Engagement
ESECT	Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team
FE	Further Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
LEA	Local Education Authority
MASh	Module assessment sheet (feed back sheet for assignments)
NCWE	National Centre for Work Experience
NCIHE	National Committee Of Inquiry Into Higher Education
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
NNEBP	North Nottinghamshire Education and Business Partnership
PDP	Professional Development Profile
PED	BA (Hons) Psychology and Educational Development
PL	Programme Leader

PPD	Personal and Professional Development
PSQR	Programme Standards and Quality Report
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QCA	Qualifications Curriculum Agency
RMT	Revalidation Management Team
SASQC	School Academic Standards and Quality Committee
SMT	Senior Management Team
SME	Small and medium employer
SWE	Supervised work experience
TEC	Training and Enterprise Council
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
VC	Vice Chancellor
VLE	Virtual learning environment
VLP	Virtual learning portal
WBL	Work based learning
WPL	Work-place learning
WRL	Work-related learning

TERMINOLOGY

While undertaking this research the Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education, within the Faculty of Education, was renamed the School of Education. There are some references, correct at the time of writing, to the Faculty of Education and Department of Secondary Education.

When I first took over co-ordination of work-based learning, it was called Applied Studies. Whilst the text of this document refers to WBL, some of the appendices and other documentation will still refer to Applied Studies: please read this as work-based learning.

Under the revalidation in 2001, referred to in chapter four, the names of the BSc (Hons) Business and Technology (BAT) degree programme changed to BSc (Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology (BICT). References in the text reflect this change, but some of the older data does refer to Business and Technology (BAT).

When I refer to 'quality' in the context of this thesis I am referring to an experience that meets a minimum standard, unless explicitly stated otherwise. This point is expanded in chapter 7.

Archives

- 1a Applied Studies Evaluation
- 1b BAT/BICT Evaluation analysis Cycle One
- 1c BAT/BICT Quality Evaluation analysis Cycle One
- 1d PED and BLSE Review and Evaluation Days Evaluation analysis Cycle One
- 1e PED and BLSE Quality Evaluation analysis Cycle One
- 1f PED and BLSE Evaluation analysis Cycle One
- 1g PED and BLSE Evaluation analysis Cycle Two
- 1h PED and BLSE Quality Evaluation analysis Cycle Two
- 1i BAT/BICT Evaluation analysis Cycle Two
- 1j BAT/BICT Quality Evaluation analysis Cycle Two
- 1k PED and BLSE Review and Evaluation Days Evaluation analysis Cycle Two
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- 1m PED and BLSE Quality Evaluation analysis Cycle Three
- 1n BAT/BICT Evaluation analysis Cycle Three
- 1o BAT/BICT Quality Evaluation analysis Cycle Three
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- 4a Tutor Handbook
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- 5b Key Skills Placement Sheet
- 5c Undergraduate Student Handbook
- 5d Undergraduate Health and Safety briefing for WBL
- 5e Undergraduate 1st Year Briefing for WB
- 5f Work Placement Report - Mentor Feedback Pro-forma
- 5g Example: Letter of application pro-forma
- 5h Example: CV pro-forma
- 5i Example: Progress chart
- 6 PSQR Quotations
- 6a Nottingham Trent University Health and Safety Policy for WBL - 2001
- 6b Nottingham Trent University Health and Safety Proposed Guidelines for WBL - 2007
- 6c ASQC Policy for Placement and WBL
- 6d Higher Education Academy document: Futures: Where Should the HE Sector Focus Attention?
- 7 Key Skills Initial Audit
- 7a Collaborative Conference Programme: 'HE: The Next Steps'
- 7b Evaluations from WBL Seminar 06
- 7c Evaluations from WBL Seminar 07
- 7d WBL Seminar Slides – June 07
- 7e Learning and Teaching Conference slides
- 7f Work-based Learning Seminar Programme 2007
- 7g Collaborative Conference Programme 'Going Further and Higher' 2008
- 8 PhD Journal
- 8a Quality Assurance Agency Report
- 8b Nottingham Trent University Revalidation Report 2001

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

This thesis sets out to present my claim to new knowledge, my contribution to new practices, and articulates how I have generated my own living educational theory of practice. The thesis focuses on a longitudinal action research study across three degree programmes within the School of Education at Nottingham Trent University (NTU), a post 1992 University in the East Midlands of England. The thesis reports on research that was undertaken to improve the experience of work-based learning (WBL) for undergraduate students on non-vocational programmes. The research consisted of three cycles (2000-2004) to produce a framework for WBL. Following an action research methodology the research has now extended into three new cycles (2005-2008) which are reported in chapter six.

This thesis articulates my claim; how I have improved what I am doing and the significance of my claim both for me and for others. The thesis is about myself and my learning and is therefore written in the first person – 'I' is at the centre of my research and enquiry. I also refer to 'we' because my learning is grounded in interactions with others, who are referred to in following chapters.

The claim that I am making is the development of an original framework for WBL for non-vocational undergraduate students within the School of Education at NTU. This is an original contribution to knowledge arrived at through the investigation and improvement of my practice. This framework has influenced the practice within the School, as discussed in chapters three, four, five and six, and has improved my own learning which is discussed throughout the thesis but specifically in chapter eight. I have

‘systematically monitored the situation and gathered data to show how things developed and [I] generated evidence whose validity [I] tested against identified criteria and standards of judgment and against the critical feed back of others’ (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009, p 44).

My claim is therefore original and based on an investigation of my practice and my ontological and epistemological values. In developing this framework I have drawn on the research of others. Within this thesis I articulate how this claim is significant. Through my articulation of each cycle I draw on my data to demonstrate a firm evidence base for this research.

As the research has evolved, my living educational theory has emerged; I discuss this in detail in chapter seven. This thesis shows how I have influenced learning and the experiences of others. The thesis articulates my educational action research, improvements in my work and learning, and is authentic and truthful.

This chapter sets out to introduce the research, the overall aims and the research questions underpinning the main data collection. I start by clarifying the term 'work-based' learning for this thesis. The following chapter will contextualise the research.

A Discussion of the Existing Practices in the Area of Work-Based Learning: Towards Clarification

While carrying out this research it became clear that there are different definitions and practices of WBL for undergraduate students in Higher Education (HE) such as work-related learning (WRL) and work-place learning (WPL). However these terms are not used consistently across the field and, as acknowledged by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (2006, p 7), this can become a barrier to 'confuse the situation and undervalue the potential benefits of WBL'. The HEA's Report (2006, p 49) states that 'everyone has a view on what work-based learning means and they use a wide range of terms interchangeably'.

Harris (in Centre for Higher Education and Research Information (CHERI) and KPMG, 2006, p 90), in her review of the academic literature on workplace learning, also found the literature to be 'philosophically, theoretically and conceptually complex'. Garnett (2008, p 32) states that confusion with the term could devalue it particularly with regard to 'quality assurance'. CHERI (2002c, p 21) also recognises 'there are problems of definition'. It is therefore important at this point to ensure there is a shared understanding of the terms related to WBL and a shared understanding of the focus of this research.

The confusion with the term 'work-based learning' became clear when conducting a literature review for this research. Texts were located such as Cunningham *et al's* (2004) 'Handbook of Work-Based Learning' which focuses on learning that takes place in the workplace as part of employee's continuing professional development (CPD) activities, although the title suggests WBL learning as opposed to WPL or WRL. The same is found of Boud and Solomon's

'Work-Based Learning: a new Higher Education' (2001), which examines the role of universities in qualifying people already in employment, that is WBL.

While discussing definitions and practices it is important to note that not all WBL experiences are compulsory although this does not lessen their significance (National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997). Some universities offer WBL as an additional experience and some will accredit the experience. Some experiences can be very brief lasting less than a day, while others can last for a year full-time, often referred to as sandwich placements. For this thesis the WBL element was a compulsory, accredited part of the year two experience of three year non-vocational undergraduate honours programmes.

CHERI (2002c, p 5) defined WBL in their research as 'to include any form of work in which an undergraduate is engaged during his or her period of study'. Little (2000, p 122) draws on Brennan and Little's (1996) definition of WBL as 'experience-led learning in the workplace'.

Brennan and Little's (1996) review of WBL within HE identifies a spectrum of experience-led WBL and lists seven types of WBL:

1. A brief encounter – lasting from half a day to seven days
2. A short project – lasting from one to seven weeks
3. A sandwich placement – lasting from six to fifteen months
4. Placements for professional development related courses such as teaching and nursing
5. Employment based learning programmes
6. Immediately post-qualifying experiences such as those for newly qualified teachers, or trainee articulated lawyers
7. Continuing Professional Development (CPD). (1996, p 7)

It is important to make it clear in this introductory chapter that the WBL referred to in this research is not related to vocational placements such as those for teaching, medicine or law, nor is it related to CPD. WBL here is focused on students taking an active role in WBL as part of their non-vocational undergraduate programme. This eliminates points four to seven from the above list. Point one is also unrelated as the placements within this research are for more than seven days.

Kitson (1993) states that sandwich placements, referred to in point three above, grew as a result of the National Council for Technological Awards (1955) and the Crick Report (1964). Nixon states that sandwich placements appear to be the most commonly found type of placement (in Bell and Harris, 1990). Harvey *et al* (1998, p 17) view the sandwich placement as 'combining a long period of immersion in the work-place setting with course relevance and well-developed structures of support and monitoring of experience'. Harvey *et al* (1997) view the sandwich placement as being the best opportunity for students to benefit from work experience. However, there are criticisms of the sandwich model, such as that by Kitson (1993, p 52) who states that 'the theoretical benefits of the sandwich year are not delivered in practice, especially for students' and advocates that utilizing workshops, industrial visits, case studies, role plays and simulations, can be 'richer in terms of learning opportunities'.

Nixon uses the term 'supervised work experience' (SWE), and defines this as 'applied learning in a work environment'. He cites the Council for National Academic Award's (CNAA) (1988, C1.4.3a, p 51) definition of a sandwich placement as 'not less than 48 weeks of supervised work experience'. Harvey *et al* (1997) recommend all undergraduates should be offered the opportunity of a one year WBL experience as a sandwich experience, and believe employers would be reluctant to provide a placement for less time. While this is supported by the findings of the Employment Studies Research Unit (ESRU) (2002, p 33) who state that 'the current demand for placements from students outweighs supply'; it is unclear whether ESRU is referring to all WBL or sandwich placements. The research within this thesis would contradict Harvey *et al* (1997) and ESRU (2002) as all students within the research were able to find appropriate placements for a maximum of one semester, the requirement for their WBL experience. Shepherd (1995, p 187) also reports that students following a 'short and thin' model of WBL found no difficulty in obtaining placements.

The type that best fits WBL within this research is therefore point two from the above list (Brennan and Little, 1996, p 7). Looking in more detail at what Brennan and Little say of this type of WBL it becomes clearer that this would define the experience of the students in this research as it is aimed at 'students of all subjects' who are taking 'a general WBL module'. Harvey *et al* (1998) discuss short-term periods as including a semester/term or one that is less than a month, neither of which represents the placements in this research.

The students within this research are taking a variety of degree programmes within the School of Education. While the module they take is not defined as a WBL module it is related directly to their WBL experience. Brennan and Little (1996, p 7) state that students undertaking this type of placement will complete 'a specific assignment in the workplace'. The students in this research have a requirement to write two assignments related to their WBL and module learning outcomes. Brennan and Little (1996, p 7) also state that the WBL experience objective will be 'immersion in a real work responsibility under sheltered conditions'. They do not define the term 'sheltered conditions' and I would argue that the students within this research were not sheltered but expected to engage in a WBL experience within a company of their choice. It could be counter-argued that the students were allocated a mentor to support them which could be viewed as sheltering them, although it should be recognized that many new permanent staff would have the same support in starting a new job. The students also have a learning contract and job description which could be viewed as a form of sheltering, but again it can be argued that all employees would have a job description. The learning contract in this research served the purpose of linking the job description to the requirements of the University, particularly in terms of learning outcomes (Brennan and Little, 1996), and carried the signatures of the University, the student and the provider as a process of confirmation of the experience. This aspect of WBL will be discussed in further detail in chapters three, four and five.

There are other definitions of WBL identified by Foster and Stephenson (1998, p 157) such as 'learners at work ... learners through work ... experience of work'; the distinctions appearing to be associated with the amount of involvement in work or education. These are not useful in distinguishing the particular students in this thesis who link to 'learners through work' and 'experience of work'. Brennan and Little (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006, p 89) expand these terms further relating learning at work to 'vocational and formal education; learning at work to 'non-formal, in-house training', and learning through work to 'the integration of learning with work'. This is more helpful in aligning our students' experiences to learning through WBL.

Harris (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006, p 89) makes the point that 'work-based learning is seen by some as a broad term embracing learning in and through work, and by others as referring only to an aspect of learning through work'.

She suggests a more appropriate term would be 'work-experience placements' to reflect an experience by full-time students as part of their academic course that is designed, assessed and controlled by the university. While this does reflect the experience of students in this research, the term work-based learning rather than work experience (see CHERI and KPMG, 2006) is the term that appears to have been adopted most widely in HE and is therefore used throughout this thesis. This definition also distinguishes the NTU student experience from the 'work experience' referred to in secondary school curriculum documentation and government documentation produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

This lack of shared definition in HE has resulted in other problems in terms of this research. For example I had wanted to include an updated indication of the number of students undertaking WBL and draw comparisons, or otherwise, between 'old' and 'new' universities. Even within my own university where the research was carried out this has not been possible. While data was held for placements, there was no clarification as to whether the data held was for sandwich placements or short placements. CHERI (2002c, p 14) also found this difficulty, having used HESA data to report sandwich course numbers. CHERI (2002c, p 14) acknowledged that there were variations as to 'what was designated a sandwich programme' and that 'centrally-held data tended not to include information about other forms of organized work experience ... nor about placements of less than a year's duration'. CHERI (2002c, p 15) also state that the institutions providing the data for their report 'would not claim that the figures are necessarily 100% accurate'. In their conclusions CHERI (2002c, p 32) state that 'to some extent our work has been hampered by the lack of available data'. One of CHERI's (2002c, p 32) recommendations was that 'Higher Education institutions should be encouraged to monitor, on a regular basis, not only the range of types of work experience being undertaken by their student population, but also the levels of participation'. This is beginning to take place at NTU through the establishment of a WBL database, but this has proved problematic and, although the deadline for completion was 2008, at the time of writing (2009) the difficulties are still not resolved and the data is still not available.

At the start of this section and in the last paragraph I referred to WRL, a term which is increasingly used in HE and has been adopted by secondary schools for many years to discuss the use of visiting speakers, planned visits, case study

work, and small project work for AS/A2 coursework. There has been some confusion with WBL and WRL definitions in HE. For example Garnett confuses these two terms:

‘The real challenge to the University is not that work-based learning provides a novel alternative route to university qualifications but that such a university validated route should also have to meet the needs of employees who are also students as well as employers who are developers and users of the high level knowledge incorporated in and generated by the work-based programme’ (2001, p 80).

Brennan (2005) and the CHERI and KPMG Report (2006) also support the need to distinguish WBL from WRL. The term ‘work-related learning’ could link to type one discussed on page 18 in Brennan and Little’s (1996, p 7) spectrum of different types of WBL. The Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) (2005b) sees WRL as being concerned with the development of a graduate to fit the changing economic situation. This could also relate to WBL. Harris (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006) views WRL as being the furthest from work including areas such as voluntary work and gap-year activities which would suggest that this type of WBL is not accredited towards a final degree. However, for this distinction to be accepted there would be a need to find a place for those students who choose volunteering modules such as those offered at NTU and Sheffield Hallam University (Brennan, 2005, p 29) which can be accredited towards their degree. Connor and MacFarlane (2007, p 2) identified a ‘wide range of activities’ ‘from learning activities which are an integral part of a HE programme eg work placements’ when discussing WRL and also found that ‘there is little consistency or consensus in language used’ (p 7), again adding to the confusion.

There are also opportunities within HE for students to undertake voluntary WBL which does not link specifically to their undergraduate programme, but may contribute to developing core professional skills which could be termed WRL. It is not clear from Brennan and Little’s spectrum, referred to above, where this latter type of WRL would fit. In addition it must be recognized that students are often encouraged to take holiday placements such as the VACTRAIN Project at Oxford University and the Shell Technology Enterprise Project. This again does not link clearly into Brennan and Little’s spectrum. Drawing on Harris’ suggestion that WRL would not be accredited to a final degree it is clear that WRL does not relate to the experience of the students within this research.

In recent years there has been an increasing use of the term 'work-place learning' to reflect those in employment undertaking an undergraduate programme where learners can negotiate credit-rated programmes around agendas set in consultation with their work, organisations, career aspirations or personal interests. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006, p 15) provide a definition for WPL as 'learning through work which is accredited and embedded within a (HE) programme', while Vaughan (2008, p 20) defines it as 'an interaction between workplace, learning and the learner'. More recent reports such as the Leitch Report (2006), and CHERI and KPMG (2006) advocate this as a development area for HE and, indeed, there is a growth in this area of HE activity with the increasing recognition of formal and informal learning through work-place learning (Cunningham *et al*, 2004). This route to a graduate level qualification is increasing and becoming an essential aspect for additional funding for HE and an opportunity to develop closer links with industry, and a clearer move towards life-long learning with learner managed learning. However this does not apply to the students within this research who were all undertaking a full-time undergraduate HE based degree programme, with the exception of a small number of part-time students who completed the modules and their WBL over an extended period of time, not through their employer. A greater discussion of the experiences of the part-time students can be found later in this thesis.

Having discussed the terms associated with students in HE who may be working with or at a place of employment as part of their programme it is important to define the WBL experience that forms the focus for this research. The closest definition of WBL to this research is that defined by Harvey *et al* (1998, p 2) that 'work experience is defined as a period of work that is designed to encourage reflection on the experience and to identify the learning that comes from working'. The definition given by Gray (2001, p 4) also aligns to the WBL within this research: WBL is 'learning at higher education level derived from undertaking paid or unpaid work. Work-based learning, however, is the means through which a discipline is delivered, not the discipline to be studied'.

The Qualifications Curriculum Agency (QCA) defines WBL as

'planned activities that use the context of work to develop knowledge, skills and understanding useful in work, including learning through the experience of work, learning about work and working practices, and learning the skills for work' (2003, p 4).

It is interesting that, while the QCA document is aimed at Key Stage four pupils in secondary schools, ESECT, a national co-ordination team funded for 3 years by HEFCE with the aim of supporting the HE sector, have taken this definition as a starting point to define WBL in HE. ESECT have since developed the definition to include 'a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations' (2005a, p 2) thereby putting an emphasis on the development of metacognitive skills linked to learning outcomes.

To conclude, this research is based on a short period of WBL experience, that is a maximum of forty five days in length, organised by the student and approved and supported by the university, to provide an opportunity to relate the theoretical knowledge learned in years one and two of their undergraduate programme to a relevant real life work-based setting. It is important to point out that the students in this research did not receive any payment for WBL which students undertaking a sandwich placement frequently do receive (Harvey *et al*, 1998).

Continuing the Introduction

In the initial stages of the research I became aware that there was little literature available relating to this specific type of WBL in Higher Education, that is, a short period of WBL. There was however literature available on longer WBL, such as sandwich placements, which I was able to draw on. Also there was no clear framework in existence in the University at the start of the research to use for planning and co-ordinating this aspect of the undergraduate experience. This is where my claim to new knowledge will sit: the development of a framework based on longitudinal research that will provide students with a quality WBL experience as an integral part of their undergraduate programme within the School of Education, where this research is situated. This reflects Bassey's (in Dadds, 1995, p 118) comment that, 'In carrying out research the purpose is to try to make some claim to knowledge; to try to show something that was not known before'. As my living educational theory emerges this also forms part of my claim; this theory is articulated in chapter seven. Once the framework was developed for the School my intention was to share it across the University where appropriate. It has become increasingly apparent as the research has progressed and has started to be shared that it is pertinent to others within HE beyond NTU. Elements may also be pertinent to areas of

Further Education (FE) and secondary education. This is discussed more fully in chapter six where I discuss how I have shared the final framework.

The methodology is action research. McNiff and Whitehead (2009, p 8) view action research as 'a creative process of trial and error, working their way through and arriving at a 'best for now' position.

This thesis is not presented in a traditional PhD structure because it is a thesis based on action research. The reasons for this are discussed in more detail later in this introduction. As stated above, the research has been on-going over six cycles of action research and a range of data has been collected. The methodology underpinning the research has been action research as discussed by Lewin (1952); Kolb (1984); Carr and Kemmis (1986); Zuber-Skerritt (1992); McNiff and Whitehead (2002 and 2006). Zuber-Skerritt states that

'The ultimate aim [of action research] should be to improve practice in a systematic way and, if warranted, to suggest and make changes to the environment, context or conditions in which that practice takes place, and which impede desirable improvement and effective future development' (1992, p 11).

This is what I have set out to do. Also Somekh states

'The planning and introduction of action strategies to bring about positive changes and evaluation of those changes through further data collection, analysis and interpretation ... and so forth to other flexible cycles until a decision is taken to intervene in this process in order to publish its outcomes to date' (2006, p 6).

Whitehead and McNiff (2004, p 10) extend the definition further by stating that 'action research is about change – in the people who value and believe that change brings progress and personal, professional and social development'. This is demonstrated throughout this thesis which articulates the process of change through the different cycles which has included personal, professional and social change.

While the School of Education at NTU in 2000 had recognised the importance of WBL and had made this part of the three non-vocational undergraduate programmes within the School, it had not established a systematic framework through which to ensure the students received a quality WBL experience. This research therefore focuses not on whether WBL should form part of the HE experience for undergraduates, rather it accepts the place of WBL in undergraduate programmes and focuses on developing structures and

procedures within a framework to ensure the students receive a quality experience. McNiff (2002) encourages action researchers to take action if their practice needs improvement, and then produce the evidence to demonstrate how the practice has improved. The following chapters set out to do this.

At the time of writing (2009) I have already started to disseminate the framework in various ways: through the School of Education's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Review in 2001, through my involvement with NTU's External Audit (May 2004), by presenting the framework at various conferences both internal and external to the University, and more recently through my involvement in a working sub-group of the University's Academic Standards and Quality Committee. This sub-group is developing a new module for undergraduate students which will provide WBL experience with credit points attached. I have also presented my research to colleagues in FE via seminars at two conferences (June 2007 and June 2008) which are discussed in chapter six. Further details of how I have continued to share and develop aspects of this research are addressed in chapter six. Discussions with colleagues in schools have also resulted in it becoming clear that the framework is sufficiently flexible to support WBL in the secondary sector.

Aims of the Research

In this section I state the purposes of this research and what I set out to achieve. The aims of the research have been to:

1. Explore the difficulties students experience relating to a short WBL, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality WBL for these students.
2. Provide a focus on quality experience, for students undertaking a short WBL as part of their degree programme;
3. Focus on three undergraduate programmes within the School of Education at NTU to examine the WBL process;
4. Investigate the preparation of the main stakeholders in ensuring a quality short WBL experience;
5. Explore curriculum changes to provide a supportive framework for students undergoing a period of WBL experience;
6. Develop a research based framework for effective practice in WBL for students on an undergraduate programme.

These aims reflect both my intentional actions and my ontological values which became my living standards of judgment against which I am able to test my

claim. I judge the quality of my practice 'in relation to the realisation of my values' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009, p 147). This is articulated more fully in chapter seven. These aims focus on improving my practice and provide changes and developments to the WBL processes and structures which may influence others' learning and action.

Aim one seeks to identify the problems and themes relating to a short WBL in 2000 when the research started. In the following chapter I provide the context through which I became aware that there were difficulties for the students and articulate how the research started. Aim two is developed as the cycles of research progress and is discussed in more detail in chapters three and four and is also discussed in chapter five in terms of the final framework. The curriculum in 2000 was not structured to fully prepare and support the students through their WBL experience and was restructured in the second cycle of the research; this is discussed more fully in chapter four. The final aim of this research was to develop effective practice to form the basis of a framework for a short period of WBL for students on undergraduate programmes. The framework, which draws on existing theory and practices, while generating new theory is presented in chapter five.

Action research is not just about the researcher improving practice and developing new knowledge for personal and social good (Whitehead and McNiff, 2004). It is also about providing explanations of how and why practices have been improved and how the validity of the researcher's claim to knowledge is demonstrated (McNiff, 2007). This thesis provides a critical explanation of why the research was carried out, a justification of the ontological and epistemological values that emerged from the research and transformed into living standards of judgment (Whitehead and McNiff, 2004), and what the research has achieved, particularly in terms of new practices and new theory. I use the quotation by Bullough and Pinnegar (in Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p 86) to explain this further 'the consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research'.

The questions that framed my research throughout are those suggested by Whitehead (1989) to judge the validity of a claim to knowledge:

- Was the enquiry carried out in a systematic way? This thesis reports the findings of research that took place across six cycles of action research

and demonstrates a systematic process of data collection, analysis, evaluation and action;

- Are the values used to distinguish the claim to knowledge as educational knowledge clearly shown and justified? In this chapter I set out my educational values and justify them. In chapter seven I revisit my educational values and discuss how they have been transformed into living standards of judgment. Throughout I draw on my values to distinguish my claim to knowledge as educational knowledge;
- Are the assertions made in my claim clearly justified? In chapters three, four, five and six I justify my claim to knowledge and demonstrate how the framework is supported by data. In chapter seven I set out how these are framed by my living standards of judgment;
- Is there evidence of an enquiring and critical approach to an educational problem? In the following chapters I explain how I have improved my practice, through critical enquiry, to develop new structures and processes for WBL resulting in a quality experience for the students.

Throughout the research I have also drawn on Whitehead's (1989) critical questions: How do I understand what I am doing? How do I evaluate my work? How do I improve it? These are discussed more fully in chapters four and seven.

By addressing these questions, through three cycles of action research, reported in chapters three, four and five, and through further cycles of development reported in chapter six, the research has resulted in an improved WBL experience for the students. The evidence to support this statement is set out in chapters three, four and five. As the research has progressed the external and internal drivers have also changed and new themes for WBL have arisen. These are discussed in later chapters.

A number of themes have been identified during the course of the research. Firstly these have arisen in the organisation and quality assurance of the WBL experience. Secondly they have arisen within the curriculum delivery of the modules that both support and provide assessment vehicles for WBL. This has resulted in a number of changes, some more substantial than others, as each cycle has progressed; these are reported in chapters three, four and five.

My initial research with the students indicated that WBL was an essential part of their spiritual journey through education and viewed as market driven and much deeper than just an experience. As the research has progressed the value they

place on the WBL element of their studies has been reported by the students through questionnaires evidenced in Appendices 3a, 3b and 3c. Not only has the WBL provided the students with a realistic context to apply their theory, but it has also provided them with excellent opportunities for personal development. WBL has also provided an opportunity for them to become more aware of their inner strengths and aspects of their behaviour that need to be addressed to help them achieve their aspirations. WBL in the School of Education at NTU emphasises obtaining the 'right' WBL, rather than a 'convenient' WBL as some students may prefer, thus helping to focus the students' development needs both within their degree programme and beyond. To withdraw this life skills development opportunity from the degree programmes would, in my opinion, be a disservice to our students, as would a poor WBL experience, or one that was not considered an integral aspect to their undergraduate experience, or a WBL experience that did not reflect the quality our students expect.

Outline of Chapters

I shall finish this first chapter by introducing the chapters that follow and further developing the statement that I made at the outset of this chapter that this thesis is not presented in a traditional PhD structure because it is a thesis based on research in action. The two influences for presenting it in a non-traditional format are the advice offered by my supervisor and by Davis (2007). In my first draft I followed the traditional format for presenting a thesis but I subsequently adopted a more appropriate format to reflect the style used by Davies

'The reflexive nature of action research in which understandings – developed from both literature and practice – help generate actions ... Therefore each of the chapters based on the [three] action research cycles contains its own review of literature and each cycle chapter is a mix of narrative, critical commentary, literature review, data analysis and interpretation' (2007, p 188).

Davis uses Winter (1996) to support this structure commenting that this better reflects her (and my) role within this participatory and collaborative action research.

The following chapters discuss the changes and developments which resulted in improving practice to the WBL experience. They interweave the development of my own ontological values. McNiff and Naidoo (2007, p 52) explain the term 'value' in the context of action research drawing on Raz (2001) who views the concept of a value as a linguistic term that defines how we hold something as

'valuable or worthwhile'. They state that for a value to become meaningful in research it must be transformed into a living practice and, within research, into epistemological living standards of judgment which we can then 'use to test the validity of our explanations' (2007, p 52). This thesis will demonstrate how my ontological values have transformed into living practice.

Chapter two sets out the background and context to this research. In chapter two I articulate how, as I became involved in reflexive critique I found that my ontological values were at times denied in my practice. I also discuss how I developed my interest in WBL, the experiences that I brought with me to NTU, and those that the students bring with them. In this chapter I set out the concerns that drew me to this research. I also set out my ontological values which transform into living standards of judgment as the research progresses and become the standards I use to make judgments on my practice (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

Chapter three explains how I identified both the themes within the WBL element of the degree programmes and the stakeholders, and the formation of focus groups to provide critique, and inform changes and developments. The changes in this cycle were mainly the introduction of new documentation, processes, and systems to prepare the stakeholders. This chapter links directly with the first three aims of the research set out above.

Chapter four explains the changes that took place in the second cycle, which were mainly linked to the revalidation and the developments within the curriculum. Chapter four continues to develop aims one and two of the research, and links directly to the fourth aim.

Chapter five reflects on the final cycle of the research, the testing of the new practices and the final changes that were made. The chapter culminates with the articulation of the framework for WBL, which links to the final aim of the research.

Chapter six discusses how I have shared the framework both within the University and externally with a view to demonstrating the internal validity and legitimacy of this research, and brings the reader up-to-date with internal and external drivers that have arisen since the completion of the initial research reported in chapters three, four and five. This chapter identifies how my role has changed, and how I have continued to develop aspects of WBL within my

new role by utilising emerging new technologies. The chapter also discusses how I have started to disseminate my research by adopting these new technologies to develop support for students while on WBL. The chapter focuses on three new cycles of research.

In chapter seven I look back on the research as a whole and discuss the ethics, methodology and epistemology. I explain how by analysing and defining my ontological values into my living practices I have come to a deeper understanding of practice relating to WBL within the context in which I work. I set out how I have transformed my ontological values into living epistemological standards of judgment against which the quality of this thesis can be judged. I also articulate how I have generated my own living educational theory of practice.

In chapter eight I reflect back on the substantive themes of the research and discuss the aspects that will need addressing in the future. I also reflect back on the whole process of undertaking my PhD and how it has impacted on me both professionally and personally.

The appendices are included to assist the reader in developing a greater understanding of the documentation produced to support WBL as part of the research and the research tools used for this thesis. I refer throughout to Archives of Evidence; these are listed on pages 14-15 to assist the reader.

Chapter Two: Background to the Research

Introduction

This chapter presents the background to the research. I introduce the reader to the background and policy context for WBL. I then discuss the internal and external context within which the research is placed. Next I introduce the literature and early findings that influenced the research. I then discuss both my own experiences and those of the students prior to starting at the University in terms of WBL. I conclude by drawing out the key themes from this chapter before introducing the next chapter and first cycle of the research.

Background and Policy Context for Work-Based Learning

While HE is rooted in academic tradition with liberalists supporting HE for the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself (Skilbeck *et al*, 1994; Reay *et al*, 2005), WBL has been an integral part of vocational courses such as engineering, medicine, applied social science, and teaching for many years (Bourner and Ellerker, 1993; Brennan and Little, 1996; Foster and Stephenson, 1998). For example, Boys *et al* (1988, p 13) quote Charlton and his argument that education has been vocational since the sixteenth century in that 'it was to help prepare gentlemen for government'. Wagner and Childs (2001) cite Dewey (1916) as identifying elitist education on one side and an increasing demand for technically educated labour on the other. Auburn and Ley (1993) discuss the increase in vocational courses with supervised work experience since 1945. Little and Harvey (2006) point out that in the 1950s the National Council for Technological Awards recommended engineering programmes include periods of industrial placement.

The significance of WBL increased in the late twentieth century when the vocational ideology gained momentum as a response to radical changes in education policy-making and practice. Many, such as Reay *et al* (2005) and Skilbeck *et al* (1994) view this as a response to the economic climate at the time: rising fuel prices, increasing unemployment, and a call from industry for education to meet their needs.

Reviews of policy and practice have been well documented by others such as Lauglo and Lillis (1987); Foster and Stephenson (1998); Avis (2004); Nixon (2006); Little and Harvey (2007), but it is important to summarise the policy trajectory here as they have impacted on the development of WBL. They

include the Robbins Report (1964) giving Colleges of Advanced Technology the status of University and endorsing the principle that 'university education should be available to all' (in Reay, 2005, p 2); the development of polytechnics in the 1960s; the 1972 Department of Education and Science (DES) White Paper 'Education: A Framework for Expansion' (1972, p 31, paragraph 108) in which the term 'relevance' is raised. Callaghan's (1976) Ruskin College Speech calling for a curriculum to equip pupils for the challenges of employment and attacking the 'professional hegemony in education' suggesting 'education should be more accountable to parents and employers' (in Finlay *et al*, 1998, p 5); Sir Keith Joseph's Conference speech (1985) urging for a HE curriculum with a more practical element; the Rise Report published by the DES (1985, p 1) which reviewed the growth and role of sandwich courses following 'its rapid expansion during the later 1960s and 1970s' ... 'by 70%'; the 1987 White Paper 'Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge'; the Enterprise in Higher Education (DfES) project launched in the early 1980s in over sixty institutions across the UK; the development of post-1992 new Universities resulting in an increase in the number of students taking courses with an element of WBL; and the Dearing Report in 1997 which is referred to later in this chapter.

Funding initiatives have also supported the development of WBL such as the Employment Department's Enterprise in HE with over forty HE Development Projects (cited by Harvey *et al*, 1998), the introduction of Personal Development Profiles (PDPs) by HEFCE in 2002, and the acknowledgement of the need for WBL Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning in 2005. These developments were a clear move away from the view of HE that it was an elite system and not for the masses as described by Coffield and Vignoles in Reay *et al* (2005, viii) and Pearson (in McNay, 2005, p 83). Brennan (2004, p 22) draws on Trow's distinction of 'elite', 'mass' and 'universal' forms of HE and states that we are now moving from Trow's definition of 'mass' HE (that is a right to HE with appropriate qualifications), to 'Universal' H.E (that is HE as an obligation for all middle and upper classes).

Some researchers, such as Unwin (in Hodgson and Spours, 1997, p 80) in her examination of how WBL has developed, suggests that vocational education 'has been a victim of ... swings in ideological approach'. The ideology is complex and not a simple split with the influences listed above crossing both new Labour and Conservative ideologies, indicating there was support for vocationalism and a more closely aligned HE and employer relationship. Others, such as Purvis *et al*

(1988, pp 4-5) view the growth of vocationalism as a battle between 'those who see education as being primarily concerned with individual self-development and fulfilment of potential' and 'those who see it more as serving the needs of the economy and industry by preparing pupils for future positions in the occupational structure'. Wagner and Childs (2001, p 314) however, believe that WBL can be 'seen as a strategy to break down barriers between vocational and academic education' and Winch (2000, p 1) states that 'anyone interested in promoting vocational education is thought to be a philistine, concerned only with material gain rather than with higher forms of human achievement'.

Changes to the economy, levels of unemployment, skills shortages and the need for a more technically competent, versatile, highly motivated, adaptable, and mobile workforce that is competitive in a global market are all reasons that are given for more vocationally relevant programmes within HE. For example Ball (2008, p 1) states 'Education is now seen as a crucial factor in ensuring economic productivity and competitiveness in the context of informational capitalism', that is within the 'pressures and requirements of globalisation'. Ball (2008, p11) continues, 'the social and economic purposes of education have been collapsed into a single, overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness'. Ball (2008, p 12) quotes from a speech by Tony Blair in 2005 stating 'education is our best economic policy'. Harris (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006, p 92) draws on Coffield to make the relationship between the 'state, capital and labour' and states that 'the UK is now recognised as a low-skill economy compared with high-skill economies such as Germany and Japan'. Brennan (2005, p 4) also recognises the 'growing occurrence and demand for WBL has been attributed to the changing nature of the economy' ... with education and training recognised 'as the key to developing and maintaining economic competitiveness'. HEFCE's 2003-08 Strategic Plan indicates that higher education has a significant contribution to make to the global knowledge economy. Locke (2008, p 183) also refers to HE contributing to 'national economic performance' and 'the demand for graduates to fill new jobs created in the growing knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy'.

Avis (2004, p 198) uses the term 'WBL movement' to describe the developments of WBL within the curriculum and links these to 'the economy and labour market needs'. Alongside this is the increasing need for lifelong learning skills and the recognition that many employees will probably make several career changes during their working lives, again linking education to economic

competitiveness (Boys *et al*, 1988; Foster and Stephenson, 1998; Levitas, 1999; Ball, 2008). Little (2005a, p 131) also comments on the 'contribution of higher education to economic prosperity' and Connor and MacFarlane (2007, p 3) argue that 'since Dearing a policy focus has been on encouraging higher education to align itself more closely to the needs of employers and the labour market'.

Coffield (1995) views the Government's focus on skill development to improve competitiveness as important. However, Harris (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006) reflects the views of Purvis *et al* (1988) that there has been a lack of focus of attention on seeing education and training as a means to combat poverty. Harris (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006) refers to more critical literature as viewing the low-skills, lack of national strategy and state intervention as adding to market failures.

Alongside the development of WBL and a more vocational curriculum in post-1990 universities is the increasing focus on vocational opportunities integrating WBL within secondary and FE to

'address the interests of those who, while academically able, feel out of kilter with schooling and are seeking practical experience alongside the acquisitions of qualifications which offer the possibility of progression to higher education' (Avis, 2004, p 211).

The 'Better Schools' publication by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (1985) recommended a new curriculum for the five to sixteen year olds and led to the establishment of Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) guided by the Manpower Services Commission 'in which students are concerned to acquire generic or specific skills with a view to employment' (in Pickard, 1985, p 23), and embedded the place of vocationalism and WBL in the school curriculum. Apprenticeships and Youth Training Schemes (YTS) in the 1980s were modernised and replaced in the 1990s with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for those wanting to pursue a vocational route that would still provide access to HE. General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) provided an opportunity for students wanting to mix both academic and vocational qualifications. These initiatives all involved a WBL experience. They were supported by a new framework developed by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in 1986 with levels from basic entry route at level one, through to degree equivalents at level four and masters at level seven, alongside changes in funding for schools and colleges.

Such vocational qualifications have not been received by education theorists without criticism. For example Hyland (1994, p ix), in discussing NVQs and competency based education and training, sees this type of competency based development in education as 'fundamentally flawed, disastrously misguided and entirely inappropriate to our current and future education and training needs'. As a teacher moving from FE to secondary education at this time, experienced in teaching both NVQs and GNVQs and familiar with the TVEI, I must argue with this point; these qualifications were, at the time, revolutionary, particularly in schools, and provided for students that did not want to follow an academic route with a viable alternative that would still provide an opportunity for advancing to HE in a way the TVEI and YTS models had failed to do. This view is supported by Skilbeck *et al* (1994). The Tomlinson Report (2004) has seen a further review of the 14-19 qualifications within the same NCVQ framework alongside the introduction of vocational Diplomas that again provide an opportunity for the integration of vocational and academic qualifications in a chosen vocational area, including a period of WBL, and the introduction of key functional skills in numeracy, literacy and information technology. Locke (2008, pp 197-198) however criticises the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in not adopting Tomlinson's reforms 'in toto', which he believes has 'almost certainly reduced the likelihood of strengthening vocational routes into higher education'.

The impact of changes within the secondary curriculum has influenced HE which has responded with a greater curriculum range of vocational degree and foundation degree programmes, all integrating WBL, and a move towards offering WBL within non-vocational degree programmes. Brewer (in Foster and Stephenson, 1998) suggested that as much as a quarter of full-time students may be engaged in WBL during their undergraduate study. Brennan and Little (1996, p 123) conclude that 'in principle and in practice, work based learning, in a variety of forms, is accepted and recognised within higher education'.

This demonstrates that new universities at least have moved from the elite system of the pre-1960s to one which caters for students from a wide diversity of backgrounds reflecting a notion of social justice, social inclusion, equal educational opportunities (Avis, 2004) and 'academic integrity' reflecting 'social cohesion' (Winch, 2000, p 207). There is also the provision of different modes of study, for example part-time, full-time, and flexible learning both with and without WBL. Foster and Stephenson (1998) see this as a result of developments in recording and reviewing student skills and the modularisation

of programmes. However, it must also link to a need for survival in a competitive market, and the need to respond to employers who are increasingly from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Little, 2005). These companies want employees who do not need a long induction or training and have developed a range of employable skills at a high (degree) level. This latter point is supported by NCIHE (1997) who found that an increasing number of graduates are being employed by SMEs who do not have the resources for training and induction and need their graduates to be effective in their roles immediately.

The argument is even more intricate than this. It needs to be recognised that the relationship between education and the needs of the economy are complex. For example Petherbridge (1997) cites Giroux (1980) as capturing the essence of the problem as a shift to a new rationale of efficiency and control. There is an increasing recognition in educational philosophy of the importance of employment and employable skills, knowledge and experience, involving a process of socialisation (Silver and Brennan, 1988) and cultural identity (Avis, 2004). Some argue that work experience may 'act as an agent of cultural reproduction in a society characterised by inequality' (Petherbridge, 1997, p 21).

These arguments have given us a new articulation of an old discourse: the liberal and the vocational referred to by Brennan and Naidoo (2008, p 288) as 'liberal theorists' and 'elite reproduction theorists'. This liberal versus vocational discourse is in itself not new and has been ongoing for as many years as the WBL discourse both in HE and secondary education. The liberal view supported the traditional role that university courses did not intend to prepare students for specific employment opportunities (Deissenger, 2000). The vocational view, which integrated WBL, supported the view that there is a need for education and training within the curriculum to provide a more competitive workforce for Britain to succeed within the global economy. The growth of foundation degrees, set up to provide a higher level of employee also reflect this view (Little, 2005).

The existence of the two philosophies can result in these opposing values having to co-exist (Auburn and Ley, 1993). The question then arises whether the needs of either are met. Silver and Brennan (1988, p 4) argue that 'all education is vocational' and 'even liberal education is in a sense vocational'. Silver and Brennan (1988, p 233) indicate that internal pressures have resulted

in different responses between different types of universities and raise the discussion of whether there should be a 'hybrid phrase' and I agree for the following reasons. Firstly because HE is increasingly used by employers as a filter, in which case high status disciplines such as law and medicine can lead to high status jobs (Brennan, 2004; Locke, 2008). Secondly those students that have the opportunity to go to a more elite Higher Education Institution (HEI) are able to establish social networks that can result in higher status jobs. Thirdly, supporting the vocational philosophy, I believe education is part of the process of becoming an adult, a core element of which is employment. Some choose a course that is more vocational leading to a specific job, for example those choosing nursing and teaching; this is not the case for the students in this research who are taking a non-vocational course. My experience of new universities is that they can co-exist, and successfully do so, through carefully designed programmes providing a balance which rethinks liberal education to enable students to achieve their aspirations. Anderson (1999, pp 53-54) reflecting on the American University System, states a University finds 'its own integrity, its own educational style, its own emphasis, its own value systems' and 'must then make choices or determine emphases among liberal and vocational ends'. This would reflect the development of Universities in the UK each of which seeks to find its own niche in an increasingly competitive market place. For NTU, the site for the research in this thesis, the niche is employability.

The different positions, discussed above, in HE relating to the polarized views of whether vocational courses have a place within what many have viewed as a liberal, academic and elite system reflect those within the compulsory education sector which has grappled with these opposing views for many years. Hodgson and Spours (1997, pp 14-15) identify three positions of secondary education: those who argue for academic education 'for those who want to continue to study school subjects', drawing on Dearing 1996; those who argue for a greater breadth of content drawing on the Higginson Report 1988; and those who support 'more subjects to learn and in which there could be a closer link between general education and vocational education'. Little and Connor (2005, p 76) make the point that within the context of formalised study there are 'various [vocational] routes in different sectors and occupational areas'.

Successive governments have recognised the importance of providing both an academic and vocational route for those in compulsory education. They have

tried to close the gap that existed in the 1980s of those more academically able taking the academic GCSE/A level route, and those who were taking the TVE1 route and opting at sixteen for apprenticeships through the YTS. Many would argue the YTS was set up to reduce the number claiming unemployment, while others would argue that the YTS apprentices gained vocational training to ensure full-time employment and secure a place in society.

My experience of working within the secondary school curriculum at a time when it was opening its doors to vocational education to complement the existing curriculum was very positive. The pupils had little difficulty with combining the liberal and vocational. I observed pupils developing from the age of eleven being able to make choices along three pathways: vocational, academic, or a mix of both, reflecting Hodgson and Spours' (1997) positions, without closing the door to progressing to HE. The pupils moved easily between the routes, rethinking their career aspirations as they progressed. On the other hand to say the liberal and vocational views sat together easily in the staffroom would not be true. What I observed was a difficulty for the liberalists to embrace the new vocational courses and a resistance to encouraging academic students to take a vocational option. This is reflected by Clarke and Winch (2007, p 9) and their description of the relationship between vocational and liberal education as being 'often uneasy'.

The view that secondary sector vocational qualifications have been developed to improve participation and achievement for sixteen to nineteen year olds who were not engaged by the more academic pre Dearing curriculum can also apply to non-vocational programmes in HE. Boys *et al* (1988) identify clear links through research to increasing numbers of HE programmes linking to future employment and this is, to some extent, reflected on by Little (2005a) reflecting on foundation degrees. Boys *et al* (1988, p 127) found through their research that an increasing number of students had formal work experience as part of their course – in particular 'business studies (80%)' and 'engineering (58%)'. This is supported by Brennan and Little (1996) who reported an increase in HE programmes that include a period of WBL. Harvey *et al* (1998, p 16) explain this increase, based on their research, as being a response to employers who increasingly seek out graduates who have undergone a period of work experience and who are therefore better equipped for the workplace and view WBL as 'augmenting the higher education learning experience'. Harvey *et al* (1997, p 102) state that 'placements are seen by employers and graduate

employees as the single most significant missing element of the majority of degree programmes. This is, to some extent, supported by Little *et al* (2008, p 52) who concluded that 'UK graduates were less likely than graduates overall to gain experiences of work during their period of higher education' in their comparison between UK graduates and those in mainland European countries.

It is clear therefore that there is considerable discussion and debate within the sector with respect to the inclusion of WBL in HE. I now return to a more detailed analysis of how this has been operationalised.

Wringe (in Corson, 1991, p 33) states that 'preparation for the so-called world of work is an important educational aim'. WBL is constrained and influenced by policy but there is no specific policy that states WBL must form part of University programmes.

Following the Dearing Report (1996) WBL became a curriculum entitlement for all secondary school pupils. More recent developments include:

- Periods of one or two weeks of WBL in Key Stage four and often a repeated experience in college or the sixth form;
- WBL as an essential component of Compact agreements (established in 1995) between schools, higher education institutions (HEI), and employers. As vocational programmes have been developed and expanded within the school curriculum WBL has continued to develop;
- Provision for disaffected school pupils whereby the government encourages a relationship between school, college and work experience to motivate the pupils from Key Stage four upwards within a context that is more relevant and appropriate to their needs. This has proven successful not only in Britain, but also in countries cited in Corson (1991) such as Tasmania, Canberra and New Zealand;
- General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) introduced in the last decade integrate WBL as part of the core entitlement of students (Yeomans, 1998; and Hodkinson, 1998; and Williams and Raggatt, 1998);
- The introduction of various vocational qualifications such as the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE), BTEC Diplomas, and Applied GCSEs which have been increasingly introduced into schools following Dearing. These all benefit from an integrated period of WBL;

- New vocational diplomas piloted from September 2008, following the Tomlinson Report (2004), provide an opportunity for secondary school pupils to mix vocational and academic qualifications more easily: these include a compulsory period of WBL and will help to establish 'vocational progression routes alongside more traditional academic routes' (Brennan, 2005, p 9).

My involvement with the North Nottinghamshire Education and Business Partnership, discussed later in this chapter, developed my understanding of how building links with local and national industries has become increasingly important to schools. It was also the reason I became aware of Education and Business Partnership groups that have formed across Britain to bridge the link between industry and schools in an attempt to provide the vocational aspects of education. These links have taken many forms, for example: local industry providing speakers; organising visits for students; role-playing interview technique; providing staff-development for teaching staff; providing 'mentors' for students who were identified as not achieving within the school curriculum; and providing 'experts' who worked across schools developing skills and knowledge via video-conferencing.

WBL and 'situated learning' (Evans *et al*, 2006, p 15) has formed an integral part of many well established HE programmes, such as trainee teachers and those including sandwich placements. The impetus to widen such learning across University programmes is more recent and as noted at the start of this chapter has often reflected the approach taken in schools. The Dearing Report (1997) gave official recognition to the importance of work experience, urging Universities to consider building WBL into undergraduate programmes. Dearing made two recommendations relating directly to work experience:

'We recommend that all institutions should, over the medium term, identify opportunities to increase the extent to which programmes help students to become familiar with work, and help them to reflect on such experience. (1997, Recommendation 18)

We recommend that the Government, with immediate effect, works with representative employers and professional organisations to encourage employers to offer more work experience opportunities for students.' (1997, Recommendation 19)

He concluded that

'Students can benefit from experience in many different settings, structured and informal, paid and unpaid. Their academic experience should help them understand how experience relates to their personal and future development' (1997, paragraph 9.30).

HEFCE commissioned the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) to carry out a project investigating employment prospects of students from socially disadvantaged groups (2002b). The findings in this report concluded that 'for graduates as a whole, there are measurable benefits to be gained from experiencing a substantial period of work experience', particularly in 'taking a non-vocational course' (2002b, p 7). A further report by CHERI (2002c) investigated the nature and extent of higher education students' WBL. The findings of this project identified that for graduates as a whole there are clearly definable employment benefits for those students that take part in a period of WBL. These findings reflect the RISE Report (1985), referred to earlier, which identified a range of benefits to both students and employers and stated that the benefits had also been recognised by 'a wide range of educational, professional and other bodies' (1985, p 4). Harvey *et al* (1998, p 17) also state that 'students who have done a period of work placement have an edge when applying for posts' and in smaller organisations providing WBL experience to students may result in 'serendipitous recruitment' (1998, p 19). Further Research by CHERI (2002a) which examined the links between work experience during higher education and experiences within the labour market in the UK, post-graduation, produced the following findings which link directly to this research:

'Work experience during higher education, and in particular that related to study, has a positive effect on employment outcomes for graduates in the UK.';

'Work experience related to study appears to have a positive impact on most aspects of employment activity post-graduation' (2002a, p 7).

Knight and Yorke (2003, p 4) support this further stating 'Employers generally prefer to employ people who have workplace experience'.

Those who have experienced WBL in school or college may want or expect this as part of their university programme. This links to Reay *et al*'s (2005, p 26) discussion of Bourdieu's (1967, p 344) 'cultured habitus'. Reay *et al* develop Bourdieu's theory of habitus being a product of early childhood experience and socialisation within the family which is modified with encounters with the outside world, to institutional habitus whereby the experiences of students in school will

transcend into their expectations of university. This is further supported by Brennan (2005) who indicates an increasing number of students moving from vocational courses in schools and FE, or apprenticeships into Higher Education with an expectation of a WBL experience.

Much is therefore made of the WBL aspect of undergraduate programmes and future aspirations. In programme design many subject and programme teams are therefore often looking for appropriate ways of developing the experiences of their students into the world of work. This may be through voluntary community work in different guises, a year long placement experience, shorter placement experience, speakers from appropriate industries or Lead Bodies, or visits to related industries to observe theory related to practice in action. There are some programmes that are not suited to long placements, while there are others where the programme team believes strongly in the WBL element of the programme, and creating a genuine relationship between University and work in addressing the learning outcomes of the undergraduate programme. For instance a study by Auburn and Ley (1993) reports that where WBL is integrated into the programme it is more successful. The latter would reflect the WBL element of the programmes within this research.

Benefits of WBL

A summary of the benefits to employers for involvement with work experience (adapted from Forrest *et al*, 1992, p 9) are:

- Social contribution: helping to establish wider experiences of students;
- Community involvement: wider understanding of students in community roles;
- Publicity: advertising for the provider;
- Educational: influence on University and stimulating educational provision to meet employer needs, development of key skills, and the opportunity to put theory into practice;
- Recruitment: screening potential recruits;
- Labour power: providing additional staff resources;
- Employee satisfaction: giving individual employees additional responsibility in supporting the student(s) on placement;
- Employee training: providing training in particular skills for employees, potential and future employees.

Evans *et al* (2006, p 18) adds to this list 'accepted as members [of the workplace] who bring new knowledge and skills and have the potential of growing competence', which is also suggested by Kitson (1993) and, more recently by Brennan (2005). This links to the benefits identified by Unwin (in Hodgson and Spours, 1997, p 81): 'selection, socialisation, orientation and preparation for work'; and Little and Harvey (2006). Harvey *et al* (1998, p 34) adds 'work experience provides the possibility that students might contribute an injection of new ideas into the organisation' and Little (2000, p 121) draws on the Dearing Report that 'the strongest simple message ... received from employers was the value of work experience'. However, Kitson (1993, p 53) recognises that some companies may exploit undergraduates who can provide 'relatively cheap labour'.

Harvey *et al* (1998, p 28) recognise that it can be difficult to find WBL opportunities for students, but acknowledge that 'in this rapidly changing world, employers have to be pragmatic and many employers have shown renewed commitment to providing work-experience opportunities for students'. Our experience, with students finding their own WBL, was that increasingly throughout the cycles the students were able to secure placements at their first choice as they were better prepared and their letters and curriculum vitae were of a high standard.

Researchers such as Kitson argue against sandwich degrees. Kitson states that 'assertions as to the value of work experience for students are clearly open to question' (1993, p 55). Researchers who support WBL list a range of benefits, such as Brennan and Little (1996) and Little (2000). It is interesting to go back to the RISE report (1985, p 13) and the list of benefits identified, which is still pertinent to today's students:

- An opportunity to put theory into practice
- Personal development
- Skills development
- Intellectual development – particularly in terms of own strengths and weaknesses
- Awareness of employment opportunities – today this would also include 'networking' (Little, 2005, p 70).

Auburn and Ley (1993), Raelin (1997) and, more recently Little and Harvey (2006), include putting theory into practice as being a benefit to students.

Researchers, such as the Association of Graduate Recruiters (1995) and Little (2000, p 130) indicate that there is also 'some evidence' that new graduates gain advantage during their early careers from having undertaken WBL, but it is unclear whether this is limited to sandwich placements or all forms of WBL. Little (2005b, p 72) found a 'minority of students' thought that 'work would help in finding a job on graduation'. Harvey *et al* (1998, p 22) state that 'the advantages of a longer placement is time to build relationships that may turn out to be valuable contacts for the future'. CHERI (2002b, p 7) also found that when searching for jobs 'using contacts established through employment undertaken during the course of study' was ranked first in job search techniques by undergraduates. However, specific figures are not given. I question Harvey *et al*'s (1998, p 22) reference to 'longer placements' (above) as there is some evidence from this research that students who went on placement for six weeks, still have opportunity to develop valuable contacts. This is evidenced by comments from one of the course leaders (CLs) involved in this research who said that a small number of students from each year group will be offered permanent employment by their placement provider. However, Kitson (1993, p 60) argues that this perceived advantage is 'illusory' and states that 'they gain no competitive advantage in the graduate job market'. More recent research, such as that by Scesa (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006, Annex B, p 122), in her review of QAA reports, lists benefits of WBL to 'personal development, employability, attitude to study and improved performance'.

This discussion cannot be completed without a comment on social and technological changes that have impacted on programme design. The demand by industry for a more rounded graduate has resulted in the need to apply key skills in the constructive alignment of modern undergraduate programmes. The key skills formally identified by those that influence curriculum design, such as QAA, QCA and exam boards indicate that the acquisition of wider skills is essential. The Professional Development Profiles (PDPs) introduced into universities by HEFCE, which follow on from the secondary school's Record of Achievement, include a range of key skills and experiences 'which aim to help students record their skill development and achievements in their learning' (Connor and MacFarlane, 2007, p 5). These include numeracy, literacy, information communications technology, problem solving, critical thinking and working with others. In evidencing these experiences the world of work becomes increasingly appealing in programme design. This discussion will be developed later in chapter four.

The Internal Context

The degree programmes which are the site of this research are all three years of full-time study at NTU in the School of Education:

- BA (Hons) Psychology and Educational Development (PED);
- BA (Hons) Business, Leisure and Sports Education (BLSE);
- BSc (Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology (BICT).

(I use the term 'were' as they have now been rebadged and come under the Joint Honours Programme, with slightly different titles. The changes will be explained in later chapters.)

Each of these degree programmes has a focus in line with the overall aims of NTU set out in the University's Strategic Plan in 2000:

1. 'To develop confident and ambitious graduates equipped to shape society;
2. To provide education that promotes both intellectual initiative and the highest academic standards to prepare students for life and career;
3. To be the university of choice for business, industry and the professions in our areas of expertise;
4. To be recognised both nationally and internationally for the effectiveness of our teaching and the relevance of our research;
5. To transform the learning and working environment to create an inspiring and innovative culture;
6. To have the courage and the will to implement change'. (NTU, 2000)

The plan has since been updated and the current plan, 2004-2010, sets out a number of Strategic Platforms: 7.2 relates to preparing students for the 'World of Work'; while 7.3 relates to the attributes students should have opportunity to develop, many of which are an integral part of the WBL experience within this research. At NTU a wide variety of WBL opportunities are offered to students: these range from placements within the School of Art and Design for one weekend where the student is able to work with a photographer on a shoot, through short placements lasting one semester such as the ones in this

research, to full year placements offered as part of a sandwich programme within the School of Business.

My role throughout the research has been as a senior lecturer employed by NTU within the School of Education: an insider-researcher. One of my responsibilities was to co-ordinate the WBL experience of the second year undergraduate students on the three degree programmes described above. It can be difficult to be the insider researcher using an action research framework:

‘Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.’ (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p 5).

My role as insider-researcher will be discussed more fully in later chapters, although it is important to acknowledge that action research is always focused on the significance of individual practice and its improvement for one person, or one institution (Whitehead, 1989 and Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

Both the internal and external contexts have shifted as the research and evaluation have developed. These changes will be discussed in later chapters to give the reader a sense of the chronology.

Initial Literature Search

This is an action research project and as such the literature has been used, and therefore introduced, at different stages of the research. I am including a discussion of literature at this point partly because of the influence of Davis (2007) that I have already referred to in chapter one, page 30, and partly because I have used Davis’s argument to move away from the traditional presentation of a PhD thesis, to better reflect my own research and developments. I have therefore followed Davis’ (2007, p 195) reflections on submitting her PhD and comments from one of her examiners that ‘he would have liked to have had earlier mention of the literature’. I am also aware that, for the reader, it is essential to set the scene as much as possible and thus include a review of the literature that influenced my research initially.

A literature survey in 2000, the outset of this research project, resulted in limited references being found specifically relating to the short type of WBL being developed (this is defined in chapter one) and evaluation of practice. For example Brennan and Little (1996, p iv) state ‘much of the literature tends

towards theory or advocacy; evaluated practice per se seems to be less prevalent'. This limitation of literature is supported by a number of sources available in the early stages of this research: for example Shepherd (1995); Harvey *et al* (1997); Cameron-Jones (1999); Elias *et al* (1999); James (2000); Blackwell *et al* (2001); Guile (2001); and more recently by ESECT (2005a), Garnett (2008) and Costley and Armsby (2008).

However, I did identify a range of reports, articles and texts that did relate to WBL in general and have drawn on these, as will be seen, throughout the thesis to support arguments and develop the criticality of the research. These include Brennan (1985), Auburn and Ley (1993) and James (2000). As the research and evaluation has developed there has been an increase in the texts, research, and reports relating to WBL and its perceived importance in Higher Education programmes for the success of graduates in obtaining employment: for example ESRU (2002); ESECT (2005a); HEA (2006); HECSU (2006); and CHERI and KPMG (2006). Some reports and authors also link WBL in Higher Education to the success of Britain in the economic market place (ESECT, 2005); others link it to the personal and professional development of students (Brennan and Little, 1996). All of these are views which I share, but will not be discussed further in this thesis, the focus being on developing a framework for a quality WBL experience.

As stated in chapter one the initial literature survey indicated that there was more literature available relating to the sandwich placement model of WBL rather than shorter WBL model such as ours. The survey also indicated that while some Universities had established work experience within some undergraduate programmes, it was often inconsistent across the institution (Brennan and Little, 1996). How, why, when, and where are usually at the discretion of Deans and the teams of staff delivering the programmes, often in varying ways, with most Universities providing WBL experience as a gap year before the final year of the undergraduate programme. At the outset of this research (2000) the Dearing Report for Higher Education (1997) and CHERI (2002a) were impacting on Universities, together with the need to provide opportunities to develop key skills. More programme leaders were looking at ways of offering WBL experiences for their students. The lack of literature findings gave me confidence that I had identified a clear gap in the then (2000) current knowledge relating to a framework for WBL.

The research that was identified tended to focus on the development of the student. For example Blackwell *et al* state that

‘Work experience enriches higher education curricula and contributes indirectly and significantly to national economic well-being’, and ‘work experience is repeatedly related to higher graduate employment rates and possibly to higher subsequent incomes.’ (2001, p 269)

Other research supports the notion of WBL in HE, such as James (2000) who found the WBL experience led students ‘towards adopting a deeper approach to learning’ and Harvey *et al* (1997) who drew the conclusion that employers rate work experience as part of a degree programme as important. Elias *et al* (1999) also found that a period of work experience was an important issue when it came to obtaining first post-graduate jobs.

Much of the relevant literature at this time was related to skills developed while on placement, rather than the management of the placement process in ensuring a quality placement (Little, 1998; Arnold *et al*, 1999; Purcell *et al*, 2004). Harvey *et al* in their research into graduates’ work concluded that

‘if there was to be a single recommendation to come from the research, it would be to encourage all undergraduate programmes to offer students an option of a year-long work placement and employers to be less reluctant to provide placement opportunities’. (1997, p 2)

I would not agree that all students should undertake a year-long placement, and would question whether WBL is appropriate for all degrees, but certainly a well-planned quality WBL experience as an integral part of an undergraduate degree programme is an essential part of the undergraduate student’s personal and professional development.

Reflections on Literature

As stated from the outset, this research takes the form of action research and is presented as an action research thesis. It is therefore important to comment on the way I have approached the literature, which can best be described as eclectic. Initially I needed to ensure that I was going to create new knowledge. I used the literature search to locate my methodology and ensure that I was following a structured process in collecting my data. As I started to write up the findings and different action research cycles, I went back to the action research books and journal articles to support my writing. This is further discussed in chapter seven.

As the research has developed I have used the literature in various ways; sometimes to identify themes that were emerging and to find out what others had experienced and what solutions they had found. At other times the literature has helped me to reflect in new ways on an issue that has arisen from the research. I have also used the literature to compare the processes I went through with others, such as Somekh (2002), and Davis (2007). I have read widely from texts, journal articles and reports that are within the field of my research.

This section sets out to report on the literature that made a difference to the research at the outset. Further discussion of the literature will be included in chapters as and when relevant following a similar structure to that of Davis (2007). It is not possible to report on everything I have read, although I have found all my reading to have informed my knowledge and helped me to develop both my thinking as a researcher and as a person. I have found much of the literature has added complexity to the research and helped me to develop a deeper understanding of the issues, both in the early stages of the research and during each of the action research cycles, and in my personal reflections at the completion of this research, which are discussed in chapter eight. This exploration and testing of my readings in relation to the data collected has become integral to the process and interpretation of the research.

I know that I have developed considerably from my use of the literature. I started, as many PhD students probably do, reading books and articles, but not engaging critically with them. Now I find myself reading and arguing or agreeing out loud with the author. I am frequently excited by the reading and regularly seek out further literature from the references at the end of an article to engage more fully in the arguments being presented. This engagement with a wide range of existing knowledge reflects Somekh in her discussion of the main principles of action research (2006).

From the available literature I was able to identify several themes: setting the context; preparation of the stakeholders; provision of a quality placement and curriculum change. I found these helpful as a focus in the initial stages of the research, and during the first cycle of the research, together with emerging themes discussed later in this chapter.

Shepherd's (1995) experiences of a short and thin model for WBL, offering an optional one day a week for ten weeks in the final year of a non-vocational HE

programme at Middlesex University provided some similar features to the WBL in this research. His discussion on the importance of preparation for WBL was identified within my own research in cycle two and is discussed in chapter four.

An article by Cameron-Jones and O'Hara (1999) proved to be invaluable in identifying that the mentors needed to be briefed and prepared for their role; this had not previously taken place within the programmes that act as the site for this research. This is supported by Harvey *et al* (1998) and more recently by Greenbank (2002), who found that quality WBL needed to have adequately trained and supportive mentors. Cameron-Jones and O'Hara's research found that the placement experience was most successful when the students received a high amount of support and a high level of challenge. Students receiving new challenges without support frequently resulted in them 'retreating' and among the most likely to subsequently drop out of their degree programme. This research influenced my perception of the role of the mentor and became an emerging theme in the early stages of the research. I shall refer again to the research of Cameron-Jones and O'Hara in chapter three.

I found Shilling's (1989) article identifying the need for a Code of Practice for secondary schools for work experience useful in discussing the main themes surrounding the provision of a quality WBL. The article gave me confidence that I could identify a framework for WBL in Higher Education that could be used across institutions, possibly even in the secondary sector, due to the similarities in organizing and managing WBL across the different sectors. Shilling's (1989, p 364) article identified basic conditions, such as ensuring basic health and safety criteria, adequate support, and an environment where students 'are not discriminated against on the basis of their gender, race or social class', all of which I engaged with and built into the first cycle of the placement organization. The article also discusses the development of key skills which became a key feature of my research, and resulted in major changes to the curriculum, discussed in chapter four. The quality of the placement as opposed to quantity is also an important feature of this article, and is reflected in this research.

Shilling (1989) and Blackwell *et al* (2001) also supported the need for providing clear guidelines for employers, particularly relating to health and safety, induction, interviewing, and providing support – all of these were incorporated into a handbook for mentors and training sessions for mentors; these will be further discussed in chapters three, four and five. I followed many of their suggestions in the preparation of the students, such as ensuring the students

knew to whom they were responsible, emphasising safety regulations, and agreeing learning outcomes. Their research includes themes such as support received in preparation, and, during the WBL, themes of health and safety, and the provision of a WBL that is free of discrimination. They found that the quality of experience of the WBL for the students is paramount. This preparation and support for the students became an essential issue from the outset of this research and led to the introduction of new systems, which are discussed in later chapters. Ensuring that WBL will meet the needs of the student in terms of their personal development and will be related to their degree subject, was also supported by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) (1998), and Guile and Griffiths (2001).

Guile and Griffiths (2001) also state the need for clear learning outcomes as being important for the placement process: this proved helpful when the degree programmes were revalidated, providing an opportunity to ensure the learning outcomes were directly linked to the placement element of the degree programmes. This article formed the basis of the need to design appropriate curriculum modules when the degree programmes were revalidated (see chapter four page 131, for further discussion). Learning outcomes were consequently directly linked to the WBL element of the degree programmes.

Richardson and Blakeney (1998, p 101) reported on their ethnographic research intended to 'provide a deeper understanding of the placement system and the processes which take place'. This report raised issues such as the importance of communication during the placement with the University and therefore impacted on the Tutor's Handbook that was later designed, and in the pack of information given to students prior to going on WBL which included a list of contact names and telephone numbers. Richardson and Blakeney (1998, p 117) also suggest a 'careful screening of ... companies is desirable', in particular in their recommendations, small companies. This was not possible with such a large cohort of students, but certain processes were put into place, which are discussed in chapters three, four and five.

Research by Saxton and Ashworth (1990) into the role of the sandwich placement visiting tutors provided some valuable themes to develop in the preparation of the tutors, and considerations to be made when allocating tutors to visit students. They used a case study approach of eighty eight placements where they observed visiting tutors at work. Some of their observations and recommendations were useful, although some needed to be adapted to the

shorter WBL experience for our students. Again these are further discussed in chapters three, four and five.

It is important to comment here that not all literature was located until the reflection stage. For example, despite careful literature searches, frequently supported by librarians, I did not locate Brennan and Little's 'A Review of Work Based Learning and Higher Education' (1996) until the reflection stage. It is unfortunate that this review was not available to me earlier. However, I have drawn on the review to inform my reflections, and references are made to it throughout this thesis.

In chapter one where I have discussed the different discourses of WBL which can include WRL and WPL, I comment here that I have found texts and reports that relate specifically to these aspects of WBL rather than the WBL within this research. To give an example, in 2001 Boud and Solomon published *Work Based Learning: A New Higher Education?* I had awaited this text with some excitement as I hoped it would give guidance to my research and on-going WBL developments. However, it was very much aimed at students undertaking a degree primarily in their workplace rather than WBL as part of their undergraduate degree programme. This would link more closely to the definition of WPL discussed in chapter one. This was disappointing initially, but there are still useful aspects that I was able to develop within my research and which are referred to in later chapters. I found particularly helpful their chapter on 'Creating a Work-Based Curriculum' and a case study from the University of Technology, Sydney where they had implemented WBL for the first time.

In drawing together the discussion from this section key themes were emerging from my literature survey which influenced the starting point for my research. These are discussed more fully in the section below 'Emerging Key Themes'.

My Background

I worked in industry prior to gaining my teaching qualifications. I strongly believe this experience provided the rationale for my future involvement in WBL. My belief that all students, whether still in full-time education at school, or at University, should be encouraged and empowered to spend time in the world of work, to put into context their learning, and experiment with career options, comes from this background. When I was in full-time education as a pupil there was no opportunity for WBL.

My first teaching post was in a College of FE where I became involved in teaching adult women returning to education on a Training Opportunities course (TOPs), and Youth Training Scheme (YTS) students. Both of these programmes involved a period of WBL. I quickly realised that gaining a quality placement was a compromise, the experience being organised in a loose fashion by a disinterested lecturer waiting to retire. This was in conflict with my ontological values of social justice, caring and respect by which I judge my living practices. My values are implicit within this thesis and my emerging living educational theory, that all the students had a right to a quality WBL opportunity that would enable them to aspire to their career goals and help them to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding that they needed to succeed. I recognised that each student should be given the opportunity to develop as an independent learner. I respected and cared for the students. This is demonstrated through the changes I made to their WBL experiences and through the changes to practices and structures set out in this thesis. My ontological values therefore became grounded within my lived professional practices (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). It is through writing this thesis that I know my ontological values were developing during this stage of my professional journey and became explicit as the research developed.

The students on these programmes were from difficult backgrounds, often with few if any qualifications, and frequently with a poor experience of learning. The YTS trainees spent four days in a job, placed there by the careers service and attached to a Youth Training Provider, and sent to college for one day each week. There was little choice about their placement; the area the college was based in, North Nottinghamshire, was experiencing pit closures and strikes; there was mass unemployment and unrest. The trainees did not want to be at college and many felt exploited, working in environments that were poor quality for £25 each week. This had an impact on their motivation to achieve in college. They were unable to understand 'social improvement' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2007, p 1) and could not visualise how this opportunity could transform their life circumstances. The area in which the college was situated, in the middle of a mining community at the time of the miners' strike, also impacted on their ability to visualise themselves in a full-time job. I listened to their experiences at their work placement and went into some of their placements, gaining access by linking it to their assessments at College.

The women on the adult returner programme often struggled with child care, unsupportive and sometimes abusive husbands or partners, or disabilities, and were often placed in totally unsuitable environments for their placements by the College placement person. There was no link to final career choices, or to the type of work they were really interested in. I started to spend time visiting the placements for this group who went on placement for one day each week.

I was able to have an impact on the placements through my visits, improving and developing the placement for the students. By gaining access to the employers' premises I was provided with an opportunity to discuss the tasks the student was involved with and suggest new areas where their student could develop their own skills. I was also able to support the development of the organisation in mentoring the student. Doing this resulted in more positive students at College. I was also able to link the curriculum to their work needs, thereby enriching the curriculum, rather than working in a vacuum with no knowledge of their working environment. This was where I learnt the importance of linking WBL to the curriculum, and visiting placements to gain a full overview of the expectations of students while in the work place. Visiting the placements also enabled me to spend time with the supervisors, many of whom had received no training in this role, and help them in managing their role. It was from this that I came to value the importance of the role of the WBL mentor.

As my role developed with WBL I started to introduce new methods of organising placements, influencing the curriculum to support the WBL environment, and using technology to simplify the placement administration. I set up a database of placements and then found it fairly quick to match the career aspirations of the adult students to placements. I was not able to have the same impact on the YTS trainees' placements as these were organised by Careers Centres and Job Centres. However, I was able to help trainees to move providers when appropriate.

After several years at the College I moved to a large comprehensive school where I took up the post of head of department. I quickly became aware that the school provided an excellent curriculum for the academic pupils in the sixth form, but little for the less academic. In my first year, using my college experience and supported by the head teacher, I introduced NVQs, expecting a small take-up in the first year, and being surprised with a first group size of fifteen (the largest post-16 group in the school).

NVQs include a requirement to experience the world of work, and assessments are based on competence in the work place. It was therefore essential that each student had one day each week with a local company where they could put classroom theory into practice. At the time, 1990, this was a novel idea for schools and I was left much to my own devices to organise the WBL. I wrote to local contacts, some of which I had made at the college, but also new ones, to represent the needs of each individual student of the group. Students were then allocated to a company based on their personal development needs. By providing an experience in an environment that met their career aspirations the motivation of each student was observed to be enhanced.

I was given the freedom to go out and visit the placements, albeit in my 'free' time. This enabled me to work with the management in the placements to train staff in mentoring the students and developing the quality of each placement. With only fifteen students in the group I was able to get round each placement each term, thus building professional relationships with their provider and developing my own knowledge of each placement. The head quickly realised that this was raising the profile of the school in the community, and assisting the school to move up the league tables as the NVQs were equivalent to four GCSEs in the School League Table points.

By the following year news of the success of the programme had spread across the school and I increased numbers to two groups of fifteen students. The following year we introduced the new GNVQs in Business. By this time I had expanded the staff in my department from two and a half to six full time staff, looking each time for staff that had worked in industry and supported the notion of WBL. We discussed the needs of the new GNVQ group and decided that they should do a two week placement in the first year to link into their career aspirations and provide them with an opportunity to put theory into practice. This was a new idea and impacted across the whole school as the GNVQ was open to students who were also taking 'A' levels. Two weeks out of school, therefore, took some selling to other teachers and the Senior Management Team. However, the success of the NVQ group, the willingness of employers to become involved in WBL, the raising of the school profile in the local community, and the positive feed back from those concerned helped to drive this initiative forward.

The initial GNVQs involved the development of key skills, including communication, working with others, and problem solving, so I developed a

process whereby the students made their own contact with local companies to secure their placement. This proved to be a positive initiative and helped with the development of career related skills such as writing a curriculum vitae, letters of application, and interviews. I also developed a database with a range of placements that had been used by the NVQ students, and contacts I had maintained from College. The careers service helped to develop the database, and when I established a link with the new local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), the database was enhanced with more new contacts.

I arranged for students who lacked confidence at interview technique to be supported by industrialists visiting the school and running 'mock' interviews which grew in popularity and ultimately resulted in all sixth form students taking up this valuable opportunity, supported by local industrialists who provided trainee managers in need of interviewing skills.

The first one week placement for the whole sixth form was quite an undertaking, and was organised jointly by myself and the head of sixth form. It was time-consuming, but enormously rewarding. It was not well received by all staff: some could not see the need for work experience, and found the interruption to their lessons a nuisance. However, as the first cohort returned with renewed motivation towards their career aspirations, and a more mature attitude towards their studies, it became a permanent feature of the school year.

At this time the local TEC became proactive in wanting to establish links with the local schools and I attended a meeting to discuss ways in which links could be useful to the schools and local industries. This initial meeting resulted in the formation of the North Nottinghamshire Education and Business Partnership (NNEBP), with a management group, and money to develop the Partnership and areas such as WBL. With regular meetings of schools and businesses that wanted to develop positive relationships the move towards WBL across school sixth forms began. After eighteen months I became vice-chairperson of this group, a role that enabled me to further influence the development of WBL across North Nottinghamshire.

The NNEBP, supported in its role by the local TEC, wanted to build on the WBL experiences of local students and started to run a series of events with local industrialists to develop the quality of the placement. I was involved with these meetings and was soon running them with an enthusiastic group of teachers and

industrialists aided by a budget from the TEC. As employers began to see the relevance of the WBL experience, and to realise that it provided them with an opportunity to influence their future workforce, we were provided with greater and wider opportunities for our students. The placements spread across other schools in the area and we started to work closely with each other in placement timings, sharing knowledge and expectations, and standardising WBL booklets and health and safety documentation. This helped to provide a more cohesive experience for employers.

In school we introduced other vocationally related programmes, all requiring work experience: NVQ in IT for Practitioners, GNVQs in Leisure and Tourism, and Health and Social Care, and Manufacturing. All of them required quality placements. The success of the sixth form placement was spread to year ten, who were able to gain a two week WBL experience in industry. This had to be 'sold' initially to parents, for whom I organised an information event. The students were again expected to find their own placements; this had proved to be successful with the sixth form and did not prove to be difficult for year ten. Placements had to be checked for health and safety compliance and the students briefed about their expectations of the placement.

The health and safety check was the main way of screening companies, in particular small companies, as suggested by Richardson and Blakeney (1998). Students were given access to the sixth form database to help them look at the type of placements available, and their choice of placement was supported with the purchase of careers related software. As this WBL experience was two weeks out of the timetable, I expected resistance from some of the teachers, but met with little – most were so pleased with the sixth form experience that they supported the introduction at year ten. Some of the parents had been concerned that their children would be exploited and used for shelf-stacking in shops, or similar unskilled tasks. This links to my earlier discussion of social justice in chapter one and the discussion of habitus earlier in this chapter (page 43). However, so much work had been done with local employers, and with the documentation the pupils took with them, that they were able to experience a range of positive experiences. Staff were quick to sign up to visits, so we were able to ensure each student received a visit during the WBL experience which helped to maintain quality.

When the pupils returned to school we ran a debriefing day so that they could share experiences. This is supported by Kitson (1993) drawing on the

experiences of Bennett (1993) and more recently by Jeffers (2006). The day had a profound effect on the students, and staff again commented on increased motivation and confidence, greater career focus, and greater maturity of their pupils in year eleven. We also found that some students who we never expected would continue with their education, wanted to stay on and gain further qualifications; their experience had made them realise the importance of qualifications and what they could gain by further study. The impact was therefore much wider than had been anticipated. Surveys were carried out with local companies on the success of this initiative, and parents were asked to comment. All the questionnaires returned a resounding endorsement of continuing with this opportunity.

In August 2000 I left the school for my current post as Senior Lecturer at NTU, in the School of Education. Prior to starting the post I was invited into the University for a day in June to organise my timetable. I was invited to a meeting in the afternoon of the Programme Team that I would be attached to in my first year; the main focus of the meeting was the WBL experience of the students, and the number of complaints that had been received. An ex-student, who had co-ordinated the WBL for that academic year, had sent out a questionnaire to the students to gain some idea of the main themes and the results were shared at the meeting. I have drawn on this questionnaire as the starting point for this research, which is discussed fully in chapter three. One difficulty for the School of Education was that the person who had organised the placement for a number of years had left and not been replaced by a member of the academic team, leaving a major gap in the WBL experience arrangements. At the meeting I made a number of suggestions about how the placement could be improved, based on my previous experiences. Shortly after the meeting I was contacted by the Programme Leader and asked if I would take on the role of Applied Studies (WBL) Co-ordinator when I started in September.

This section has set out my personal background and the experiences of WBL prior to the commencement of this research. The discussion has included links to action research and the emergence of my ontological values. I have articulated how my values were denied in practice (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) when working at the College. I have also acknowledged the 'multiple influences' (Whitehead, 2009, p 9) in my own learning which impact on my understanding and belief in WBL.

Students' Background

The above section gives an indication of the experience that most students may arrive with at University in terms of WBL. However, space needs to be given here to the range of experiences they have that impact on WBL. Naylor (1997) defines WBL as part of the school-work transition, connecting school learning with the wider world. Indeed, it is within secondary school that many students first encounter an opportunity to experience the work place through a WBL experience, while others will experience work through part-time employment prior to starting University and to provide financial support during their undergraduate studies. Reay *et al* (2005, p 87) found that a third of students from middle class homes and two thirds of students from working class homes were in paid employment during their undergraduate course.

The overall aims and objectives of the school WBL experience is set out in the DfES publication, 'Work Experience: a Guide for Secondary Schools':

- 'developing students' employability and key skills;
- careers education and guidance;
- vocational programmes, including GNVQ and NVQ programmes;
- personal and social education;
- National Curriculum and other subjects.' (DfES, 2002, p 4)

Wider experiences of undergraduate students may include:

- GNVQ. Students who have experienced GNVQ, particularly at the Advanced level will have had a period of WBL experience. This will differ depending on the arrangements their institution makes. In the sixth form it is usually a minimum of a week, but could be one day each week, particularly if the programme has been followed in a College of Further Education (Yeomans, 1998; Hodgkinson, 1998; Williams and Raggatt 1998).
- School Placement. Following the Dearing Report (1997) all schools are required to make provision for WBL. Most of the students will have had at least a week long experience either in the sixth form, or year ten or eleven, depending on which school they attended. Some may have had experiences in both years, and some may have had more than one week WBL experiences. There is criticism of the school placement in that the type of placement and experiences gained will vary greatly and may result in a negative impact on the replication of

cultural experiences (Petherbridge, 1997). For example, some may have stacked shelves, or swept floors at the local hairdressers, others may have shadowed a solicitor or barrister, worked with the managing director of a small diverse company, or spent the time training with the local football club.

- NVQ. Students following the NVQ route will have had more substantial work experience, due to the nature of the NVQ and its competency-based assessment. This could be one day each week in industry, or more substantial time each week.
- Experience of work-related environments through the enrichment of the curriculum for the new vocational Diplomas launched across Britain in 2008.
- Working with local CoVEs or Colleges to gain vocational experience which may lead to an NVQ or Diploma (Williams and Yarrow, 2006).
- Part-time Work. Many of the students will have gained experience of the world of work through part-time work. The key skill development in all part-time work is often overlooked, but is an essential part of the development of the student, and these experiences need to be understood. It is also likely that quite a number of students may have had gap years, working to gain some funding for their University programme, or come to the University as mature students, with a wealth of industrial/life experiences that are relevant, or who are part-time on the programme, supporting their studies by working, or who work outside of University hours to support themselves financially through their programme. Others may be involved during their programme in additional work experiences such as the Students in Classrooms placement experience, which is undertaken voluntarily by the student.

These different types of previous work experience are also identified by Harvey *et al* (1998) and CHERI (2002c, p 32) who argue for a more 'coherent approach' to WBL experiences across schools and post-compulsory education with an 'integrated approach to recognising explicitly the learning gained across the age ranges'. My experience of WBL in the secondary and FE sectors would support this. The new vocational diplomas may enable this, but not all pupils will take the diploma route.

The level of work experience is therefore different. In addition students coming to University may have been involved with working with industry in other ways:

- **Mentoring:** Mentoring has been used by schools for several years by attaching a person from business, an older student, or a volunteer student from a local University to support students who may lack motivation, regularly truant, have a low self-esteem, or are the first generation considering going to University as part of the Government's Widening Participation scheme. These mentors will be asked to make regular contact with the student they are supporting; some are encouraged to set targets for development. Most mentors receive training to ensure their support is valued and aimed correctly for the student concerned. Some businesses see this as a significant part of their community links agenda, while others encourage staff to become involved as part of their individual professional development. University students who take on the role of a school mentor are generally well trained by the University and take on this role as part of their work in the community, valuing its place in their own development. Students in schools that I have observed having a mentor have welcomed the support of this person. Some mentoring is now carried out on-line and referred to as e-mentoring.
- **Industry Days such as Compact:** Compact is an agreement that was set up in 1995 as a partnership between schools, local Universities, and local businesses. School pupils are introduced to the scheme in year nine, when they are set targets to achieve in years ten and eleven. These include targets for attendance, behaviour, and taking part in a period of work experience. Universities became involved by supporting Compact days, arranging visits to their University, and undertaking to interview Compact pupils who achieved their targets for entry qualifications. Businesses undertook to work with the schools in a variety of ways, such as providing speakers, mentors, visits, and interviews for successful Compact completion. This widened the opportunity for pupils in schools to undertake WBL and gain further experience of industry.
- **Speakers:** Local and national industrialists are invited into schools for a variety of purposes which can be career linked, or more specifically for an aspect of the curriculum. Some schools will take pupils to conventions to listen to a range of industrialists from specific business areas.

- Visits: Schools have a range of visits that pupils are able to join in with. Some are as rewards, celebrations of achievement, or residential visits, while others are specifically linked to subject development and career development.
- Work-based projects: A range of projects have involved industry over the years. TVEI worked closely with industry to develop teaching and learning materials, resources, speakers, visits, and projects. More recently, with the introduction of vocational GCSEs and AS/A2 levels, GNVQs, and NVQs pupils have widened their opportunities to work in industry for a period of time, or arrange visits to complete project work (Yeomans, 1998).
- Taster weekends: These are aimed at specific job areas, for example psychology, law, and teaching. Sixth form students go to a University for a weekend and meet a range of practitioners in their chosen field and obtain information on programmes available in higher education.

Emerging Key Themes

In reflecting on the internal and external context, the literature available at the time of starting the research, my background and that of the students relating to WBL, it can be seen that certain key themes were emerging:

- Positive experiences of WBL when developing programmes in secondary education and FE from my own experiences and that of the available literature: Shepherd (1995); Harvey *et al* (1997); Cameron-Jones (1999); Elias *et al* (1999); James (2000); Blackwell *et al* (2001); Guile and Griffiths (2001). Linked to this is my belief that there is a definite place for the students within these institutions to experience WBL.
- The need to ensure that stakeholders were adequately prepared for their roles, and were clear about the University's expectations. This links to my experiences of developing the mentor roles when I was visiting the YTS and adult students as discussed earlier in this chapter. This theme is also supported by Kitson (1993), Cameron-Jones and O'Hara (1999) and Blackwell (2001).
- The need to visit the students on placement. This is reflected in my discussion relating to my experiences of visiting the YTS and adult returners when working in FE, as well as the NVQ students, year ten and year twelve students when working in the secondary school. This theme was also influenced by Bournier and Ellerker (1993, p 4) who commented

'students can feel isolated and abandoned' and by Richardson and Blakeney's research (1998). It was through such visits that I was able to make the curriculum links between education and WBL placements, develop the role of the mentors, and start to develop key skills, and consider methods of recording these developments.

- The need to provide opportunity for debriefing students, and helping them to share their experiences. This links to my own experiences of debriefing the students when working in the school. When the students returned from WBL we collapsed the timetable on their first day back and spent the full day debriefing them and providing an opportunity to share their experiences. The feedback from colleagues and students was positive and we therefore kept it as part of their overall experience in following years. This theme is supported by Brennan and Little

'an explicit debriefing stage following work based learning elements, comprising personal reflection; group reflection; experience exchange and the formulation of a critique in the 'cool light of day' is vital for effective learning, and diagnosing future learning needs' (1996, p 64)

and more recently Jeffers (2006).

- The need to ensure the environments where students were placed had appropriate health and safety procedures in place such as adequate insurance and that a risk assessment had been conducted. This links to my experiences in the school; as WBL developed across the Local Education Authority (LEA) training for co-ordinators in health and safety was organised. I attended annual meetings and completed my Health and Safety Certificate. I later used, and continue to use, case studies from this certificate in my student briefings. This experience raised my awareness of the importance of ensuring health and safety in the workplace for all students. This is supported by Shilling (1989) and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) (1998).
- WBL can provide opportunities to develop a range of key skills and an opportunity to put theory into practice. This links to my personal experiences of visits and observing the development of students through WBL both in FE and the secondary school. This is also supported by Shilling (1989) and links to ESCET's findings (2005a).
- WBL can provide the opportunity to help to make career choices, motivate students in their studies, and to network with others in their chosen career. This links to ESECT's findings (2005a) and is further supported by Corson (1991); Auburn and Ley (1993); Dearing (1997);

Elias *et al* (1999); Guile and Griffiths (2001); CHERI (2002b and 2002c) and more recently by Ball (2008).

- The need to link WBL to learning outcomes. While I was not familiar with the term learning outcomes prior to starting at the University, having come from a school and further education experience of having a syllabus provided by an exam board, with criteria of assessment, rather than learning outcomes, I experienced a steep learning curve in the first term. At the outset of the research I was more aware that there had to be a close link between what was experienced in the classroom and the opportunity to put this into practice in a work environment to make the experience relevant and motivating for the students. This is supported by Guile and Griffiths (2001).
- The recognition that learning while in work is contextual and involves students with challenges and demands other than those placed on him/her by the University. This is supported by Boud and Solomon (2001, p 45) that 'There are different workplaces with different demands on [students] with different opportunities for learning'.

These themes and the developments made during the cycles of action research will be discussed fully in later chapters where I describe how concerns were raised by those in the research and why these led me to make changes and choices in the research. The themes also link to my ontological values of justice, caring and respect which are revisited throughout this thesis and discussed more fully in chapter seven.

Concluding Overview

The research began as part of my journey as WBL co-ordinator, to improve the quality of WBL and ensure the curriculum underpinning this experience was appropriate. This has involved a number of stakeholders: students, academic and administrative staff at the University, and the workplace representatives who support the students while on WBL (mentors).

As outlined above, my prior experience of student WBL in the school context was at the level of the students often shadowing a professional person, working within manual occupations, or lower level retail roles. This experience helped to shape my role as WBL co-ordinator at NTU, where the expectations both of WBL support and organisation was much higher.

As discussed above, WBL within Higher Education has traditionally found its place in sandwich degrees. With the increasing emphasis placed by the Government on the responsibilities of Universities to ensure employability, driven by the Dearing Report (1997), and the need for Britain to remain competitive with other countries, the role of WBL has increased over recent years. In 1998 the CVCP began urging HEIs to devise strategies for improving their undergraduates' employability skills. More recently the HEA has published guidance on the employability skills graduates across a range of subject areas should achieve (2007). Mandelson, writing on behalf of the Labour party, setting out the party's plans for the future of further and higher education states there needs to be a greater 'emphasis on identifying the strategic skills that the economy will need in the future' (in Newman, 2009).

The changing nature of the working environment, with an increasing number of SMEs recruiting a much greater number of graduates, is resulting in a need for graduates to be 'employer ready' (Harvey *et al*, 1997; National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997; ESECT, 2005a; Nixon *et al*, 2006). This, together with pressure from the Government and employer bodies for HE to contribute more directly towards economic regeneration and growth has resulted in an increase in such undergraduate programmes offered across Universities (HEA, 2006). Ball (2008, p 17) states 'Education reform then is intimately tied through the development of skills and 'new knowledge' to the requirements of the knowledge economy'.

The students' view of their studies has been developed through the WBL experience, and the opportunity to apply theory to practice as well as develop life skills. The changes that have taken place as a result of this research, which are discussed in the following chapters, have been fundamental in developing the role of WBL and ensuring it is viewed as integral to the overall experience of the students. Their vocational aspirations have been given an opportunity to become manifest and to develop. Some students have changed their aspirations as a direct result of WBL, returned with increased levels of maturity and motivation, as reported by their tutors and evidenced in Archive 2e. This links to findings reported in Bourner and Ellerker (1993), and James (2000). Little and Harvey (2006, p 2) however make the point that there is little research which 'explicitly' explores the academic development resulting from WBL. Tutors also reported that students and tutors can benefit by drawing on their WBL in their third year. Auburn and Ley (1993, p 276) do not agree and

state that the emphasis in the final year should be 'geared towards obtaining a degree ... rather than backward looking toward the placement', although in their conclusion they comment that the benefits of the WBL could be limited if not integrated into the programme.

It is important to be realistic and question whether my research, based at one University, can be used as a framework by others. It must be acknowledged that other universities will approach the curriculum supporting the WBL in different ways to meet their programme outcomes. Also, other universities may have longer or shorter WBL experiences which will inevitably require different strategies in preparing and supporting both the WBL providers and students. However, much of the development of the WBL framework will be constant, no matter what the variables at other institutions.

McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p 2) state that 'research is undertaken in order to generate a theory'. It was not until the final stages of writing up this thesis that my living educational theory started to emerge through both creative and critical practice throughout the period of this research. On reflection it is clear that this theory was developing at this stage in the research, linking closely to the themes that were emerging, and continued to emerge in each cycle, but I did not recognise it as such until much later. My living educational theory is discussed in chapter seven page 287. Also emerging at this stage was evidence of my ontological values of justice, caring and respect as discussed earlier in this chapter.

In conclusion, this chapter presents the background to the research, discusses the background to and policy for WBL, introduces the initial literature that underpinned the research at this stage, and discusses my experiences and those of students prior to the commencement of the research. Key themes have been identified to be built on later in the thesis.

Chapter Three: Cycle One

Introduction

This chapter discusses the first cycle of the research. It identifies, through the collection of data, the main themes for this cycle, and the new structures and processes that were put into place as a result of both the data collection and the influence of the literature available. The chapter concludes with links to the second cycle and briefly identifies progress of the initial aims of the research that are made in this cycle.

Background and Context

As stated in chapter one, there are three non vocational degree programmes each comprising two subject strands. They are:

1. BSc (Hons) in Business and Technology (BAT) renamed BSc (Hons) in Business and Information Communications Technology (BICT) based in Nottingham City Centre, Comprising Business, and Information Technology;
2. BA (Hons) Business, Leisure and Sports Education (BLSE); based at the Clifton comprising Business, and Leisure and Sports Education;
3. BA (Hons) Psychology and Educational Development (PED); also based at the Clifton Campus and comprising Psychology, and Educational Development.

The WBL experience formed two modules of the second year semester for each undergraduate programme: one module per subject area for each degree programme. As part of the WBL experience students from each programme had to submit a 3,000 word assignment for each subject strand (6,000 words in total per programme accounting for sixty credits towards their degree).

The BAT/BICT degree followed a six week programme of WBL, while the latter two degrees (BLSE and PED) followed a programme of WBL that involved forty five days over a fifteen week semester.

The BAT/BICT programme used a WBL model which spanned across the full semester as follows:

Weeks one to three provided timetabled hours for preparation for the WBL experience similar to that found by Little and Harvey (2006). Groups were timetabled in University for each subject strand (Business, and Information

Technology) each week, during which time they followed a carefully planned programme of activities to prepare them for their placement. This included:

- opportunity for tutorials with staff in both small groups and on an individual basis;
- opportunity to search for relevant texts and journal articles to support their placement;
- opportunity to develop software or business skills they may need on their placement;
- an overview of roles they may undertake on the placement;
- input on the focus for the assignment they may undertake while on placement.

During the pre-placement weeks students were encouraged to visit their placement to discuss their role and project(s) they could become involved in, meet staff, begin to understand the nature of the organisation in more detail, and start to identify possible areas for their assignments. This pre-placement activity reflects Harvey *et al* (1998, p 26) who state that such familiarisation is an element of a 'good' placement design 'necessary to optimise the learning opportunities for students'.

The six week placement period then followed. Students were well-prepared, confident and excited about their WBL experience. The organisation providing the WBL experience received no preparation other than a two sided document about the programme, and a letter thanking them for offering the placement, confirming details such as start and finish date. Students had to complete a learning contract the purpose of this was unclear, and there was no system in place to track whether these had been submitted. There was no job description required, and no confirmation of the hours students were expected to work. Cunningham *et al*, (2004, p 9), in their later research, also experienced this, describing the organisation of WBL as 'unplanned',

During the placement there was limited contact with the University, although students could contact their tutors by telephone or email. A tutor was assigned to visit, although not necessarily one from their teaching team, and this person was asked to visit the student mid-way through the placement. Interviews with colleagues (evidenced in Archive 2h) identified there were no guidelines on what to cover on this visit, so not all students received a planned quality visit that moved them forward on their assignment planning, or addressed themes of

concern about the placement. This reflects research by Bournier and Ellerker (1993, p 4) who found that tutors visited 'purposelessly, some supervisors have no clear idea of what they want to achieve in their time'. Interviews also revealed that the length of these visits differed, some students receiving a good hour, while others received a quick ten minute visit. Tutors were allocated two hours for each visit. Bournier and Ellerker (1993, p 4) recommend a 'minimum time of one hour with the student and thirty minutes with the supervisor followed by another 20 minutes or so with the two together'. Some students did not have a visit from their tutor, and no explanation of why they did not visit.

Following the placement the students were timetabled for a further three weeks for tutorials to support their assignments. This time was also spent in debriefing the students and sharing their experiences, which is supported by Kitson (1993). Some tutors encouraged them to put together a presentation to the rest of the group on where they had gone, what they had done, and the skills, knowledge and understanding they felt they had developed. Where this took place the students found it useful (evidenced in Archive 2i). Individual tutorials were then offered to discuss what they needed to do next in terms of their assignments. In the final three weeks of the semester the students were introduced to their third year major project and encouraged to start to make decisions on what they would focus on. Time was provided for them to establish any links they may need for this project. Interviews indicated that the most successful of the third year projects were, and still are, those where the students returned to their second year WBL environment to work on a project they had identified during this time (Archives 2h and 2i).

This placement model was therefore structured. Discussions with the BICT Programme Leader (evidenced in Archive 2e) and interviews with the students (evidenced in Archive 2i) indicated this group felt well-prepared for their WBL experience, had a good understanding of what to expect, and had reported feelings of success, achievement, enjoyment, and support. This was not as evident with the PED and BLSE students.

The BLSE students and the PED students had a different model for their placement. This group was required to spend forty five days at their placement across a fifteen week semester. The students arranged the placement and days of attendance themselves. Their placements received a brief general outline of the programme and a letter confirming the need for forty five days at the placement. There was no indication of how much time each day should be

spent at the organisation. These students were again supported by a tutor who made one visit to them while on placement, and they could also email or telephone their tutors.

There was no system of ensuring attendance. In interviews staff expressed concern that this was exploited by the students, particularly by the BLSE students, who would 'drop in' to their placements to gain information for their assignments, but not actually work there, or gain any significant opportunity to apply theory to practice and develop professional skills (evidenced in Archive 2h). The lack of any detailed information to mentors about the University's expectations reinforced the acceptance of this practice.

Discussions with the Programme teams for BLSE and PED (evidenced in Archive 2h) revealed that the difficulty of this placement spanning the whole of the semester meant that the students did not have the time for planning and preparation for their WBL experience that the BICT students benefited from. Some students did not benefit from an introduction prior to starting the placement; in some cases all arrangements were made by post.

The PED and BLSE students were expected to attend University for review days: two consecutive days part way through the placement, and one day at the end of the placement. The first two review days enabled them to spend half a day with their group for each subject, supported by their tutor, in which to discuss common themes and identify the progress made with assignments. On the second day they could book individual tutorial time with their subject leader. The final review day was timetabled for the end of the WBL experience to evaluate the experience and submit assignments.

The early stages of research identified that for all three degrees the students were not consistently briefed (evidenced in Archives 2a, 2e, and 2h). There was no separate session for a placement briefing, the handbooks had limited information, and there was no help with developing interview skills. There was no health and safety checking being carried out, although this was a requirement by the Health and Safety Executive and stated as essential in CVCP (1997), a document which provides guidance to HE on arranging student placements.

At the outset of taking up the role of WBL 'Applied Studies' co-ordinator I became aware that the students, and staff, particularly those attached to the

PED and BLSE programmes, were unhappy about the current process of WBL and the poor quality of placement a significant number of students were experiencing. This is evidenced in Archive 1a. This had been exacerbated by the placement co-ordinator leaving without notice as discussed in the last chapter. He was replaced by a recent graduate from the PED programme, who was inexperienced in co-ordinating placements, other than her own personal experience as a student.

Reflections on Methodology

In chapter one I introduced the reader to the underpinning methodology: action research, as discussed by Lewin (1952); Cohen and Manion (1980 and 1994); Kolb (1984); Carr and Kemmis (1986); Zuber-Skerritt (1992); McNiff and Whitehead (2002); Whitehead and McNiff (2006). Cohen and Manion's (1994, p 186) description 'Action research is small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention' together with Whitehead and McNiff's (2006, p 15) approach to action research which views practitioner researchers as enquirers 'into their own practice' reflects the choice of an action research methodology.

This research could be considered 'small-scale', but its results may be far reaching as the framework is developed and shared with others beyond the University. While the site for this research is three undergraduate programmes in one School within one University, I have since found that colleagues in other Schools and beyond NTU have had similar experiences, as discussed further in chapter six. The effects of the interventions made as part of the process of developing a quality WBL experience for the students are discussed in detail in this and the following chapters.

Using an action research methodology has provided a systematic, critical framework for this research which has involved 'learning from reflection on practice and taking action to improve practice' (Sanguinetti, in Garrick and Rhodes, 2000, p 232). As the research has progressed the methods of data collection have changed. The methods chosen to gather data are reported systematically to show the action within each cycle of the research. Thus the methods reflect the choice of action research as the methodology and the recognition of the need to generate evidence to support my claim to knowledge. The changes in method are discussed below for cycle one and within the relevant chapters which report on further cycles of research. 'The purpose of

gathering data is to generate evidence to support and test a claim to knowledge' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p 63).

In chapter seven I discuss the reasons for using action research to underpin this research. The main process that I followed was that suggested by Carr and Kemmis (1986) in relation to working with teachers in researching their own practice as insider researchers and recognizing the cyclical nature of action research: planning for change --> action to make the change --> observing the changes made and how these impact on those involved --> reflecting on how successful the changes were and what then needed to be developed further --> return to planning. This cyclical spiral is shown in diagrammatic format in figures 7.2 and 7.3. Zuber-Skerritt (1992), writing on action research in higher education, confirmed my choice of action research

'the ultimate aim should be to improve practice in a systematic way and, if warranted, to suggest and make changes to the environment, context or conditions in which that practice takes place, and which impede desirable improvement and effective future development' (1992, p 11).

The work by Carr and Kemmis (1986), and McNiff's (2002) argument that action research should be educational and help people to make sense of their professional practice also reinforced the use of an action research methodology. Lewin's (1946) description of action research reflecting small steps in spirals has definitely been a great influence in this research and is referred to throughout each cycle. I have found these theorists to be integral to develop my own understanding of action research.

I was further influenced by Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p 12) who state that research involves 'gathering data and generating evidence in relation to articulated living standards of judgment in order to test an emergent theory' and state the purpose of research as 'generating and testing new knowledge'. In this section I set out the methods I adopted to gather the data, and in later sections I show how I have used this to generate evidence. By underpinning my research with action research I show in the following two chapters how I have been able to test the new knowledge through a process of cycles. In chapter seven I set out my living standards of judgment. I have already made comment on my emerging theory and will continue to refer to this in the following chapters as I discuss each cycle and in chapter seven I articulate my living educational theory of practice that has emerged through this research.

The paradigm of Praxis within action research is where my research lies: 'knowledge is derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge, in an ongoing process' (O'Brien, 1998, p 11). This paradigm rejects the idea that researchers are unbiased and suggests that within action research the researcher is often the person to gain the most; this is discussed further in chapter seven. I would question whether I gained the most; action research is also about working collaboratively, and as this research developed, moving through cycles, all stakeholders began to gain as will be explained in the following chapters. Ultimately everyone involved in the research had the opportunity to gain in different ways.

For this cycle of the research the methods by which data was collected were:

- Use of an evaluation document already in existence (evidenced in Archive 1a). This evaluation had been carried out with the PED and BLSE students, with a response rate of thirty seven out of fifty five, high compared to the norm for undergraduate students, a view supported by comments from colleagues who generally experience poor response from students for such surveys. This document proved to be useful in identifying some of the initial difficulties that students were finding in their WBL and is further discussed later in this chapter.
- Meetings held with a Student Focus Group set up specifically for this action research. Notes taken from these meetings are evidenced in Archives 2a-c. The way in which I was able to set up a focus group with student representatives is discussed below in the section 'Identifying Key Themes for cycle one'. The way in which this group was involved in this research is discussed throughout this chapter and in chapters four and five.
- Interviews held with BAT/BICT students who had not been involved with the evaluation document indicated above (evidenced in Archive 2i). These students followed a different pattern to the PED and BLSE students who completed the initial questionnaire and had a more positive WBL experience. Interviewing a group of these students proved helpful in identifying what made their experience more positive. Themes raised by the students that were relevant to this research are discussed in this chapter, particularly in the section 'Background and Context', page 68.

- Interviews and conversations with colleagues involved in the placement process. These are evidenced in Archive 2e and 2h. These proved to be important in identifying some of the themes for each cycle of the research. The themes raised by colleagues in this cycle, and the way in which they were developed into positive aspects of the WBL experience are discussed below, particularly in the sections 'Preparation of Students' page 89, 'Preparation of Mentors' page 99 and 'Preparation of Tutors' page 97. I also involved colleagues in a collaborative way and welcomed their role as critical friends which deepened the criticality of the research. I was able to discuss ideas for developments and encourage colleagues to challenge the developments; these are also discussed later in this chapter. McNiff (2002, p 9) states that 'new knowledge can most effectively be generated through dialogue with others who are equally interested in the process of learning'. My colleagues were at different levels of 'interest' which transformed through the period of the research; this is discussed later in this chapter and in the Tensions section of chapter seven. In the final section of this chapter I reflect on why I did not set up a Tutor Focus Group.
- Meetings held with a Mentor Focus Group set up specifically for this action research. Excerpts from the journal I maintained, together with notes from meetings are evidenced in Archive 2e. In the section below 'Identifying the Key Themes for cycle one' I discuss how and why I set up this group, and the composition of the group. I found this group to be of enormous help in the developments of the structures, processes, and documentation, particularly in this cycle. The developments the group was involved in are discussed in various sections below, particularly in the sections 'Preparation of Students' and 'Preparation of Mentors'.
- I mentioned briefly above my journal. This journal of my reflections was used throughout each cycle; it was most helpful in cycle one where I was identifying the themes for the research. As the themes started to emerge the recordings in my journal were analysed and coded into each of the themes. I was able to follow the emergence and developments of the themes through the journal which also provided a focus for my thoughts as the research progressed. It was in this document that I was able to record my increasing confidence with the developments of the WBL and my confidence of working

within the HE sector. I was also able to record where I thought I had made progress and identify the themes that needed further development, the changes that had not been successful such as the issuing of the mentor handbook reported in the following chapters, and identifying the people, that I still needed to 'convince' that the developments were improving the experiences of the stakeholders. Some examples of these are given in the following chapter when I discuss the curriculum changes and the tensions that I noted at that time.

Each of these methods of data collection which are discussed below reflects the use of qualitative methods to identify themes (Janesick in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Identifying the themes, planning actions to develop the themes, putting these into practice, then observing and reflecting on the changes, reflects Whitehead and McNiff's (2006) idea of the cyclical nature of action in which practice informs and generates new theory, and that new theory feeds back into practice and thus generates further new practices. This is further discussed in chapter seven.

By using qualitative methods in this cycle I was able to gather data to generate evidence of what needed to be developed. The methods selected provided an opportunity to use open ended questions, and follow up questions. In initial meetings and interviews I started with a blank canvas, but as themes emerged, and I was able to triangulate these I became more focused on the themes that needed to be developed in each cycle as discussed below and in following chapters.

The opportunity for critical reflection on the process was important. Sanguinetti, in her role as action researcher comments that the process of action research requires a 'shift in focus beyond action to reflection, in the sense of reflexive, critical praxis' (in Garrick and Rhodes, 2000, p 237). She develops three levels of self-reflection which mirror my own role within this research: reflection about 'our own discursive formation in relation to the problem at hand'; reflections on our role and 'how we might be implicated in the structures and practices we are trying to change'; and reflections about our 'investments in the research project itself, our role in the dynamics of power structuring projects' (2000, p 237). These are expanded in the following chapters, with a further discussion on power on page 277.

The choice of these methods, the questions asked, and the data collected links closely to my values which I articulated in chapter one: the values of justice, caring and respect. I will refer to these in greater detail in chapter seven.

As I was involved in working closely with each focus group I observed the gradual sense of empowerment and of progress being made. This was supported by colleagues who moved their own perceptions from despair to a more positive view, as the first cycle progressed and the first cohort of students were prepared for their placement with new structures in place. This continued to develop further throughout the research, and is reflected in chapters four and five.

It could be argued that this process lacked structure and therefore one might question whether it was valid and reliable. However, the themes identified with the stakeholder groups triangulated with those raised by other stakeholder groups. This process of collecting data enabled me to identify a range of themes to address in the research, some of which linked to themes identified in the previous chapter. Additional themes were identified as the research progressed, reflecting the action research process.

These methods of data collection and collaborative working proved successful and I would justify my use of these methods for research in the first cycle on the grounds that action research is cyclical, and reflects a process of collaborative enquiry. Setting up the focus groups, holding meetings, and recording conversations enabled me to engender the process of a team approach. Working collaboratively is a significant part of action research, as discussed by Grundy (1982), resulting in all stakeholders having a sense of power and ownership in the process of development. Certainly the feedback I received from the focus groups was positive, and the level of commitment of all focus group members, and my colleagues was strong, as evidenced in Archives 2a-c, 2e, 2h, and 3c. Research methods were adapted at the end of the first cycle when the need for the focus groups to meet regularly diminished and quantitative data was required to more systematically measure the effects of the changes made in this cycle. At this point however there was more awareness of the themes arising from this first cycle, and an opportunity to make greater use of more qualitative methods of evaluation. As action research is an emergent and iterative process I gained greater understanding and knowledge of the structure and processes related to WBL in each cycle.

Further detail of the role of the focus groups and the interviews and conversations conducted with colleagues and stakeholders is given below.

Identifying Key Themes for Cycle One

When I took up post in September 2000 I was informed by the Programme Leader (PL) that the placement experience was the weakest aspect of the undergraduate experience and had received criticism in student evaluations, at student meetings, and Programme Committee meetings (evidenced in Archive 2e). It was evident that rapid changes to the current structures and processes were needed. The impending QAA inspection the following year added urgency to the review of practice in order to reduce the number of criticisms of WBL by the time of the review. In addition the undergraduate programmes were timetabled for a re-validation in 2001, providing an opportunity to develop the curriculum related to WBL. This would build on the positive elements that the research data identified, particularly in relation to the structure of the BAT/BICT WBL.

My investigation into the existing situation began with an analysis of the Programme Committee Meeting minutes and a categorisation of these into themes. Following this I met colleagues to discuss current process and practice and analysed the evaluation document (evidence in Archive 1a) into themes. At this point I started to develop my living standards of judgment which were formed from my ontological values, which are discussed further in chapter seven.

Comments from the students in the evaluation (evidenced in Archive 1a) included requests for:

‘More information for the organisation in order for them to be clear of their role in the placement’;

‘Implement some organisation’;

‘More structure’;

‘University to contact the organisation before the student starts’;

‘Ensure the student has a contract’;

‘Time should be negotiated for study at the organisation where the workers can be interviewed and student gets on with assignment’;

‘Communication between mentor and visiting tutor needs to be improved’;

‘More time with my mentor’;

'More effective monitoring'.

My next step was to meet with the BAT/BICT student representatives who had not been involved in the initial evaluation (evidenced in Archive 2i). Again this was analysed for emerging themes. The student view was emerging as an important aspect at this stage in the research therefore the next stage was to set up a focus group of student representatives who would be willing to work with me in the research. On the advice of the PL I invited the student representatives for each of the undergraduate programmes (elected on an annual basis by their peer group to represent them at Programme Committee meetings). Student representatives, two from each year group across the three degrees were emailed. I explained the research and requested that if they were unable to join the group they send someone else to ensure a balanced representation across each year of each degree programme. All representatives accepted the invitation to be involved and represent their group's views. The group therefore comprised eighteen students, plus the Programme Administrator and me. This was potentially a large group, but I was aware that not all students would attend all meetings and felt it was important students from each year of each degree programme had an opportunity to have input.

At the first meeting with the student group some of the themes that I had already identified emerged, thus correlating with the analysis and categorising of the collated data. One theme that re-emerged at this meeting was the concern about the lack of quality and support during the WBL experience. It was agreed that, to respond to this concern, a group of mentors would be established to produce a framework of support, provide criticality, and have an input to the developments. This group, the Mentor Focus Group, was established by a request in writing to mentors who had provided placements to our third year students in the previous year. Eight providers agreed to be involved. I worked with this group throughout the research, although the meetings were more regular in cycle one when a great deal of initial work had to be carried out with the group. There was some change to the membership of the group each year but continuity was provided as some remained throughout the research. The change in membership did not appear to dilute the impact they had on the changes made. In fact, it possibly added to the impact as a wider range of providers was represented overall. Their involvement in this action research in this first cycle is discussed in detail below.

I would always question my role as an insider-researcher at the meetings of each focus group because it can become difficult to know if participants say what you want to hear, or whether you are going to interpret what they say to fit your viewpoint (Somekh, 2006). I believe that because of the themes raised by the stakeholders, and because of the negativity expressed by students at programme committees initially, all comments were given and accepted freely of bias. I discuss bias and my role as insider-researcher further in chapter seven.

The process of the meetings with students and interviews with staff, particularly in the first year, were helped because there was little structure in place, and what was there was not due to existing staff. This gave us the freedom to develop existing structures and processes and move forward. The freedom was limited in that I had to work within the existing structure of WBL, that is, it would sit within the second semester of the second year of the three year undergraduate programme. I was not given the freedom to research whether a completely different approach such as a sandwich year, or two shorter periods of WBL would be more appropriate for the students. I found all the meetings with stakeholders to be positive – there was a feeling of anticipation and involvement, as well as my belief that participants knew their ideas and concerns were being listened to and, where possible, acted upon.

There was an acceptance that the problems could not be solved in one year, and that the research and developments would be ongoing. As discussed in chapter seven, this is where action research as the methodology provided a framework. In each cycle I was able to improve and develop the WBL experience, building on the developments and transforming the negative aspects to become positive. This finally resulted in a quality experience, as evidenced by the student evaluations discussed in chapters three and four and evidenced in Archives 1c, 1e, 1h, 1j and 1o. Many of the changes that proved to be positive are included in the framework which is presented in chapter five, page 203.

The themes that were emerging from the research at this early stage included the need for:

- Improvement of communication between all stakeholders;
- A review of patterns of attendance, including a review of the purpose and structure of the review and evaluation days for the PED and BLSE students;
- Greater structure for visits by tutors;

- Preparation of all stakeholders;
- An understanding of expectations while on placement;
- Quality management structures to support WBL;
- Improved University support.

At this point the data I was accumulating. I therefore categorised the data into:

- Section 1: Evaluation – to this category were added the questionnaires I introduced in cycles two and three;
- Section 2: Meetings;
- Section 3: Mentors;
- Section 4: Tutors;
- Section 5: Students;
- Section 6: Policies.

These categories remained throughout the research and are reflected in the ordering of the Archives – see page 13.

The early stages of my research therefore enabled me to clearly identify the main stakeholders. Figure 3.1 identifies the stakeholders, and the overlap highlights the need to ensure good communication between each stakeholder group. These stakeholders are those most commonly found in WBL reports; see for example Brennan and Little (1996); Harvey *et al* (1998); Little (2000).

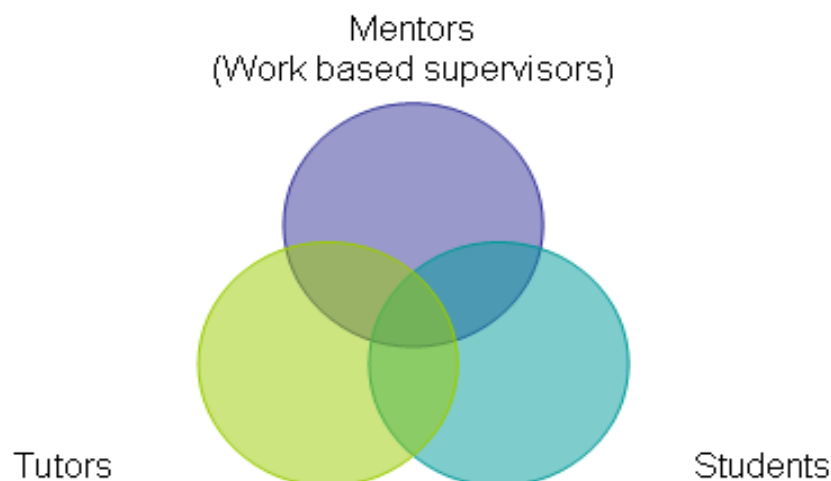


Figure 3.1: Stakeholders

An action plan (evidenced in Archive 2f) was agreed with the Programme team and the Student Focus Group, with the main priority being WBL for that academic year, that is the student experience for those students going on placement prior to Easter in cycle one. Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p 22) express 'alarm' that research may be driven by prescribed action plans that define the research in terms of 'targets and outcomes'. However, this action plan was very general and while there were target dates for completion, this was helpful as it was shared with colleagues such as the CLs and administrative staff who needed knowledge of when to expect certain changes.

As I took up the role of WBL co-ordinator the second year students returned from their summer vacation. Few students had confirmed their placements – they had been told to organize their placements during summer. At this stage little could be done but send emails and give constant reminders in seminars. However it was agreed in conversations with staff that a clear deadline needed building into the changes: this will be further discussed in cycle two.

The lack of confirmed placements identified that there was no clear system for approving providers. The placement needed to provide students with an opportunity to carry out vocational work, link theory to practice, and develop key professional skills, but underpinning that was the need to complete two assignments equivalent to sixty credits and therefore link with the learning outcomes for their programme. After discussion with the PL (evidenced in Archive 2e) it was agreed that the CLs would be responsible for approving the placements for this cycle – an improved strategy would be put into place in the following cycle. This staged development is a further example of how the cyclical nature of action research supported this research.

At Programme Committee in the first term of this cycle there was a discussion about the placement process and experience. The third year PED and BLSE student representatives stated that they felt disappointed with their experience and reported a poor experience from their student groups; the second year students from these programmes were unhappy that they would have the same experience and wanted to know what changes were being made.

This resulted in a meeting the following day between the PL and me to draw up the action plan, referred to above, that would respond to the students' concerns, where possible, for this cycle (evidenced in Archive 2f). This again reflects the appropriateness of action research as the methodology for this

research: everything could not be solved in one cycle; this was acknowledged by all stakeholders, emphasizing the collaborative nature of action research. The paradigm of action research also accepts that as one aspect is being 'fixed' the situation can change, which did happen in this research and will be referred to in more detail in following chapters. This links to the quotation on page 73 from Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p 12) that the purpose of research is 'generating and testing new knowledge'. The cyclical nature of action research provided an opportunity to reflect and evaluate the new structures and processes, while continuing to develop in following cycles.

At this stage in this first cycle, I was able to categorise the data into themes. This came from the conversations, interviews and data gathered from the initial evaluation (evidenced in Archives 1a, 2a, 2i, 2e, 2h and 3c). I then drew on my initial literature search discussed in the previous chapter to correlate with the themes others had identified as of value to the WBL experience of undergraduate students.

Figure 3.2 identifies the main themes that had emerged from the data and were the focus for cycle one. These were agreed with the PL, CLs, and both focus groups.

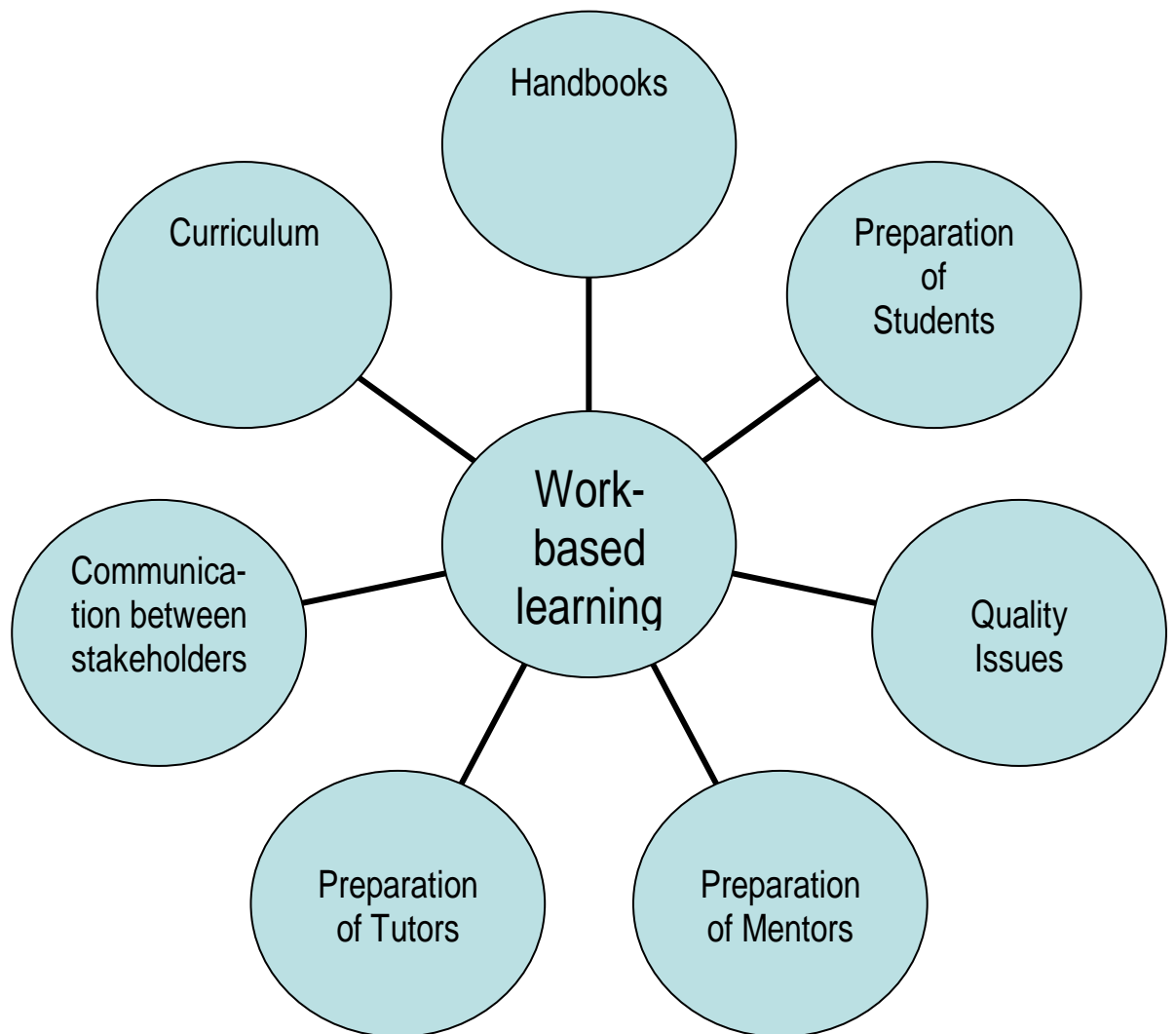


Figure 3.2: Identified themes

Each of the themes was equally essential in terms of requiring improvement and were all addressed as the first cycle progressed. Reflecting back on this stage of the research I recognise that the themes reflected my ontological values of justice, caring and respect which transformed into my living standards of judgment which Whitehead and McNiff view as 'core' to action research (2006, p 82). These can be used to judge the validity of my claim to have developed the practice of WBL within the School of Education at NTU.

There is an overlap with each of these themes, and they each reflect changes in practice that impacted on the quality of the WBL experience. The next stage in the research involved how to take these forward into possible future action.

They are all discussed in detail below; the order in which I address them does not reflect any order of importance.

Handbooks

The research discussed above had identified that the student handbook was not meeting the required need. The existing handbook contained little information other than dates, expectations in terms of days in placement, and brief information on the assignment. The data also identified that handbooks were needed to better prepare the mentors in their role. This links to my initial literature search, for example Cameron-Jones and O'Hara's (1999, p 91) research involving '669 students' found a need to ensure mentors were able to provide a high level of challenge and high level of support without which students were more likely to retreat and drop out of their programme. Shilling's (1989, p 364) research identified the need for basic conditions such as ensuring basic health and safety criteria, ensuring adequate support, and an environment where students 'are not discriminated against on the basis of their gender, race or social class'. Blackwell *et al* (2001) also supported the need for providing clear guidelines for employers, particularly relating to health and safety, induction, interviewing, and providing support. Brennan and Little (1996) and Harvey *et al* (1998) also discuss the need to brief mentors in their role, and Shepherd (1995, p 187) indicates that 'thorough briefing' of students is necessary. This literature reflected the need for the development of the students' handbook and a new document, a handbook for mentors.

The Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Group quickly engaged with the handbooks. Initially the focus was on the student handbook and additional information required to provide better support for the students in planning, obtaining, and progressing through their WBL experience. This work then moved seamlessly into the role of the mentors and the information they needed to prepare them for their role. The Applied Studies Action Plan (evidenced in Archive 2f) shows the urgency of updating handbooks and was targeted to be one of the first completions of this research cycle in order that the handbooks could be piloted, then used, with the student cohort going on WBL in this cycle. It was acknowledged that the updating would need to be evaluated with the students at the end of this cycle and further changes made in cycle two. In practice the development of the handbooks also formed part of cycle three as the processes for WBL to align the three degrees resulted in further changes being necessary. This again evidences the appropriateness of action research

and the cyclical nature of action research as being appropriate for this research. As the handbooks were developed they became so valued by the students and the mentors that they were included in my final framework. The framework is discussed in cycle three.

One of the main areas the Student Focus Group identified was the inclusion of a section in the student handbook on applying for the placements and preparation for interviews if their placement called them for an interview: at this stage in the research not all students were asked for an interview. It was later identified by the mentors and the students that an interview was a useful part of the process and in later cycles much work was done to encourage providers to hold interviews, again reflecting the cyclical nature of action research within this research. This is further discussed in chapters four and five.

At this point in the research I was able to engage the help and support of the University's Careers Service. Working with the education liaison careers officer we were able to put together a good range of resources that students could use to locate information on preparing for an interview. The range reflected the need to provide for different types of learners and included videos, opportunity for face-to-face interview practice with a careers officer, interactive web sites for interview practice, and information on the Student Union's interview training sessions.

I then worked with the Mentor Focus Group on general questions that we would expect students to be asked on a pre-placement interview. We included a short summary of the main areas of preparation for students before going to the interview, such as up-dating their curriculum vitae (CV) and taking a copy, planning for the general first question; 'Tell me about yourself'.

The Student Focus Group went through the resources carefully and reported that they were excellent. They also approved the interview questions, but were unsure as to how students would react if they prepared for the questions, but were not asked them at interview. I therefore put the same questions in the mentor's handbook with a suggestion that they might like to use these questions. Ultimately this worked well with many students reporting they felt better prepared for their interview, and the mentors reporting that the students were well prepared for their interviews at the end of this cycle. The questions, following the initial 'tell me about yourself' questions, were broken down into subsections as follows:

'About the organisation:

- Why do you want to work with this organisation?
- What can you offer us?
- How capable are you of fulfilling the required duties and responsibilities?

About you:

- What attitudes and values do you have that would help you to succeed in this placement?
- Do you foresee any difficulties?
- Which areas of the organisation would you specifically like to work in?
- What specific areas of your degree programme would you like to have an opportunity to develop?
- How competent are you in communicating/IT/etc?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What information will you require for your assignments?

About the degree:

- What exactly is your degree about?
- What sort of things do you do?

Source: Student Handbook 2001

Alongside the preparation for interviewing was the need to develop the students' skills in writing CVs and letters of application. Some mentors in the Mentor Focus Group had reported that they had received poorly written letters from our students. I developed both a CV and letter of application template which was further developed and approved by the Mentor Focus Group (evidenced in Archives 5g and 5h). This in turn was presented to the Student Focus Group and approved as an example of good practice. The examples of both documents were included in the Student Handbook with a suggestion to ask someone to check them through before they sent them off. Both the letter and CV were created as pro-formas based on a 'fill in the gaps' framework. There was a discussion with the Mentor Focus Group as to how this would work in practice; they could receive several letters that were similar. The Group did not feel this would be a problem and it never became one; indeed the letter and CV were still being used in 2008. The overall quality of the placement experience improved through these changes as students were able to send out well-prepared CVs and

letters. This generally resulted in the students getting their first or second choice placement, rather than one much further down their list of choices, reflecting fewer early rejections due to poor communication skills being evidenced.

It was agreed with the Student Focus Group that the CV and letter pro-formas should be available via the Virtual Learning Portal (VLP). (NB The VLP at NTU at that time was a portal through which materials could be shared and learning take place. There were also links to the library, support services, software tutorials, and study skills support. Each student was linked via the VLP to their programme and the modules they are taking to enable e-dissemination of documents). At this time there were three degree programmes, so the documents needed uploading onto each separate degree VLP area. This was cumbersome and was changed in cycle two when I was able to develop a whole new area of the VLP dedicated to the WBL experience, and used to support the students on WBL. This is an example of one of many smaller action research cycles that took place during the research. The process of identifying the problem, addressing the issue, coming up with a possible solution, observing the impact, reflecting on it, then re-addressing it follows Stephen Kemmis' cycle of action research: plan --> act --> observe --> reflect --> plan (1988).

Other aspects were developed using the cyclical nature of action research; involving both the Mentor Focus Group and Student Focus Group in action, observation, and reflection resulting in changes to the planning. For example, there was no clear guidance on what the placement should offer the student and what they should expect from their WBL experience. The research identified that some students were approaching their WBL with no clear goals in mind, and there was little guidance on how to reflect on progress built into the tutor's visit. This finding is supported by Cunningham *et al* (2004). How to more clearly articulate student expectations was therefore developed through various meetings with the two focus groups and guidance included in the student handbook.

The concerns discussed above on attendance (evidenced in Archives 2a, 2e and 2i), were affecting the quality of the placement for both the mentors and the students from the PED and BLSE programmes. This was also discussed by the focus groups and resulted in the insertion of a paragraph in the student handbook stating the need to attend their placement regularly.

At the start of the research there had been no handbook for tutors to follow. Discussions with the team showed that staff changed frequently and often part-time staff that did not work on any of the programmes were allocated hours to visit the students. This impacted on the student experience, and the tutor's visit had been identified as being a mixed experience (evidenced in Archive 1a and Archive 2b). In addition research by Richardson and Blakeney (1998) referred to in chapter two stressed the importance of ensuring systems were in place for students to contact the University. In the NTU system contact would need to be through the tutor assigned to support the student during their WBL. Producing a Tutor Handbook was therefore essential and included in the Applied Studies Action Plan (evidenced in Archive 2f). A Handbook was written to support the tutor's role, and comments were sought from the Mentor Focus Group, Student Focus Group, PL and CLs. Minor changes were made prior to it being circulated at a training session for tutors. This training session is discussed below in 'Preparation for Tutors'. The Handbook was reviewed annually following feed back from staff and students and is further discussed in chapters four and five.

Further discussion of the Mentor, Tutor, and Student Handbooks can be found in the following sections: 'Preparation of Students', 'Preparation of Mentors', and 'Preparation of Tutors' below.

Preparation of Students

The preparation of the students was an issue that was frequently raised in the meetings of the Student Focus Group, Mentor Focus Groups, and in discussions with the staff team (Archives 2a, 2e, and 3c). The need to adequately prepare students is supported by the research of Cameron-Jones and O'Hara (1999), Shilling (1989), Little (2000), and Blackwell *et al* (2001) who had all found how essential the preparation of students was in a successful placement experience.

The nature of the preparation needed some discussion with the programme team. Little (2000, p 126) found that preparation of students often only involved 'preparation of CVs, drafting letters of application, preparation for interview and the like'. These were all aspects that we wanted to develop, but we also wanted to include more detail such as how to find a placement, what to expect, what the University's expectations were, and how their assignments were integrated into the experience. Little and Harvey (2006, p 14) comment that some students in their research did not receive any pre-placement

preparation and 'most didn't really know what to expect', but do not discuss this in terms of impact on the placement experience, or expectations of placement providers. These were areas that were important to us because the impact of not having careful preparation and a shared understanding of expectations between stakeholders was contributing to poor placement experiences and complaints.

A discussion of the handbooks to support the students is given above. This section will therefore focus on other aspects of the preparation of the students during this cycle of the research that were developed.

Prior to this research all preparation had been carried out at programme level and had been addressed during seminars. This resulted in each group having different information and no record being kept of what advice students were being given. Discussions with the Student Focus Group indicated the lack of quality of the placement partly originated in the initial advice the students were being given. It was agreed with the Student Focus Group (evidenced in Archive 2a and 2c), and with the PL and CLs (evidenced in Archive 2e), that I would take over the briefing of the students and have a formal briefing, with a register taken, to ensure all students received the same information. This would then be supported by informal discussion by subject leaders in seminars, to include discussion of the subject assignments. It was agreed the pattern of the briefings would be:

- a short briefing during induction in year one to start to focus students' thoughts on their WBL experience, and provide time to make arrangements for the WBL period, such as child care;
- a formal briefing prior to Easter of year one to 'launch' the placement and issuing of student handbooks;
- a formal briefing immediately prior to placement in year two to address themes of health and safety, professional role while on placement, and expectations.

This is supported by Harvey *et al* (1988, p 10) 'a prior briefing or period of familiarisation is essential to ensure that all parties are clear what is expected of them'. Boud and Solomon also make the point that 'considerable preparation is needed' (2001, p 57). The time when induction should have occurred had already passed so this formal briefing prior to placement was the first to take place. Despite reminders to students explaining that attendance was

compulsory the first meeting was not well attended by the BLSE and PED students. A further three year one briefings were needed before all students had attended. The BAT/BICT students' attendance was much better, and had been significantly supported by the CL, who had 'rounded up' students prior to the meeting which he also attended. Separate briefings were held at the City and Clifton campuses to distinguish between the different processes and structures: the BLSE and PED students had shared briefings at the Clifton campus; and the BAT/BICT students had a separate briefing at the City campus.

The year one briefings addressed a range of themes: a register was taken, and the handbooks were issued. Attendance at WBL was addressed including the expectations of the programme team in terms of the number of days attended and the need for the students to work a full working day. The students were shown the pro-formas for writing letters and CVs, advice was given on where to go on placement, the role of mentors, and the type of work they should expect was discussed. There was an opportunity for students to ask questions.

Following the meeting the students started to email queries on where to apply – some simply did not know which companies to approach. I therefore asked staff where students had been in previous years and put together a list which I uploaded into the VLP area for each group. In cycle two this was developed further and we set up a template that included the placement, mentor's name, address, telephone number, and the name of the student who had been there, so they could discuss the WBL experience with them if they wished to. This proved an excellent development and again reflects the appropriateness of action research and the cyclical development of actions based on research.

My literature survey discussed in the previous chapter identified that Shilling (1989) and CVCP (1998) both state the importance of students having clear guidelines about health and safety. A health and safety briefing was therefore held in January 2001 for the year two students, but was not well attended, despite emails, reminders and notices. A register was taken to comply with the University Policy that all students must be briefed on health and safety prior to going on placement. Ultimately all students did attend, but only after several briefings had been arranged. Again, separate briefings were held to reflect the different programmes. This briefing addressed health and safety themes, and provided an opportunity to give students a pack of information about their placement, including information on health and safety, a health and safety induction tick sheet and SAE for return to the University by the end of the first

week, and contact details for University staff. This reflects Richardson and Blakeney's research (1998). The pack was a new development which did receive some criticism following an evaluation at the end of the first cycle. Further changes were made to this in cycle two, again reflecting the cyclical nature of action research.

Feedback at the end of this cycle, which will be further discussed in cycle two, indicated that these briefings, together with the development of the handbooks, provided a much more confident student cohort in preparing for, and undertaking their placement. The briefings were improved in each of the cycles and ultimately became part of the framework, discussed in chapter five, page 203. This again reflects the appropriateness of an action research methodology in underpinning this research.

Preparation of the Mentors

The term 'mentor' has already been described as being the person who supported the student while on placement: s/he was selected by the employer and often had no formal training in managing staff and some had little or no mentoring experience. At no point in the research did I question whether there should be a mentor. My own perception of WBL, based on my developing epistemology and ontology and framed by my values, was that each student should have a mentor. My literature survey also confirmed that mentors generally support WBL, for example Cameron-Jones and O'Hara (1999) and Shilling (1989). More recently Little and Harvey (2006, p 28) indicate that their research identified that in 'many' cases the students had a mentor/supervisor, but some viewed this as their university tutor.

Brennan and Little (1996) refer to studies by Davies (1990) which suggest that students and mentors should be matched via learning styles to help their relationship to develop. This was not something that we considered and may only be appropriate to those placements, such as sandwich placements, where the University has a close relationship with companies who offer to take a student each year, thus building a close relationship with the HEI. Within the current structure where students chose their placement this was not possible, although it is something that could be considered as a future development. Brennan and Little (1996, p 104) concluded that matching students and mentors via learning styles might be 'an unhelpful diversion'.

At this stage in the research the mentor received no direct communication from the University. All communication was done via the 'named' person that the student provided the University with. This did not always filter to the mentor, which on occasion resulted in the student arriving on placement to be told they were not expected. Generally this was quickly rectified, although on more than one occasion it resulted in the student having to find another placement. The view taken by the tutor team was that the students organize their own placement and it was therefore their responsibility to confirm details with their mentor. Harvey *et al* (1998, p 10) support this approach to WBL but equally support the notion that the student needs to be 'provided with adequate, trained and supportive supervision'. Our ad hoc process was not responding to the students' needs and did not recognise the importance of the placement which forms an integral part of their programme. CHERI and KPMG in their review of QAA reports states 'the QAA views good employer links plus employer involvement in the organisation of placements as essential for effective placement learning' (2006, p 28). Poor communication was also identified as an area for development in the initial evaluation (evidenced in Archive 1a), interviews with colleagues (evidenced in Archive 2h), and discussions with the Mentor Focus Group. Little (2000, p 125) discusses the need to ensure the providers understand the context of the programme of study and the integration of the WBL experience and that a 'real partnership is established with mentors'.

It was agreed that we needed to ensure we worked towards establishing a partnership with each mentor. Every placement provider therefore received a letter of confirmation from the University, together with a handbook that would detail expectations of the placement, including information on the role of the mentor, and information on the required student assignments. The handbook needed to support the mentor's role, explain the context of the WBL experience within the context of the programme of study, the University's expectations of the placement, the role of the lecturer who would provide additional support and visit the student while on placement, what that visit would entail, and additional themes, such as the role of WBL in the degree programme and the assessment that would take place following the WBL experience via the students' assignments that 'were directly linked to learning outcomes' (Brennan, 2005, p 38). Little and Harvey (2006, p 28) state that in short placements not all students had a mentor but relied on their University 'tutor based back in the institution'. Whereas in this research the mentor was seen as an essential part of the structure of the WBL experience.

Cameron-Jones and O'Hara's article (1999), referred to in chapter two, proved to be invaluable in preparing mentors in their role. Their research had found that the placement experience was most successful when the students received a high amount of support and a high level of challenge. Students receiving new challenges without support frequently resulted in them 'retreating' and being among the most likely to subsequently drop out of their degree programme. Little and Harvey (2006, p 22) comment that a small number of students in their research found the 'activities during placement unchallenging', but do not develop this further to indicate whether this impacted on their final year studies, or their motivation to continue. Brennan and Little (1996, p 84) list various activities of mentors 'supporting and encouraging, guiding and advising, appraising, role modelling, supervising, directing, reflecting, challenging and confronting, educating, criticising, counselling, coaching and generating ideas'. This is a comprehensive list and one that needed to be shared with mentors.

The mentor's handbook was seen as critical by the Student Focus Group, evidenced in Archive 2b and was supported by the Mentor Focus Group. Before the first meeting with the Mentor Focus Group I had drafted a handbook, based on the student evaluation and the two meetings already held with the Student Focus Group. The main aspects addressed were:

- A brief introduction to the WBL experience;
- The undergraduate programme structure;
- The role of the mentor;
- Planning and preparing for the student;
- The expectations during the placement;
- The visit from the University tutor;
- What would happen at the end of the WBL;
- Information on the assignments and the involvement of the mentor;
- The learning contract.

The handbook set out clear guidelines for supporting the student. For example, the mentor was asked to meet the student on a weekly basis to review progress and provide feed back. Mentors were asked not to help the student to write the assignments as this was the responsibility of the student, but to provide information that was required to enable the student to complete the assignment. The handbook also included help and advice on interviewing the student prior to offering the placement and linked to the information on

preparing for the interview contained in the student handbook as discussed in the 'Handbooks' section above.

It is important to note that the mentors did not have a role in the assessment of the student's assignments which was set and marked by the module leader. This contradicts Little and Nixon, (1995) who view the role of the mentor as important in the assessment process. However, it was felt by the programme team that this would require the WBL mentor to be trained and fully conversant with NTU's assessment policy and procedures. This may be appropriate for a sandwich placement, but not for a short placement such as ours.

When the handbook was completed and had the agreement of the Mentor Focus Group it was discussed again with the Student Focus Group and minor changes were made to reflect the needs of the student group. This again reflects action research in practice and is another example of a mini-action research cycle within this first cycle. Action research is also reflected in the collaborative nature of the research and the way the different stakeholders, identified in figure 3.1, worked together to develop the mentor's handbook. My observations showed that there was a clear sense of participation, with those involved having a feeling of being equal partners throughout the process, gaining a renewed sense of ownership in each cycle.

As stated above, Shilling (1989) and Blackwell *et al* (2001) also support the need for providing clear guidelines for employers, particularly relating to health and safety, induction, interviewing, and an environment where students 'are not discriminated against on the basis of their gender, race or social class' (Shilling, 1989, p 364). All of these were incorporated in the handbook for mentors. It was agreed with the mentors and programme teams that we produce separate Mentor Handbooks for each degree programme. This reflects the differences in the overall structure of the WBL experience, and types of placements chosen by the students. Following the cyclical nature of action research, this decision was eventually changed in cycle three to reflect ongoing evaluation at the end of each cycle and the emerging needs to streamline the placements across the programmes; this is further discussed in chapter five.

Shilling's research (1989), together with that of Cameron and O'Hara's (1999), and Blackwell *et al* (2001) influenced my perception of the role of the mentor and resulted in identifying a need to provide meetings to support their development of appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding. It was agreed

with the programme team to run these as breakfast meetings, a concept which was developed from my earlier experience with the NNEBP group, discussed in the previous chapter. A programme was prepared for the breakfast meeting at a meeting with the PL (evidenced in archive 2e). It was agreed to hold a separate meeting for each degree programme so that programme themes could be addressed. CLs were invited to talk about the assignments, third year students were invited to discuss their experiences, and the PL agreed to lead a discussion on future developments. Funding was given by the School to support this so that a working breakfast could be provided. These meetings were well attended. We were able to focus on the mentor's role and draw on Cameron-Jones and O'Hara's research (1999), stressing the need for a mentor to be supportive, but at the same time provide challenge for the student. The student speakers were selected by their CLs for their ability to present their experiences to the mentors, and were also able to reflect many of the student WBL experiences. The Mentor's Handbook was issued and discussed at this meeting.

The issue of confidentiality was raised by some mentors at this meeting, particularly by those working in organizations such as hospitals and schools, needed for inclusion in assignments. Mentors were concerned that they would be asked for sensitive information for inclusion in student assignments. This was discussed in detail, and it was agreed that the employer should ask the student to complete a 'Confidentiality' statement prior to commencing the placement. This was then linked back into the Mentor Handbook as guidance for those unable to attend the meeting. A letter was sent to mentors unable to attend the breakfast meetings alerting them to this issue, and students were also informed at their briefing. The handbook for the following cycle also included guidance. This demonstrates again how through the research, we were developing our communication systems with the mentors and engaging them more effectively with the WBL process.

At the meetings the mentors were also briefed on the University tutor visit and asked to meet the tutor to provide feed back on how the placement was progressing from their viewpoint, how the structure was developing, and to discuss any areas of development needed by the student.

At the end of each session mentors were asked to complete an evaluation form (evidenced in Archive 3a). The evaluations were good. A rating scale of one to five was used to collect this data; five being excellent and one being poor. No mentors at these events rated the overall usefulness of the session at less than

three demonstrating overall satisfaction. One mentor commented that he had students from many different universities, and the training they had received from NTU was by far the best. The meetings have proved to be important, particularly to new mentors, and have helped in improving the overall quality of the students' placement. As such they have been included in the final framework, discussed in chapter five, page 203.

I have found CHERI and KPMGs (2006) report useful when reflecting back on this stage of the research in terms of what the learner should expect in a workplace. These include 'advice and guidance', support in 'negotiating a planned programme of study', 'support for learning', and agreed 'assessment in recognition of learning' (2006, p 9). Others such as Knight and Yorke (2004, pp 102-119) had identified similar themes in their research:

- All stakeholders appreciate and support the intentions of the experience;
- There is induction, ongoing facilitation of reflection, formative assessment and a thorough debriefing afterwards;
- Students gain credits for the process;
- Students develop a work-experience portfolio;
- Students can identify what they have learned, and communicate it to others.

More reflection on these expectations is included in cycle three.

Preparation of the University Tutors

The role of the tutors, particularly in terms of the visit, had been identified by the Student Focus Group and in the initial evaluations, evidenced in Archive 1a, as significant to the quality of the placement. This is supported by Saxton and Ashworth (1990) and Greenbank (2002, p 268), who speaks of 'the role of the academic tutor is crucial to the success of the placement'. The importance of the monitoring process is supported by Harvey *et al* (1998, p 10) who say 'academic staff must have an ongoing responsibility to monitor and support the work-experience of students'. More recently Scesa (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006, Annex B, p 121), drawing on institutional audit reports from Aston, Brunel, Coventry, Leeds Metropolitan, Loughborough and NTU, has identified similar findings.

Feedback from students before commencing this research showed that some students had not been visited and those who had received different levels of

tutor time and support; this is also reflected in research by Saxton and Ashworth (1990).

The tutor team was more experienced in working in HE than I was at this stage in the research, but were less experienced with WBL. The initial meeting with the tutors held prior to my taking up the post (evidenced in Archive 2g), identified the need for a tighter structure. The tutors wanted the placement to go as smoothly as possible for the students, as it was an integral part of the programme and should be seen as such. In my initial discussions with colleagues they had requested more guidance in preparing the students for their placement and for the student visit. This reflects findings by Bourner and Ellerker (1993) and Saxton and Ashworth (1990).

I met the PL on several occasions to discuss how to develop the role of the tutor (evidenced in Archive 2d). I subsequently met all the CLs to discuss how they wanted the role of tutors to develop (evidenced in Archive 2e). The main themes for development identified were:

Allocation of tutors to students. This had also been raised by the students (evidenced in Archive 2a). However, it had to be acknowledged that while I would try to allocate students to tutors they were familiar with, this would not be possible in every case due to workloads and travel distance. We also had to contract part-time staff to help with visits (where necessary) who did not necessarily teach on the programme. This practice has been criticised by Nixon (in Bell and Harris, 1990) who view the role of the visiting tutor as verifying assessments and therefore requiring experienced university staff familiar with the programme, assessment, and learning outcomes. However, the role of the visiting tutor in this research was not related to final assessment of assignments or competency based assessment as it was the learning from the placement that was assessed rather than the experience itself (Benett, 1993). Saxton and Ashworth (1990, p 34) also found that visiting tutors 'may know the student well or not at all'.

Support during placement. Clearer guidance was required on how to maintain support for, and contact with, the students. Tutors were allocated sufficient time for the visits, that is, two hours per student, reflecting that recommended by Bourner and Ellerker (1993). (NTU operates a system whereby each teaching hour is then multiplied by 2.75 to provide time for planning, preparation and assessment. When this is applied to the two hours it gives a

total of 5.5 hours per student visit.) The students were also asking for greater contact with their University WBL tutor (evidenced in Archive 2a, and Archive 1a).

Structure and guidance for the visit. From the initial evaluation (evidenced in Archive 1a) and meetings with students (evidenced in Archives 2a-c) not all tutors were visiting, some tutors arrived to visit without giving notice, and some students had no additional support other than the visit. Some tutors spent time discussing progress with assignments, whereas others talked generally about the placement. Not all tutors met with the mentors. These findings are supported by Bournier and Ellerker (1993) and Saxton and Ashworth (1989) who reported that staff visits were not always standardised in the time spent with students, what was discussed and talking to the mentor. In discussions with the Student Focus Group their main concern was that the visits needed a greater focus and shared agenda to maintain quality. Richardson and Blakeney's ethnographic research (1998) supported the concerns raised by NTU students and the need to organise the visit so that the student has an opportunity to raise any issues with the tutor before s/he meets with the mentor.

A training session was held for tutors before the students started their WBL experience. This is supported by research by Saxton and Ashworth (1989) and was the first time such training had taken place. Training was attended by most tutors and supported by a handbook developed in consultation with both the Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Group.

The final handbook for tutors for this cycle comprised:

- Introduction with general information about the placement such as dates;
- The assignment titles, and general information on the expectations of the assignments;
- Copies of essential documents such as the visit form, the health and safety form that had to be completed by the provider prior to the start of the WBL experience, and a copy of the learning contract;
- The expectations of the tutor's support, such as an initial telephone call, visit, and final telephone call. (The initial telephone call was introduced as a response to the recommendation by Richardson and Blakeney (1998) for a questionnaire to be sent to each student at the beginning of their placement. As this was such a short placement, and it was

important we were aware of any difficulties early on, it was felt a telephone call would meet this need);

- What the student would experience prior to the placement;
- Information on the visit and the role of the tutor. This specified what should be discussed, and reflected research by Saxton and Ashworth (1990, p 35) that the student and mentor should be seen separately 'for at least part of the visit'.

It was agreed at this session that, as a minimum, each student would receive a telephone call/email at the beginning of the placement to ensure they were settling in, a visit, details of which tutors were to notify the student of before the visit, and a telephone call/email towards the end of the placement.

The specific functions of the visit reflected those observed by Saxton and Ashworth (1990, pp 40-42), namely that the tutor was fulfilling a pastoral role and encouraged to have some awareness of the 'student's personal situation with regard to the placement'. Tutors were asked to ensure the level of work was appropriate, to provide scaffolding to the academic course and to discuss progress. It was also agreed that if necessary they would be the first point of mediation if problems arose.

It was agreed that the focus of the visits was to be the assignment, however some tutors might be allocated to support and visit students they did not teach, so CLs briefed all tutors on assignments. It was agreed however that where visiting tutors were unable to answer specific questions about assignments, they would ask the student to email their tutor. Tutors were also required to complete a tutor visit form, also included in the student handbook, mentor's handbook, and tutor's handbook. This focused on the main areas required for each assignment and the development of the student's key skills. It also required comments from the mentor, which ensured the tutor met the mentor and confirmed the placement was progressing well from their viewpoint. Tutors were required to meet with the students first, then ask to talk to their mentor. This process was a response to research carried out by Saxton and Ashworth (1990) and Richardson and Blakeney (1998).

Tutors were not required to complete an evaluation form at the end of this training session, but several colleagues said how useful the training had been. A similar session was run for the following two cycles of the research and it is

interesting to note that the same tutors attended year on year supporting the need for this to take place annually.

Communication Between Stakeholders

As indicated above prior to the research commencing students made their own contacts and the University sent out a letter confirming the placement together with a sheet of information about the degree programme. The changes to this in the first cycle have been discussed above, but it is useful to draw them together and reflect on them here.

- The communication was developed in this cycle to include greater information about the WBL experience and was developed with the Mentor Focus Group and Student Focus Group. We also asked students for the name of the mentor and sent a separate letter to him/her which was accompanied by a copy of the Mentor's Handbook
- The inclusion of the request to invite students to an interview in the Mentors' Handbook and at the breakfast meetings facilitated a meeting between the mentor and student at the beginning of the planning stages for the WBL experience.
- The learning contract encouraged a 'conversation' between the student, the mentor, and the University tutor and 'formalised' the roles (Brennan 2005, p 30, and Costley, 2007). Students were not able to negotiate their learning outcomes 'from an array of intended learning outcomes' (Brennan and Little, 1996, p 51). Instead they had to ensure the experience was planned, would meet the learning outcomes for the module and provide a valuable experience for the student and provider. This emphasised the WBL experienced as part of the formal learning (Billett, 2001). This was further developed in cycle two when the use of a Job Description was introduced. Bourner and Ellerker (1993), Brennan and Little (1996), Harvey *et al* (1998), ESRU (2002), and, more recently, the HEA (2006) view the purpose of the learning contract as important in the success of the placement. Brennan and Little (1996) include a detailed discussion including the history of the learning contract. They concluded that the learning contract, agreed by stakeholders, was an important document in the work experience process. The learning contract we used was separate from the job description, and in the first cycle the purpose of the learning contract was unclear. This was rectified in cycle two

when the job description was developed as a linked document to the Learning Contract reflecting the definition provided by Brennan and Little (1996) that

‘work based learning contracts are a means by which the individual work based learner, the higher education institution and the employer can negotiate, approve and assess the outcomes of a learning process with both the higher education institution and the employer acting as a resource for learning’ (1996, p 70).

The development of the learning contract is further discussed in cycle two.

- Mentors were invited to a breakfast meeting where they were able to meet the PL, CLs and some of the teaching team and to share the experiences of students from each programme.
- The visit form now encouraged the University tutor to meet the mentor while on the visit and record their comments for possible future use in a reference and feed back to the student, as well as to raise any issues of concern from the student. This again reflects Richardson and Blakeney’s research findings (1998).

The changes made to the communication system were reflected in the final part of this research cycle and underpinned the increased feeling of ‘quality’ for the placement. They are further considered at the start of cycle two.

Curriculum

Evaluating the curriculum was an essential part of the first year of the research in order to identify if it needed to change, and if it did, where and how. This was first identified at the start of the research evidenced in Archive 1a. Meetings with colleagues and the Student Focus Group showed there was a real need for review, evidenced in Archives 2b and 2e.

At this stage of the research there were no learning outcomes for WBL, nor a clear framework that could be utilised by students in negotiating their WBL which is recommended by Little (2000). Applied Studies was a module in itself; students from each degree programme undertook a module spanning the second half of the academic year in year two. While reference was made to the Applied Studies module from the outset of year one, this was done through other modules. Guile and Griffiths (2001) state the need for clear learning outcomes for the WBL process and, more recently, the HEA (2006) discuss the importance of the learning outcomes being linked to the learning contract.

As the programme was to be revalidated the following year it provided an opportunity to consider the WBL experience and how the curriculum could support it. The ESECT report (2005a, p 13) discusses the importance of developing graduates 'who are active and empowered to seek out jobs and organisations that fit their preferences and characteristics'. CLs felt that it was important to ensure the curriculum provided an opportunity for our students to find their own placements and thus develop transferable skills for future employment. Staff agreed to the establishment of a staff group to develop the WBL programme for the three degree programmes and prepare for revalidation. These developments are further discussed in chapter four, pages 133 and 136.

Quality Issues

Figure 3.2 identifies the issues arising from the first cycle of the research. Sections above demonstrate how the overall quality was improving as each new structure and process was implemented. However there are some themes that were addressed earlier in this cycle that need to be revisited at this point.

The pattern of attendance on placement was discussed earlier in this chapter; BAT/BICT went on WBL for six weeks, while the PED and BLSE students needed to attend for forty five days spread across semester two. On taking up my appointment it was agreed that the placement would need to run following the existing model because the timetables had already been agreed. However, it was clear that this was an area that needed addressing and is further developed in cycles two and three, demonstrating again the cyclical nature of action research.

The initial evaluation (evidenced in Archive 1a) identified that the Review and Evaluation days for the PED and BLSE students were received with mixed feelings. Discussions with the PL and CLs (evidenced in Archive 2e) for these programmes showed that staff felt these days were important, and that formal contact with the students for a full semester would be lost if the Review and Evaluation days were removed from the timetable. This reflects the findings of Bourner and Ellerker (1993). Following Programme Committee in the first term of this cycle at which a number of complaints were received from Programme Representatives about the organization of the Review and Evaluation meetings a further meeting was held with both CLs to review these days (evidenced in Archive 2e).

Previously on Review and Evaluation days students had been put into groups, led by a Module Leader. Following meetings with the PL and CLs (evidenced in Archives 2e and 2h), and discussions with the Student Focus Group (evidenced in Archive 2a), it was agreed to consider putting all groups together to gain general feedback on how the WBL experience was progressing. It was also agreed that each group should follow the same pattern and agenda to ensure a better quality experience for the students. These changes reflect the experiences of Bourner and Ellerker (1993) who made similar changes to their review days, although they included more regular meetings with tutors to support students on a sandwich course, rather than a shorter WBL experience. A letter and schedule was sent out to students the week prior to each set of review and evaluation days stating an expectation that they attend. An evaluation of the new format was conducted and found a more positive response. Further changes were made to the Review and Evaluation days in cycle two: this is discussed more fully in chapter four. These days were however eventually eradicated due to the new structure that was introduced in cycle three, as discussed in detail in chapter five.

An important factor in the perceived quality of the WBL related to part-time work. At this stage in the research students received grants from their Local Education Authorities (LEAs) who also paid their fees. The number that worked to support themselves was therefore relatively small and this did not impact on their placement experience as much as in later cycles. However, there were a small number of students who were studying part-time, and others who were full-time students but had part-time jobs. Both groups had difficulties reconciling their work and WBL experience. Attempts had been made at writing a clear policy to provide a transparent structure for these students, but at this stage, ad hoc arrangements continued to be made, mainly to meet the individual needs of the students. Students from both groups requested that they undertake their placement at their place of employment. While this was agreed to help the students, it ultimately caused problems and was one of the main areas of complaint. Trying to combine paid work with WBL resulted in two students losing their part-time work, and two students having to be withdrawn from their placement experience and find a new one.

The problems were mainly caused by a lack of understanding about their placement role versus their employment role. On two occasions employers rang up to complain about their employees being unable to separate their work from

their placement – these students both lost their jobs. The two students who had to be withdrawn found the opposite; their employers were unable to separate their placement and full-time work. This meant that they would be at their place of work on placement time, but asked to undertake contractual duties – without being paid. Both of these students contacted me early on in the WBL experience and both I and their respective CLs visited the companies. For both groups it was agreed that this duality of expectations would not work out, and, with the agreement of the students and employers, withdrew the placement. We were quickly able to arrange an alternative placement for both students, who were able to complete the required number of days' attendance and their assignments. Both employers were happy with the withdrawal, and both students kept their jobs. This issue had to be addressed for future years and will be further discussed in chapter four.

The expectations of the students while on placement, particularly relating to their assignments, were also impacting on the overall quality of the experience. As outlined above there were two different placement structures. Those on the BICT undergraduate programme received three weeks at University before starting their placement, which resulted in them being clear about their assignments and the support they would receive while on placement. These students generally attended their WBL experience as expected and understood that they were on placement to have an opportunity to put theory into practice within an approved context, experience the world of work from an undergraduate perspective, work within an environment from which they could learn, gain experiences that could be identified to inform the remainder of the programme (particularly the third year project), and develop key professional skills. The WBL experience also provided an opportunity for the students to network with others and identify possible future careers. Their assignment titles were written in an open form so that they would be able to achieve their learning outcomes for their placement modules irrespective of context.

The placements for the PED and BLSE students were less structured, which resulted in a lack of understanding of the expectations of the WBL experience. Students only had to attend forty five out of the full semester of fifteen weeks. The only other commitments to their programme were to attend the Review and Evaluation days, and to write their assignments. Unfortunately there was apathy towards the placement from a significant number who did not necessarily attend for the forty five days, and rarely stayed for the full day when

they did attend. This finding was made apparent when their tutor visit forms were completed and comments on attendance, or lack of it, were picked up in this cycle. For the following cycle it was agreed with the programme teams to introduce an attendance sheet, and develop a much greater emphasis on working for the full day with both the students and their mentors. However, it did take two years to eradicate the poor attendance completely. This is discussed further in chapter four.

I have mentioned earlier in this chapter that there was no process of recording documentation from students. This caused difficulties in communications with providers and in knowing which students needed chasing about their WBL arrangements or completed health and safety induction forms. For this purpose I created a spreadsheet for recording the documentation that was sent and received to both student and WBL providers (Archive 5i). This spreadsheet was shared with colleagues via a shared area of the University's electronic network. This in turn helped to ensure students were being chased up when necessary and was further developed in cycle two as the job description was introduced. This is another example of the cyclical nature of this action research.

Concluding Overview

This cycle of research took place from September to June, almost a full academic year. Significant changes to the processes were introduced across the three degree programmes to improve the quality of the students' WBL experience. I worked closely with colleagues, the Student Focus Group and the Mentor Focus Group to firstly identify the themes shown in figure 3.2, then make revisions and implement changes to structures and processes using the literature that supported these elements of the WBL experience. Areas that still needed further revisions and refinements will be discussed at the beginning of the next chapter, reflecting the next cycle of the research. A particular focus for cycle two was the revision of the curriculum that I have discussed briefly above; this was needed to underpin and integrate the student experience of WBL across each degree programme. The main focus for cycle three is the major change to the overall structure of the WBL experience, and the final framework as a result of the research.

This first cycle of the research started with me taking up the post of WBL co-ordinator. I was given an evaluation undertaken by the previous, temporary post-holder from which I was able to identify a number of themes. My initial

meetings with colleagues and students, together with themes identified from my initial literature survey, my prior experience, and my decision to underpin the research using action research, resulted in me identifying the main stakeholders, shown in figure 3.1, and setting up two focus groups: the Student Focus Group and the Mentor Focus Group. I did not set up a focus group of tutors because, after careful consideration I decided I was able to work closely with this group of stakeholders on a daily basis and collaborate with them. On reflection I can see that this was a sensible decision and did not overload colleagues with additional meetings. The work with the focus groups and continued discussions with colleagues resulted in the identification of the main themes that needed to be changed; these are identified in figure 3.2.

Within the discussions of the main themes, and developments made in this cycle, I have interwoven how I have made use of action research as the methodology underpinning this research. I have explained how three cycles form the main basis of the research with an additional three smaller cycles continuing themes from the major part of this research (reported in chapter six), with this chapter focusing on the first cycle. Many of the themes identified here are revisited and developed further in the following two chapters. Again, this reflects the appropriate use of action research and my focus on Carr and Kemmis's cyclical nature of action research (1986). I have also identified mini-cycles of action research that took place within the overall cycle again reflecting the appropriate use of action research. Underpinning this cycle is the establishment and involvement of focus groups in the developments: this again reflects the collaborative nature of action research.

In chapter one I introduced my ontological values of social justice, caring and respect by which I judge my living practices. In chapter two I outlined my prior experiences of WBL and discussed how my values were being denied in practice by the way students in the college were 'assigned' to their placements. In revisiting these values at this point in the research it can be seen that my values are beginning to transform, a process which will continue to develop into epistemological living standards of judgment. In chapter one I stated that all the students had a right to a quality placement that would enable them to aspire to their career goals and help them to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding that they needed to succeed. The Applied Studies process of allowing students to find their own placement reflects more closely my ontological values, but they are not fully realised in this cycle. The living theory

that I introduced in chapter one, and discuss in chapter seven, is still emerging at this point. My living theory is framed by my ontological values and is the theory of what is a quality WBL experience for students on a non-vocational undergraduate programme. In this chapter I have identified the themes that underpin the quality of WBL, but the theory continues to emerge.

At no time did the Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Group come together. They both worked independently developing the documentation with me as the intermediary. As I now reflect back on the process I still believe this to be appropriate. By working in this way I was able to identify common themes for the two groups and start to align their needs with that of the curriculum which is discussed further in chapters four and five. The themes of power and collaboration within action research are discussed in chapter seven.

As I conclude the first cycle of this research it is useful to reflect back on my overall aims for this research:

1. *Explore the difficulties students experience relating to their WBL, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality WBL.* It is clear that much of this cycle has been in identifying the difficulties, which are shown in figure 3.2.
2. *Provide a focus on good quality experience, for students undertaking WBL as part of their degree programme.* Much of the discussion in this chapter has been on focusing on what should be present in a quality WBL experience and the emergence of my living theory. This discussion continues in chapters four and five.
3. *Use a focus of three degree programmes within the School of Education at NTU to examine the WBL process.* I have identified the three degree programmes, and discussed their WBL processes and structures at the outset of the research. I am now in the process, throughout this and the following two chapters, of developing the discussion of the structures and processes.
4. *Investigate the preparation of the main stakeholders in ensuring a quality WBL as part of my living theory.* Early on in this chapter I identified the main stakeholders in figure 3.1. The literature has helped to identify what others have found in their research that is necessary in the preparation of the main stakeholders and I have used this in developing the preparation for each stakeholder group. I

have also drawn on my own prior experiences of WBL discussed in the previous chapter.

5. *Explore curriculum changes to provide a supportive framework for students undergoing a period of work experience.* While this aim is not fully addressed in this chapter, I have introduced it as a theme. The curriculum will form a main focus for the next cycle of the research, chapter four.
6. *Develop a research based framework for effective practice in work experience for undergraduate students.* As this chapter has progressed I have started to identify key themes for the framework. The final framework for undergraduate programmes in Education is presented in chapter five, page 203.

When the students returned to University at the end of this cycle of the research, following their WBL experience, I issued two questionnaires which had been designed with the focus groups and colleagues. The first questionnaire investigated the overall experience of the placement, the second the overall quality of the placement. These questionnaires can be seen in Appendices 3a and 3b and the results of analysis are discussed early in the following chapter as these results form the basis for the changes made in the second cycle.

Chapter Four: Cycle Two

Introduction

In this chapter I shall start by summarising and reflecting back on cycle one. I shall then discuss the methods used for data collection for this cycle and explain how I selected the data that was relevant to my research question, my research claim and my living standards of judgment.

Throughout this cycle I followed Whitehead's critical questions already discussed in chapter one: How do I understand what I am doing? How do I evaluate my work? How do I improve what I am doing? (1989). I shall then identify the changes needed for this cycle, again referring to the themes identified in cycle one, illustrated in figure 3.2.

There are two main areas of development for cycle two which I have previously referred to: changes to the curriculum underpinning the WBL experience, and changes to the overall structure to bring the three degree programmes into one structure. I shall discuss each of these, but will give a more detailed discussion of the changes to the structure in cycle three which is where the impact was measured. I will then look at the results from the data collected at the start of this cycle, and the data collected at the end of this cycle. I shall then conclude by reflecting back on this cycle and linking to cycle three. As with the previous chapter I shall interweave links to action research methodology and the literature that supported the changes made in this cycle.

This chapter focuses on two main external influences on my research: continued changes based on research carried out at the end of cycle one; and changes made to the curriculum to further underpin and integrate the WBL experience for the students.

Looking Back To Cycle One: Overview and Reflections

It would have been easy to have a 'knee jerk' reaction to the difficulties that were identified in cycle one where there was pressure to introduce significant change before year two students started their WBL experience. There was also pressure from colleagues to put in place stop gap measures, such as quick fix changes to the curriculum, which were not based on research, scholarship, or reflection. By taking the time, and deciding from the outset that it would be a long-term project where not everything could be solved in one year. I felt the new structures and processes became more solid and workable. Once the

foundation and groundwork had been completed in the first cycle I was able to start to build on these: this is further discussed in chapter seven in the section 'Positioning Myself within the Field of Action Research'. This again reflects Carr and Kemmis' (1986) cycle of action research: plan --> act --> observe --> reflect --> plan. In cycle one I state that action research is an emergent and iterative process; by the end of cycle one this had been shown to be the case in this research. Through scholarship I had identified the experience of others, and drawn on my own experiences to move forward. An example is the development in the preparation of the students, drawing on research by Shilling (1989); Richardson and Blakeney (1998); Cameron-Jones and O'Hara (1999); and Blackwell *et al* (2001).

In chapter seven I discuss how the methodology of action research accepts that as one aspect is being 'fixed' the situation can change. Through my research and close working with the Student Focus Group I identified the need for greater support and preparation for the WBL experience of the students, and an increase in the way we built on this experience in year three through developing the curriculum. The changes to the curriculum, discussed later in this chapter, were possible as the programme underwent revalidation during this cycle.

Reflecting back, what surprised me most was the freedom I was given by all the stakeholders to make the changes. I had come from teaching in a school that had an authoritarian head teacher; the process of establishing structures and changes in that environment had taken time and I frequently had to ask permission to have meetings, send letters or make changes to administrators' roles. At the University I was given much more freedom. I did start by asking 'Is it okay if ...' but quickly realised that so long as developments were sensible and going to improve the quality of the stakeholders' experience, it was acceptable. This was helpful and empowered me to make decisions quickly, consult when necessary, and be able to put into place the structures needed for the consultation process, such as through the focus groups.

I was also frequently surprised at some of the praise for developments I had made without really considering the impact. For example, organising the breakfast meetings for the mentors received a high level of praise from all stakeholders yet it seemed such common sense to arrange. I was also surprised by the feed back from the Student Focus Group, and their commitment to the project, at how much they enjoyed working on the developments, and how they really felt they were involved in the project.

I was equally surprised at the apathy of some of the students towards arranging their WBL experience. It was really hard to get some of them to arrange this and complete the required documentation, yet it was part of a programme they had chosen to undertake and a clear opportunity to experience what it would be like to work in an area of their choice when they graduated. I did find myself frustrated at the efforts required to get a minority of the students to attend briefings, despite sending emails saying it was compulsory and they would not be able to start their WBL unless they attended a briefing. This continued to be a theme throughout the cycles.

It is important to reflect on what went as I hoped it would. The developments made in the first cycle went well. This statement is supported by evidence discussed in the last chapter, underpinned by qualitative data. There was a much more positive feel to WBL across the undergraduate programmes, although there were still areas that needed further development, or, as in the case of the curriculum underpinning WBL, substantial change. This is supported by evaluations from briefings and mentor training sessions. This is also reflected in Programme Committee meetings: in the previous chapter I commented that, particularly at the first Programme Committee meeting in cycle one, the students complained at the lack of quality within their WBL experience. By the final Committee meeting in the first cycle complaints about the WBL experience were much reduced and I was thanked by two student representatives for all my hard work in improving the experience (evidenced in Archive 2k). However, there was still much to do.

The administrators' role had grown by the end of the first cycle, in having more documentation to collate, more letters to send out, the briefings to prepare copies for, as well as the handbooks to copy and distribute: however their comments were always positive and supportive (evidenced in Archive 8). There were two administrators, one working at the City campus that covered the administration for the BAT/BICT programme, and another working at the Clifton campus covering the administration for the PED and BLSE programmes. At the end of the first cycle they both said they felt supported in their role, not just by me, but by the whole academic team; they found that the majority of the students were better prepared and organised for WBL. At the start of cycle two the whole process had been moved forward in terms of the student deadline for organising their placement and informing us where they were going, so much of their work could be done over summer when it was quieter. They also said they

enjoyed being part of the team and being involved in the whole process. I made sure I invited the administrators to the meetings and briefings and introduced them to those attending so they had a status and recognised role with the developments, and were seen to be important in the process.

My journal at the time comments 'I'm beginning to feel some relief that the students are complaining less and the analysis of the data shows that there are definite improvements on last year. The feed back from most of the tutors [informal] is better. Not everyone's on board, but mostly they are. Most of the Year 2s have sorted their placements. I need to chase them up and organise the briefings. The induction briefing has gone well – lots of questions from the students and parents' (2 October 2001). This entry reflects the collaborative nature of this action research and the support and help from the stakeholder groups: collaboration in action research is discussed in chapter seven.

As I reflect on the overall process more than three years later, my main areas of 'hindsight' would have been to align the three degrees in the placement process at the end of the first year. This ultimately happened at the end of cycle two and impacted on cycle three, but perhaps, on further reflection, had we moved so quickly and so drastically I might have lost supporters along the way. Change happens all the time, but sometimes too much change at once can be counter-productive. By using the cyclical nature of action research the major changes and development of the framework were carefully planned and reflected on, as a result of collaboration, although sometimes things shifted as the situational context in which I was working changed. This shifting is recognised by McKernan (1988, p 156) who identifies the need to 'produce a revised definition of the problem situation'.

As discussed previously at the end of cycle one it was clear to me that more quantitative data was needed, particularly in relation to the quality of the placement. Changes were still needed to ensure more standardisation of the expectations of the placements. The students needed greater support in planning for, and seeing how WBL linked to their overall programme of study. With the planned revalidation of the undergraduate programmes that would impact on cycle two there was an opportunity to enable change to the curriculum to underpin WBL.

I was also conscious that the students were developing many new skills as part of their undergraduate experiences that were not being recognised formally, but

could be recognised and developed further through their WBL experience. This awareness came from my previous teaching role in the secondary sector and the value we placed on the development of key skills in the secondary sector. Many of the undergraduate students had come from schools where they were familiar with the recognition and value placed on key skills and, in informal discussions I identified this as an area that was not overtly developed at the University. This discussion will be further developed in the Key Skills section of this chapter as changes to the curriculum became one of the main themes in cycle two.

Setting the Context for Cycle Two

The original aims of my research are set out on page 26, and how cycle one addressed them, on page 108.

It can be seen from my reflections above that I had spent the first cycle identifying and exploring the difficulties students were experiencing in relation to their WBL experience, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality experience. There is clearly a focus on improving the quality of the WBL experience, and this continues to be a clear focus in cycles two and three. The focus of three programmes is clearly being evidenced. The investigation of the preparation of the main stakeholders had, at this stage, taken place, and changes had been made in preparing the stakeholders. Exploring the curriculum to provide a supportive framework for the students had been identified through the research as essential for the second cycle of the research. The development of the research based framework for effective practice in work experience started in cycle one, and would be developed further in cycles two and three.

The key questions at this point in the research were therefore:

- What changes do we need to make to the curriculum to better support the WBL experience for all stakeholders?
- Have the changes made so far put mechanisms into place to support the difficulties students were experiencing relating to their placement, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality placement?
- Was the overall quality of the WBL experience improving?
- Had the preparation of the stakeholders been improved?

Underpinning these questions were the critical questions by Whitehead (1989).

These questions will form the main focus of this chapter. I will reflect back on them at the end of this chapter.

Methods

At the end of the first cycle, I was much clearer on the themes that still needed to be addressed or further developed in this cycle, but I also needed to gain a greater insight into how successful the changes made had been to the students' experience. It was important to understand what I was doing and how I could improve what I was doing (Whitehead, 1989). I had gained considerable feedback from the Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Group and colleagues during the year: much of this was based on qualitative research which was framed by an action research methodology. What was needed now was more quantitative, measurable data. The impending QAA inspection was also impacting on my research through increasing requests from colleagues to provide statistical evidence for the inspection. This resonates with McNiff and Naidoo (2007, p 44) who refer to Whitehead's idea of living contradictions where, as researchers, our 'epistemological values of enquiry learning are denied in our practices by the hegemony of the dominant institutional values'. On reflection gathering statistical data did push me towards constructing and using the questionnaires, which in turn gave an increased number of students opportunity to input to the developments thereby giving greater validity to my research and allowing me to generate evidence that would 'withstand robust critique in testing [my] claim to knowledge' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p 6).

This choice of blending the two methods of qualitative and quantitative data collection is supported by Borda in Reason and Bradbury (2006, p 33) 'we know that rigour in our work can be gained by combining quantitative measures, when needed, with relevant, well-made qualitative methods'.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p 9) describe qualitative research as involving 'the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials'. Denzin and Lincoln suggest interconnected collections of data to gain an improved understanding of a situation. Examples they give include those used in cycle one: my own experiences and reflections, interviews, artefacts, observations, interactions, and meetings. Qualitative research is about interpreting these interconnected collections to gain an improved understanding of a situation. My concern at this stage was to determine the extent to which the experience was improving: how did I know, and how was I measuring progress? The

stakeholders were telling me the WBL experience was much improved but I wanted to triangulate this with quantitative data. Qualitative data collection had been appropriate for cycle one, helping me to understand what I was doing and measuring improvements. For this cycle I wanted something measurable rather than my construction of the evidence emerging from the qualitative data. I therefore turned to quantitative research methods that would allow more objective data collection and enable me to measure and analyse causal relationships. I designed questionnaires to be used with all students across the three degree programmes on their return to University at the end of their WBL experience. By mixing the methods of data collection it also enabled me to adopt a 'critically reflective stance' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p 9). By using the same questionnaires over two cycles and analysing these in the same way it enabled me to measure progress, ensure rigour in the collection of data, and develop substantial data to support the developments I was making and the evidence that was emerging. It also enabled me to evaluate my work (Whitehead, 1989). This was reflected in the WBL development action plan discussed in chapter three.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p 134) state that quantitative researchers claim that their work is conducted from 'within a value-free framework'. I would argue with this as I was so involved with the research, I was concerned that the design of the questionnaires I used for data collection for this cycle could be influenced by what I felt was important necessary data. For this reason I piloted the questionnaires with the Student Focus Group and discussed them with the Mentor Focus Group, to provide support that I was addressing the aspects of the WBL experience that related to our shared vision of what made a quality placement.

Using the 'bases for understanding' discussed by Black (1999, p 3) in which he makes distinctions between 'empirical' and 'non-empirical' research, this cycle would reflect the systematic gathering of data, and testing of hypotheses relating to the empirical argument. Black (1999, p 3) states 'Empirical indicates that the information, knowledge and understanding are gathered through experience and direct data collection'. Black makes the point that although we aim to collect data and discover the truth, we do not always do this (2000, p 6). My aim was to identify the 'truth' and this is further discussed in chapter seven.

Initially I designed one questionnaire from the student perspective that investigated the various aspects of the WBL experience (evidenced in Appendix

3a). I wanted to gain quantitative feed back on all aspects of the placement. I split the questionnaire into pre-placement preparation, experiences during the placement, including the University tutor's visit, and post-placement. This would enable me to evaluate developments (Whitehead, 1989). After designing the first draft, in consultation with colleagues and the focus groups, I requested feed back from two experienced research colleagues who became 'critical friends'. I then presented the revised questionnaire to the Student Focus Group and asked those in the third year to complete it based on their WBL experience to allow the collection of some feed back on this pilot. The questionnaire was then revised slightly before being presented to the Mentor Focus Group. Members raised questions about the actual 'quality' of the placement and questioned whether the questionnaire would elicit the data I needed to measure these developments. I therefore drafted a second questionnaire focussing on the quality of the WBL experience (Appendix 3b), which I again asked for feed back on from critical friends, then piloted with the third year students in the Student Focus Group. Minor changes were made and a further question added, recommended by the Mentor Focus Group: 'How would you rate your placement in terms of quality?'

Discussion did take place about whether the students would be willing to fill in both questionnaires. The Student Focus Group indicated they would complete both forms because of the student engagement with the developments to the WBL experience. This proved a good indication. I would comment that the questionnaires had to be devised as the research was on-going, as action research always is. For this reason it was not possible to design the perfect questionnaire. This can be seen as another example of a mini cycle within action research. It also reflects the collaborative nature of action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2006).

By cycle two, I began to establish the validity of the research and emerging framework within my claim to knowledge. My ontological values began to transform into living standards of judgment from which my theory, discussed in chapter seven, emerged.

The main areas of focus for the questionnaires, evidenced in Appendices 3a and 3b) were:

- Whether the briefings I had instigated to introduce the students to the WBL processes, structures and requirements, as well as the health and

safety briefing, had been useful in the students' overall preparation. They were time-consuming to organise, and, as I stated in cycle one, I had to do several of each briefing at each site to ensure all students had attended – this is part of the University's policy on WBL;

- Whether students had used their handbook in organising their placements, how helpful the placement pack issued at the health and safety briefing were and if there were changes that needed to be made to these. Again these documents were time-consuming to prepare, copy and disseminate and costly to produce if students were not finding them useful.
- Whether the visit from their University tutor had been supportive and whether the tutor had needed to resolve any problems during the placement for the student.
- Whether the students had developed key skills. This was to form part of the focus for the development of key skills which is discussed later in this chapter. I also wanted to encourage the students to reflect on their overall placement experience and identify what had gone well and aspects they did not enjoy or find useful. Both focus groups felt it important to encourage students to give examples of each of these which are further discussed below.
- Some open questions were included in both questionnaires. For example in the first questionnaire I asked students to record three 'good' and three 'bad' aspects of their experience. In the quality questionnaire I provided space for students to record overall comments, either positive or negative relating to their WBL experience. I acknowledged that responses could be risky and could damage my self-esteem. However, I wanted to know that, if students felt I was in a position of power, and felt unable to raise issues that were of concern to them, they had an opportunity to comment honestly. By including open anonymous aspects to the questionnaires there was a level of legitimacy to the research, in that I was open to criticism. Equally, I was also open to new ideas and new themes emerging. It also showed others that I was serious about the research and developments. This was shown to be useful as some comments identified new themes. For example one BAT student's comment on the lack of new skill development which impacted on this cycle and subsequent curriculum changes to ensure all students had a 'fulfilling' experience (evidenced in Archive 1b). This will be discussed further below.

In the 'Quality of Placement' questionnaire (Appendix 3b) the focus was on the placement itself, rather than the role of the University in preparing and supporting students. The Mentor Focus Group felt that it was important to be able to go back to students with follow up questions, particularly if they felt the placement had been poor, that is graded one or two. Students who had been involved in the pilot supported the need for this questionnaire not to be anonymous. This questionnaire therefore asked for details of the placement and mentor. The questionnaire was again broken into pre-placement, during placement, and post placement, but the focus was on quality. It is the theme of quality that forms the basis for my living educational theory which is discussed further in chapter seven.

As discussed in chapter three concerns had been raised about the Review and Evaluation days for PED and BLSE students. These concerns were voiced by students in the Student Focus Group, comments at Programme Committee and conversations with the CLs (evidenced in Archive 2e). While designing and piloting the questionnaires I took the opportunity to include a questionnaire to elicit what problems, if any, the students experienced with these days and how the students would like to see them organised to provide improved support. The final questionnaire is evidenced in Appendix 3c. Again, this received feedback on design and questions from critical friends and was piloted with members of the Student Focus Group.

After discussion with the Student Focus Group it was agreed that the questionnaires should be distributed and completed in University sessions to obtain maximum possible returns. The distribution was therefore as follows:

- The BAT/BICT questionnaires were distributed by the CL in a whole-group session during the first week following the students return to University after the Easter holidays: the placement was immediately before the Easter break, so this was the first opportunity to distribute it to the whole second year cohort. Out of a possible thirty five students, twenty three (66%), returned the general questionnaire, and twenty one (60%) returned the Quality questionnaire.
- BLSE and PED groups both returned to University at the end of the full semester WBL for an Evaluation day. Both questionnaires were distributed on that day: there were fifty five students in total that could have responded. Thirty three (60%), returned both questionnaires. In

addition thirty two (58%) students completed the questionnaire relating to the Review and Evaluation Days. I felt at the time this was a poor response rate considering they were completed during a University session, but after consulting attendance registers for this day only thirty three students had attended the Evaluation Day. Questionnaires were subsequently sent to absent students, with a stamped addressed envelope, but none were returned. This reinforced the decision to distribute questionnaires during a University session, to provide students with the time to complete them, and to collect them at the end of the session. This is the process that I followed in the next cycle of the research.

The data was then analysed, as discussed below. The analysis was part of the enquirer process set out by Whitehead (1989) in the critical question 'How do I evaluate my work?' The analysis for the questionnaires is evidenced in archives as shown below:

- Archive 1b, and 1c -analysis of the responses to the questionnaires for the BAT/BICT students;
- Archives 1e and f - analysis of the responses to the questionnaires for the PED and BLSE students;
- Archive 1d - analysis of the responses from the PED and BLSE students to the Review and Evaluation Days questionnaire).

The themes that were identified from the data are discussed below.

From the full cohort, that is all BAT/BICT, PED and BLSE students, 78% had found the initial briefing useful. This meeting had been held in June prior to their placement in February. Comments included the request to have information earlier, to have been given greater detail of what to expect from their WBL experience, to have received more help with interviews and writing CVs and more information on assignments. These triangulate with evidence from cycle one.

81% of the PED and BLSE students found the handbook to be helpful, while 68% of the BAT/BICT students found it helpful.

68% of the BAT/BICT and 70% of the PED and BLSE students found the health and safety briefing useful. There was therefore an improvement in satisfaction

at the end of this cycle. This provides evidence of how the research was impacting on the WBL experience for the students and how I was able to measure progress.

97% of PED and BLSE students and 73% of BAT/BICT students had received a visit. 60% had also received a telephone call to check they were settling in at the start of the placement. These reflect the themes that I addressed in cycle one, such as tutors informing the students when they would be visiting. There were some requests that I was unable to influence, such as tutors being allocated to students taking modules the tutors were not familiar with, and the requests for more visits which were not possible because of costs and the length of the placement.

Overall the comments on the placement were positive (evidenced in Archive 1b and 1f, section 3). However, the quality questionnaire responses (evidenced in Archives 1c and 1e) showed that there was still more work to do with some mentors.

As a result of the feedback revisions were made to the handbook and discussed with both focus groups. The changes made in this cycle, discussed later in this chapter, resulted in greater satisfaction in the following cycle. It was useful to take the data and comments to the Mentor Focus Group meeting and re-examine the handbook to ensure we had covered the student requirements. I was also able to change the mentors' briefing session to ensure they would set time aside each week to discuss progress and provide feedback.

Overall the quality of the placement was reported to be good with only two students in the BLSE and PED group, and two students in the BAT/BICT group rating it at less than satisfactory while 45% rated it as excellent with the remainder finding it at least satisfactory. This was an aspect I was concerned about. It had been suggested by the PL that we might need to consider 'blacklisting' companies unable to provide a quality placement. However, when I talked to the students with the exception of one, it became clear that problems may not have arisen had the students been given a clear job description with their learning contract.

As the questionnaires were not anonymous I was able to follow up why the students had rated their placement as below satisfactory. My journal records:

Placement	Quality Rating	Comments
A writing support unit	2	The BAT/BICT student who undertook this placement has now been deferred for a year due to poor performance in all modules in Year 2.
A clothes retail store	2	This student already works part-time at this shop and was strongly advised by her tutor not to choose this placement. The visiting tutor reported problems in her employer's expectations of the placement.
A large supermarket	2	This student already works part-time at this supermarket and was strongly advised by her tutor not to choose this placement.
A Primary School	2	The following summative comment made on the Quality Evaluation Form would suggest that a placement with a greater focus on psychology in the work place might have been a more suitable choice for this student. 'They have an uneasy perception of psychology' – no other reason was given for a grade two and on follow-up interview the student stated she had possibly been unfair and should have rated the placement higher.

Carrying out the follow-up interviews was effective and helped me to answer questions at Programme Committee. After discussing this list with the PL and providing further examples from my own previous experiences where students had complained about their placement. We concluded that it may not be a 'fault' of the provider. Indeed, I found through following up the reason for the perception of a poor quality placement was often complex, and not based on the placement providing a poor quality experience, rather being influenced by, for example, personality clashes, a difference with mentors over expectations, or poor time-keeping. It was therefore agreed not to have a black list.

With the Review and Evaluation Day evaluations (evidenced in Archive 1d) it was clear that the majority of the PED and BLSE students found the days useful

and informative. The students made some useful suggestions of how these could be developed in particular with regard to the timing of the days. Students commented on time wasted between sessions, and the need for individual tutorials. These suggestions were fed back to the CLs who subsequently made changes to the timetabling.

Where appropriate I was able to feed back the responses to questions to CLs who took action over the themes that they were able to, such as improving reading lists, developing tutorials, and greater information on the third year project. The CLs responded positively to this feed back – the BAT/BICT CL changed his input for the three week preparation time following this feed back. This again reflects the collaborative nature of action research which is further discussed in chapter seven.

Developments for Cycle Two

The main aspects of the evaluations needing to be developed to further improve WBL link back to developing further the areas identified in cycle one, figure 3.2. These changes also link to Whitehead's (1989) critical question: How do I improve what I am doing?

Preparation of Students

Student comments about preparation for their WBL, about assignments and the request for clearer guidance on the type of placement to choose, linked to their career plan, influenced the redesign of the handbooks.

This was the first cycle in which an Induction briefing was possible. Introducing the students to thinking about their WBL so much earlier also supported bringing forward the deadline for the hand in of final documentation. I started the preparation through an initial, short briefing, during the induction week in year one. This reminded the students that they had enrolled on a programme where an essential, integral part of this was WBL. The briefing only lasted fifteen minutes, but I stayed for questions on an informal basis. I found the students did have worries and queries, but the informal feed back to this development was positive and CLs informally reported that it raised the level of planning. They also reported an increased number of questions during seminars relating to WBL which they viewed as a positive development.

The introduction of a job description in this cycle was designed to reduce difficulties experienced in the placement and 'maximise the potential for learning from the placement' (Saxton and Ashworth, 1990, p 38). It was agreed that the job description would be negotiated between the student and placement provider as a document that identified the student's goals and opportunities and could be referred to throughout the placement (Brennan and Little, 1996; Cunningham *et al*, 2004). It was intended that the goals would not only include specific goals related to learning, but also developmental goals (Billett, 2001).

Preparation of Mentors

Mentor breakfast meetings were developed as a result of the analysis of the questionnaires and feed back. For this cycle we merged the meetings for the PED and BLSE mentors. BAT/BICT mentor briefings were kept separate because of the different placement structure. Merging the PED and BLSE meetings resulted in a larger group of mentors and a greater diversity of discussion, which was a positive development. I provided time in the agenda for programme groups to be formed to discuss programme specific themes - led by CLs. My observations and informal discussions at the end of the briefing, together with evaluations from the briefings, support my view that this worked well.

The meeting included discussion of the importance of the WBL interview and mentors were encouraged to go through the process of an interview. We discussed how to support the students further in preparing for interview and their CVs, as these had been identified as key themes in the questionnaires. A representative from a large retail company offered to set up a partnership with us whereby our students could receive a 'mock' interview before the placement process started to allow her middle-managers to gain real experience of interviewing. She also offered to provide feed back on CVs as part of this process. This development was implemented in this cycle for students opting for the communications module in year one (see Curriculum section below for further information on this new module).

One theme that emerged from the breakfast meetings was that the mentors had no opportunity to feed back formally. This is supported by Harvey *et al* (1998, p 12) who state 'debriefing needs to be for all parties, students, higher education institutions and also employers who often feel they are not asked for feed back'. This was addressed in this cycle and a pro-forma for feedback was designed

with the Mentor Focus Group (evidenced in Archive 5f). This pro-forma was sent once the placement had finished and retained by NTU and used to inform references for employment after graduation. This system still continues to work well with students having access to their report.

Quality

A new development for this cycle of the research was to offer all students the opportunity to work outside their immediate geographical area. The visit area had been defined historically by the head of department as Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, and Derbyshire. The suggestion that students were encouraged to undertake placements abroad came from a student at a Programme Committee meeting in cycle one, but needed further discussion before the placement abroad option was included. This was a new area for us to manage and considerable discussion took place at programme level. There were concerns from the tutors regarding the possibility of weak or failing students being allowed to go abroad when they really needed to stay close so they could have additional support. I had concerns about health and safety, insurance, and developing a policy that colleagues and students would support.

The policy was written and agreed at Programme Committee in this cycle and approved by the School's Academic and Standards Quality Committee (SASQC) the following month. The policy allowed students to go abroad or outside the agreed area of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, and Nottinghamshire, with the permission of their CL. Weaker students were counselled out of a placement abroad as they may need the additional support provided by a visit. We had a small number of students who applied to go abroad or out of the immediate area each year after this policy change. All have had successful WBL experiences and in several cases the students have been offered full-time jobs after completing their degree. Students did have to fund the cost of this themselves (as with all WBL within the School of Education), and provide a copy of their insurance policy (covering the period of WBL) before leaving the United Kingdom. Students who would not receive a visit were also required to complete the Student Visit Form, located in the Student Handbook (Appendix 2a, evidenced in Archive 5c) and Tutor Handbook (Appendix 2c and evidenced in Archive 4a), each week and email or post them to the tutor allocated to support them throughout their placement. (The policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Appendix 2a and Archive 5c, section 6.)

Feedback from students and colleagues indicated that the process of finding placements and notifying University staff of placement arrangements needed to start much earlier in the academic year; this was also identified in cycle one. It was therefore agreed with the programme team that the briefing in cycle two would take place in March rather than June of year one, allowing students who wished to complete a placement close to home the opportunity to make arrangements during the Easter holidays. It was agreed all documentation should be completed and handed to the programme administrator by the last week of the term in year one; namely the Learning Contract, signed by placement provider, module leader and student, and the completed Job Description.

Some students, in their evaluations, requested more information about previous placements and an opportunity to talk to third year students about their WBL experience. The time taken to email electronic copies of CVs and other pro-formas to students was discussed in relation to cycle one and concerns about students staying in touch during placement were also raised during evaluation. I brought these themes together to develop a new usage of the VLP (the VLP is explained in cycle one, page 88). Working with the VLP support team we were able to create a new area to support the WBL experience. The new area then linked the three degree programmes together, rather than creating separate modules within each degree programme. The CV and letter of application pro-formas could then be uploaded once to the new WBL area of the VLP but shared across the full cohort – this links to developments from cycle one. I was then able to upload the database of placements with contact details that had been used in the first cycle, together with the contact information and the name of the student in year three who had been there – thus enabling any student to contact them via their University email and find out more information about the placement.

I further developed the use of the VLP to include a discussion area for students to keep in touch with each other while on placement. The isolation of students on placement has been recognised by others such as Bourner and Ellerker (1993), Brennan and Little (1996) and Richardson and Blakeney (1998). Instructions on how to log onto the new VLP area and use it on placement were included in the pre-placement health and safety briefing and a sheet was inserted into their WBL packs issued at this briefing. This is an area that has

continued to develop over the cycles and will be referred to again later in this chapter and in the following chapter.

Attendance at placement discussed in the previous chapter continued to be a problem in this cycle. In this cycle the PED and BLSE students continued to 'exploit' the forty five day rule which lacked structure and limited the students' motivation to develop professional patterns of attendance. This is further discussed later in this chapter and was finally resolved by the new structure introduced in cycle three.

The overall structure of the placement remained the same in this cycle; it was later changed for the PED and BLSE programmes when the programmes were revalidated. Although the revalidation formed an important part of this cycle the changes were not reflected until cycle three. (A detailed discussion of the new structure can be found in chapter five.)

Difficulties faced by part-time students were discussed in cycle one when I outlined the problems students were encountering who carried out their placement with their part-time employers (page 103). Similar problems were experienced in this cycle and after discussion with the PL and CLs it was agreed that this would not be permitted for future placements. This was built into the Student Handbook and students were informed of the new policy and the reasons for it in the student briefing in March. No complaints were received and no perceived difficulties were identified by students during the remainder of the research.

Communication

The approval of placements continued to be an issue as is evidenced in the analyses of student evaluations. After discussion with the programme teams it was agreed that the module leader and CL would sign the learning contracts (evidenced in Archive 2d) which would be attached to their job description. These were to be submitted by the student with a copy of their job description. This development was viewed as essential to the programme team, as evidenced in Archive 2d, to ensure that students had equivalent learning opportunities. This is also supported by Brennan and Little (1996).

The job description, introduced for the first time in this cycle to develop communication between stakeholders, provided an opportunity for the student and mentor to identify the goals of the student, the required learning outcomes

and align them with what the placement could provide. This is supported by Brennan and Little (1996); Yamnill and McLean (2001); Billett (2001 and 2004); Cunningham *et al* (2004); and the HEA (2006). This enabled the module leader to ensure that the placement would provide the student with the opportunity to meet the module learning outcomes and assignment requirements. This development links to discussions in cycle one, pages 69 and 101. Halliday (2004, p 579) argues against the use of learning outcomes for WBL stating that 'competence in the workplace involves tacit knowledge and wide-ranging understandings that are not amenable to precise specification'. He states that Billett's (2001) theoretical analysis is ambiguous and that performance in a workplace 'does not necessarily imply that anything significant is learnt during such performance' (2004, p 579). There can be difficulties in assessing learning in terms of levels of achievement. In terms of this research although I acknowledge Halliday's argument I believe that the assessment was rigorous and linked to levels and outcomes following University pre-defined policy – exactly what Halliday argues against. My belief is supported by internal and external audits, some of which are evidenced later in this thesis.

Brennan and Little (1996, p 72) in their discussion of learning contracts, note that some universities give ten credit points for the 'successful planning, management and self assessment of a learning contract lead'. This was not considered by the NTU programme team, but may have proved a useful development and raised the profile and importance of these documents.

We did find limitations in the job descriptions, for example some WBL providers found it difficult to write job descriptions for the students and some of the job descriptions were weak. Guidance was therefore developed further in cycle three when examples of job descriptions were included in the mentors' and students' handbooks, providing a further example of how the cyclical nature of action research provided a structure to underpin this research.

Another potential issue of concern was that the job description could limit student development while on WBL and being asked to take projects that had not been identified when the job description was negotiated. This reflects Brennan and Little's discussion (1996). However, the concern raised by Brennan and Little that if the learning contracts were not negotiated carefully they may not reflect the correct level of academic achievement was not an issue that impacted on our provision for two reasons. One, the level of academic achievement was measured by two assignments completed which were based

on their WBL. The second reason was that the module leaders were required to sign the learning contract, having read the job description, to ensure the WBL would be at an appropriate level to enable the student to work at an appropriate level and produce assignments at that met the appropriate learning outcomes.

A further limitation to learning contracts identified by Brennan and Little (1996) relates to the appropriateness of developing negotiating skills for those involved in the job descriptions. With the revalidation that took place in this cycle we were able to develop the WBL underpinning curriculum. Negotiation skills for this purpose was built into the new year one module Problem Solving and Personal Planning, and writing and negotiating job descriptions were built into the year one module Communication. No training was provided to the mentors, but examples were included in the Mentor Handbook in cycle three, as stated above. This was at the request of the mentors in cycle two when a discussion of the changes to the Learning Contract and introduction of the Job Description took place.

Preparation of Tutors

There had been various comments in the evaluations relating to the tutors' visits. While there had been some improvements there was still a need to develop visits further and give them greater value. The visit form was therefore re-developed. It still retained a focus on the assignments, but included space for mentors to comment. The intention was to instigate all visiting tutors to discuss the progress of the student with their mentor (evidenced in Archive 5a).

The tutor training session was repeated in this cycle. The new form for the tutor visits was issued in the updated handbook, and a telephone conversation record form was devised. This was developed as a result of a request from one of the tutors at this meeting and is another example of how working collaboratively to develop the experience of the students resulted in improved practice, again reflecting the appropriateness of action research. These forms are still in existence at the time of writing (2009). A new development in this cycle was that we were given funding to pay part-time staff to attend the meeting to ensure they were fully prepared for the role.

Student evaluation had revealed that more support was required for assignment preparation. CLs were therefore asked to revisit and develop tutor briefings regarding the assignments. This enabled clearer guidance and advice to be

given during the visits by visiting tutors. Feedback from tutors following this briefing was again positive: 'Very useful', 'An opportunity to discuss themes', and 'the timing was good' were recorded in my journal. While this informal feedback was welcomed I was very aware that although I was working to change the WBL structures and processes, I was not able to change the way the tutors thought about WBL. I was however able to influence their thinking and practice (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009).

As students were to be allowed to go on placement out of the visiting area (with the permission of their programme tutor) experienced tutors were allocated to support them. Their role was discussed at this training session and it was agreed the students would be required to complete the Student Visit Form each week. This would identify their progress with assignments and key skill development. It was agreed this process would provide an effective support and two way communication. This system is still in place and has proved to be successful.

Review and Evaluation Days

Analysis of the Review and Evaluation Days questionnaire (evidenced in Archive 1d) identified that the students felt they took place too early in the WBL experience. This was mainly because students were starting their placements later in the semester, but still managing to achieve the forty five day attendance. Some students were still only attending placement for short periods of time, rather than working the full day, despite the changes to the learning contract and job description. This problem was eventually solved in cycle three with major changes to the whole process to align the WBL experience across the three degree programmes. This is discussed in detail in chapter five.

Curriculum

One of the main areas identified as needing change in cycle one was the curriculum that framed the WBL experience. I have discussed previously that this was identified through my research and close working with the Student Focus Group and discussions with the head of department, CLs and teaching team, reflecting the collaborative nature of action research. During this cycle the programme underwent revalidation which provided the opportunity to develop the curriculum to support the WBL experience. It was intended that the

WBL element of the programmes would provide an opportunity for students to transfer the knowledge learnt at University into a setting where they could apply theory to practice. This was reflected in the learning outcomes in the revalidated curriculum. It is important to note that the WBL for the undergraduate programmes within this research was not 'constrained by the need to meet professional body requirements' (Little, 2000, p 124), but there was recognition that the curriculum, driven by the learning outcomes, needed to remain flexible due to the different contexts in which the students would be placed. This is supported by Boud and Solomon (2001).

The development of the curriculum reinforces the choice of action research as the methodology as it has provided a systematic, critical framework for this research including curriculum development. The framework provided me with a mechanism for introducing changes to the curriculum underpinning the WBL student experience, based on research carried out in cycle one. It enabled me to provide the evidence to my colleagues that the change was needed and allowed my control of the development of the curriculum that was supported by my research. Boud and Solomon (2001) identify key learning themes when developing a curriculum to support WBL. Consideration was given to 'Learning identified', how we were going to develop the knowledge to enable students to apply theory to practice; 'Learning added', how we were going to support the students to gain new knowledge; 'Learning recognised', how we were going to identify new learning; 'Learning equivalence' how we were going to ensure academic equivalence in terms of credit points and level of achievement (Boud and Solomon, 2001, p 27).

I had a clear idea of what needed to be introduced to frame WBL developments from the research I had carried out in cycle one; as the discussions unfolded a whole new suite of modules was introduced which are discussed below.

In the initial stages of the revalidation several meetings were held with the full programme team, led by the head of department. The meetings were sometimes acrimonious with a small number of staff not wanting major changes to the programme. However, at these meetings it was agreed that the three undergraduate programmes should become modular within subject strands: Education, Psychology, Leisure and Sport, Business, and Information Communications Technology. Students would enrol on a joint honours programme; Business Leisure and Sport Education (BLSE), Psychology and Education (PED) or Business and Information Communications Technology

(BICT). Each programme would have a suite of subject related modules within it at each level, and an additional suite of Professional and Personal Development Modules (PPD) which would underpin and support the WBL experience and provide an opportunity for students to develop key life skills.

I was asked to write and co-ordinate the PPD modules which provided an opportunity for me to use my research to influence the value of the WBL experience and provide a sound underpinning of knowledge, skills and understanding for this aspect of the overall programmes. Action research provided me with a model of change involving collaborative working through shared educational values, based on the work of Lewin (1946) and Schon (1983). Being given the role of PPD co-ordinator empowered me to drive through the changes, while using collaboration and dynamic networking as the mechanism for making the changes. I was able to develop a framework for curriculum development at the same time ensuring that the new learning outcomes would 'be appropriate to most of the workplace situations that particular cohorts of students would meet' (Little, 2000, p 124). The theme of collaboration within action research is further discussed in chapter seven.

The PPD modules agreed were:

Module	Year /Level
Developing Academic Skills	1, Semester 1
Problem Solving and Personal Planning OR Communication	1, Semester 2
Career Planning	3, Semester 1

Figure 4.1: Professional and Personal Development Modules

Once decisions regarding the main aspects of the programme, the modular nature of the programmes, and the need to have key skill development within modules had been made, a Revalidation Management Team (RMT) was formed to oversee the development of the revalidation documentation. This comprised

the head of department, PL for the three undergraduate programmes, the CLs for each programme (BAT/BICT, PED and BLSE), and me as PPD co-ordinator. We were each tasked to write the revalidation documents, meet regularly to provide support and ensure the new modules, learning outcomes, and assessment were rigorous and would enable 'academic judgments about the validity of learning', including that of the WBL experience (Brennan and Little, 1996, p 49).

We additionally ensured that the new modules met the Education benchmark and had appropriate learning outcomes that represented 'a form of openness and accessibility' rather than 'a form of closure' (Brennan and Little, 1996, p 45). Full staff meetings were frequently held to ensure the views of all staff were, where possible, reflected in the re-validation process. I found the meetings to be supportive and I grew in confidence working with the RMT group. We finally agreed on the aims and outcomes for each of the modules which can be found in the following appendices:

Module	Appendix
Developing Academic Skills	4a
Problem Solving and Personal Planning OR Communication	4b 4c
Career Planning	4d

Figure 4.2: Modules

The final documentation, reflecting the new programmes, was therefore the result of a team effort as is reflected by the comment by the Revalidation Panel (see Archive 8b): 'The panel was impressed by the teamwork and enthusiasm which had been shown in the validation meeting.'

The process of decision making is reflected in the figure below:

Full tutor team



Revalidation Management Team



Module Teams

Figure 4.3: Process of Decision-Making

I have mentioned above that the modularity of the degree programmes still exists, although modules have been updated to reflect new agendas since the inception of these in 2001. Many aspects that have been discussed above, using the literature survey to support and guide the research and changes implemented, are still in place at the time of writing, for example the concept of the PPD modules (although the content of some modules, and titles of others are now different), the use of the PDP, and the emphasis on key skills; indeed, the key skills, discussed later in this chapter, have not been changed since I wrote them in 2001 and were shared across the University as an example of good practice by the Centre for Academic Practice.

Reflections on Literature Underpinning Curriculum Developments

The new programmes were well received by most staff and students. They have been updated over time following evaluations, revalidations, and changes in skills undergraduates bring with them to University, but the core aspects still exist at the time of writing (2009). While I did not teach on all of the new PPD modules, those I did I enjoyed and found myself reinvigorated through the whole process of design and delivery. Anderson's (1987, p 239) discussion of 'creating an inclusive curriculum' by asking 'what is the present content and scope and methodology of a discipline?', was a question that we frequently discussed at the RMT meetings, and was also reflected in our final curriculum design and the move to modules, some of which were optional.

As stated above, from the outset of this research it had become clear that curriculum development was essential in supporting the students' placement

experience. For each degree within the research the students completed two 'double' assignments, equating to sixty credits each. A change in University regulations during the research resulted in these credits (second year second semester modules) counting towards final degree classification. Writing in 1990 Nixon stated that 'it is comparatively rare for formally assessed sandwich work experience to contribute to a student's final classification' (in Bell and Harris, 1990, p 85). This may be because the sandwich placement (defined in chapter one) was an experience of forty eight weeks, whereas the placement in this research is shorter, or it may be our University's regulations that allow this. Certainly research at NTU indicates that formal assessment through the WBL experience counting towards final degree classification is common.

The issue of assessment needed careful consideration as we wanted students to evidence reflection of their placement and the development of skills, knowledge and understanding within a form of learner identity and autonomy. This reflects Silver and Brennan (1988, p 248) where they recognise the liberal tradition of assessment versus the more vocational types of assessment relating to 'real world problem-solving' ... 'establishing relevance together with practitioners in the field'. Foster and Stephenson (1998) also view assessment from WBL to be more varied than traditional assessments. Brennan draws on Brennan and Little (1996) identifying six possible types of assessment for WBL:

- 'direct observation of the student at work
 - assessment of student's log book or work diary
 - interviewing/interrogation at work
 - surrogate assessment, ie the assessor obtains views of others
 - student prepares a final report and this is assessed
 - written or oral tests of the intended learning outcomes from the WBL.'
- (2005, p 25)

Our assessment method would fit most closely with the fifth type encouraging reflection and drawing on the use of the student's log (second type) above.

Guile and Griffiths (2001) provide context on the importance of linking the curriculum to the placement and in turn providing opportunity for students to develop both vertically (continue to develop their theoretical/intellectual knowledge gained at University) and horizontally (the process of change as students move from one context to another). This is also supported by Blackwell *et al* (2001), and James (2000). It was therefore important that

students had the opportunity within the curriculum to 'draw upon their formal learning and use it to interrogate workplace practices' (Blackwell *et al*, 2001, p 126). Brennan (1985, p 152) uses the term 'vocational specificity', that is an identification of what the students on non vocational degree programmes will do on WBL.

In our discussions of the assessment linked to the WBL modules the points made by Harvey *et al* (1998) were taken into consideration, for the assessment to be valuable to the students; equivalence with non-work experience assessments; discussing the development of a range of attributes; increasing the independence of the student. Garrick and Rhodes's (2000) discussion of the legitimisation of knowledge at work also impacted on what we considered to be valid knowledge particularly in relation to the new PPD modules. We were able to use Garrick and Rhodes (2000, p 1) questions related to knowledge development such as 'when and how is it produced?', 'what counts and what doesn't?', and 'how [is] WBL knowledge conceptualised?'.

The stages that we went through in developing the curriculum are reflected by Bridges (2000), in his review of the higher education curriculum. He identifies five competing epistemological pressures on the curriculum, the first two of which resounded through the discussions we had relating to the changes:

- 'the deconstruction of the subject, as reflected in, for example, the modularization of the curriculum;
- the cross-curricular key skills movement' (2000, p 41).

I found Bridges' research (2000) linked closely with the developments we were making and supported the modularization of the curriculum which as a team we had agreed to. This is firstly because it enables a more student-centred curriculum, in that it allows students to assemble a flexible degree programme which fits their interests and aspirations. Secondly it can satisfy the social expectation that University programmes might serve more directly with needs of employers. This second point also links to the key skills agenda that is discussed below on page 143. Bridges (2000, p 43) advocates that modular programmes provide flexibility and 'build consecutiveness and progression into the study' as well as reflecting 'student choice'. This is certainly true of the programme that we designed and revalidated.

In discussing changes made to the curriculum it is important to provide a framework that reflects the processes of change. The processes I followed in developing this framework are underpinned by the following relevant research articles.

Asiala *et al* (1996) link research and curriculum development within a framework for undergraduate maths education. While this is a different subject area, some of the aspects discussed in the article have relevance to this research, such as the methodology for the research. Riding *et al* (1995) produced a useful article on developing the curriculum through action research while supporting learning innovation.

Anderson's (1987, p 224) article on Curriculum Change focuses on women's studies; some aspects of this research linked to the changes we went through. For example she states that curriculum change is 'developmental and transformative' and discusses the 'reconstruction of the curriculum' (1987, p 234) both of which reflect our experiences. Anderson also states that in her experience 'inclusive curriculum projects report new enthusiasm for their work' and 'the degree to which participants discuss and share programme syllabi, pedagogical problems and successes' (1987, p 234); this is certainly something that I experienced through my involvement in the validation process. I found it invigorating working with the Revalidation Management Team (RMT) and felt that my opinions and contributions were valued.

Kress (2000, p 141), in his discussion about the future curriculum focuses on the need to provide a curriculum that is 'attuned to global demands'; a necessity we were beginning to come to terms with at the point of revalidation in 2000. It is interesting that this article states that there had been an era of educational stability, but the new era 'requires an education for instability' (Kress, 2000, p 133). This was certainly key to the need for changes in our curriculum. Kress (2000, p 139) views instability positively in terms of curriculum development and transformation, using words such as 'creativity, innovativeness, adaptability, ease with difference, and comfortableness with change'. These are words that would reflect the team's view of the changes that were ongoing during the revalidation period. Kress views educational change as a reflection of the changing needs of society and the responsibility of educators to produce citizens that will continue to develop within their culture. He discusses the importance of life-long learning which links to the PDPs, discussed more recently by Brennan (2005), which we were introducing through our curriculum changes.

Kress (2000, p 141) focuses on the importance of design both in terms of the curriculum, the materials to be used in the classroom, and the fundamental importance of the 'realignment of the curriculum' which is discussed below.

In redesigning the curriculum it is useful to look at what the literature says about the nature of curriculum development. Eraut (1976) identifies a framework for curriculum change which fits to the process that we ultimately used, that is aligning the curriculum through learning outcomes and assessment. This links to Guile and Griffiths' (2001) statement of the need for clear learning outcomes to ensure success in WBL.

In realigning the curriculum we followed Biggs' (1999) model, which reflects that of Eraut, in developing within each module aims, intended learning outcomes and agreed assessment criteria. We were then able to align the learning outcomes with objectives, subject matter and assessment patterns, then to teaching, learning and communication methods, again reflecting Eraut's model. Each model can be seen below: both have slightly different central themes. For Eraut it is the overall curriculum strategy, while for Biggs it is the intended learning outcomes. However, they both identify similar themes, with Eraut's focus for assessment being on the pattern of assessment and ensuring there was no over assessment of the students, while Biggs focuses on the assessment method and ensuring this is fit for purpose. In terms of the assessment for our programmes both the pattern and method were of equal importance and we designed an assessment map across each programme to ensure there were a variety of methods of assessment, each of which assessed the learning outcomes for the modules without putting the student under pressure of over assessment or bunching of assessment deadlines. What both models fail to do, which we found of impact on our curriculum developments, was to identify the internal and external forces that drive the changes.

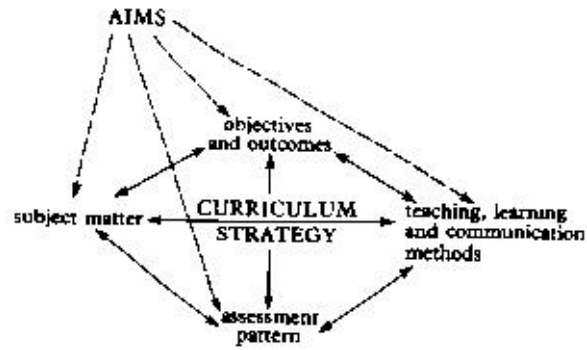


Figure 4.4: Curriculum Development Strategy, Eraut (1976)



Figure 4.5: Model of Curriculum Development, Biggs (1999)

Hartwell *et al*, 2001, in identifying five stages in curriculum development includes the notion of identifying the need for change, which reflects our process of identification of the pertinent factors in our own curriculum development.

These are:

1. Identifying the need for change;
2. Research to specify actions and processes;
3. Research to identify ways of accomplishing actions and processes;
4. Development and production of pedagogy which allows widespread application of the research results;
5. Assessment and continuous improvement.

The authors later discuss curriculum alignment; 'that planned learning outcomes be included in the delivered curriculum and assessed' (2001, p 319).

Using this framework for our curriculum development would include the internal and external drivers that need to be identified under point one. This framework supports the research that had taken place during cycle one which identified the need to underpin the WBL experience within the curriculum, leading to the introduction of the PPD modules. It also includes the review of pedagogy that

took place, supported by Anderson (1987), and the way in which it was decided to deliver the PPD modules. In turn this was aligned with the assessment and continuous improvement which took place as evidenced by the end of module evaluations. Again, the notion of evaluations is supported by Anderson (1987, p 237) as providing 'a yardstick for measuring the development' of learning within the subject discipline. However, this framework does not include the need for aims, objectives and outcomes which Eraut identified as essential.

Skilbeck (1976, p 52) distinguishes six stages of development-implementation-evaluation within 'rational interactive' curriculum development:

- 'Situational analysis';
- 'Preparation of objectives';
- 'Programme building';
- 'Interpretation and implementation';
- 'Monitoring, assessment, reconstruction';
- 'Feedback and decision-taking'.

This framework also links in part to our developing framework, that is, the analysis of the current situation through the cycle one research, and writing the documentation for validation which included the preparation of the objectives which Eraut also supported. This framework also links to programme building which aligns with Hartwell's production of pedagogy. Skilbeck also links to Eraut and Hartwell with the need to have constructive alignment; linking assessment to the learning outcomes. Again, this framework includes the need to make changes based on evaluation and feed back, although in this rational model the objectives are seen to be general rather than specific.

These three frameworks have common themes namely identifying objectives, and linking these to assessment and curriculum content.

We did not follow any one specific framework for the curriculum changes made at this time, but each of the above frameworks reflects elements of the processes we followed. The framework we followed consisted of:

- Identification of the need for change through external and internal drivers, reflection, evaluation and research (reflects Hartwell and Skilbeck);
- Identifying appropriate modules, based on the perceived needs of the students, and available resources (reflects Skilbeck);

- Preparation of objectives and learning outcomes in line with University guidance (reflects Eraut, Biggs, and Skilbeck);
- Mapping the programme's overall curriculum objectives across modules (reflects Eraut and Skilbeck);
- Ensuring constructive alignment and a variety of assessment methods (reflects Biggs, Eraut, Hartwell, and Skilbeck);
- Curriculum planning and delivery, including methodology (reflects Hartwell, Eraut, and Skilbeck);
- Module evaluation – needed to meet University policy, but also to inform planning and future developments (reflects Skilbeck).

Linked to the framework are the different levels of decision making. Russell (1981) identifies a framework with decisions at different levels being linked.

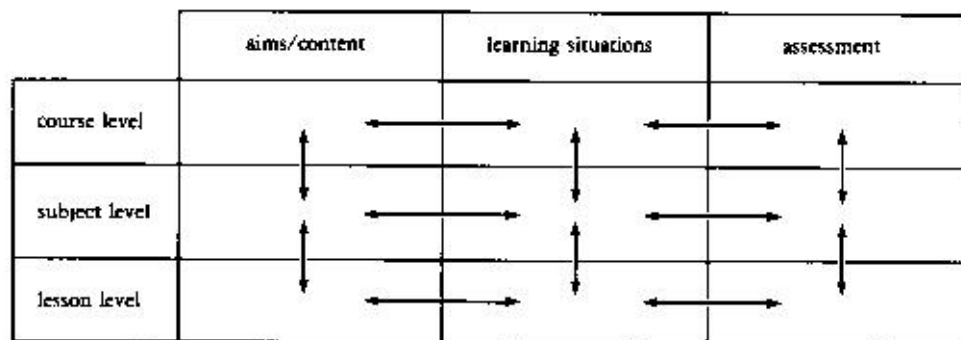


Figure 4.6: Levels of Decision Making, Russell (1981)

This framework reflects the levels at which we were making decisions. This omits an additional level above that of programme, namely at the level of the University. The University had specified the requirement to move to modular programmes and to revalidate the programmes.

In redesigning the programme, once we had identified the new subject modules which reflected the interests, abilities and experiences of staff (Skilbeck, 1976 and Van Driel *et al*, 1997) and the perceived needs of our students, we focused on the objectives/learning outcomes, making the decision that they should be general rather than specific. This decision was made because the process of changing module specifications can be time-consuming as they have to be approved by Programme Committee, School Standards and Quality Committee, and, depending on the level of change, Academic and Standards Quality Committee.

Hartwell *et al's* (2001, p 316) comment that education should be 'based on a broader set of competencies to a better understanding of what those expanded competencies were and where they could best be learned' supports the need to identify PPD modules, with specific expanded competencies. This reflects the stages in the changes to the curriculum within the focus of this research, and also reflects the key skills they identified for accountancy students, together with the need for 'application of skills in a real work environment' (2001, pp 319-320).

I have already made mention that tensions existed during the research. One example given was the tension that some staff exhibited as to the changes that were to be made. It is always difficult to make changes, but changes to the curriculum were recognized as necessary by many of the staff, students, and to some extent, the WBL providers through the Mentor Focus Group. There is a further discussion of tensions in the next section: Key Skills, and in chapter seven.

While discussing the curriculum developments it is important to link the discussion to WBL. Brennan and Little (1996) identify four types of WBL 'that reflect the control and design of the curriculum and status of the learner':

'Type A: curriculum framework controlled by HEI, content designed with employers - learner primarily a full-time student;

Type B: curriculum framework controlled by HEI and professional body, and content designed with employers - learner primarily a full-time student;

Type C: curriculum framework controlled by HEI, content designed with employer - learner primarily full-time employee;

Type D: curriculum framework controlled by HEI, focus and content designed primarily by learner - learner primarily full-time employee.' (1996, p 52)

The WBL in this research relates most closely to Type A. Types C and D both refer to full-time employee rather than student. Type B refers to the curriculum framework being controlled by the HEI and professional body, which would more closely align to our Initial Teacher Education programmes which would involve the Training Development Agency (TDA). The development of the curriculum framework, as discussed above, was controlled by NTU and the content was designed, in terms of the validated document and learning outcomes by NTU with the learners being full-time students. However the content was not designed with employers, so it does not align perfectly with these types. It

could be argued that the employers had an input to the design through the negotiation of the job description, but this is peripheral to the curriculum design as recognised by the validation panel within NTU; this is recognised by Brennan and Little (1996).

Brennan and Little (1996, p 53) also make the point that universities do not always consider the 'integration of the placement element with the overall objectives of the programme of study' and draw on findings from the Higher Education Quality Council's Learning from Audit report to support this statement. This was not the case with this research. Prior to the revalidation discussed in this chapter the WBL was not fully integrated, but through the process of revalidation we were able to ensure it was an integral part of the programme. This is evidenced in the questionnaire responses discussed in the following chapter, issued at the end of cycle three (Section 3 in Archives 1n and 1l). The responses indicate that 93% of the students did consider the WBL was an integrated part of their programme, 4% did not consider it was, and 3% did not know.

Key Skills

QCA define key skills as those generic skills which individuals need in order to be effective members of a flexible, adaptable and competitive workforce and for lifelong learning (Brennan 2005). Nixon (in Bell and Harris, 1990, p 83) identifies a push from Government to develop programmes that were 'more industrially and commercially relevant'. Within this they see 'student centred learning designed to enhance key generic competencies' as an integral part of the curriculum which was essential in meeting this government push (1990, p 83). Fallows and Steven (2000) also identify there was a need at this time in Higher Education to introduce key skills to ensure the economic competitiveness of Britain and to develop the skills of its graduates, while Harvey *et al* (1998, p 21) view 'the development of a variety of skills in a relevant work context is a key benefit for students who have undertaken a sandwich placement'.

In my opinion the distinction between sandwich placements and short term placements, such as the ones in this research is important in discussing key skills development. I would argue that students do not need to undertake a full year's WBL to develop key skills; the development of key skills should be recognised, encouraged and recorded irrespective of the type or mode of study. Indeed Harvey *et al* (1997, p 99) argue that WBL provides 'a wealth of

opportunities to develop attributes that can help students to be successful in the future'. Boys *et al* (1988, p 218) refer to a need for undergraduates to 'work along with their specialised knowledge of the student and develop personal skills and communication, problem solving, team work and leadership'. More recently Little (2005a, p 135) found from her research focussing on foundation degrees that employers sought graduate recruits because they 'will be more likely to possess other attributes' such as 'personal skills'

Garnett (2001) discusses an emphasis on gradueness and the increase in academic endeavour to ensure that skills that were implicit are now explicit through integration into the curriculum. However, Havard *et al* (1998, p 63) argue that students only require a 'support and assessment network' to achieve level four NVCQ Key Skills. Kitson (1993), in his argument against sandwich degrees, makes the point that the claims of some researchers that key skills developed as a result of WBL, may not be founded, and this development may simply be because the students are older and more mature when they leave University. He also makes the point that some skills, such as interpersonal skills, will develop more on programmes where key skill development is built into the programme and may not be a direct result of a year in industry as part of the degree. Boys *et al* (1988) acknowledge that QAA was at this time increasing its expectations for explicit reference to key skills in teaching programmes. More recently Little (2005a, p 139) states that HND programmes 'have become less work-related and more academic' and questions whether vocationally focussed foundation degrees will 'meet employers' needs for peoplewho can bring a broader business awareness and personal skills to the work role' (2005, p 144).

Little (2000, p 120) identifies the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative as 'the most notable' of the UK government-funded initiatives to effect change within the curricula. She links the development of 'key personal transferable skills' and the ability to learn within the workplace (2000, p 120).

Bridges (2000) identifies four aspects to the curriculum agenda which are similar to those identified by Fallows and Steven:

- development of generic skills linked to employability;
- an emphasis on the interpersonal dimensions of academic and employment skills (for example team working, communication and personal skills);

- applying theory to practice through WBL;
- establishing basic skills (for example numeracy, basic writing skills, and use of ICT).

Bridges goes on to discuss whether key skills should be integrated into the subject programme or be set apart with specialist tutors delivering the 'key skills' element, while Brennan (2005, p 24) suggests 'drop-in workshops' as a third approach. This links to some interesting discussions we had both across the full teaching team and the RMT, which is reflected by Nixon (in Bell and Harris, 1990). As the programmes stood at that time, 'core skills' were delivered in an integrated way by each programme team. However, the range of skills had not been identified and shared across programmes, and the integrated method of delivery had received criticism from students through Programme Committee, meetings with the Student Focus Group (evidenced in Archive 2a), and module evaluations. This was one of the factors affecting the decision to identify and articulate key skills and teach them within the PPD modules. This decision was not made lightly and the discussions on whether there was a need to integrate and provide opportunity for the development of key skills reflected some of the debates in compulsory education in the mid-1990s, for example Hodgson and Spours, 1997.

While it was decided to deliver key skills through the PPD modules, and provide opportunity for development of key skills through WBL, it was recognised that the current team would need to deliver the modules, rather than use specialist tutors. This was mainly due to a reduction in contact hours following revalidation resulting in a surfeit of teaching hours and caused tensions when staff were allocated to PPD modules. For example, one colleague was concerned that she lacked the skills to deliver the module and was not comfortable with the teaching styles that would be needed; this is reflected in Bridges' (2000, p 46) discussion about the need to 'develop new capacities among traditional teaching staff and new approaches to their teaching'.

The practice of using existing staff without staff development caused some criticism of the new PPD modules. New strategies and skills were needed by some staff. While I was able to bring this to the attention of senior staff, I was not able to influence any staff development. The response I received was that staff could raise the need for staff development through appraisal. The lack of staff development is cited by OfSTED (2000) as being one of the areas of attention for managers in the success of key skills delivery. This is further

supported by Van Driel *et al* (1997, p 107) who attribute the lack of success to many innovations in higher education to 'the failure of teachers to implement the innovation corresponding to the intentions of the developers'.

The opportunity for students to apply their key skills and further develop them through WBL was seen as important and is supported by Hyland (1994), James (2000), Greenbank (2002), and reflects the more recent findings of Little and Harvey (2006).

I therefore worked with a colleague to develop materials for modules to support staff if they felt they lacked the skills – particularly the Developing Academic Skills module. Colleagues were therefore able to work through a presentation at the beginning of each teaching session, then issue a booklet for that session. The booklets had differentiated pathways enabling the students to work independently with the support of the tutor. This was not always completely successful but the student module evaluations showed such practice was accepted by the majority of students, some of whom particularly enjoyed the opportunity to learn independently. The overall quality of this process was reflected in comments from QAA when we were subject to a review following the revalidation

'The learning, teaching and assessment strategy ensures the development of knowledge and understanding with particular emphasis on the acquisition of transferable and professional skills. This encourages students to become autonomous learners and employable graduates. All courses have a systematic and mainly integrative approach to key or transferable skills.' (Archive 8a, paragraph 16).

The main concept of the PPD modules still exists at the time of writing (2009) reflecting the success of this innovation.

As stated above it was agreed to develop the key skills through the PPD modules and I was tasked by the head of department to develop a set of key skills that would meet the requirements of our graduates. My previous experience in teaching in schools, particularly through GNVQs and NVQs had provided me with a great deal of key skills experience. Key skills had been introduced in schools in 1997 as a new qualification following the Dearing Report in 1996; at Key Stage four (year ten), forming a much greater focus at Key Stage five (years twelve and thirteen) where all students had to take Key Skills at levels two and three. In FE there was also a strong focus on Key Skills; the funding mechanism enabled colleges to claim additional funding for each key

skill their students achieved, the amount increasing for each level. Students were therefore coming from environments where key skills had been valued and been part of their compulsory curriculum.

I found the QCA Framework for Key Skills helpful as it outlines the key skills required for each framework level. I focussed on level four, the equivalent to undergraduate study, but found it did not fully reflect the needs of our students. Nor did it align with the curriculum in the revalidation process. I conducted a series of meetings with the CLs (evidenced in Archive 2e) to clarify the key skills they wanted to include. I then met with the deputy of the University's Centre for Academic Practice who was able to advise me on the University's expectations of graduate skills. (Since setting up the key skills within the School of Education the HEA has provided useful guidance on graduate skills in a range of key areas.)

Following meetings, discussions and literature searches to identify how other universities were developing key skills, it was agreed that the key skills for our students would be:

- Communication;
- Numeracy;
- Information Communications Technology;
- Working with others;
- Improving own Learning and Performance;
- Problem Solving.

These reflect those that Little (2000) identifies following an analysis of case studies and are also reflected by Havard *et al* (1998). Little (2000) makes the point that the identification of specific key skills will help students and employers to discuss them and aim to build their development into the WBL experience. Appending the key skills to the Visit Form, discussed on page 102 and ensuring visiting tutors discussed and recorded the development of each key skill area further embedded their place in the WBL process. Garrick and Rhodes (2000) in their discussion of the legitimisation of knowledge in the work place also identify similar key skills.

A curriculum document was developed expanding each of these key skills and identifying where the skills would be developed in each year of the degree. This was discussed with the Mentor Focus Group who had been invited to take part in

the revalidation process, to inform curriculum design – the group was renamed for the purpose of the revalidation ‘Partnership Forum’ (evidenced in Archive 2j). The final curriculum document can be found in Appendix 1 and reflects many of the skills, qualities and attributes listed by Liverpool John Moores University, based on the work of Knight and Yorke (2004). The development of key skills was recognised as fundamental for WBL and a form was designed for tutors to complete during the visit to capture the students’ development of these skills within the work place. This was agreed with the Partnership Forum Group. An example of this can be found in Appendix 1, and in the Key Skills section of the Student’s Handbook in Appendices 1 and 2, and Archive 5c.

Alongside the introduction of the PPD modules came funding from the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) to support the use of PDPs; a way for students to record personal and professional development of skills. As a School we were keen to use the PDP as a method of supporting and recording evidence of personal development, to set goals for further development, form a focus for tutorials, and inform job applications. This is supported by ESRU (2002) and later by Cunningham *et al* (2004). I successfully bid for some of the HEFCE funding which was used to buy some staff development time to allow staff to become familiar with the NTU PDP. I also worked with the Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator to identify where we could successfully build the PDP into the PPD modules as shown in figure 4.7 below.

Module	PDP Development
Developing Academic Skills	Various areas were identified with completion of 4 documents from the PDP forming part of the final assignment for the module.
Problem Solving and Personal Planning OR Communication	Recording of appropriate key skills development. Completion of the CV, and recording of an interview, forming part of the final assignment for the module.

Career Planning	Updating of CV forming part of the final assignment for the module.
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Figure 4.7: PDP Development

An extract from the Revalidation Report is shown below which demonstrates the rationale for inclusion of the modules:

‘The programme team outlined the rationale for the delivery of research methods at level one. The programme team wanted to offer a common, compulsory module and did not want to wait until level two to deliver research methods. The level one module provides general skills and knowledge, more specific research skills would be developed within each of the subject areas throughout all three levels. At level three the support for the project would further develop research skills.’ (Paragraph 24) (The full report is evidenced in Archive 8b,)

Since completing the initial research Maher and Nield (2005) have discussed the need to develop the curriculum to enable students to develop key employability skills with PDPs playing a central facilitating role in this, thus supporting our developments in 2001-2.

The development of this curriculum and the fact that it had attracted HEFCE funding, led to a request from the Centre for Academic Practice to produce a report on these developments and the way in which we linked PDP development into assessment. This was seen as an example of good practice and has been shared across the School, through the Learning and Teaching Network and with other Schools in the University. QAA now sees the use of the PDP as compulsory in all undergraduate programmes.

Reflections on Literature Underpinning Key Skills

The aim, as stated in the previous section, was to introduce key skills into the undergraduate programmes as part of the revalidation process. This was being externally driven by The Dearing Report (1997) which indicated that key skill development was an important requirement of HE and is supported by various researchers and reports, for example Auburn and Ley 1993), and Brennan and Little (1996). The Dearing Report (1997) required all HE programmes to develop programme specifications, incorporating learning outcomes that included:

‘the knowledge and understanding that a student will be expected to have on completion’;

'key skills: communication, numeracy, the use of information technology and learning how to learn';
'cognitive skills, such as an understanding of methodologies or ability in critical analysis';
'subject specific skills'. (Paragraph 41, Recommendation 21)

Other significant external drivers included funding such as Enterprise in Higher Education, Teaching and Learning Technology programme and Higher Education for Capability. The Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) (1995) also contributed to the pressures by 'asserting the importance of key skills development' (in Drummond *et al*, 1998, p 20). Drummond *et al* (1998) identify pressures from professional bodies such as the Law Society, and Institute of Personnel and Development, who were identifying skills development as a criterion for the accreditation of degree programmes. Drummond *et al* (1998) link the development of core skills to creating more effective learners while recognising an increasingly diverse range of entrants.

Internal drivers were the need to ensure graduates left with appropriate graduate skills (including generic professional and life-long skills), which needed to be identified within the programmes, the requirement by the University to change to modular undergraduate programmes which reflected the education benchmarks, and the need to ensure we recruited to target by offering attractive programmes. This is supported by Mansell (1976), Becher and Kogan (1980) and Kress (2000). Yorke and Knight (in ESECT 2005a) define employability as a

'set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the community and the economy', reflects our definition of key skills (2005a, p 3).

Fallows and Steven's (2000) text on Integrating Key Skills in Higher Education identifies the same drivers that we identified in 2001, namely the need to ensure graduates had the opportunity to develop key skills as part of the life-long learning and employability agenda, together with the need for key skills, set out in the Dearing Report (1997). I found the text helpful in identifying ways of developing the key skills agenda at the time, and have more recently come back to it to reflect more widely on this aspect of Higher Education, particularly in view of the changes to the secondary school curriculum and the rebranding of 'key skills' into 'functional skills' in the new vocational diplomas. The elements that Fallows and Steven discuss relating to the 'skills agenda' were all those that we faced in our discussions about key skills, namely:

1. 'nature of the student population;
2. organisational arrangements;
3. diversity of programmes offered;
4. financial status of the institution;
5. location of the institution;
6. particular national priorities.' (2000, p 51)

Points one to three are all discussed in the Curriculum section above, but additional discussion is needed for points four to six.

Point four reflected the costing of the programme that had to be considered. We were recruiting to target and bringing in a secure amount of HEFCE funding for each of the degree programmes. They were all increasing in numbers each year (and still continue to do so), so we were able to afford the additional costs of introducing the new PPD modules discussed above. Within the new programme, following re-validation, we moved to modular programmes which ultimately resulted in a reduction of contact time with students to eight hours per week, including the PPD modules, rather than the existing twelve hours per week. We were therefore reducing our costs, rather than increasing them.

Point five is reflected in the links with local industry that the University was developing at that time, and continues to. These links are at the macro and micro level. I have discussed in several chapters the influence of the placements on the programme design and how the Mentor Focus Group influenced the design of WBL, including the design of the key skills.

Point six is particularly pertinent as employability of graduates had become high on the national agenda and at NTU at this point in the research. In 2008 NTU was in first place on the employability league table, having climbed securely over the last six years. At the time of writing, 2009, NTU has an employability rate of 94.8%. Enhancing employability is core to the University's Strategic Plan, as is the desire to retain our position in the league tables.

Fallows and Steven (2000) outline the external factors for the need to recognise and integrate key skills development in undergraduate programmes. The main reasons they identify are:

- the recognition, supported with data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, that competition for graduate employment is fierce

and consequently the variety of jobs available to graduates is becoming more diverse;

- the increasing recognition that many of the attributes of a programme are transferable; the example given is that of information retrieval and analysis skills required for a literature search;
- the changing nature of employment reflecting the need for graduates to have a range of key skills that can be transferred to new careers as the job market changes;
- the increasing number of SMEs that are now employing graduates who are expected 'to hit the ground running'. The authors suggest that SMEs will be employing as many as 70% of graduates in the near future (2000, p 62).

Each of these points is pertinent to the undergraduates involved in this research. Indeed, the final bullet point is particularly so as a large percentage of our students find employment with SMEs, and are likely to move more often and seek work in different employment sectors. This is also reported more recently by Maher and Nield (2005) and Brennan (2005).

Alongside these themes Fallows and Steven (2000) recognise the increasing Internationalisation Agenda and the recognition by the European Commission of the need to establish a 'Learning Society' that provides a mix of formal qualifications and personal skills. They also recognise the move to an information society and the need to ensure graduates have the required key skills to succeed. Again, these were factors that we were discussing at the time of revalidation and were seen as essential elements when drawing up our Key Skills Outcomes for each level of the undergraduate programmes (Appendix 1).

Various other authors also discuss external drivers, for example the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE) Higher Education and Employment Division produced a report 'Getting the Most out of HE: Supporting Learner Autonomy (1997) which found that employers have stressed the priority which they give to personal transferable skills. AGR (1995) stressed the need for graduates to become self-reliant, taking responsibility for their own careers. AGR (1995) make four key points:

- a degree is not an immediate passport to a graduate-level position;
- most graduates do not directly utilise the content of their degree curriculum during employment;

- the degree curriculum is a means through which students can gain a range of skills that can be considered to be the key attributes of a graduate;
- all graduates must be ready for lifelong learning.

As a team we would have agreed with each of these statements, and they were certainly themes that were discussed by the programme team in the process of revalidation.

Fallows and Steven (2000) recognise that there is no 'generic' list of key skills appropriate to all undergraduate programmes in all universities, and that each institution/department needs to draw up its own framework for key skills development. They give a number of case studies (2000, pp 220-222) from the UK, the USA and Australia, all identifying the processes undertaken to develop and integrate a key skills framework. They identify common factors in these processes which also align with those by Auburn and Ley (1993) and Little (2000). Examples include information technology skills needed as the information society develops, and the transferability of key skills in areas such as literature reviews and research skills. Fallows and Steven (2000, pp 220-222) produced a table which listed the essential key skills identified by each University as essential. These do vary, but are all similar to those which we had identified:

- Communication;
- Numeracy;
- Information Communications Technology;
- Working with others;
- Improving own Learning and Performance;
- Problem Solving.

Fallows and Steven (2000, pp 220-222) articulate that some universities included aspects such as 'Global Perspectives' and 'Effective Citizenship' (Alverno College, USA), 'Commitment to Ethical Action and Social Responsibility' and 'International Perspectives' (University of South Australia, Australia), 'Valuing of Diversity – ability to function in a multicultural or global environment' and 'Individual Responsibilities and Obligations' (University of Wollongong, Australia). This indicates that Universities outside the UK were possibly further ahead in their discussions about internationalisation and globalisation. At NTU we were slower to recognise this agenda, but it is now a part of any UK

University's agenda. We could argue that we were addressing the global environment and social responsibility aspects through subject specific modules and therefore did not see the need to have PPD modules covering these themes. However, this was not part of the NTU agenda at the time of the research, so we were not aware of the need to plan for these aspects. As the internationalisation, global environment and social responsibility agendas have developed, changes have been made to modules at NTU to reflect the changing agendas. At a recent revalidation of the programmes (2006), new modules were written to support such changes and reflect internationalisation more widely.

Bridges' (2000, p 44) research also focuses on key skills and describes the development as a 'disturbance of the nature and role of the traditional subject'. This is an apt description reflecting the tensions in introducing the PPD modules. Simply agreeing a title for the suite of new modules caused tensions. The 'array of definitions and classifications' is discussed by Brennan and Little (1996, p 32). We decided against the term 'key skills' because of the experiences I was able to share with the team from secondary education: in particular some of the negative attitudes of staff, students and parents towards key skills. The team shared my concerns that 'key skills' may engender a demotivating experience for the students. Much discussion took place at RMT and team meetings to decide on an appropriate title for the modules, and module content. There seemed to be a great deal of 'muddiness' in the discussions, but these possibly reflect discussions in other Universities, and by the QCA when discussing the term for secondary curricula. We dismissed the terms 'generic skills' because of the closeness in term to 'key skills' and 'core skills' because the term had been used to describe unpopular modules in the pre-revalidated programme. We believed it was important to signal a clear development for the students in the new title. The chosen term 'Professional and Personal Development' was felt to reflect a more mature embodiment of key skills linked to life-long learning and accurately describe required employability skills. It is interesting that Bridges (2000, p 44) discusses similar titles in his article and describes the different terms as reflecting the 'conceptual mud' of debate. Since our discussions further debate has taken place in the redesigning of the secondary school agenda and the term 'key skills' has now been replaced by 'functional skills'.

Drummond *et al* (1998) suggest similar themes to Bridges and draw attention, as did Fallows and Steven (2000), to the varied lists of key skills. Again, the

authors recognise the tensions within departments when establishing key skill programmes. They recognise that minor adjustments to existing systems represents a more attractive option than more radical change. This is mirrored in our first choice, one that long-serving colleagues preferred to retain the existing core skills element for each programme, rather than make the radical move to establish completely new modules for key skills. The authors do recognise the need for a change in delivery methods, which created further tension, but one that eventually worked well.

Drummond *et al* (1998) identify three broad approaches to developing skills:

1. 'embedded or integrated with development at different levels with skills being mapped across programmes';
2. 'parallel development with free-standing modules which are not integrated';
3. 'work placements or work-based projects in which students complete internal or external collaborative projects developing key skills as part of the project'. (1998, p 21)

The authors state that the embedded approach 'is often considered to have a number of intrinsic advantages' but 'there is evidence that such approaches have been difficult to operationalise effectively' (1998, p 21). Certainly my own experiences of teaching integrated key skills in schools through the GNVQ programmes, where key skills were mapped across programmes, was difficult to manage and co-ordinate, especially before the development of a computer-based management system. This time-consuming paper-based process of tracking key skills achievement is supported by OfSTED's findings in their survey of secondary schools (OfSTED, 2000). On point three it is important to note that we had identified that WBL would provide an ideal opportunity for key skill development, supported by the PDP, and identified in the student handbook (evidenced in Appendix 2 and Archive 5c).

Drummond *et al* (1998, p 21) also make the point that 'truly effective approaches' to key skills involve 'a structured and coherent programme running throughout different levels of any programme of study', but acknowledge that this is difficult to achieve.

I have already outlined some of the tensions and difficulties that we experienced. One tension that has not yet been discussed relates to how the students received the new modules, which was mixed. Some students felt the PPD modules were good and enjoyed the student-centred approach, while

others felt they had enrolled on a subject specific degree and did not want to spend so much time on developing key skills.

Another tension relates to how prior learning is recognised. Although the booklets that were developed for the Developing Academic Skills module were differentiated, they did not take account of prior learning – I therefore introduced a key skills audit (evidenced in Archive 7) which is further discussed in cycle three, page 192. This reflects my ontological and epistemological values of justice and respect. The audit was introduced to obtain baseline data for the tutors teaching on PPD modules and it proved to be invaluable in allowing differentiation of seminar groups and ensuring the students were being sufficiently challenged. The audit was completed during induction, giving sufficient time for the information to be collated and sent to tutors of the PPD Modules. The audit provided a base-line for developments throughout the whole degree programme, allowing students to identify areas for development appropriate to their WBL experience. This in turn fed into their PDP. Again, this is an example of a small cycle of action research within the much larger cycle; by including the introduction of key skills modules, which were evaluated at the end of the first year with students and making changes to improve practice by the introduction of the key skills audit demonstrates action research. Since its inception this audit has undergone several changes to reflect the changes in the skills, knowledge and abilities the students have on entry, adding further cycles to the action research and reflecting Kolb's (1984) cycle of action research, and that of Carr and Kemmis (1986).

Drummond *et al* (1998, p 20) recognise tensions in key skills development linked to their findings that 'skills development is most effective in situations where the established approach to teaching and learning is predominantly student centred'. This is supported by Bridges (2000). Drummond *et al* (1998) report similar findings to Bridges in that barriers to change in key skills include resource implications, modularisation, and a reluctance to adopt innovative approaches to teaching. Drummond *et al*'s (1998, p 24) research does suggest that for the implementation of key skills to be successful it is important to have support and guidance from the 'centre', and 'bottom up approaches are highly unlikely to be totally successful', and 'the most effective results seem to be achieved when the centre provides direction, support and co-ordination' ... 'within a framework for development'. This structure mirrors our experience:

we were led by the head of department in our developments who had the support of senior management.

Placement Structure

As part of the revalidation we examined the placement structure, based in part on the evidence from cycle one. As discussed in chapter three, it was clear that many of the problems the BLSE and PED students experienced related to the need to spend forty five days on placement across a full semester. The teaching team felt this was not sufficiently focussed and was leading to poor or incomplete attendance patterns which then resulted in poor quality assignments. Feed back from a Student Focus Group meeting (evidenced in Archive 2b) also indicated that greater support with assignments and WBL preparation was needed. This is further supported in the responses to the evaluation questionnaire (evidenced in Archive 1b and 1f). This pre-placement support could only be put in place by allowing time at the start of the semester for full-group seminars and tutorials.

The BAT/BICT experience of placement provided opportunity for preparation for WBL and the feed back from these students was more positive overall with requests for assignment support mainly during the visit (evidenced in Archive 1b). At this time I taught one of the BAT/BICT groups and found the three weeks preparation time was productive; this was supported by colleagues (evidenced in Archive 2e) and more recently by Little and Harvey (2006). The students were more confident in their understanding of the expectations of the WBL experience; we also encouraged them to visit their placement during these three weeks to establish a relationship prior to starting. They additionally knew what they were going to focus on for their assignments, and were encouraged through individual tutorials, to start their research and background reading prior to starting their WBL. Discussion with colleagues supporting and visiting the BLSE and PED students during the placement experience revealed that they were not as well-prepared, and their assignments were weaker; they also required more tutor time during their visits to discuss their assignments. This is also evidenced by the comments in the questionnaire analyses (evidenced in Archive 1f).

It was therefore agreed that the BLSE and PED students should follow the same structure as the BAT/BICT students. This proposal was then discussed with the Student Focus Group (evidenced in Archive 2a) and the Mentor Focus Group,

gaining their agreement, and subsequently written into the revalidation documentation.

This major change to the structure received praise from the Revalidation Panel, paragraph 11 (evidenced in Archive 8b):

‘Currently the Clifton based programmes utilise a placement comprised of a thirteen-week block in the second half of level two of the programmes whereas the BAT/BICT programme on the City campus had a placement in the middle of the academic year. The programme team had decided to make use of a single model across all of the programmes. The details were given in the relevant module descriptions. The placement period itself would last six weeks.’

and paragraph 5: ‘The panel commended the programme team on the support and guidance given to students, particularly the support provided for the student placements.’

This led to other advantages:

- Simpler administration and shared resources. Although the administration remained between two administrators, one for PED and BLSE and another for BAT/BICT, they were able to share the preparation of placement packs, standard letters and database structure. They were also able to provide greater support to each other, having a shared understanding of the structure.
- I was now able to share the briefings at the City and Clifton campuses. This gave the students greater flexibility in which briefing they attended, which received positive comments from students. I still needed to give more than one briefing at each site because of non-attendance, but it did reduce the workload and the need to prepare separate slides and handouts to reflect the different programme structures.
- The handbooks for the mentors, tutors, and students could be merged. This created less work, costs were reduced and updating was less complicated. I did maintain separate sections for each programme within the handbooks which reflected the difference in assignments, Module Assessment Sheets (MASH), and the nature of the career paths that required different examples of documents such as job descriptions.
- The mentor meetings could be shared. This led to greater discussion across disciplines at the meetings, and also meant we were able to offer two different dates for mentors resulting in a higher overall

attendance.

- There was common documentation, such as the blank learning contract and job descriptions, which again saved time and resources.

Continuing Developments

Cycle two had therefore begun with a decision to continue with the qualitative data collection, and develop quantitative methods of collection. This section reports on the developments for this cycle of the research, supported by the data collected as the framework was tested to support my claim to knowledge. On reflection using both methods proved successful and enabled me to provide statistical data; it also demonstrated that improvements were measurable. At the end of cycle two, as the second year students completed their WBL experience, I reissued the questionnaires discussed earlier in this chapter. This proved to be good practice as it enabled a clear comparison to be made on the same themes. It also linked closely to the main areas that had been identified during cycle one (figure 3.2).

Questionnaires were distributed as for the start of cycle two, as this method had resulted in an appropriate return of completed questionnaires. Questionnaires were issued to the second year students in the second cycle of the research: for BAT/BICT students this occurred as soon as they returned to University; for BLSE and PED students, on their final review and evaluation day. The analyses of these questionnaires can be found in Archives as follows:

1. Archive 1i – an analyses of the BICT responses to the placement questionnaire;
2. Archive 1j – an analysis of the BICT responses to the quality of placement questionnaire;
3. Archive 1g- an analyses of the BLSE and PED responses to the placement questionnaire;
4. Archive 1h - an analysis of the BLSE and PED responses to the quality of placement questionnaire;
5. Archive 1k – an analysis of the BLSE and PED responses to the review and evaluation days questionnaire.

The response rate for the questionnaires was again pleasing:

- BICT – twenty two responses from a group of thirty five students (63% for both questionnaires);

- BLSE and PED responses forty five students out of fifty five (82%);
- BLSE and PED responses thirty two students out of a possible fifty five (58%) for the Review and Evaluation Days questionnaire. I noted that only thirty two attended the final review and evaluation day where this questionnaire was issued, completed, and collected.

This is comparable to the response rates reported earlier in this chapter where the questionnaire analysis from the first cohort returning from their WBL is discussed.

The themes raised showed some continued improvements on the preceding cycle of this action research. I have used the analysis of the data from the questionnaires as evidence to show that the actions I took were tested as they were incorporated into the new processes and structures (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

Preparation of Students

For this cycle the briefing had been brought forward to March. This was as a response to the students' comments in the questionnaire analysis from cycle one reported earlier in this chapter. This eradicated any further comments from students to hold the briefing earlier, so was clearly a positive development. The comments from the students were varied from feeling sufficient information was given, to wanting more information on the assignments. This correlates with the findings discussed in cycle one. In cycle one I make several references to the issue of the assignment and the students' need for increased information relating to this aspect of their WBL: this has continued to be an issue throughout this research. For cycle two I had included the assignments from the previous year in the handbook, together with the feed back form, and included this in the presentation I did. At this point in the research the handbooks were still separate for the BLSE and PED students, and the BICT students. The section on the assignments was detailed and the tutor team was not able to add any further helpful guidance for the students. The previous year's assignment and MASH had to be included because each year the assignment was 'adjusted' slightly based on the feed back from evaluations from the previous year. This was explained to the students both during the presentation and in the handbook, although some still did not seem to take this on board.

As the issue of assignments had recurred as a continuing anxiety of students I discussed this at the October Programme Committee Meeting and it was felt that all that could be done further was for tutors to discuss the assignments in tutorials, and module seminars, to try to reduce the students' anxiety. However, although this was done the following cycle, it was, and still is, raised as an issue by a minority of students. In reflecting on this I believe that whatever we try to do to discuss the assignments with the students, there will always be some that have anxiety around this issue and students will therefore raise it as an area for further development in the preparation we give them.

The student handbook had received an improved rating, which was good because of the amount of work that had taken place through the Student Focus Group, the Mentor Focus Group and me. This is further discussed in cycle three. As the structure of the placement was to change following the revalidation the handbooks were amalgamated for the following year, all students following the same dates for their WBL experience. This is further discussed in chapter five.

Sixty-five percent of the PED and BLSE students and 68% of the BICT students had found the briefing to be between satisfactory and informative. These figures were slightly down on the previous year. It is difficult to know why this response is given as the presentation had been developed taking on board students' comments from the previous year. It may have been because there was some poor behaviour resulting in disruption from some students in the PED/BLSE presentation, and the BAT/BICT students were allocated a room in a building that was unfamiliar to them resulting in some arriving late; this was exacerbated by there being insufficient chairs for the group in the room so late arrivers had nowhere to sit.

I commented earlier that I did not enjoy giving the health and safety briefings and felt the students did not find them enjoyable. In using the cyclical nature of action research I have been able to reflect on this and look back on my initial feelings and comments against the actual data from the questionnaire analysis. In my journal entry following the analysis (7 July 2002) I wrote 'Again, the health and safety presentation was not particularly well-received by either student cohorts', referring to the BATs/BICT and the BLSE/PED groups. However, when I look at the data it shows that 73% of the BLSE and PED students and 63% of the BICT students rated it as satisfactory or better. My journal (same entry) went on to comment 'However, this remains a compulsory part of their preparation and it is always going to be contentious, particularly for

students who have already undergone several health and safety presentations.’ I would still maintain this is the case, as one student commented in their evaluation ‘Have done lots of health & safety before which was more in depth’. This is something I needed to be aware of in future briefings, but bearing in mind that at the same time University policy has to be followed.

Comments from the questionnaire responses were taken on board about the presentation of the pack, which was improved for the following year. It is difficult to know how to respond to some comments in the questionnaire responses, for example a comment from one BICT student that ‘a bit more practical may have helped, such as how to sit at desk – actually done whilst sitting at computer’, presumably rather than the digital photographs that were used s/he wanted a demonstration which was not practicable in a large lecture room. However there were positive comments such as ‘It helps in making you aware, of what to do in an emergency’ (evidenced in Archive 1i) and ‘Made me aware of the dangers in the workplace’ (Archive 1g).

Preparation of Mentors

The breakfast meetings were well received. They had been adjusted slightly in this cycle, while we were undergoing revalidation, to incorporate a section where the mentors looked at the programme and modules and had opportunity to feed back on the relevance of the programme to their specialist area, and give input to the module curriculum. This proved to be so useful that it has been retained as a standing item on the agenda for these meetings.

The meetings were again evaluated using a standard University form (evidenced in Archive 3a). Three mentors (Ice Hockey UK, John Lewis, Rolls Royce) again offered their assistance in preparing the students for their placement experience. This information was passed to the relevant CLs and the offers of speakers were taken up. In particular John Lewis, who had taken one of our students on placement and were impressed with the preparation she had done for her placement, offered a partnership: their middle managers would come and give mock interviews for our students, providing their middle managers with interviewing experience, and our students with interviewee experience. This reflects observation by Brennan and Little (1996, p 90) that ‘a number of project reports’ refer to mentors developing through their involvement with WBL.

Some providers offered places for the following year and these were advertised through the WBL experience area of the VLP and on the students' notice board. This was pleasing and evidenced that they were impressed enough to want to take our students again. In particular the mentors commented on how well prepared the students were, especially in interview technique, which was a clear result of the work reported in the last chapter where we worked through action research cycles in developing the students' handbook to include interview technique and preparation, and linked this to the mentor's handbook. The mentors also commented on how useful they found the job descriptions, which had been introduced for the first time in this cycle and learning contracts which had been amended for this placement. However, this final point also resulted in a further development being needed, as not all mentors had found writing job descriptions simple, and they asked for some examples: these were included in the handbook for the following year, and this is further discussed in cycle three.

Another aspect that was identified by the mentors at these meetings was the need to consider how we got their handbooks to them. In the last cycle we were only just developing the handbook so they were not available. In this cycle they had been posted out with the confirmation letter to mentors, but as some mentors rightly pointed out, it was too late to use the interview questions we were suggesting. After discussion with the mentors it was decided that in the following year we would ask the students to notify us when they had an interview and post out the handbooks at that point. This resulted in us having to send out far more handbooks as some students had more than one interview, but it was agreed by the team that this was a worthwhile additional cost.

The comments from the BAT/BICT students (evidenced in Archive 1j), on the overall role of the mentor reflected the training we had done in the breakfast meetings. In cycle one I referred to the influence of Cameron and O'Hara's research (1999), together with that of Shilling (1989) and Blackwell *et al* (2001) in the recognition that training mentors was important to providing a quality placement, in particular looking at their role as supporter and challenger. The comments are different and more positive than those from the students in the first evaluation (evidenced in Archive 1a) and reflect the changes I had made to the WBL experience through the mentors' training.

Preparation of Tutors

The visits had not received such positive comments as in the previous year. After further research into the student comments it was found that this was due to the large number of part-time staff we had had to recruit to undertake the visits. Three staff were appointed only to carry out the visits, and although they attended the tutor briefing, their knowledge of the programmes and modules was limited. Two members of staff were new to the programme, and again their knowledge was a little limited. These changes to staffing resulted in a drop in the number of students receiving initial telephone calls. Eighty-nine percent of the BICT students and 74% of PED and BLSE students had found the visits useful in refocusing them on the purposes of their placement. Overall comments on the visits were more positive than in the first cycle and there were no complaints about students not being informed when their tutor was visiting – this was an area I had identified as needing improvement in the last chapter.

Further Key Skills Developments

The ratings the students have given in the questionnaires to the development of key skills – all of which were rated highly – gave further support to our development of key skills within the programme, and by the use of the PDP, as discussed earlier. This development and recognition by the students is also evidenced in Archive 1g and 1i, Section 3, as follows:

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Communication	0	5	23	21
Problem-solving	1	8	29	11
Planning and strategic thinking	1	9	24	14
Interpersonal relationships and teamwork	1	8	16	20
Visioning/evaluating/critiquing	1	16	25	6

Figure 4.8: Questionnaire analysis for PED and BLSE students - Archive 1g

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Communication		1	10	10
Problem-solving		4	13	4

Planning and strategic thinking		6	12	3
Interpersonal relationships and teamwork	1	1	9	10
Visioning/evaluating/critiquing		5	13	3

Figure 4.9: Questionnaire analysis for BICT students - Archive 1i

Communication Between Stakeholders

Much work had taken place to improve communication with the stakeholders: letters were now sent to confirm the placement and the mentor's handbook had been developed and improved with the support of the Mentor Focus Group and the Student Focus Group. Breakfast meetings were held annually for the PED and BLSE mentors, and a separate one for the BICT mentors to reflect the differences in structure for the WBL experience.

Review and Evaluation Day Developments

The Review and Evaluation days questionnaire (evidenced in Archive 1k) received similar responses to the previous questionnaire. The analysis identified that the March days had not helped 37% of the students with their assignments: this was one of the main purposes. The majority of the comments from the students also supported the need to provide greater support with assignments during these days. However, it was pleasing that 87% had found the two days to be supportive of their placement. The comment from one student was useful in asking for 'More specific info on what was required of us'. Had we been going to run the same structure again this would have been useful in planning the days and being more specific with the students on the purpose, what they should bring with them, and what they should reflect on prior to coming. The analysis identified that the May Review and Evaluation days were more productive for students in the writing of their assignments with only 25% finding it unhelpful with their assignments. However, only 63% found it useful, as compared to 87% in the March days. The request for more information about year three at this day links to the structure of the BAT/BICT placement where time was given at the end of the WBL semester to the year three project which formed a substantial amount of the third year curriculum and contact time.

Quality

Analysis of the quality questionnaire (evidenced in Archive 1j for BAT/BICT students, Archive 1h for PED and BLSE students) identified that the quality experience of the placement for the students had improved in this cycle. This links to one of the original aims of this research to 'Investigate the preparation of the main stakeholders in ensuring a quality placement.' The quality questionnaire analysis shows that 100% of the BICT students who had had an interview had found the pre-placement interview to be satisfactory or better. Only one student had not had an interview. Eighty seven percent of the PED and BLSE students had received an interview and of these 91% had found it useful. Improvements made to this aspect of the placement have been discussed earlier. The comments from the students support the range of themes we had asked mentors to address in the interview, which is positive. This is reflected in the comments from the mentors' evaluations at the breakfast meetings discussed above.

Fifty-nine percent of students had been given a regular time each week to meet with their mentors. While this received comments from some students that this was not necessary because s/he 'Could see her whenever I needed', 'Worked alongside her', 'I was working in same office so we were interacting constantly', 'But there was always daily meetings and an 'open-door' situation', this was seen as an important aspect of their WBL experience by the tutor team. Setting aside time each week to talk to their student was therefore built into the mentors' handbook in the following year, and emphasized at the mentors' breakfast meeting the following year. However, giving the students half a day for gathering data had been shown to help the students and provided time for critical reflection. Little (2000, p 127) found that students who were given inadequate 'time-out' for critical reflection and discussion with their mentors could lead to 'frustration and despondency'. This may have been the cause of some despondency but had not been voiced by stakeholders within the research. However this proved to be a positive development with 88% saying they had been provided with suitable opportunities to collect information for their assignments; one student commented this had been 'superb'.

Overall only one BAT/BICT student had rated that the placement experience had been less than satisfactory in terms of 'quality'. The one student who had not felt he had received a quality placement had been one of the few who, despite constant reminders, had not submitted a detailed job description. His comments

were followed up in an interview and he stated that he should have given more thought to the placement and felt he had 'missed a valuable opportunity'. Three students from the PED and BLSE group had stated the placement lacked quality. Of these one had worked with his cousin and seemed to have chosen to do little of the agreed job description which had placed his cousin in a difficult position; another had been unable to establish a working relationship with his mentor which seemed to be linked to arriving late or not at all, then being unhelpful when he was at work; the third I was unable to ascertain the problem as both the mentor and student were reluctant to talk to me.

This was the first cycle when the chat room facility was utilised. I referred to this earlier as a 'discussion area', and I described how this was set up through the VLP with the help of the VLP support team. In the BAT/BICT summary (evidenced in Archive 1i) there are comments relating to inappropriate use of this facility by the students. This was the first time the School of Education had experienced a chat room in such a way. At the briefing the students were given a copy of the University's Computer User Regulations, but a small minority of students chose to ignore this. Unfortunately this was such an early usage of the VLP that students were able to enter a pseudonym name, rather than their University username, which meant we were unable to track back who had put up specific comments. I regularly viewed the discussions, some of which were valuable to the students taking part, and provided additional support for them. When I saw it was being abused I put up a message stating it would be taken down if it continued to be abused. When it was further abused, we closed it down. This was 'disconfirming data which showed [me that this aspect of my] research was not going as planned' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009, p 62). I therefore made changes which are set out below.

This was a learning curve for the VLP team and me. The following year we set up the facility so that the students had to log on with their University Username so that we could track down any mis-use. Since the research part of this PhD has formally ended, further developments have been made in the introduction of a Discussion Board as part of the whole VLP system, rather than one developed for the purpose of supporting students during their WBL experience. I have also started to use web blogs rather than the discussion board to provide support for students on WBL which seems to have a greater impact on the students and leads to a greater level of engagement and reflection. This is discussed in chapter six.

The overall comments at the end of this cycle were positive:

- 'It was a great experience. I think it was a very good idea to do the placement rather than just doing a straight degree because it gives you the opportunity to get a feel of working in the real world. It also enabled you to prepare for work after graduating.'
- 'My placement was great. I loved going to work each day. I have been invited back to work this summer.'
- 'I really enjoyed working at Ikea especially in Human Resources. It was an extremely positive experience in showing me how a business works.'

Comments which helped to inform planning for cycle three are:

'Perhaps more help in obtaining a placement in the first place. I know of other programmes where they just sign their name down, even for short term programmes'. We had always made it clear that this was seen by the tutor team as an opportunity to practise finding their own job, as they would at the end of the programme; we provided the support in giving help with CVs, writing the letters, deciding on a possible placement, and sharing the bank of previous placements. The whole tutor team agreed that we could not find placements for the students because they had such differing ideas about their career and the area they would move into following their degree. However, this made me aware that I needed to emphasise this to the students and it was included in the handbook the following year, and included in the student briefing, so there was a shared understanding of why we did not find their placements.

'It would be better if the assignments would fit more around other skills developed on the placement. Overall it was a very good experience.' It was interesting that a student had raised this issue as it reflected the work we had done in the revalidation process and the introduction of recording their key skills development in their PDP, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

With the PED and BLSE students we had an 82% response rate for the quality questionnaire (evidenced in Archive 1h). The results can be seen below in graph format.

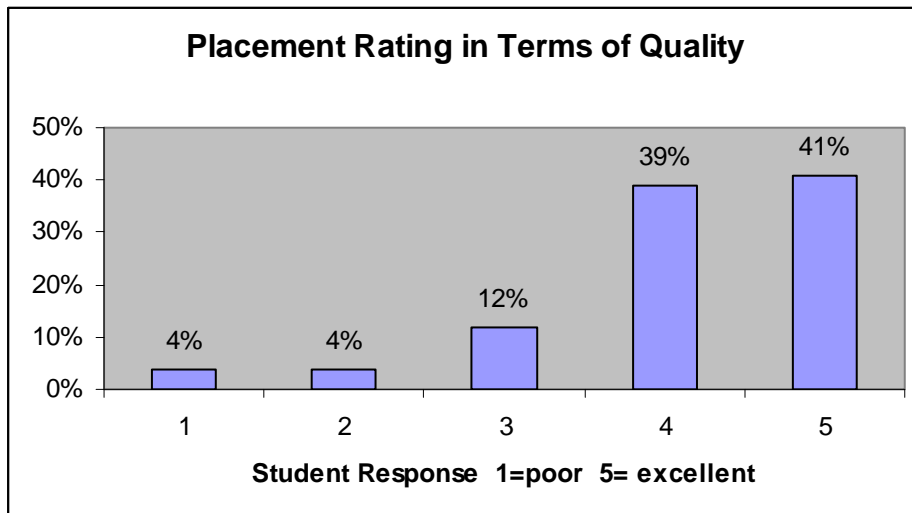


Figure 4.10: Placement Ratings PED and BLSE

This reflects the same findings as for the BAT/BICT students, that is a much improved WBL experience in terms of quality overall, with 92% rating it as satisfactory or better.

The PED and BLSE students were less certain about recommending their placement to others:

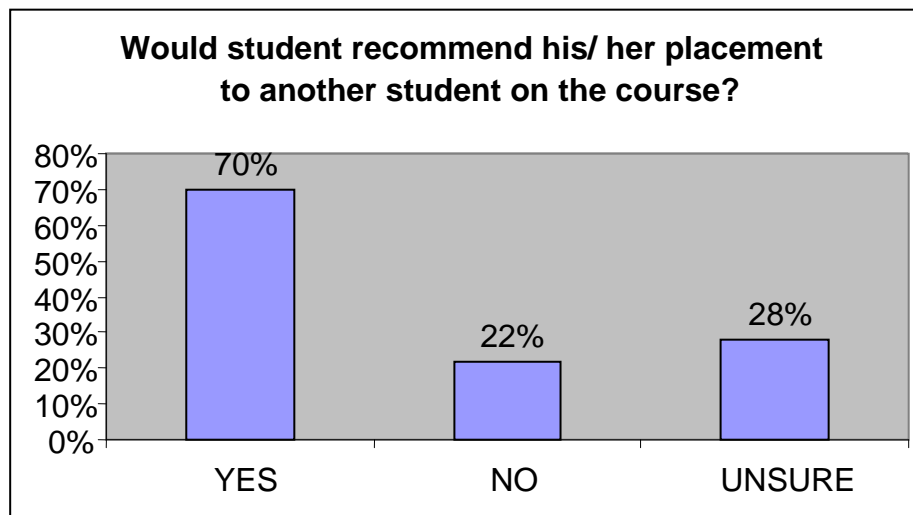


Figure 4.11: Recommendation of placement to another student

Of the BICT students only 16% would not recommend it to another student. Their reasons can be seen in the relevant archives (BICT results Archive 1j and PED BLSE Archive 1h).

Final Reflections

Earlier in this chapter I identified the questions that were pertinent to the research at the start of cycle two. These are discussed below:

What changes do we need to make to the curriculum to better support the WBL experience for all stakeholders? These have been discussed in detail above and supported by reflections on literature that underpinned the decisions made. As discussed in cycle one it was not possible to change everything all in one go. It was important from the outset that a cyclical process of change with good opportunity to reflect on actions was used. This supports the choice of action research as the chosen methodology for this research. This enabled changes to be made in each cycle then reflected on before the next cycle as shown in the figure below.

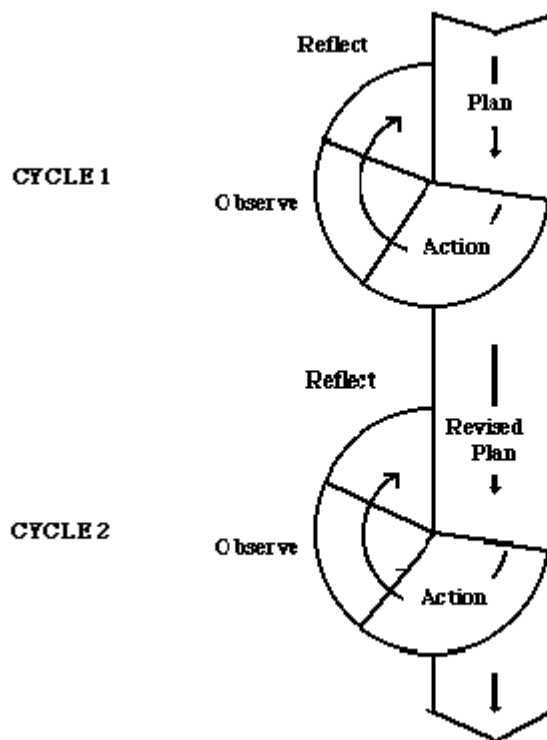


Figure 4.12: Action Research cycles taken from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p 14)

This process of planning the changes, taking actions to improve the WBL experience for the stakeholders, observing and gathering feedback on the changes made in each cycle, reflecting on what went well, and what still required further adjustments, had been a positive experience for me as the

researcher. It was decided by the whole team, working collaboratively, that the curriculum needed to underpin the WBL for the students, and provide much greater preparation for their placement experience, but it was agreed that this would be too much too soon in the overall review, if introduced in cycle one. It was also agreed by the team that revalidation in the second cycle would provide the right opportunity to adjust the curriculum.

Have the changes made so far put mechanisms into place to support the difficulties students were experiencing relating to their placement, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality placement? These have been discussed in detail above. The difficulties that had arisen at the end of cycle one, such as the design of the questionnaires, and the results of the first cohort are discussed above in this chapter. There is also discussion of the changes made during this cycle to support all of the stakeholders, as well as reporting of the results from the questionnaires with the second cohort. My reflections of the changes to the structure and process at the end of cycle two reflect a feeling of being 'nearly there'. The main themes had been addressed, the quantitative feed back from the students and mentors indicate a much more positive, quality driven placement.

The curriculum had undergone a major overhaul as part of the need to become modular in our delivery, but the opportunity had been seized to put new modules into place to underpin the WBL experience, supported by the introduction of the PDP across the programmes. These changes are discussed extensively above. It was agreed by all concerned that the final cycle would be more a matter of 'tweaking' through reflection and evaluation rather than further major changes.

Was the overall quality of the WBL experience improving? The issue of quality has been discussed in detail above, particularly with respect to the themes of quality we needed to reflect further on at the start of cycle two. I have discussed the methods used within the research in this cycle and my decision to include quantitative data to gain more objective evidence that quality was improving. This proved to be a good decision and I was able to sit at meetings, quote statistics, and give quotations from students. To me this seemed to give greater credence to the research, and certainly impressed the revalidation panel, as well as those involved in the collaborative aspect of the research. This is evidenced in the revalidation report: Revalidation of the Undergraduate Degree Programmes in the Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education,

Monday 4 June 2001 evidenced in Archive 8b. In this report the one area of good practice identified is point five already quoted on page 158.

I have discussed the results of the questionnaires, which supports the development of the quality aspect of the WBL experience. I have reflected on the new changes that were made following reflection and evaluation of the results of the questionnaires, and the changes made to the curriculum to underpin WBL and thereby help to improve the overall quality. The new structure is introduced in this chapter; this enabled us to build on the framework of the BAT/BICT placement which had received much less criticism from the students, and had many benefits relating to quality, such as the opportunity to prepare students more overtly through seminars and tutorials prior to their placement starting. I have discussed the benefits of the new structure, and the impact this had on the overall quality. The changes to the new structure are further discussed in the next chapter when the impact of these changes is evaluated.

Had the preparation of the stakeholders been improved? Yes: this is evidenced in the discussions above relating to the analyses of the questionnaires of two cohorts of students.

Reflecting on Whitehead's (1989) critical questions: How do I understand what I am doing? How do I evaluate my work? How do I improve what I am doing? This chapter has very much followed these questions. I started by reflecting on where the research has developed at the end of cycle one. I then articulated my research methods for the chapter. These two aspects helped me to understand what I was doing. I was evaluating my work throughout the cycle, but particularly when I analysed the results from the first questionnaires early in 2001, and when I analysed the results from the questionnaires to the second cohort of students. The whole cycle was about improvements and reflections on the improvements linking to Whitehead's final question.

The reflections from cycle one, and the improvements made to support the mentors are discussed above. In addition I have discussed the changes made to the preparation of the stakeholders, developments to the student handbook and briefings, changes to the mentors' briefings and the way their handbook was issued. I have also discussed the need to provide opportunity for mentors to provide feed back on the student they have on placement, and I have discussed how they were included in the tutor visit. The tutors' preparation was improved

during this cycle through developing a clear structure for their role, supported by a handbook and annual briefing. I have also discussed the improvements to the tutor visits which helped to impact on the overall quality.

I have discussed in detail the changes made to the curriculum and the curriculum development model we used. I have addressed the new modules that were developed to underpin the WBL experience and the role of key skills within this structure.

There had been considerable change made in the cycles one and two, to the preparation of the stakeholders, the structure of the placement, the development of a curriculum to underpin the WBL experience, and the overall processes that engendered a much smoother overall management of this integral part of the students' curriculum than at the outset of the research.

Cycle three discusses the final developments as a result of the reflections at the end of this cycle and the final stages of the development of the framework.

Final Reflections on Literature Impacting on Cycle Two

It is interesting that following the completion of the research and the development of the framework I located Jeffers' (2006) article which discusses similar findings to mine. The article focuses on WBL in secondary schools. As discussed in chapter two, although secondary school WBL is generally much shorter there are similarities with WBL in Higher Education and we must be confident to share research across education phases. Jeffers found that it was important to provide the students with opportunity to debrief following the WBL experience. This is supported by Harvey *et al* (1998). Jeffers (2006, p 420) also discusses how important it is to adequately prepare the students for their placement 'The overwhelming realization among the group during the debriefing was that placements are worthwhile, that preparation and debriefing are essential ...'. Jeffers' discussion focuses on the development of key skills in the work place and the need to be overt in preparing students in this. This particularly reflects on the work I report in cycle two in developing the whole aspect of key skills related to WBL; 'this led some participants to highlight not only preparation for placements, but to look at the development of such skills within the wider curriculum rather than as merely "bolt-on" activities' (Jeffers, 2006, p 415). Jeffers (2006, p 416) also reflects comments from the tutor team at NTU that the students are much more motivated in their studies following a period of WBL; 'Indeed, for some young people increased motivation for

schoolwork and a more focused career plan can result ...'. The article also makes reference to health and safety and the importance of this aspect of the WBL experience. It is interesting that the pupils raised the lack of payment as an issue; this is reflected in comments raised by NTU students.

Before leaving this chapter and moving to cycle three I reflect on the development of my ontological and epistemological values articulated in chapter two. In chapter two I state that, at that time, and within the context I was working, elements of the WBL experience, such as where the students were placed, were in conflict with my ontological values of social justice, caring and respect by which I judge my living practices. I articulated in chapter two that I believed all students had a right to a quality placement that would enable them to aspire to their career goals and help them to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding that they needed to succeed. At NTU the students were able to choose their placement, so there was not the same conflict. However, there was conflict for me with my values in the preparation and support they received. Throughout cycles one and two, which I have now articulated, I was able to make changes so that each student had the opportunity to develop as an independent learner within a culture of mutual respect and justice. The changes to the support they received and the developments in the preparation of the mentors led to a more caring culture. My ontological values therefore became grounded within my lived professional practices (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). By articulating cycles one and two I have been able to recognise that my ontological values were implicit during this stage of my professional journey. These values became explicit as the research developed as I moved into cycle three.

I have made reference to the emergence of my living theory which I discuss more fully in chapter seven. By this stage in the research, that is by the end of cycle two, on reflection I can now recognise that my theory was developing as I strived to improve the WBL aspect of the undergraduate programmes, but I had still not named this as a theory. I will discuss this again at the end of the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Cycle Three

Introduction

In this chapter I shall reflect back on cycles one and two and set the scene for the stage of the research at the start of cycle three. I will then link this to action research methodology, which underpins this research and discuss the themes that needed to be reflected on and actioned in this cycle. I will discuss the impact of the new structure that was set up in cycle two on the staff, students, and mentors. I will then examine the final changes made to support the WBL experience and discuss the changes that were taking place internally and externally at this time that impacted on the research. Finally I will discuss the framework that I have developed: the final aim of this research. This chapter concludes with comments from various sources in support of the changes made.

I have chosen action research as the chosen methodology for this research, using Carr and Kemmis' (1986) cycle of action research. Action research has provided a systematic, critical framework for this research and for the developments made, using Lewin (1946) and Schon's (1983) model of change involving collaborative working through shared educational values. In the first cycle I identified the need for changes to the WBL experience for the students undertaking their degree within the School of Education at NTU. In cycles one and two I have discussed the changes that were put into place using the cyclical nature of action research.

I have also drawn on Whitehead and McNiff's (2006) theory of action research and their focus on the development of ontological values, and living educational theories. I have set out my ontological and epistemological values and shown how these have been implicit within my research. As the research has progressed, these have transformed into living standards of judgment, which are discussed in chapter seven. I shall refer to my living educational theory at the end of this chapter, and discuss it fully in chapter seven.

Students from three degree programmes were the focus to inform this research as described in chapter two, page 68.

Reflecting Back To Cycles One and Two

In cycle one I identified the main stakeholders, shown in figure 3.1. In cycles one and two I articulated how I formed a Mentor Focus Group and a Student

Focus Group, to help to inform the changes I had identified through my research. I also discussed how I worked closely with the tutor team, a team that changed throughout the cycles, to address collaboratively the themes that had arisen from the research.

My aims from the outset are set out in chapter one, page 26 I reflect on each of these, and the stage of the research at the start of cycle three.

Explore the difficulties students experience relating to their placement, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality placement. I set out in chapter three how I identified and explored the difficulties students experienced relating to their placement, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality WBL. Establishing focus groups helped greatly in working towards achieving this aim during cycle one, and provided excellent feed back on how the changes were impacting on the stakeholders. The cyclical nature of action research based on planning, action, evaluation and reflection has been of great relevance in the process of making the improvements.

As I have identified the themes for this research, planned the changes, or actions, in a collaborative way with the stakeholders, there has been opportunity through using action research to evaluate and reflect on the impact the changes have had. I have found that the situation has changed and shifted as the research has moved forward (McKernan, 1988). It has been necessary to make both major changes, such as the changes to the curriculum discussed in cycle two, and minor changes, such as the introduction of the handbooks to support the preparation of the stakeholders, and the subsequent changes made to these to develop the quality experience of the students.

There were some continued difficulties, such as the need to provide greater information to the students about WBL assignments, but these diminished as new changes were made in each cycle. This chapter continues to discuss the changes made in the final cycle of the research drawing on evidence from the evaluations completed in this cycle to show the impact of the changes. The chapter also discusses internal and external changes that impacted on WBL and sets out the framework that has been drawn from the research, which was the final aim of the research.

To provide a focus on good quality experience, for students undertaking a placement as part of their degree programme. In cycles one and two I

explained the steps I took to provide a much improved WBL experience for the students on these undergraduate programmes. Cycle one focused on identifying the main themes that needed to be addressed through action research. In cycles one and two I addressed each of these themes and discussed how I developed them using qualitative data in cycle one and a mix of qualitative and quantitative data in cycle two.

In this chapter I discuss the continued development using action research. At the start of cycle two I developed questionnaires that I designed with the two focus groups, and piloted with the Student Focus Group. This provided quantitative evidence that the changes I had made were providing a much improved WBL experience for the students, and also helped to identify areas where further changes were needed. The methodology and decision to mix the styles of data capture are discussed in chapter seven.

Cycle Two focused on making further changes to the areas identified in figure 3.2, in particular on the curriculum. Changes to the curriculum had not been possible in cycle one, but revalidation provided an excellent vehicle to make the changes identified with the focus groups and in collaborative discussions with the tutor group concerned. My role as co-ordinator of the Professional and Personal Development (PPD) modules, and as part of the Revalidation Management Team provided an excellent opportunity for me to develop the curriculum and introduce new modules to support WBL. It also provided opportunity to develop the role of professional and personal key skills, which is discussed in chapter four.

Changes have also been made to the structure of the preparation and overall WBL experience for the students. The research had evidenced in cycle one that the students on the BAT/BICT programme had a higher quality placement experience which was shown to be due to the structure of the placement process that was far more supportive in the preparation of the students. The changes to the structure, discussed in the previous cycle, enabled the three degree programmes to follow the same structure, which led to improved preparation of the PED and BLSE students, better attendance by these students on WBL, a sharing of documentation, systems, and briefings, and simpler administration.

Investigate the preparation of the main stakeholders in ensuring a quality placement. In cycles one and two I discussed how I investigated the

preparation of the main stakeholders, identified in figure 3.1, in ensuring a quality placement, and the measures I put into place to ensure a more consistent quality approach to the support our students received, both prior to and during their WBL experience. The Focus Groups were invaluable in the way they engaged professionally with the developments. The handbooks I designed with them to support the students, mentors, and tutors, which were further developed in each cycle as part of the cyclical nature of action research, and the breakfast meetings that were instigated and supported by the tutor group were well attended, and well received. The briefings for the students, mentors and tutors were instigated in cycle one and developed in cycle two. These continued to be developed throughout the research. How they have been developed in this cycle will be discussed further in this chapter.

Explore curriculum changes to provide a supportive framework for students undergoing a period of work experience. Cycle one sets the scene for the changes to the curriculum. This part of the research explores whether changes to the curriculum were necessary to provide a supportive framework for students undergoing their WBL experience. The evidence was clear, and supported by all the stakeholders, that there was a need for curriculum change. This was not addressed in the first year as there were more immediate problems that needed addressing in the first year of the action research cycles. The revalidation process that occurred naturally in the second year of the research proved to be the vehicle through which the curriculum changes were made. These are discussed fully in cycle two. This spiral of cycles where changes were made to the WBL experience supports the use of action research for this research, as can be seen by the diagrams in chapter seven, figures 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3.

Develop a research based framework for effective practice in work experience for students on an undergraduate programme. The first two cycles focused on putting systems and processes in place to ensure a quality WBL experience for all the students. This chapter focuses on the final cycle of this research. It develops the planning, actions, observations and reflections discussed in the previous two chapters, and the final changes that were made to create the framework. Once this stage was finished, as you will read in the following chapter, I focused on sharing the framework across the University through seminars, workshops, working with the University's Centre for Academic Standards and Quality (CASQ), and informing developments for WBL within the

University by my membership of a sub-group of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee set up by the pro-Vice Chancellor 'Experiential Learning and Community Engagement' (ELCE). As with all research, developments have taken place, particularly in technology: these are discussed in chapter six, where I identify the ways in which I utilised Web 2.0 technologies to improve peer group support during the WBL experience and also provided an alternative for students required to keep a reflective diary as part of their WBL experience assignment(s).

This chapter focuses on the final stages of developing the framework with me as the 'insider' researcher. The way my research reflects action research is that:

- It was situational in that the research is related to difficulties experienced by students within the School of Education at NTU. However, much of the framework discussed at the end of this chapter could be applied to other Schools in other Universities, both within and outside the United Kingdom.
- It involves planned actions through spirals, in this research referred to as cycles. The cycles followed an action research pattern of planning, action, evaluation/observation, and reflection, as indicated in diagrammatic format in figure 7.1. The paler arrows in this diagram reflect the mini action research that was taking place within the bigger cycles, some of which have been discussed in chapter four.
- It was collaborative in that the process involved all stakeholders identified in figure 3. 1. As I introduced each change I worked closely with stakeholders to ensure changes were positive, while building a consensus of understanding. This is discussed in detail throughout chapters three, four and five.
- It has been participatory in that I established the Student Focus Group and the Mentor Focus Group which were involved in making the decisions, and aimed to demonstrate that they did indeed have a stake in the process. Collaboration within action research is further discussed in chapter seven.
- The research recognizes that situations change (McKernan, 1988) and that new problems have arisen as the research has progressed. This is evidenced in each chapter of the research cycles and the analysis of the associated questionnaires used in cycles two and three.

- The research has been framed by my ontological and epistemological values of caring, justice and respect.
- As the cycles progressed and the WBL improved, my living educational theory gradually emerged (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006), but it was not until the reflective stage of this research that I was able to recognise and articulate this theory.

When working with academics in HE I became exposed to colleagues' on-going research experience and was given the opportunity to share my experience. There has, however, been no criticism from my colleagues of the methodology I have chosen and the way I have applied action research to this research project. Each cycle indicated definite improvements and this was welcomed by the stakeholders. The methods used reflect a mix of qualitative and quantitative data which is supported Bryman (1988), Brennan (1992) and more recently by Reason and Bradbury (2006) who suggest action researchers may use multiple qualitative research methods, such as interviewing, focus groups, or social network data gathering and also support mixing methodologies; a full discussion can be found in chapter seven.

Setting the Context for Cycle Three

Within the context for this cycle there were several internal changes that impacted on the WBL experience of the students.

A new Vice-Chancellor (VC) was appointed to the University. He made it clear that to survive as a University we needed to find a niche in the HE market place in which we could excel. The Senior Management Team quickly identified 'employability' as an area needing development; at this time we were sixty seventh in the overall league tables. His direction provided a new emphasis on undergraduate programmes and WBL at a strategic level which supported the work we had already done during revalidation, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The new VC and senior management team developed a Strategic Plan, 2004-2010 which was launched during this cycle of the research; section 7.2 relates to preparing students for the 'World of Work'

'The employability of our graduates has long been a key element of NTU's popularity with students, parents, and the world of work. We will build on this by:

- Offering internships and/or key skills development as an integral part of all courses.
- Using simulations and transactional learning to reflect the modern world of professional life.
- Taking theory into practice through skills development relevant to the modern world.
- Embedding career management, entrepreneurship and creativity into the delivery of the curriculum.
- Bringing virtual faculty into the University from professional life to help deliver our courses.
- Incorporating international and multi-cultural perspectives into our curricula.
- Offering stimulating work-based projects of real value to the outside world as part of level three/postgraduate/practice masters programmes.’ (NTU, 2004)

In chapter four I discussed how CASQ was set up during that cycle. This was as a response to QAA delegating more responsibility for quality assurance to HEIs. As the Centre responsible for quality enhancement and quality assurance across the University, one of its early foci was on ensuring WBL for all students was a quality experience. During this cycle of the research CASQ produced a policy document which listed requirements that had to be adhered to for students undertaking a placement as part of their University programme; this is discussed below.

The policy referred to the need to ensure all placements were approved, health and safety procedures were in place and being followed, students were aware of their role, the WBL processes were clear to all stakeholders, and students were provided with appropriate support and guidance before, during and after the placement. (This is a brief synopsis, the full document being available in Archive 6c, and on the University's CASQ web site: www.ntu.ac.uk.)

We were complying with all aspects of the policy except for one that stated the students must be given ‘information on the consequences for students of a failure to secure or complete a placement’ (point five of the policy). This is an area that had not been thought through by the team simply because it had never arisen as an issue. Where we had students that experienced personal problems which impacted on their WBL experience we would negotiate a new

placement at a different time before starting their level three studies. Examples have been referred to in chapter three. In addition we had one or two students each year having to stop their placement and start again, either at the same placement, or a different one. This was due to a variety of factors such as health problems, or the death of a close relative. I developed the new policy which was approved at Programme Committee before going to our School Standards and Quality Committee (SASQC) and finally being approved by CASQ. The whole process took over a year. The policy is as follows:

‘There are serious consequences if you fail to obtain a placement or if, for any reason, you fail to complete your placement. The placement is a central feature of the programme and progression onto Year 3 is impossible unless it has been undertaken. The scheduling, management and supervision of the workplace-based element of the module (and the two assignments which must be completed after it) is such that it would be extremely difficult for a student to ‘make good’ a failure in this module before the start of Year 3. The implication of this is that the only way to complete the course is likely to be a repeat of Year 2. Apart from any other considerations, this would have considerable financial implications. It is therefore IMPERATIVE that students not only identify and obtain a suitable placement well in advance but also that all the necessary documentation required is completed on time. Students should notify tutors as soon as possible if they are experiencing problems in arranging a placement.’

In this cycle the University’s health and safety department issued new guidance relating to health and safety and WBL, building on that issued by the CVCP (1997) (a copy can be found in Archive 6a). The guidance reminded staff that

‘The University has a duty to conduct its arrangements for the organisation of student placements in such a way that it can ensure, to a reasonable degree, the health and safety of those students while they are working on their placement.’ (Archive 6a, NTU, 2001, p 1)

This new guidance set out clear responsibilities for staff, and stated that ‘Persons who are involved in the arranging of placements and in visiting students on placement are required to undergo appropriate training.’ I have not received such training at NTU, but had received training in my previous job, including Stage one of the Health and Safety Certificate. I was, however, fully aware of the requirements of the CVCP Guidance (1997) and had ensured we were compliant. The health and safety checklist for placement providers that formed part of this guidance had already been introduced to the placement process in cycle one, and I had set up procedures to ensure the completed form was returned before students were permitted to start their placement experience. The guidance stated this now

needed to be kept for five years; we put processes into place to ensure we were compliant.

There was clear guidance for the first time about what needed to be included in the student briefing:

- Action to be taken in the event of emergency;
- Fire precautions;
- Seeking of information upon commencement of placement;
- Electrical hazards.

These all formed part of the existing briefing, so I was pleased that I had been covering essential aspects.

The guidance stated that students must be issued with a health and safety checklist for completion during the first week of the placement. Again, this was already in place, with the document being included in the pre-placement pack issued at the health and safety briefing (which can be viewed in Archive 5d), together with an SAE for them to return it to the Programme Administrators: receipt of which was recorded and, where necessary, chased by the administrators.

A new aspect was the requirement that 'visiting tutors are required to make simple health and safety checks on providers' arrangements. This will be carried out through visiting the student during the course of their placement'. This has been a contentious issue throughout the University, and in 2008 was reconsidered by the health and safety section before being removed from the policy. Tutors who visit students are not trained in health and safety and tutors on our team did not feel qualified to make decisions about whether a place of work was suitable. At the tutor briefing the document was discussed, and included in the Tutor Handbook (Appendix 2c and Archive 4a). It was agreed that all tutors would complete the form as carefully as possible, but it was recognized we were not qualified or trained in carrying out this check.

The guidance also stated

'It will not be possible for a university to fulfil its obligations to review the placement if no visits at all are made, unless the placement is exceptionally short (i.e. a few weeks) and in a very low-risk environment.' (p 3)

Again, this was taken from the CVCP, 1997 document, so I had already ensured we were compliant with this. As discussed in cycle two, not all students received placement visits as the head of department had stated that we could only visit those students on placement within the Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire areas. As we were now encouraging our students to go abroad visits were not always possible, but as the placement was only six weeks long it was cleared by the University's health and safety section that we came within the 'exceptionally short' exemption to the statement.

'Sufficient contact should be maintained with the student throughout the placement' was a new requirement, but as discussed in chapter four we were already complying by ensuring those students not receiving a visit completed the Student Visit Form on a weekly basis. In cycle two tutors were also asked to make an initial telephone call and a final telephone call. These calls, together with the visit, ensured we maintained contact. Students not receiving a visit were required to complete the 'visit form' each week and email it to their contact tutor – only experienced tutors were asked to be contact tutors.

We were therefore already complying with the new health and safety regulations.

Methods

At the end of cycle three I issued the students with the same questionnaires I used in cycle two:

- Placement questionnaire focusing on the main aspects of the placement preparation and WBL experience;
- Quality questionnaire focusing on how the students rated the overall quality of their WBL experience.

(NB The Review and Evaluation Days questionnaire had become redundant by this stage in the research due to the new structure that aligned the three degree programmes for their WBL experience.)

I used the same questionnaires so that I could compare the findings between the cycles of the research and identify whether the new structures and processes I had put into place using action research cycles (shown in chapter seven, figures 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3), had improved the quality of the WBL

experience. Results were also used as part of the action research evaluation stage, to ascertain what further actions were needed.

In the last chapter I identified questions pertinent to that stage in the research. At the end of the chapter I reflected on how these had been approached and some of the solutions proposed and implemented. Some of these questions were still pertinent at the start of cycle three, but with a slightly different emphasis. As Whitehead (1989, p 45) argues 'living educational theories are created through a process of rethinking and re-focusing'. The questions are reflected on below:

- *What changes do we need to make to the curriculum to better support the WBL experience for all stakeholders?* In cycle three the newly validated programme with the changes to structure and the introduction of the new modules that would support the WBL experience, were introduced. It was therefore important to look at how the changes impacted on the students.
- *Have the changes made so far put mechanisms into place to support the difficulties students were experiencing relating to their placement, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality placement?* The questionnaires used in the previous two cycles were again used to provide opportunity to evaluate findings and analyse causal relationships, with the exception of the questionnaire relating to the Review and Evaluation days. As the new structure was now in place in this cycle, all students were following the BICT structure (that is three weeks in University prior to the start of the placement as preparation time for the WBL experience, six weeks on placement, with the remainder of the semester spent in seminars and tutorials for the assignments and starting to look and plan for their third year project (Foster and Stephenson, 1998)).
- *Was the overall quality of the WBL experience improving?* The analysis of the questionnaires at the end of cycle two identified that the students' experience had improved significantly following all the changes made in cycles one and two. Cycle three needed to embed these changes, and ensure that the new modules and structures were a positive development.

- *Had the preparation of the stakeholders been improved?* It can be seen from the discussion in the previous chapters that this had improved significantly during the research.
- *What needed to be done to improve the curriculum to develop the support for the WBL experience?* This has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter. This cycle of the research needed to ensure the developments were positive and make further changes if necessary. This again reflects the cyclical nature of action research by Carr and Kemmis (1986).

These will be discussed further and developed as this cycle progresses.

In reflecting on the methods used throughout the research the one aspect that, I would now employ, should I carry out similar research, would be that suggested by Whitehead and McNiff (2006). They suggest making use of a discussion board or poster board in the staffroom to encourage colleagues whose roles were affected by this research, to record their own reflections and the significance of changes. This could then have informed my own reflections in my journal and provided additional evidence. By providing an opportunity for colleagues to make these anonymous if they wished may have provided evidence on whether or not colleagues agreed with me but were deceptive in their responses and their wish to please me. It should also be questioned how anonymous these would be; would I recognise their handwriting?

Developments in Cycle Three

This cycle saw the first impact of the new structure on the second year students who were undertaking WBL and the change in the title from 'Applied Studies' to 'Placement'. The students had all completed the modules outlined in chapter four (that is Developing Academic Skills in semester one and either Communication, or Problem Solving and Personal Planning in semester two). These modules prepared the students for their WBL experience, by developing skills in planning and obtaining their placements, as well as further skills that they may need for this experience. The Communication Module focussed on interview technique, writing letters of application, CVs and job descriptions. The Problem Solving and Personal Planning module supported the students by addressing their placement in a slightly different way, namely through solving the problem of identifying possible placements, making applications, and writing job descriptions. The interview technique section of the Communication module

was supported by a partnership I set up with the company John Lewis which is discussed in cycle four. This partnership worked extremely well, with some of the John Lewis' staff also volunteering to 'mentor' our weaker students through the process of obtaining an appropriate placement, an idea I had brought with me from my previous job. The Developing Academic Skills Module in year one covered a range of skills needed throughout the degree programme and beyond: presentation skills, research skills, writing assignments, using the VLP and discussion boards, presenting business reports, and higher level computer skills.

All students within the three degree programmes were now following the same structure: this was the structure followed by the BICT students and found to be most effective. All students therefore now started their WBL experience in semester two, with three weeks in University preparing for the WBL experience, then six weeks on placement prior to the Easter vacation. The rest of the semester was timetabled for tutorials and small seminars to reflect on their placement using 'reflection on action' (Cunningham *et al*, 2004, p 223), focus on their assignments, and for debriefing and sharing placement experiences; this reflects Jeffers (2006). This was followed by small seminars, group seminars and individual tutorials to focus them on their third year project. This structure is discussed further in chapters three and four. As stated in chapter four the benefits to the students were evidenced in the increased quality of their assignments and increased motivation towards their studies. This finding is also supported by Bourner and Ellerker (1993), and James (2000). The timetable for this cycle is shown below and also indicates the new modular pathways. This format is still followed at the time of writing, and the structure included as part of the final framework:

Sessions	ICT	Business	Leisure and Sport	Educational Development
Wks 1-3 2/2/04 – 20/2/04	Preparation for placement built around using IT for: Organisation, Control, and Management in the workplace	Preparation for placement built around organisational issues in the workplace.	Preparation for Placement built around the organisation and management of Leisure and Sport.	Preparation for Placement built around cultures and change within organisations.

Wks 4-9 23/02/04- 2/4/04	Workplace Based PLACEMENT	Workplace Based PLACEMENT	Workplace Based PLACEMENT	Workplace Based PLACEMENT
	EASTER BREAK	EASTER BREAK	EASTER BREAK	EASTER BREAK
Wks 10- 13 26/4/04- 14/5/04	Tutorials, including evaluating possible year 3 Project opportunities	Tutorials, including evaluating possible year 3 assignment opportunities	Tutorials, including evaluating possible year 3 assignment opportunities	Tutorials, including evaluating possible year 3 assignment opportunities.
Wks 14- 15 17/5/04- 4/6/04	FAT (Formal Assessment Time)	FAT (Formal Assessment Time)	FAT (Formal Assessment Time)	FAT (Formal Assessment Time)

Figure 5.1: Excerpt from Undergraduate Placement Student Handbook 2003-4

The advantages to this shared structure have been discussed in chapter four and are further discussed below.

Handbooks

I was able to amalgamate the handbooks for the students, while keeping separate sections for each degree programme: this proved important, particularly for quick reference to examples of job descriptions, and to their assignment briefs and assessment feed back sheets. (The final handbook that resulted from the collaborative work with the Mentor Focus Group, Student Focus Group, and tutors, is available in Appendix 2a and Archive 5c.) This handbook has undergone minor changes to update dates and internal and external changes, such as the need for students going into schools on placement to complete a Criminal Record Bureau check.

The mentors' handbooks were also amalgamated (see Appendix 2b and Archive 3d). The handbook included information on the placement and structure of the placement, the role of the mentor (reflecting the research by Shilling, 1989; Cameron-Jones and O'Hara, 1999; Blackwell *et al*, 2001), suggestions for the

interview, information and guidance on completing the job description, the role of the learning contract (Brennan and Little, 1996, and Foster and Stephenson, 1998), expectations during the placement, and information on what would happen after the placement had finished. The supporting appendices included examples of job descriptions, and documentation, the previous year's assignments, and the key skills the students should be developing.

The tutors' handbooks were also amalgamated (see Appendix 2c and Archive 4a). This handbook included information on the placement, dates, assignments, where students should go for additional advice, documents tutors were required to complete, guidance on the structure of the visit, and how to maintain contact with students.

The handbook had also been updated to reflect, for example, the request for tutors to ring the students at the beginning and end of the placement. It included the health and safety regulations and a copy of the form tutors now needed to complete during their placement visit which had to be retained for five years.

The tutors' handbook, together with the students' and mentors' handbook are part of the final framework. A copy of all these documents is available to all University WBL co-ordinators and administrators on the CASQ website where they are shared as examples of good practice: www.ntu.ac.uk.

Preparation of Students

The briefings for each group were amalgamated as the structure was now shared: two briefings were held for the students: one at each Campus, giving students the option of dates and venues for the year one briefing and the Health and Safety briefing. The Induction briefing was held separately for each programme. This arrangement proved to be of benefit to the students who did not have to travel to a specific campus for their briefing. Although it reduced the amount of briefings I gave overall, I still had to give additional presentations to those students who chose to ignore the word 'compulsory' in all the notices. In order to follow the health and safety guidance and the CASQ Policy discussed earlier, we had to keep registers and ensure all students had attended. The presentation covered themes such as the role of the students on placement and the University's expectations, the purpose of the placement, how to find an appropriate placement, the documentation that needed to be completed,

guidance on support such as the pro-formas and previous placements in the VLP, guidance on their interview, and information on their learning outcomes and assignments (evidenced in Archive 5e).

Preparation of Mentors

Two briefings were held for the mentors, again amalgamated across the programmes, allowing them options on dates. The format of the briefings is discussed in chapter four. Having two sessions meant an increased time commitment for the tutors who had previously only been involved in one breakfast meeting for their degree programme. However, no complaints were made by staff who found attending these meetings 'interesting', 'informative', and 'an opportunity to talk to people in the industry we are providing employees for' (Journal entry 12 December 2002). Widening the meetings to cover all degree programmes also meant the mentors heard from a wider range of students about their experiences. We did have to be careful that the mentors knew which students were from which programme, but in the second half of the briefing, where mentors were working in groups, the students were able to join in the discussions. I observed the mentors asking more questions of the students than the tutors and clearly found them an excellent source of information (Journal entry 30 January 2003. (The presentation for these meetings can be viewed in Archive 3e.)

The briefing covered aspects such as key personnel, the purpose of the placement, the preparation of the students in University, (particularly in terms of the advice and guidance they had received), the assignments which gave guidance on the level of learning particularly through the MASH sheets, the documentation which formalised the planned programme of WBL that the student had negotiated linked to their learning outcomes, the support the students would receive during the placement from the University, our expectations of the role of the mentor, talks by third year students from each degree programme, an opportunity to raise issues in degree programme groupings led by the CL, and information on future developments within the programmes.

In cycle one I made reference to the CHERI and KPMG (2006, p 45) report which suggested a possible student 'entitlement' might be for the students to receive WBL. It can be seen from the information above that the recommendations suggested in the report (which was published after the

completion of this cycle) were implicit in the briefing, suggesting good practice was taking place. Not all recommendations in the CHERI and KPMG report (2006) were relevant to our students, such as the prior assessment of current knowledge and skills, which is possibly more pertinent for WPL, the focus of the report.

Mentors who attended the breakfast meetings were asked if they would like to be further involved with the degree programmes, either as speakers, or in an Employers Group: we had found the Partnership Forum that had been set up from the Mentor Focus Group to inform revalidation so useful, and were aware the Mentor Focus Group would end with this cycle, it was agreed with the tutor team that a group that met once or twice a year to review the programmes would be beneficial. For example, at the meeting in this cycle a mentor from Rolls Royce and another from IBM both volunteered to give talks to the students: these were both taken up by the BICT programme team which I attended and they were excellent. I also invited the mentor from Rolls Royce to talk at the student briefings – again he was well received by the students.

Preparation of Tutors

One briefing was still held for tutors and these continued to be well-attended. Even in times of reduced funding, the head of department continued to fund part-time staff to attend these briefings to ensure WBL went as smoothly as possible and was seen to be an integral part the degree programmes. The handbook, discussed previously, was updated to reflect the changing nature of WBL in cycle two and the analysis of the student questionnaires. Some of the changes included revisions to the Telephone Record form that was introduced in cycle two and the changes to the Visit Form.

Quality

The shared documentation across the programmes was now much simpler to manage and upload to the VLP using the shared placement area. All staff were now familiar with the forms, and found the standardization across the programmes of the WBL experience simplified the processes. It also gave additional support to the administrators in processing the documents. The processes I set up for monitoring the progress of the documentation could also be shared between the administrators and myself, again simplifying the process, and giving access to an up-to-date database of placements and placement

documentation processing. It also created a replacement process so that if one administrator was off sick, as happened in this cycle, another could easily pick up where the documentation processing had got to each week.

The key skills audit, introduced in cycle two, evidenced in Archive 7 was so effective that I worked with the IT support staff to design a computerized system that collated the information automatically and was available to the full tutor team.

As discussed throughout this thesis, these developments and changes all reflect the nature of action research. They had been made following collaboration with the different stakeholder groups using cycles (shown in diagrammatic format in chapter seven, figures 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3).

Communication

In this cycle I further developed the job description guidance. I introduced the job descriptions in cycle two and discussed that some mentors had found writing job descriptions new to their role. Some had received no training in doing this, and the only job description they had seen was their own. Other mentors had used standardised job descriptions from their employers that were not relevant or appropriate to the WBL experience of students. For this cycle I therefore included some examples of a range of job descriptions for each degree programme in the Mentors' Handbook, and Students' Handbook. These were examples from previous placements that had been particularly good, so were useful and pertinent for the mentors and students to use. This was beneficial and received positive comments from the mentors at the breakfast meetings held in this cycle.

The impact of this was a much improved standard of job description that we received from the students. The administrators also commented that it saved them a great deal of time in not having to return poorly written job descriptions to the students. Many of the concerns that had been expressed by students not knowing what they should be doing on their placement, or feeling their placement lacked quality, were reduced by the introduction of the job description. As it was a document completed with their mentor it provided an opportunity for professional dialogue about the student's needs and expectations and what the mentor could provide. This was a significant improvement and another aspect that I included in the final framework.

A further addition to the job description was a requirement to state the working hours. This was to stop students abusing their WBL experience and not attending for the full day. The final wording in the document was:

**'Hours to be worked each day: Start time Finish time
.....'**

If shifts are to be worked please state total number of hours per week to be worked

Students are expected to work approximately 37 hours per week for 6 weeks.

The job description fulfills the B.Sc.(Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology; B.A.(Hons) Business, Leisure and Sport; and B.A.(Hons) Psychology and Education Development.

**Signature of University
representative_____Date_____**

**Signature of Organisation's representative
_____Date _____'**

Figure 5.2: Excerpt from Undergraduate Placement Student Handbook 2003-04

The added advantage of this newly devised form was the fact that the document was then signed by the organisation's representative so they were aware of the expectation of the hours to be worked. Stating that the students were to work approximately thirty seven hours per week did stop the 'abuse' from a minority of students who only stayed for a couple of hours at their placement, rather than the full day. Attendance has been a theme in discussions relating to the BLSE and PED students throughout this research and changes had been made in each cycle to try to improve this. The developments in this cycle proved to be the most effective. Again this is another example of the appropriateness of action research to provide a framework for this research. Tutors reported a significant improvement in attendance, and mentors were quick to report non-attendance to us. Asking mentors to report on attendance and punctuality in the final report form they completed for us also provided information on attendance. With the steps I had put in place through the cyclical nature of action research poor attendance was no longer a serious issue. This form is still used at the time of writing (2009).

In cycle two I discussed the developments to the Learning Contract. After discussion with the tutor team it was decided to develop this document in this cycle to include a signature from the placement provider. Again this form had been introduced in one cycle and developed following evaluation, reflecting the appropriateness of action research as the methodology for this development. A full example of the learning contract can be found in the Students' Handbook (Appendix 2a and Archive 5c): the signature section is shown below:

'I have negotiated and agreed the job description written overleaf /attached*, with a representative from the above organisation.

Student signature

Date

I confirm that a representative from this organisation has been/will be appointed* to act as line manager for this student during her/his* time of Placement work experience.

Signature

Date

SIGNATURES OF SUBJECT TUTORS

Signature

Date

Assignment 1

Signature

Date

Assignment 2

Figure 5.3: Excerpt from Undergraduate Placement Student Handbook 2003-04

This allowed for each student's module leader to sign to say they had checked the job description and it would provide the opportunity for the student to develop their key skills and gain the experiences needed to complete their

assignments and meet the learning outcomes for the module. The development of the Learning Contract and Job Description led to a quality focussed WBL experience that was more closely aligned to the students' degree programme, and learning outcomes (Guile and Griffiths, 2001, Boud and Solomon 2001, CHERI and KPMG, 2006).

Continuing Developments

As stated earlier in this chapter questionnaires used previously in cycle two were re-used in this cycle as they had produced useful data that supported the research process. I also felt it important to be consistent with the data collected so that comparable data, over a period of time, could be analysed. I know that the input from the Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Group into the design and piloting stages of the questionnaires, together with meetings and discussions I had had with the tutors, reflected a collaborative understanding of the themes all stakeholders felt were important. The findings from these are discussed below (further analyses of the responses can be found in the following appendices):

- Archive 1l – an analysis of the BLSE and PED responses to the placement questionnaire;
- Archive 1m - an analyses of the BLSE and PED quality of placement questionnaire;
- Archive 1n– an analysis of the BICT responses to the placement questionnaire;
- Archive 1o - an analyses of the BICT quality of placement questionnaire;

The response rate for the questionnaires was again pleasing and an increase for PED and BLSE on the previous cycles:

- BICT – twenty one responses from a group of thirty five students (60%);
- BLSE and PED - fifty responses from a group of fifty students (100%).

As in previous cycles these were issued and completed in post-work based learning seminars and the number of responses reflected the number of students attending those seminars. The data from the questionnaires was analysed and transformed into evidence to support the developing framework

and my claim to knowledge as well as identify new themes that needed to be addressed within the research.

The themes raised showed some continued improvements on the preceding cycle of this action research:

Preparation of Students

92% of the PED and BLSE students and 81% of the BICT students found the initial briefing satisfactory to very informative. This was an improvement on both previous cycles and reflected the changes I had made to the briefings, which are discussed in cycle two. The comments from the students in this section of the evaluations related to themes that were more relevant to small seminars and individual tutorials, rather than whole group briefings. One PED/BLSE student suggested giving ideas on what previous students had researched. This was a sensible suggestion and one I put into the following years' briefings, spreading this good practice to the mentors' briefings.

Mentor evaluations from the mentor briefings were analysed and provided evidence that mentors have found this a helpful development. Talking informally to the students after the briefings, they particularly found the input from the third year students useful: for the first time this year I had given the student speakers a clear briefing on what they needed to include in their 'talks' based on feed back from mentors and students in the previous year. I had also invited a mentor from Rolls Royce to come in and give a brief presentation to the students. Again this received positive informal feed back from the students. Having third year students and a mentor at these briefings impacted on the students sufficiently for it to be included as a recommendation within the framework.

94% of the PED students and 81% of BICT students had found the student handbook useful. This was a slight increase on the preceding years. This high rating reflects the hard work, time and energy the stakeholders and I had put into developing this handbook. I had been concerned at whether amalgamating the three degrees into one handbook following changes made to align the placement structure, might cause difficulties for the students. However, the evaluations do not reflect this. In addition the Student Focus Group confirmed that the way it was structured (with general information for all programmes, with a sub-section for each separate degree programme), was working well.

The health and safety presentation received better ratings in this cycle, although no significant changes had been made to the presentation. During the cycle I had met with the Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Group to discuss this presentation. It was agreed by both groups that it would be difficult to improve either the presentation or the content, other than by purchasing videos to emphasise various aspects in a visual way: when I enquired about funding I was told this was not feasible. I had also approached the University's health and safety section to ask if I could borrow two of the videos they had shown in the staff induction, which would have been appropriate for students going on WBL, but was told this was not possible. The ratings for this year showed that 90% of the BICT and 76% of the BLSE/PED students had found the briefings useful. The drop in the previous cycle may have been caused by the disruption which is discussed in chapter four, page 160. The comments were also much more positive (Archives 1l and 1n). In each group only one person had asked for more information in the pack; comments were positive about the presentation of the pack which was improved on the previous cycle: the development of the information pack had been an action from the previous cycle's evaluation. Again this was a positive response and reflected the developments made in previous cycles.

In the quality questionnaire four of the BICT students and seven of the PED/BLSE students had not had pre-placement interviews. Initially this was disappointing as the tutor team saw this as an important aspect of the process and a good opportunity for developing interview skills. It was also a recommendation in the Mentors' Handbook and we had carried out a lot of work on this aspect as part of the research. However, when I emailed these students, three emailed back that their placement had been organized through a parent, four were working with friends/relatives, and the rest had experienced a brief meeting when they went to the company to ask for a placement. Looking at the comments from the students about the content of the interview in the questionnaire analyses, it is good to see that it reflects the interview questions we had put in the Mentor and Student Handbooks as a result of work by the Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Group (Archives 1m and 1o).

Preparation of Mentors

In the quality questionnaire both the BICT and BLSE students reported good support during their placement. Of those that did not have a weekly timetabled meeting with their mentors, only 1% said a regular meeting would have helped

them with their placement. This again is an improvement. The comments in Archives 1m and 1o reflect the training we had given the mentors at the Mentor Breakfast Meetings and the research I had carried out on what their role should be which is discussed in chapter three. Comments from the students about their mentors in the evaluations such as 'Very good', 'Very supportive', 'Very approachable', 'Always willing to listen & help', 'Easy to contact', 'Enthusiastic', 'Helpful', 'Energetic', and 'Attentive' were positive indications of the developments made in the preparation of the mentors.

Quality

The request for more information on assignments was raised less in this cycle; hopefully due to the information in the handbook, the greater focus I put on it at the student briefings, and the increased support tutors had given to the students during seminars as discussed in cycle two. One student in the PED and BLSE evaluation summary (evidenced in Archive 1l), had asked for 'More in depth information on the assignment criteria', but this was clearly set out in the MASH form in their handbook. One of the BICT students in their evaluation had asked for the 'exact assignments' (evidenced in Archive 1n). As explained in chapter four the assignments are adjusted each year following evaluations with students, so this is not possible, and had been explained to the students in their briefing. Overall the responses reflected a definite improvement on previous years' comments.

This year we had worked hard as a tutor team to ensure fewer part-time staff were allocated visits to improve the quality of the students' experience and respond to comments on the evaluation form. However, unfortunately the weekend before the first visits started one member of staff, who had been allocated twenty five visits for PED and BLSE students, was involved in a serious car accident and we were unable to cover all of his visits. Some students were therefore contacted by me by telephone and staff assigned to visit those students that requested additional support. The telephone contact was sufficient for students deemed by their CLs as able to manage without a visit; this is the same process we had adopted to support students on placement overseas or in areas outside our visiting area of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. I asked these students to complete the visit forms each week themselves and either email them or post them in. I also contacted their mentor to ensure the placement was going smoothly and to gather comments from them for the visit form which was completed 'virtually'.

Analysis shows that 90% of BICT and 68% of the BLSE/PED students received a visit. This reflects the impact of one member of staff not being able to do his visits due to the car accident. The overall comments from the students about the visits and the support from the University are much more positive and reflect that the placement process was working well, and was seen as an integral part of their degree programme. Many positive comments such as 'It was very beneficial because I got to discuss the assignments in greater detail and show him what I had done' and 'It gave me the chance to talk about questions I had about the assignments' (evidenced in Archive 1n) reflected the impact of the changes that had been made during the action research cycles. These actions helped develop the preparation of the tutors, which in turn helped to ensure a more professional visit that both the tutors and the students had been prepared for.

58% of the PED/BLSE students and 71% of the BICT students had made use of the discussion forum accessed through the VLP. This difference may reflect the fact that the BICT students were on an IT focused programme and may have been more confident in using the VLP, although all students had received information on how to log on and use this area, as part of their information pack, and access was via their VLP which they were familiar with. The comments about the discussion area were positive this year. I had worked with the VLP support team to ensure we could track back any mis-use by using the student enrolment numbers when they logged on. One of the BICT students commented on this 'Easy to use but real name not user name is used' (evidenced in Archive 1n). The feedback from the Student Focus Group and the evaluations is that this is seen to be important to the students that chose to use it. A significant proportion do choose to use it, and find it useful; this is an important aspect for the framework. With the changes in technology, and the introduction of Web 2.0 social communication tools, this has been further developed and will be discussed in the following chapter.

The results from the quality questionnaires were again good and favourably compare with the previous cycle: the overall quality of the placement was rated highly by the students as BICT – 95% and PED/BLSE – 94%.

Again this is a significant increase on cycle one and from the point at which this action research started.

Comments received from students (Archives 1m and 1o) include:

'I really liked the fact the work was so varied. Meeting different people and going out on sales calls and visits.'

'I thought the placement was worthwhile and extremely helpful. It has made me more prepared for a job when I graduate. I have made some valuable contacts and got a lot out of my placement in terms of skills.'

'Placement was good, it was a completely different environment. Good to mix with different people, was a good experience for me, builds up confidence.'

'A wonderful life changing experience, I am still there as a volunteer and hope to have a long term relationship with [...] school'.

'A valuable experience'.

'An excellent placement with huge relevance to all modules and programme details'.

Analyses of the questionnaires for this final cycle of the research indicated that there was continued improvement in the quality of the WBL experience for the students. This reflects back to one of the questions in this cycle, 'Was the overall quality of the WBL experience improving?' The experience of the students, supported by the findings of the data collated, following the changes put into place throughout the cycles of this action research, supports the fact that the experience of the students had improved significantly. The purpose of this cycle was to embed these changes, and ensure that the new modules and structures were a positive development.

Curriculum

Again, the development of key skills rated well with the students (see figures 5.4 and 5.5). These students had already completed the Developing Academic Skills module in year one which introduced them to their Personal Development Profile (PDP): this was discussed in cycle two. As part of their assignment for this module they had to start to complete part of their PDP, particularly relating to their key skill development. Following their WBL experience, they were encouraged to complete the sections relevant to this experience in their PDP, and record their key skills development from their placement.

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Communication		2	11	8
Information Technology	2	5	10	4
Numeracy	6	4	9	2

Working with others		1	9	11
Improving Own Learning and Performance	1	5	8	7
Problem Solving	1	8	6	6

Figure 5.4: Placement Evaluation Summary, BICT students (evidenced in Archive 1n)

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Communication		2	28	20
Information Technology	4	12	24	10
Numeracy	3	18	21	8
Working with others			20	3
Improving Own Learning and Performance		9	26	25
Problem Solving		12	19	19

Figure 5.5: Placement Evaluation Summary, PED/BLSE students (evidenced in Archive 1l).

This reflects data provided by Little and Harvey (2006). While Little and Harvey (2006, p 29) did not ask the students in their research to rank the development of key professional skills, they provide data that also supports the development of 'interpersonal, personal and intellectual skills'. It is also supported by findings by Auburn and Ley (1993) who found that students ranked the development of key skills during their placement as higher than cognitive skills.

Comments from Stakeholders

At the end of this cycle and the completion of the action research it is good to be able to report some of the comments received from the stakeholders:

Comments which are representative of the mentors' verbal comments include:

- 'The students from this University are the best prepared for their placement experience.'

- 'The Mentors' Handbook and the briefing have been very useful. I now feel much more confident in my role and what the University expects of me.'
- 'The input on assignments has been helpful. I will involve the student in a project that will help us and meet the requirements of the assignment.'
- 'The placement discussions at this briefing have been useful.'

Comments from the students include:

- 'I feel well prepared and supported.'
- 'The support from the University was excellent.'
- 'I know what I will be doing and feel supported by my job description.'
- 'The placement has been a brilliant opportunity to relate theory to practice.'
- 'My placement has helped me to make a decision about my career. I've made loads of contacts that will help when I come to apply for jobs.'
- 'I really feel that I have had a good opportunity to develop a lot of different skills and network with people who are already doing the job I want to do.'
- 'The VLP has been very useful, particularly the contacts for placements, documentation and discussion area.'
- 'Some students have found it difficult to find placements, but they have had support from their tutors.'

Comments from students about their mentors:

- "Very supportive."
- "Helpful and friendly."
- "Tutorials with mentor every Friday afternoon."
- "Mentor always willing to help and trusted my judgment so I was free to move as I pleased."
- "Supportive although she was very busy with her own workload. Always had time to talk."
- "Provided me with work that would help me complete my assignments."
- "Interested and supportive, always available if I had any problems."

- “We worked closely together.”
- “Supportive, friendly, helpful, easily approachable.”
- “She did a lot to show me good managing skills.”

Comments from tutors:

- ‘We have moved a significant way in a short time. The students are now much happier about their placement.’
- ‘The streamlining of the placement experience is much easier for us.’
- ‘The tutor handbook is a good source of information and the briefing is a timely reminder of what we need to do.’
- ‘The new documentation is working well’.
- ‘The standard of the assignments has improved.’
- ‘It’s good that the students are encouraged to go abroad and experience different cultures. The processes for this are made very clear to the students.’

The impact of the changes are further emphasised in an email from the PL to the head of department:

‘I want to put in writing my appreciation of the big contribution that Helen has made to the undergraduate programme this year.

She has transformed Applied Studies in all sorts of ways so that possible placements are now properly vetted, students, staff and mentors are clear about expectations, and communication and support is greatly improved. The comments made by the chair of the validation panel are an indication of how the Placement has become something of a crown jewel in the department when only a short time ago its management did no credit to us. A lot of the changes were made against opposition but she persisted and insisted and now staff and students have real pride in the placement. Almost all of the credit for those changes is due to her.’

The Framework

The final aim of this research was to ‘develop a research based framework for effective practice in work experience for students on an undergraduate programme’. As stated in chapter one, Basse (1990, p 35) argues, ‘In carrying out research the purpose is to try to make some claim to new knowledge; to try to show something that was not known before’ (in Dadds M, 1995, p 118). Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p 12) argue ‘the purpose of research is generating and testing new knowledge’. The framework that has been developed from this research and supported by a substantial and authentic evidence base, reflects my ontological values, and is new to my living practices. It has been tested

within the context within which I work and transformed into a living practice. Some aspects are supported by the research of others, as set out in the literature sections throughout this thesis, some are new.

The cyclical nature of action research enabled me to generate and test the different aspects of the framework, and by collecting data, analysing the results and testing the proposed framework, I was able to provide evidence that the framework, situated as new knowledge, has been implemented successfully within these undergraduate programmes. By sharing the framework, and working on the ELCE project team which provided an opportunity to influence University policy and practice, as set out in chapter six, I have been able to test the framework with critical others to consider whether this framework will work outside the programmes for which it was intended. The feed back from colleagues is that it is sufficiently flexible to work for other programmes in HEIs and in different sectors of education.

The living educational theory that I present in chapter seven that I have generated is also as a result of this research and I have set out how I have shown this to be valid and myself to be a legitimate researcher in chapter seven where I also articulate the living standards of judgment that inform my practices as set out by Whitehead and McNiff (2006). The framework and theory that have emerged through this research are my claims to new knowledge.

In chapter four I discuss O'Brien's (1998) illumination of the action research paradigm that 'knowledge is derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge, in an ongoing process'. I spent several years working with the stakeholders, identified in figure 3.1, to ascertain the problems we were experiencing. I put new structures and procedures into place, using the collaborative nature of action research, building on developments with each cycle. This process of planning, action, observation and evaluation helped to meet the aims of the research, provide a quality WBL experience for the students, and ultimately resulted in working out what an effective framework would be through practice, research, and evaluation to inform my knowledge. This took place within a cyclical process reflecting Kolb's (1984) cycle of action research, and Carr and Kemmis' (1986) collaborative nature of action research. My framework is below.



Figure 5.6: Framework Themes

Figure 5.6 identifies similar aspects to figure 3.2, but it has been extended to reflect the new framework. I have included the main elements that have been introduced successfully through this research, and are seen by the stakeholders and me to be essential to ensuring a quality placement. Added to this would be the need to have all students going on placement at the same time, when following a similar programme within the same school.

Communication between all stakeholders

Documentation needs to be provided to support the placement, and shared with all the stakeholders to ensure good communication and outcomes. As a minimum this should include communication directly to the mentor as well as the initial contact person, a job description so that both mentor and student know what is expected while on WBL and a learning contract signed by each party (that is the student, mentor and module leader). Module leaders should be involved in these to ensure the placement will provide opportunity for the student to meet the learning outcomes of the module.

Curriculum to underpin the WBL experience

Within the curriculum element the modules needed to have a set of learning outcomes that reflected the overall outcomes of the programme and were shared with the students and mentors. Guile and Griffiths (2001) state the need for clear learning outcomes as being important for the placement process: this was reflected in the revalidation programme, providing the opportunity to ensure the learning outcomes were directly linked to the placement element of the degree programmes.

The assignments would need to be written in a way that all students can achieve the learning outcomes, no matter what placement they choose to go on (CHERI and KPMG, 2006). It needs to be recognized by the teaching team that they need to share the assignment with the students as early as possible and know that this is the element that will cause the students the greatest anxiety.

Tutor teams may want to develop common key skills during the placement and devise some process of recording these such as the Placement Visit form I developed and discussed in cycle two, or/and the key skills section of the Professional Development Planner available to all undergraduate students. Tutor teams may also want to link these to the new Student Employability Profiles provided by the HEA for all areas of employment which are discussed in chapter six.

Ensure policies are integrated into the processes of work-based learning

Policies that needed to be met in terms of this WBL experience at NTU included the CASQ Policy and the University's health and safety policies. Other Universities will have their own policies that need to be followed. In terms of the degree programmes within the scope of this research, additional policies had to be written and followed to meet the CASQ Guidance, such as organizing

placements abroad, and the consequences for not completing a placement. These have been discussed earlier in this chapter.

Preparation of Students

Students require careful preparation. As a minimum this should include: an initial briefing explaining the purposes and processes; where supporting materials are located; possible placement opportunities; how to organize placements abroad. Students should also be supplied with a detailed handbook that they can use as a reference; this should include examples of all documentation, contacts, resources, assignments, and administrative processes that will help them in their preparation.

A health and safety briefing is essential; indeed at NTU, it is compulsory. A health and safety pack, and pack of general information for the placement may also be issued at this briefing which might include details of how to log onto a discussion area, contact details, and a checklist for their health and safety induction.

Some Schools within NTU, such as the Business School, find placements for their students (CHERI and KMPG, 2006). If, as in the case of this research, the students are required to find their own placement, the reasons for this should be understood by the students, and they should be supported by various methods, such as the sharing of previous placements, facilitation of downloading documentation such as CVs and letters of application and having the opportunity to talk to students from previous years who have gone through the process. It may also be appropriate, as in this case, to include mentors in the preparation of the students, such as supporting the weaker students in their applications, and talking at student briefings.

Some form of discussion area is ideal for students to provide peer support and maintain contact during the placement period. This might be through a discussion board within the University's system, a website set up for the purpose of the placement, or a social networking site (see chapter six).

Preparation of Mentors

Mentors need careful preparation for their roles. The mentors in this research requested a handbook and a briefing. These have both been developed during the three cycles of this action research using the process identified by Carr and

Kemmis (1986): plan --> act --> observe --> reflect --> plan. The format has been shared across the University as being an example of good practice; this is further discussed in chapter six. Preparation of mentors is supported by Shilling (1989) and Blackwell *et al* (2001) who stated the need for providing clear guidelines for employers, particularly relating to health and safety, induction, interviewing, and providing support – all of these were incorporated in the handbook for mentors. The handbook should include contact details for the University, general information on the purposes of the WBL experience, the programme structure so mentors can see where the WBL fits into the overall structure, information on their role and the expectations of the University, what should happen prior to the placement including information on the expectation of an interview if this is appropriate to the WBL experience, what will happen at the end of the placement, and what needs to be done during the placement by the student, in terms of attendance, and role. There is also a need for copies of documentation with exemplars to be available as well as examples of previous projects and assignments, and information on any key skills to be developed as part of the experience included.

Preparation of Tutors

It is important that tutors understand their role, the role of the WBL experience, and the role of the mentor. Tutors ideally need an opportunity to meet and share the understanding of their role. A handbook is useful, but possibly not as essential as that for the students and mentors, unless part-time staff are involved in the visits. The handbook might include information on all assignments, together with names and contact details of module leaders in case they need to refer students to these staff, the role of the tutor, specific information on the visit, if they are required to visit students, including the need to meet with the student prior to talking to the mentor (Richardson and Blakeney, 1998), the expectations of the tutors in terms of contact with the student, copies of any documentation that needs to be completed, what their role is in terms of health and safety (if any), and what to do if an emergency occurs for the student during the WBL experience.

In addition

The addition to figure 5.6 would be that visits should take place by tutors who are involved in the programme. I have not added it to the final framework because discussions with staff from other Schools indicate that there is

inconsistency across NTU with this aspect and this may be the case for other universities. This is an area that needs further follow up by CASQ and a standard policy for all Schools to follow. If it is agreed there is to be no visit, there should be a system in place to ensure some form of monitoring is taking place, particularly where the WBL experience is aligned to learning outcomes and assessment.

Quality

This is central to the structures and processes that underpin WBL. The above framework leads ultimately to quality; this is supported by the quotation in the following section from the QAA Subject Review Report, Programme Standards and Quality Reports (PSQR), and Academic Review and Development Committee Report. It is interesting to note that Brennan and Little's (1996, p 118) research indicates that the literature on WBL 'contains very little on quality assurance'. The theme of quality in this research has been integral and discussed throughout.

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter I provide some quotations to illustrate the success of the changes made to this WBL experience process within the School of Education. These endorse that I influenced the experience of others and thus provide support for my claim to new knowledge. The comments reflect the findings of Boys *et al* (1988, p 127) that 'amongst students whose courses included work experience, levels of satisfaction were generally high' ... 'Most students in subject areas where significant numbers had taken placements considered the experience to have been either fairly or very useful in deciding on a type of career and in developing skills and knowledge relevant to employment'. They also reflect Scesa's (in CHERI and KPMG, 2006, Annex B, p 121) findings in her review QAA and DfES reports that 'where there is a significant commitment to placement provision, the quality of provision is usually high, with well-organised work placements geared to effective experiential learning'. The account thus far will have indicated the increased commitment to placement provision from the tutors, co-ordinator, and mentors which in turn impacted on the students, as evidenced by the data collected and reported in this thesis. Evidence of positive feed back is shown below:

BSc (Hons) Business Information and Communications Technology Programme Standards and Quality Report (PSQR) 2003: 'Placement learning is central to the

programme' and the PSQR includes a separate placement report (evidenced in Archive 6).

BA (Hons) Psychology and Educational Development PSQR 2003: 'Placement well received by students, with strong achievement and completion levels. International placements are available.' (evidenced in Archive 6).

QAA Subject Review Report

'The currency and relevance of the curricula reflect the changing nature and demands of students, employers and other stakeholders across a range of post-compulsory education and training provision and in wider social contexts. Placements feature within all programmes, offering students possibilities to develop and enhance their practical and professional skills. The work placement experience in the second year is a fundamental and substantial feature of the degree programme and provides a coherent and structured learning experience for students. It also lays the foundation for final-year studies and entry into employment. There is a clear relationship between the placement and subject modules and the core personal professional development strand.' (para 14)

In this report it states that

'The positive features of Education in relation to the aspects of provision include the following:

- Ongoing development of programmes that is informed by internal and external inputs' (para 53a). This relates particularly to the Mentor Focus Group and the Revalidation Management Group that was formed to inform the Revalidation.
- 'Work-placement or WBL opportunities across the curricula, which underpin the personal and professional development of students' (evidenced in Archive 8a).

The Academic Review and Development Committee Report (evidenced in Archive 8b) quoted good practice as 'The panel commended the programme team on the support and guidance given to students, particularly the support provided for the student placements.'

Brennan and Little note that within WBL student 'voices are insufficiently heard and perhaps too remote from those with policy responsibilities' (1996, p 122). This is not the case with this research. It reflects four years of research in which the student voice was an integral and valued element through the Student Focus Group and the responses within the questionnaires.

In chapter two I introduced the notion of my ontological and epistemological values and have revisited this in following chapters. I also stated that I had identified my values as justice, caring and respect and explained how these had been contradicted in my practice. In chapter three I revisited this and said that again there were living contradictions in my practice which I took action to address. With the changes that I made to the WBL experience for the students I am able to say confidently that by the end of cycle three that these values, which had been implicit within my practice, had become tacit and I was able to recognise them. They were no longer living contradictions and had transformed into living standards of judgment which I drew upon as I finalised my framework.

At this time in my practice, (that is at the end of cycle three, July 2004), I was aware that the PGCE students, whom I cared for and respected, were not being fully supported on their placements in schools. I had tried using the discussion area of the VLP to increase the support, but with limited success. Students did not use the discussion area frequently and evaluations at the end of this academic year indicated that they found it time-consuming to access the discussion boards from their school placements, which often had ISDN lines, rather than a fast Broadband connection. This led me to start to research into the use of Web Logs, and is the focus of further research reported in chapter six.

By the end of cycle three my living educational theory had also emerged, although I did not name it at that time. One of my aims had been to provide a focus on quality experience for students undertaking a short WBL as part of their undergraduate programme. While I had developed the framework that I had tested and evaluated over three cycles of action research I continued to reflect on how I could identify the quality aspects and articulate them. This reflective period continued as I moved through the next cycles, reported in chapter six. It was not until after my viva voce, that I knew my theory related to what makes a quality WBL experience for students on a short WBL as part of a non-vocational undergraduate programme. In chapter seven I articulate this theory.

This concludes this part of the main research; however as with much research it never really ends and I refer the reader to the next chapter which discusses how new cycles linked closely to this research have developed.

Chapter Six: Further Developments and New Cycles

Introduction

This chapter sets out to move beyond the cycles of action research discussed in the previous chapters and discuss developments both internally and externally since the development of the framework related to WBL. As the research over the last three cycles has developed it has raised new themes. The overall aims set out in the first chapter have remained the same, but they were written knowing that new situations may develop and the foci may change: this again reflects an action research methodology.

As discussed in previous chapters, some of the new themes, when identified, were dealt with quickly, others have continued to overflow beyond the initial cycles of this action research. Also, events both internally and externally have caught up with the research: internally such as the CASQ policy discussed in the previous chapter and the greater emphasis on WBL by the University's senior management team; and externally through the increased focus the HEA has now given to WBL and the Leitch report (2006).

Three new cycles have taken place as part of the developments with WBL and I have started to share the framework I developed through this research and presented in the previous chapter. Therefore in this chapter I will discuss how I have shared the framework and set out the area of research I am currently involved in, and update the reader on the internal and external developments impacting on WBL.

It was anticipated that this chapter would end the final cycle of the research, but it is now clear that this research will continue to evolve:

‘because action research is an integral part of the ongoing activities of the social group whose work is under study, the cyclical process is unlikely to stop when the research is written up, although the extent of data collection and intensity of the inquiry is likely to reduce’ (Somekh, 2006, p 7).

In chapter two I discussed my own experiences, both in this job and previous jobs, of co-ordinating WBL. I have gained much experience, and it has developed my perception of the importance of WBL, and become part of my ‘internalised role’. Some researchers carry out research, write it up, then move

onto the next area, but WBL has become such an intrinsic part of my interests at work, that I have not been able to move away from it in its entirety. This is interesting, particularly because I no longer co-ordinate this part of the degree programme. However I am still involved with WBL through my role as PGCE (Secondary) Information Communications Technology (ICT) Strand Leader; the students on this programme spend two thirds of their training in WBL situations.

At the end of cycle three the School of Education underwent structural changes and all staff were assigned to teams. I was assigned to the Business, Technology and Education team (BTE) as my 'expertise' in teaching terms was ICT and Education and I no longer co-ordinated the WBL element of the undergraduate degree programmes. The year following this change I successfully applied for the role as Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator for the School of Education which would have resulted in my having to relinquish co-ordinating WBL.

My continued involvement with WBL following the completion of my research is reflected in mini action research cycles, each one building on the previous one. These are discussed in detail below as continued cycles from my previous research. Figure 6.1 shows how these mini action research cycles fit with the larger cycles discussed in chapters three four and five. Cycles four, five and six will be discussed in this chapter. In figure 6.1 the arrow indicates a continuation and identifies the new area of research I am currently involved with: the use of web logs by student teachers to provide peer support while on WBL and for developing self-reflection while on WBL. I have presented this research at national and international conferences, which provides additional evidence to support the legitimacy of my research and my role as researcher (evidenced in Appendix 5).

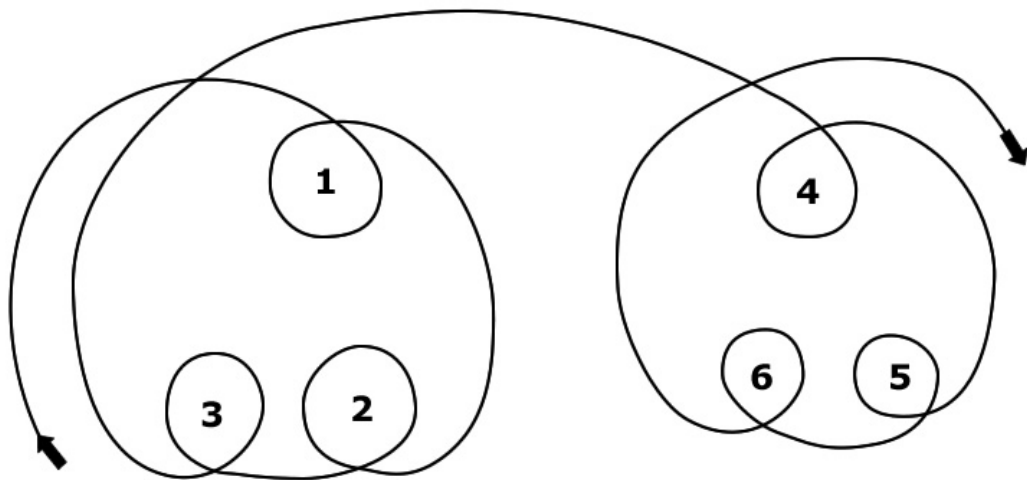


Figure 6.1: Depicting the Main Research and Further Developments

Developments in the External Context

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter the external context relating to WBL had moved forward. This section is intended to provide a reflective overview of the changed context as a setting for the next cycles which are reported in this chapter. It is interesting to note that the changes reflected our own experiences and the developments we were already making to the WBL experience for the undergraduate students within this research.

Leitch Report

In 2006 the Leitch Report was published which set out a challenge to the Government to make changes in many areas of HE, FE, employment training, and careers advice services. The report recognised the need for greater development of key skills for the United Kingdom to improve on the OECD table (in 2006 we were ranked twentieth out of the thirty member countries), and become increasingly innovative. The report calls for greater investment in vocational qualifications and WBL qualifications. This is having an increased impact on WBL and work-related learning and will be referred to again below.

HEA Update

Externally at the time of the completion of cycle three and the completion of the development of the framework, WBL was gaining momentum in the Higher Education (HE) sector. The HEA developed a new area of its web site

(www.hea.ac.uk) with information to support WBL. This reflects the increasing importance of WBL in higher education institutions. In 2006 the HEA published a document relating to WBL experience: 'Work Based Learning: Illuminating the higher education landscape'. This document sets out profiles for over fifty disciplines in HE linked to subject benchmarks. The key skills elements of each subject profile link closely to the work I did as part of this research in cycle two, in developing the key skills area of the curriculum to provide guidance to staff and students on the skills sets they should be developing on placement. In turn it also links to the Professional Development Profile (PDP) completed by students, and a requirement by HEFCE, discussed in chapter four. Alongside this the HEA have provided links to electronic tools to help academics map exactly where and how students will develop key employability skills. Brennan (2005, p 17) defines employability as 'integrating knowledge from work experience, the development of technical and interactive skills, and engaging in personal development planning for lifelong learning'. This reinforces the sound decisions we made in cycle two in increasing the focus on key skills and introducing the PDP at the time we did, and reflects the changing focus on recruitment strategies by employers:

'Employers used to ask potential employees what they had done and, implicitly, what skills they had acquired. Now they ask what it is that students have learned from their experiences and, implicitly, how well equipped they are to learn and continue learning' (Universities UK and CSU, 2002, p 11)

The HEA (2006) started to address future issues: 'Where Should the HE Sector Focus Attention?' as a response to the Leitch Report (evidenced in Archive 6d). This focuses on various areas the HEA views as paramount to the successful continuity of the HE sector. A section is devoted to the development of the WBL agenda over the next five years. The document states that in order to extend the legitimacy of WBL within University programmes it will necessitate developing strategies which cross the cultural bridge between learning and work, address the issues and challenges throughout the system, and demonstrate how the practices of WBL have wider applicability in the HE sector, The document then goes on to list a range of issues the HEA believes the HE sector needs to focus on. There are a number of issues from this list that I have begun to unpick through these latter mini cycles of the research and address below, although it must be recognised by the reader that this document is aimed at senior management level so I can only comment on the responses from my experience within the School of Education at NTU:

'Focus on demonstrating how the features of work-based learning fit to the pedagogical mission of HEIs at both the policy and practice level in such a way that assertions can be evidenced'. This has been evidenced through this research within the School of Education. The seminars that I have delivered across the University (see cycle four later in this chapter, page 224) have gone some way to examining the pedagogical issues surrounding WBL experience and how these fit into the University's Strategic Plan. Further work on this has been done at Senior Management level through the Strategic Plan; in particular section 7.2 relates to preparing students for the 'World of Work'; while section 7.3 relates to the attributes students should have opportunity to develop, many of which are an integral part of the placement experience within this research.

'Demonstrate how work-based learning development can benefit from existing and new funding streams.' I have not detailed a costing for the WBL experience part of the undergraduate programmes, but I have discussed how the new modules reduced taught hours on the timetable in cycle two, and how we were able to gain additional HEFCE funding for the introduction of the PDP. As WBL is an integral part of the programmes within this research the funding has not been a major issue that has been raised during this research, although the limit to the visits, in the Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire areas, was a result of cost: two hours of staff time were allocated to each visit, plus transport costs. This is a great shame as some of the students have gone to some interesting countries across the world, which staff would have welcomed the opportunity to visit and make contacts. WBL does, however, have a cost implication, as noted by Brennan and Little (1996, p 81) 'a more significant impact on reality may well be financial aspects, for example the procedures which individual institutions have devised to 'cost out' support for work based learning in relation to the other teaching and learning provision'. This has been raised by staff at seminars I led at NTU in June 2006, and May 2007 discussed later in this chapter. In addition new cross-University developments with the ELCE project (again discussed in further detail later in this chapter) is planned to offer modules in WBL across the University at levels one, two and three. This will have cost implications, particularly with regard to staffing.

'Orchestrate more detailed research which:

- *unpacks the territory, captures what is going on now and addresses issues of language, meaning and interpretation;*

- *highlights practices which work and explores the nature and value of the WBL approach to institutions and practitioners;*
- *explores how new initiatives can be used to inform practice (e.g. how the use of National Occupational Standards alongside professional standards can shape the HE curriculum);*
- *challenges our intuitive assumption that the pedagogical processes associated with WBL are widely applicable and present benefits to institutions beyond that of learning in the workplace alone;*
- *identifies where the 'discipline' and approaches associated with work based learning can be aligned in order to add value to the teaching and learning strategies of institutions;*
- *illustrates how flexibility and responsiveness in WBL programmes are delivered in cost-effective ways.'*

We have started to address these issues within the University, but need to continue to revisit and redefine solutions as new initiatives such as the ELCE project, referred to previously and discussed later in this chapter, are developed. The first bullet point is an interesting point and one which we need to look at more closely with the increasing focus on internationalisation and the growing number of international students. For example, during the research we had a Chinese student who chose to return home for her WBL experience. The company she chose to work with did not speak any English so we had to employ a Chinese PhD student to translate the documents and handbooks for her, then translate the agreements back for us. We had to rely on the PhD student to ensure the translation imparted the information and advice as intended. With the increasing number of international students we do need to focus on the language we are using and our interpretations of different cultures. This is an issue that is raised at the second cross-University seminar I ran, reported later in this chapter.

The first and fourth points were carefully addressed at the meeting held by the Pro-VC in September 2005, which is discussed later in this chapter. The second point has been addressed in detail throughout this research, albeit only in detail across the School of Education. The School of Education works closely with the Training and Development Agency (TDA) who funds our teacher training related provision and designs the teaching standards, and HEFCE who funds our undergraduate provision. This research has also detailed how I have worked with a range of mentors who have influenced the WBL experience and the curriculum

now in place to underpin this part of the undergraduate programmes within the School of Education. Point five has been addressed to some extent within the discussions in cycles one, two and three relating to the changes to the teaching and learning that have taken place, and the alignment of the placement structure across the three degree programmes. The final point has been discussed above, but may impact on the WBL experience in the future; for example there have been discussions across the undergraduate team that the number of hours for visits may have to be cut, following the new requirement from Senior Management to fully cost programmes. Visits may then take place on the basis of visiting weaker students, and 'sampling' the rest of the group. However, this research does only focus on one School within the University and these aspects do need to be explored in more detail at a wider level.

'Ensure that a strong research base provides the bedrock on which policy and practice are developed.' The research that has been undertaken to develop the framework took place over three cycles and involved representatives from all stakeholder groups. The framework is now being shared across the University and beyond, and this will be discussed later in this chapter in greater detail. However, this is one piece of research based in one school in one University.

'Ensure appropriateness and rigour of assessment in everything that the sector does; approaches to assessment that work will need to be illuminated through further research.' Again, assessment has formed part of this research. I have not focussed on the specific assignments for the WBL modules, but this was part of the role of the Revalidation Management Team that wrote the assignments and ensured constructive alignment with the outcomes. This rigour is further supported by the QAA inspection, the University's Academic Review and Development Committee Report during Revalidation, and the quality assurance systems put in place by CASQ, such as the detailed annual programme reports. This has been shared within the University to some extent via the seminars that I have led, but greater sharing would be beneficial.

'Share understanding and strengthen the 'community of practice' to better enable the adoption of good practice'. This has certainly been a significant outcome of this research and is discussed in detail above. The opportunities I was able to provide in the seminars for discussion (see later discussion) and identifying cross-University themes for development has helped to engender a greater community of practice. The new cross-University database that is being established at the time of writing will further help to develop this, and the new

WBL module, ELCE, currently being developed to be made available to all undergraduate students will continue to engender the development of this community. (See later in this chapter for a wider discussion of the ELCE project.)

'Build a stronger understanding of the process of partnership (or collaboration) in learning and the nature and fit of relationships between students, institutions and employers.' This has been a substantial part of this research and has been discussed in great detail in cycles one, two and three. Again, this will continue to develop as the new database is established, information is more available for sharing, and the ELCE project develops.

Conferences

Increasingly conferences are being held across the United Kingdom focussing on the WBL area of the students' experience. ASET, the professional body for placement and employability staff has been particularly active in running one day staff development events for Placement Officers, Placement Managers, Placement Administrators, Academic Placement Tutors, as well as an annual conference.

Centres for Excellence

A Centre for Excellence in Work Based Learning (CEWBL), one of seventy four Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning awarded to Universities in England by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was set up in 2005 based at Middlesex University. This CEWBL was set up to maximise the impact of excellent practice in WBL and to provide a catalyst for dissemination of good practice across Higher Education Institutions.

QAA Code of Conduct

The QAA have reviewed a number of areas in their Code of Conduct which includes WBL. This is in response both to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee (the Dearing, 1997, and Garrick, 1997, Reports) and the consequent remodelling of the national arrangements for quality assurance in higher education. Draft guidelines were issued for consultation in 2006, and published in September 2007 to bring this up-to-date with current practice in Higher Education institutions. The Code of Conduct recognises that there is a great disparity across and within institutions

of the different types of WBL and the need to try to distinguish between WBL and work related learning. The Code of Conduct defines work-based and/or placement learning as 'identified and agreed learning that typically takes place outside a higher education institution' (QAA, 2007, p 8).

There are many similarities with the previous QAA Code of Conduct relating to WBL in 2001. For example, the emphasis on placement learning, the need for clear intended learning outcomes and a coherent assessment process, the need for students to understand their rights and responsibilities, and the need to engage and share the understanding of the purpose of the placement with employers. Assessment has been a thorny issue throughout this research as reported in chapters three, four and five, but its importance is supported within the recommendations of Universities UK and CSU (2002, p 42) report 'If students are to take employability in the curriculum seriously, institutions should consider including it in the assessment and grading process'.

New areas in the Code of Conduct include an acceptance that students now come from an increasingly diverse background. Comments are made on the need to provide additional language support if necessary and ensure there is opportunity for 'advice on the culture of the overseas location' (2007, p 21). It is interesting that the proposed changes include 'appropriate re-orientation on students' return to institutions' (2007, p 21). This is an area that we had found necessary to develop, supported by evidence in the analyses of the students' responses to questionnaires in cycles one and two, which led me to suggest all programmes follow the same structure as the BICT group, thus allowing time following the placement for planned and structured re-orientation.

Another new aspect in the Code of Conduct (2007, p 23) is the requirement for institutions to ensure staff receive staff development and 'are appropriately qualified, resourced and competent'. The points raised at cross-University seminars I led, which are discussed later in this chapter, indicate that there are areas of staff development that are needed within NTU, in particular greater knowledge about the requirements of health and safety.

There is an increased emphasis in the draft on gathering feed back and evaluating the process of the WBL experience with all stakeholders. Again, this reflects the processes I put into place during the three main cycles of this research.

Aspects that are not covered in the Code of Conduct but may be useful are, in my opinion, the need for there to be documentation such as a learning contract and agreed job description to ensure students have the opportunity to meet learning outcomes while on WBL. For example the learning contract and job description I developed as part of this research are being used as a core document for the ELCE project. These documents have greatly improved the quality of the experience of the students within this research. Also, there is no link to key skills development during WBL or to the use of the PDP, which is now a compulsory requirement of all undergraduate students by HEFCE, to record their experiences and set targets for areas that are still under-developed. I would have welcomed greater guidance on students going abroad and the HEI's role in ensuring quality and safety, particularly for students going into areas that might be considered less safe than the UK.

Throughout this research health and safety has remained a theme because of the responsibility we have for our students, not only under the law, but also as an ethical part of our roles. Both of the cross-University seminars I have led (discussed later in this chapter and evidenced in Archive 7f) have raised issues about health and safety. Perhaps the most concerning is that not all staff were aware of the health and safety regulations. This is an issue the University needs to embrace. The information does not appear to be getting through to those that are responsible for placements.

Developments in the Internal Context

Following the completion of cycle three and the development of the framework there have been several developments internally relating to WBL. Among these are new draft guidelines, issued by the University's health and safety section (evidenced in Archive 6b) which have been released for discussion in response to QAA's new Code of Conduct for Placement Learning. For the first time we have been given a definition of WBL:

'A period of vocational experience, paid or unpaid where: -

- there is the transfer of direct supervision of a student to a third party, and
- it is integral to the individual student's programme, and
- the student is enrolled at the institution during this period.' (NTU, 2007, p 1; Archive 6b)

This clarification provides a shared understanding of the University's view of WBL. It is interesting that the draft guidelines refer to 'Placement', rather than 'WBL', reflecting the QAA draft Code of Conduct, rather than the agreement across the University. The draft guidelines include for the first time a simple diagram for placement organizers to follow (Archive 6b, p3).

There is a continued requirement to brief students on their placement, and to provide a health and safety briefing. This reflects the briefings that I built into the School of Education's structure and forms part of the framework identified in chapter five. Areas identified for the briefing are clear and there is a requirement for a record of attendance to be kept. Again, these reflect the processes I had put into place by the end of cycle three.

The guidelines put the onus of ensuring health and safety arrangements are carried out on students, rather than staff:

'Before arranging any placement you must contact your Placement Organiser who will ensure the process is implemented. Placements arranged without undergoing the due process will not be recognized by the Institution.' (NTU, 2007, p 6)

The implications of this will be interesting if any student organizes a placement, does not inform the 'Organiser' and has an accident. It does not seem to link into the other precepts about it being part of a structured programme and linked to learning outcomes.

It is interesting to note the guidance to students going outside of the United Kingdom for their WBL experience. This guidance, which relates to their health and safety, is fairly extensive in terms of the hazards they may encounter, ranging from contaminated water, to contact with insects, to legal differences. It does not include guidance on what to do in case of an emergency, or the need for adequate travel insurance – a copy of which should be held by the WBL organizer, according to the first part of the guidelines which is intended for staff use.

Strategic Plan

As the research has progressed the University's Strategic Plan has developed and moved forward. In chapter one I set out links to the Strategic Plan which related to preparing students for the world of work, and the attributes students should develop. The updated Strategic Plan (2007) has developed these in line

with developments in the HEA and new draft QAA Code of Conduct in the previous section. Section 7.2 now includes:

- 'Offering internships and/or key skills development as an integral part of all courses;
- Taking theory into practice through skills development relevant to the modern world;
- Embedding career management, entrepreneurship and creativity into the delivery of the curriculum;
- Incorporating international and multi-cultural perspectives into our curricula;
- Offering stimulating work-based projects of real value to the outside world as part of level three/postgraduate/practice masters programmes'.

As can be seen, WBL is still a feature of the strategic plan, but it is wider now and incorporates the development of key skills, entrepreneurship, and the emphasis on internationalisation and globalisation that is more recently on the agenda in HEIs.

I have already discussed the focus on the development of the attributes of the NTU student, again reflecting the more recent agenda from the draft QAA Code of Conduct and HEA guidance. It is interesting to note that many of the attributes listed reflect the key skills that I developed in cycle two. For example ICT skills, critical thinking, problem solving, managing time and communicating effectively. New areas that I had not included but are part of new developments are leadership skills and international awareness, including an awareness of cultural and social diversity.

Experiential Learning and Community Engagement (ELCE)

I have referred above to the ELCE project. This is a newly established project that has developed from discussions at Academic Standards and Quality Committee meetings and recognises the popularity of WBL for students who view this as a benefit in gaining employment. A sub-committee has been formed to establish whether it would be possible to develop a new module, focussed on WBL, that all undergraduate students could undertake either as part of their programme, or as an integrated option. The concept is that the student would negotiate individual learning outcomes from a list identified by NTU to

'complement and extend other indicative outcomes identified for the programme overall' (Brennan and Little, 1996, p 51). The WBL element could include volunteering work, entrepreneurship and work in the community. This reflects Brennan's (2005, p 43) discussion of 'shell modules' for WBL, the main benefit of which is a shared bank of learning resources which could be customised for use in 'different subject areas and in different settings'. In Brennan and Little's (1996, p 127) discussion of curriculum frameworks for WBL they state that it can be difficult to establish 'generic level descriptors which are easily understood and applicable across even a limited number of different subject areas within the same institution'. This is a difficulty we are experiencing, and may not be able to resolve.

I am part of a task group linked to the sub-committee (above) and I have found it has provided another opportunity to share the framework I have developed. At the time of writing (2009) the project is still at an early stage. It is interesting that the conversations and themes that I was grappling with during the main research, three years ago, are being considered again in the context of the ELCE project.

One of the main areas developing relates to which key skills students should have the opportunity to develop as part of this module, and the content of the underpinning curriculum, learning and teaching and assessment methods. This is providing an opportunity for me to share the results of my research. There has already been a discussion around how to develop my framework into practice through this project, and to adapt the documentation that I devised as whole-University documentation for this module. This discussion provides evidence of the educational influence I have in sharing the framework and my living educational theory.

This section has focussed on a discussion of the developing external and internal context that sits behind the next cycles of this research, which are discussed in detail below.

Cycle Four: Sharing the Framework

This cycle represents the way in which I share my research and framework for WBL and submit my findings to the scrutiny of others. By presenting my research publicly I am able to demonstrate my educational influence and provide further evidence to support my legitimacy as a researcher. Using action research within this cycle I again refer to Carr and Kemmis' (1986) cycle of

action research: planning for change --> action to make the change --> observing the changes made and how these impact on those involved --> reflecting on how successful the changes were and what then needed to be developed further --> return to planning, using a cyclical spiral shown in diagrammatic format in chapter seven, figures 7.2 and 7.3. As articulated in chapter two, one of the aims of my research was to develop a framework for WBL that could be shared with others. In chapter seven I set out how my aims, framed by my ontological and epistemological values transform into standards against which my research can be judged. In this action research cycle I presented my framework at NTU's Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, 2005. My session was attended by twenty seven academic staff from NTU and two academic colleagues from other HEIs.

The presentation was titled: 'The Placement Experience'. I began by outlining the internal and external drivers for WBL. I then discussed my research, the methodology used, and the collection of the data over three cycles. I gave the background to the research, the concerns by staff and students at the situation in existence when I took up the role of co-ordinator, and explained how the WBL experience had been set up originally within the School of Education. Having set the context for the research I then presented the framework, using the diagrams I included in cycle one (figures 3.1 and 3.2) to identify the stakeholders and issues that my research had shown needed to be addressed, and ultimately needed to be included in the final framework as shown in chapter five, figure 5.6. Having presented the framework I then shared the results and comments from the stakeholders. (The full presentation is stored in Archive 7d.) The observations in my journal reflect that this was well-received. A specific evaluation was not required by the organisers for each presentation so I have no written data to support this reflection. However, a number of colleagues stayed at the end of the presentation to discuss their own experiences, and thank me for presenting a sensible and workable framework. At the time I was not able to gain evidence of how I had influenced others. However, following the seminar I was contacted by colleagues who attended the seminar who wanted to share my research findings and enter into a discourse around WBL. I also received two requests to give talks to specific Schools who were finding WBL 'difficult'. This was a first step in sharing the framework beyond the School of Education and reflects the action and observation stage of Carr and Kemmis's cycle.

Following this presentation I was asked to join a group, headed by a senior pro-VC examining at the whole issue of WBL. This provided an opportunity for reflection and evaluation, following Carr and Kemmis's (1986) cycle and for me to influence WBL within NTU. As stated in chapter five, we were sixty seventh in the University League Table of graduates achieving graduate level jobs in 2003. In 2004 NTU graduates had the tenth lowest unemployment figure (4.5%) of multi-disciplined universities including first degree, full-time study.

In October 2005 we had a full day's meeting, led by the pro-VC, to address the issues that Senior Management had identified relating to WBL. These included:

- Flexibility: How can we adjust our educational structures better to facilitate work placements and projects?
- Employer Engagement: How can we better engage our corporate networks to extend opportunities for our students?
- How can we better showcase what we are already doing well, internally and externally?
- How can we better manage placement activity and employer relations?

Following my input relating to my research and framework I was asked to meet with one of the deputy heads of CASQ to look at a wider cross-University process of sharing the framework. This led to a further mini cycle in the process of the action research which are reported in the next cycle. This again adds legitimacy to my role as researcher and validity to the research that I had undertaken and was now sharing across the University.

Cycle Five: Sharing the Framework Developments

This cycle again reflects a cycle of action research, as shown in figure 7.1. The deputy head of CASQ had been tasked with providing quality assurance for WBL. She was keen to set up a cross-University seminar on WBL and asked if I would lead a seminar. It was intended that further seminars would take place in future years. This reflects the planning stage of action research.

The seminar was scheduled for June 2006, and reflects the action stage of action research. I had been told to expect a maximum of twenty interested academics from across the whole University and planned a seminar/workshop session. Two days before the seminar I was told by CASQ they had had to close the seminar list at fifty – there was also a reserve list. This resulted in me completely changing my planned delivery to more of a tutor led seminar with some time for discussion and sharing.

The presentation is stored in Archive 7d. The content was similar to that already outlined above that I had given at the Learning and Teaching Conference the preceding year; that is the internal and external context, which had been updated to reflect the increasing focus NTU had put on WBL and £5m of HEFCE funding we had secured with three other Universities for student placements for Entrepreneurs. I then discussed my research, methodology and the framework that I had developed from the research. I also included a section on the changes we had made to the curriculum and the key skills developments we had made. I included comments from the main stakeholders that reflected the final placement at the end of cycle three, discussed the framework I had developed, and finished with an opportunity for colleagues to look at the documents I had developed as part of the research. As this was a seminar rather than a presentation I interspersed opportunities for discussions based on the following topics:

- Identify two aspects that you believe would make a 'quality placement'.
- Are there other stakeholders you need to support/manage?
- How does this compare with the work experience you are involved in, or planning?
- What issues have arisen so far that you want to address?

The discussions proved to be useful and provided an opportunity to observe the processes within other Schools. The responses to the first point were as expected, and did not differ from those that my research had revealed. The

response to point two included the need to meet the requirements of external bodies, which mirrored the HEA document discussed previously in this chapter. The response to the third point was interesting, revealing many different types of WBL across the University, from one week or weekend for some students in the School of Art and Design, through one month, six weeks, a full semester, to a full year. This is supported by CHERI and KPMG, 2006. I noted the Deputy of CASQ making notes on these and she later commented that CASQ had not realised there were so many different variations were taking place. The final point also raised many new issues, and some common issues:

- Health and safety was a significant issue that the CASQ representatives took away from the meeting. Many staff were not following the guidance from the health and safety section and were sending students on placement with no preparation and no briefing – some staff said they had never seen the guidance.
- Many staff had not done any briefing for mentors, or produced a handbook for them.
- Some had not written a handbook for tutors or held a tutor briefing – for similar reasons that I experienced and have discussed in cycle one.
- Most, but not all, held a briefing for the students. For many this was quick, attendance was not recorded, and no documentation was given.
- The structures and processes were not shared between programmes in the same School which staff found was confusing for students. They were interested in the approach we had taken in bringing all programmes into the same structure, and this part of the research.
- Some students were being paid for their placements, others were not. This reflects the findings of Little and Harvey (2006).
- Not all students received visits – there were differences across the University on visits, including how many per placement, whether tutors were allocated visits, how far tutors were able to go to visit and the allocation of hours for the visits – some tutors received no recognition for hours for visits undertaken to students on placement.

The evaluations from the seminar were good and are stored in Archive 7b. Everyone rated it at one to two – one being excellent, three satisfactory and five being poor. Written comments that were received included 'Really excellent, you're hired', 'It would be good to have electronic copies of the documents to crib from', 'I've got a greater understanding of the different roles involved and

how they impact on WBL', 'As a member of a team just introducing a placement to our degree programmes, this was an extremely useful session', and 'very useful and comprehensive – the framework seemed to cover everything'.

Following an opportunity to reflect on this seminar I was asked to attend a further meeting with CASQ to consider how we could develop a series of seminars for the WBL experience and to discuss what we should be doing to continue to improve the experience of WBL for students. This reflects the evaluation and reflection stage of the action research cycle. As the action it was agreed that the first step should be to create an area on the VLP (see page 88) that staff could use to find policy documents and resources to support WBL and was a response to comments from colleagues at the seminar. This reflects requests from a number of staff. A number of colleagues from different departments were asked to contribute and we established an area accessible by all University staff. All of the documentation I had developed was uploaded to the VLP, including the various presentations I had created. The details of this were circulated via the University's ENews system; an electronic system operating through University-wide email addresses. These are available online at www.ntu.ac.uk.

It was agreed that there would be a programme of three seminars in 2006-7 as shown below. This again reflects the planning stage of the action research cycle:

- 'Embedding Entrepreneurship in the Curriculum' which was to be led by a representative from HIVE, an area of the University which focussed on developing business projects that students instigate through entrepreneurship;
- 'A Framework for the Effective Management of Placements' which I was asked to lead. I was asked to focus on the framework I had developed and also show the delegates the documents I had produced within the framework for mentors, tutors, and students, and how these could be accessed on the VLP. In addition I shared various resources I had used in shaping the framework, including the CASQ Policy document, health and safety policies, the recently established CASQ website pages and 'Employability for Students', 2006, produced by the HEA.
- 'Exploring Work-Based, Experiential and Placement Models' led by one of the deputies of CASQ. This was as a direct response to the queries raised at my previous seminar. (See earlier discussion above).

The seminar I ran was limited to twenty participants, and was filled quickly, again with a waiting list; this reflects the increasing profile of WBL within the University. I built in opportunity for colleagues to discuss issues that needed to be developed or addressed further again providing evidence of the observation and reflection stages of action research. The issues raised were:

- A request for a shared database of providers available across the University – various people seemed to have worked on developing one but there was not one available to be accessed by all staff and students. This was causing problems for staff and students organising placements and receiving responses that they already had/had offered a place(s) to students from the University, and also in staff visiting and being asked why several staff from the University were coming out for each student. Recent developments have now been made relating to this database which is being developed (2009) and will enable sharing of placement information across the whole of the University.
- International Students – additional support was felt to be essential for all Schools on how to manage these WBL experiences. There was some discussion about visas and permits – and differing practices/understandings, so clarification was needed. This was a new issue and reflects the increasing number of international students we now have at the University.
- Clarification was needed for the whole issue of health and safety, including whether there should be risk assessments for students going on placement to difficult areas such as places abroad where there is unrest, rather than challenging inner city areas in the United Kingdom (or perhaps both).
- The issue of students being paid a bursary while on placement was raised. Most of the group felt there should be more of a cross-University view about whether students should be paid or not and a policy consistently applied across the University.
- Criminal Record Bureau checks – some Schools ask students to pay for these, other Schools were paying for them. Again, a consistent approach was requested.
- Time allocated for staff to visit – some staff visited in their own time, others were given differing amounts of time. A consistent cross-University approach was requested.

- Concerns again came from Schools where students were out on placement for either a whole year, or a considerable part of the year but still paying fees for the year. Schools seemed to be taking different steps to reimburse a percentage of the fees for the year out, but there were complaints from students about paying these fees when they were receiving no tuition that year. It was requested that this was standardised across the University.
- Visits – staff reported that companies were complaining about the consistency in the number of visits colleagues were making – again, it was requested that this be standardised so a clear message was sent out to placement providers.
- Keeping in touch with the University and peer support during the placement was an issue; more guidance and sharing of how this was managed was requested.
- Delegates wanted to know what the minimum requirements were for health and safety. They asked for clear guidance from the health and safety section together with a cross-University template and simple guidance on this. This point received a great deal of discussion due to the nature of the different types of WBL experiences across the University.

Again, this meeting received positive evaluations (see Archive 7c).

In July 2007 I was invited to be a guest speaker at a Collaborative Conference for all of the University's FE collaborative centres, entitled 'HE – The Next Steps'. (The programme is in Archive 7a.) My presentation was on WBL. This followed a similar formula to previous presentations in which I presented my research and the framework I had developed. The audience was again from many different academic areas as shown in the figure below:

Subject Area	Length of Placement Experience	Type of Placement
Performing Arts and Music	2 months – mixed in-house and out	Production or acting companies
Early years	Full-time employment with day release to complete programme	Wide variety of placements such as nurseries, first start centres

Construction	Ditto	Wide variety such as plumbing, electricians, site design
Computing	Short-term 1-2 week projects extending to 1-2 months on placement	Variety of small computing companies
Events Management	240 hrs for placement, can be on block or 1 day per week throughout programme	Junior management/supervisory roles in variety of contexts, such as local councils
Fashion	1-2 months placement. Also involvement in live projects and fashion shows when possible	Variety of fashion companies, or magazines, across UK
3D Design	Employment based learning in-house - college 4 hrs per week	Variety of small companies
Hospitality	1 day a week placement for 30 weeks	Hospitality such as hotels, restaurants, kitchens
Tourism	6 month placement	Variety of tourist attractions and visitor attractions such as Centre Parcs

Figure 6.2: Delegates' Prior Experience of WBL

The variety of delegates' experiences with WBL resulted in a useful discussion. As well as sharing my framework we were able to focus on how to build assessment into WBL and how to prepare students for this assessment. I was able to share many of the issues discussed in chapters three, four and five; the concerns of students about their assessment; and processes I had put into place to help them to feel more confident in this part of their experience. We discussed issues around assignments and I shared the strategies I had introduced, such as discussing the assignments in the briefings, including the previous year's assignments in their handbook and the mentor's handbook, ensuring they understood that only minor changes would be made, working with

tutors to ensure that as much information was given to the students about their assignment prior to placement, and the new structure we had set up to provide three weeks prior to the placement in small group seminars and tutorials with the assignment being part of the focus for these. I was also able to explain how we had linked learning outcomes to the assignment and had written the assignments in an open way to ensure students in any WBL environment would be able to engage and achieve with them. This links to the point raised by the HEA (2006), discussed earlier in this chapter, regarding the need to ensure appropriateness and rigour of assessment.

As can be seen the process of this cycle also reflected Carr and Kemmis' (1986) action research cycle including planning for change, action to make the change, observation of the changes made and how these impact on those involved, reflection on how successful the changes were and what then needed to be developed further.

Cycle Six: Supporting the students on placement

So far in this chapter I have outlined the internal and external context for WBL since the completion of the framework developed from the research reported in chapters three, four and five. However, another significant area has arisen which should be reported here as it forms the basis of the next cycle in this on-going action research.

In chapter four I introduced the notion of the discussion area that I set up with the help of the VLP team. In the same chapter I discussed the problems that we faced with the 'abuse' by some students in the way they used this facility. In chapter four I described the steps I had taken to stop this poor use of the discussion area and reported the increased usage. In chapter five I explained that the new Developing Academic Skills Module, that was compulsory for all students on each of the degree programmes during the first semester of year one, included a session on using discussion boards which helped to develop good practice during the placement period. Since completing cycle three developments with the VLP had led to a Discussion Board being accessible by all students across the University. This meant that I no longer needed to create a separate discussion board for peer support during the placement; I simply needed to set up a 'thread' within their discussion area. While this sounds a positive development, and indeed, in terms of other uses of the Discussion

Boards it was a good development, it had a number of disadvantages to those on WBL:

- Firstly, the discussions were limited to separate degree programmes, so it was no longer possible for students to share their experiences and gain support via the discussion board across the degree programmes.
- Secondly, navigating to the discussion board within the VLP was slow. It took several clicks through different pages to get to the discussion board, then students had to locate the right thread, open this up, then open up each individual message before reading them and posting a response. The original system I had set up with the VLP team, was linked to the front page of their VLP area, so only required one click, the messages were then displayed and did not need to be opened. This new version is a distinct disadvantage, and is recognised as such by the VLP team. It is particularly time-consuming for students trying to access the system outside the University where downloading is much slower. For those still using an ISDN line it was really not appropriate at all as it was far too slow to navigate to.

As can be seen this reflects another mini-cycle of action research. The different cycles identify how I planned changes based on observation and reflection, then acted on them, collated data which I analysed to provide evidence to support the change, to develop the use of the VLP to support WBL. The following section of cycle six reflects how I have continued to plan further developments, acted on these, observed how the new developments were used by the students, and then reflected again before starting to plan further developments.

Earlier in this chapter I have explained that I am no longer WBL co-ordinator for the under-graduate programmes. I am now the Learning and Teaching co-ordinator for the School of Education, a promotion I actively sought, and Strand Leader for the PGCE (Secondary) in Information Communications Technology, the role I originally came to the University for. My PGCE students also go on WBL; they go to three school-based placements during their one year programme, one week in a primary school, seven weeks in one secondary school, and fourteen weeks in another secondary school. I have been through similar processes with these students over the last few years as I did with the undergraduate students and set up the discussion board previously discussed in

chapters three, four and five, to try to encourage peer group support. I believe this form of peer support is important to the students while on placement, perhaps fundamentally more so for the PGCE students as 60% of their programme is out of University in school based environments. This belief is supported by research articulated in chapter six and informal feedback from students involved in cycles one, two and three of this research. The students find the programme stressful and welcome peer support during placement. It is these students that complained loudly about the slowness of the VLP discussion board, particularly as many are working in schools with slow broadband connection. It is these complaints that led me to evaluate my actions so far and look for something that was quicker but still provided the support needed by students on WBL, using the new technologies that were emerging.

In 2005 I read what I found to be an informative electronic book 'Coming of Age' aimed at developing the use of Web 2.0 technology in secondary and primary schools (Freedman, 2006). It particularly focussed on social networking and included some examples of how secondary schools were successfully using Web Logs to provide additional peer support. A web log (blog) works through a web site. There are many such web sites such as www.LiveJournal.co.uk, www.edublogs.co.uk, and www.blogger.com. Students have to register with the site which is free, and can then set up their own private blogs. When they upload a blog, which is similar to an entry in a journal, they can choose options to keep it private to them, share it with their friends, or let the whole world have access to it. As I reflected on some of the examples given in Freedman's ebook, I began to consider the use of blogs as an alternative to the discussion board for students on WBL.

Initially I investigated an appropriate blogging site which would meet several criteria I felt were essential:

- it was free;
- it was simple to use;
- students could be part of a community blog for the purposes of shared experiences such as WBL;
- students could create their own personal logs as an alternative to reflective diaries many were required to keep as part of their WBL experience, but still give access to their tutor if they wanted to;
- blogs could be kept private to only those listed as friends rather than open their blogs to the whole world;

- supported by a web site that would not be taken down by the 'owners';
- a system of notifying those in the community blog that a new message had been posted to save the time of having to keep checking the blog site. A community blog is a social networking forum enabled through using blogs. This is done through setting up a blog as a community blog then either inviting friends to join in, or giving permission when requested to people who are interested in joining your community.

This research led me to decide on 'LiveJournal'; a blogging site that met all the criteria above.

I have now used LiveJournal across several programmes in the following way:

- PGCE (Secondary) English: this group has used blogging for both individual reflective journals, and to provide support across the whole group while on WBL. The strand leader has reported that this has been enormously successful in her PSQR report;
- PGCE (Secondary) Information Communications Technology: this group has used blogging to provide support across the whole group throughout their WBL. It has more recently been extended to provide a reflective diary that can be shared with peers and tutors (Raelin (1997)). This is my own group so I am able to report on their experiences in more detail below;
- The Undergraduate Programme. Working with the PL we selected a group of students across the degree programmes as a pilot group. I went to a seminar with this pilot group and talked about blogs and using them as an alternative to the reflective diaries that they are required to keep as an assessed part of their programme. The initial usage is reported by the students to be good, but these are private blogs rather than a community blog, so I do not have access to them. The students use their reflections from these blogs within their assignments.

As stated earlier in this section the PGCE (Secondary) Information Communications Technology group is the group I lead. I have therefore worked closely with this group and carried out some research in their usage of the blog during their placements. Once the students have registered with the blog site

provider they email their username to me and I add it to the Community blog; with a Community blog each time an entry is made it is open to those who have been listed by friends by me, thus keeping it private to the group. Each diary entry, or blog, appears in chronological order, and no threads or messages have to be opened to be read. A distinct advantage is that the blogs can be written, recorded and uploaded as an MP3 file, or attached as a video file, thus appealing to all learning styles: visual, kinaesthetic, and auditory.

When I first introduced the students to the blog I had no experience of using it myself, other than dabbling and creating a blog space for myself. I showed the students how to register and set up the community blog at the start of a seminar, and then encouraged the students to put up one blog each prior to going on their first secondary school experience. I was surprised at how quickly the students took to blogging. In the first few weeks of placement I was constantly getting notices in my email that a new blog had been posted.

The types of blogs posted also surprised me. They were detailed and varied. Some would be a diary of a day at the school, or a request for help for a lesson they were giving; requests for help with software or hardware were common. Some blogs were illuminating, reporting funny incidents that had happened at the school, others were remarkably honest in their feelings of isolation while on the placement. All were responded to by others in the group; I was pleasantly surprised at the warmth of support from the group to those that were finding it tough going. For me as tutor, it alerted me quickly to issues that needed dealing with, or additional support required. I did not always put my responses on the blog as some needed to be personal, but I would email the student directly with a response or request them to email their mobile telephone number so I could talk to them.

At the end of the first placement we evaluated the usage of the blogs and the feed back was extremely positive. Following this I carried out further research into blogging and e-moderating, and found some of Salmon's (2004) ideas helpful in reflecting on this development. In particular I found the five steps she advocated for on-line learning and activities to be helpful:

- The first stage refers to *Access and Motivation* with the tutor being welcoming and encouraging, while the students learn how to access and set up the system. In the first year of my research I set up the blog immediately before the students went on placement, and spent a short

time showing them how to use LiveJournal. I included a welcome message that they saw each time they logged on and each week left a message to encourage the students in what they were including in their blogs. I also used the University email system to remind reluctant bloggers to use the blog, explaining the benefits of peer support and contact while on placement each time.

- Stage two is *Online socialisation* with the students uploading their blogs, while the tutor provides bridges between social, cultural and learning environments. As the students already knew each other and had formed a fairly social element in their relationships this was not particularly appropriate in the first year. However, in the second year, following discussions with the previous cohort of students, I set up the blog prior to the programme starting and wrote to them with information on how to log on, encouraging them to upload a photograph of themselves and say a little about who they are and why they were wanting to be on the programme. This proved successful and made quite an impact on their induction week, changing the whole atmosphere of our first group meetings. This is still practiced at the time of writing (2009).
- Step three is *Information Exchange* with the students personalising and using the software, while the tutor facilitates and supports the development of their use. One function of LiveJournal is the ability to use emoticons. Without suggesting to the students they use this function they started to do so. This gave immediate information on how they were feeling. It was interesting to see that those who were sad or frustrated often got more responses to those that were happy. I found myself looking at the emoticons before reading the blogs; this was also reported by the students.
- Step four is *Knowledge Construction* with the students using the software to develop knowledge and the tutor facilitating the process. Certainly when the students returned from their placements they had much greater knowledge of each other's situations, difficulties, and successes through the community blog. It is interesting to observe that in the first year of using the blog I had no students withdraw during the placements; this may be due to the support they received from each other via the blog. At the time of writing I am using the blog for the third year and have just read a blog from a student who is clearly under pressure in her WBL and is seriously considering leaving the programme. It is really good that other students have contacted her, and alerted me

to her blog. I have immediately been able to contact her and provide the support of a tutor to visit her. Without the blog I may have received an email from an administrator informing me she had left.

- The final stage is *Development* with students providing links outside closed conferences and the tutor supporting and responding. The example I have given above is a good example of how this has worked in practice. Other examples are the sharing of resources to develop professionally, and experimenting with linking in other software such as voice threads to further develop the blogs.

The use of blogs has been successful and is definitely a leap forward from the use of the discussion board to support WBL. There is no opportunity for abuse, and students report that it engenders more of a social support feeling, particularly with the use of the photographs and emoticons which the discussion board never managed to achieve. This development, which I have shared at conferences (evidenced in Appendix 5) has been recognised by JISC and I was invited to write a case study, including interviews with ex-students who had been involved with this development (evidenced in Appendix 5).

I have reported on the use of blogs to support students on WBL at various meetings in my own school and have been asked by several Learning and Teaching co-ordinators in other Schools within the University to talk to them about the use of blogging to support WBL. I have also been asked to provide a Key Issues in Practice staff development session, which is advertised across the University.

My usage was also picked up by NTU's Education Unit that was been tasked with identifying a new VLP for the University. Representatives from this Unit have had several discussions with me and as a result I was asked to be part of the Consultative Group for the new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to replace the VLP. The use of blogs has become part of the remit for the new VLE and I was asked to take part in piloting this tool.

As my research in this area has developed I gave a paper at NTU's Learning and Teaching Conference in April 2007 and a further paper at the Initial Teachers in Education Conference in July 2007 (evidenced in Appendix 5).

Alongside using the blog to support WBL I have also been piloting the use of blogs to develop self-reflection. I have been working with a colleague from

Sheffield Hallam University and have co-authored papers which we presented at the International Federation for Information Processing Conference on valuing individual and shared learning: the role of ICT, in Prague in June 2008. We have also had a paper published in *Learning Media and Technology*, a peer-reviewed journal. We have now analysed the language used by the students in blogging and have presented our findings at the Improving Student Learning Symposium (2009, evidenced in Appendix 5). These publications and conferences reflect my personal development as part of my journey as a developing researcher; this will be referred to in my final chapter. In addition I have presented the findings of using the blog to support teacher trainee students on WBL at the NTU Learning and Teaching Conference, April 2008. I was again invited to give a paper at the Collaborative Centre's 2008 HE conference 'Going Further and Higher' where I was able to share my research into using new technologies to engage students and support them using blogs through WBL. These examples of presenting my research at national and international conferences provide evidence towards my claim of legitimacy and validity for my research.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the developments that have taken place since the initial research and the development of the framework. Throughout each of these developments my ontological standards have continued to be implicit within my practice. I have updated the reader on the contextual changes both internally and externally, and I have discussed three additional cycles that link into the main research, indicating the direction in which the research is now moving. I have discussed opportunities I have had to share the framework and these continue to be on-going. The cycles of action research have been extended beyond the original three cycles to reflect two main cycles: the first comprising cycles one to three, and the second smaller cycle comprising cycles Four to Five. This is shown in diagrammatical format in figure 6.1. In the final chapter of this thesis, it is intended to summarise the main findings, and how they contribute uniquely to this field of research, and to suggest what implications there are for future research in this context. Throughout the research I have made references to action research providing a framework for this research. The following chapter discusses this methodology in detail and also identifies and discusses ethical issues.

Chapter Seven: Methodology and Ethical Issues

Introduction

In previous chapters I have made reference to action research to provide the methodological framework and structure within which I have carried out this research.

As I explained in chapter one I have not followed the traditional PhD structure because it is a thesis based on research in action. This choice of presentation has been influenced by my Director of Studies and by Davis (2007). Each chapter reporting a cycle has, where appropriate, contained its own review of literature, and each has been a mix of 'narrative, critical commentary, literature review, data analysis and interpretation' (Davies, 2007, p 188), including commentary on relevant internal and external drivers.

In this chapter I will describe why action research has been the most appropriate methodology to provide the structure and framework to this research. I will position myself within the field of action research and discuss how the research was methodologically rigorous and ethically valid. In all action research it is important to consider the role and nature of power, trust, bias and tensions; I set out to do so in this chapter. I will consider my role as 'insider researcher' which has been referred to in previous chapters. I will articulate the transformation of my ontological and epistemological values into my living standards of judgment and living practice and present my living educational theory. My values were within my tacit knowledge from the outset and introduced in chapter two. I shall also state my living standards of judgment by which this research can be judged. This research has become an 'ongoing process of generative transformational self-realisation' (McNiff and Whitehead in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 31) part of which I have already explained and part of which I continue to explain and articulate in this chapter and chapter eight.

The methods I have used to collect the data for each of the cycles have already been discussed within chapter three in the Reflections on Methodology section, and the Methods section of chapters four and five. I have articulated in chapter three why I chose to draw on a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, supported by others' research.

This research into WBL was significant within the School of Education at NTU, impacting on many students, staff, and external stakeholders; this aligns with action research methodology. The students' view of their studies has been enhanced through WBL, as has the opportunity to apply theory to practice. The changes that have taken place have been fundamental in developing the place of WBL within the undergraduate programmes which have formed the focus for this research. Vocational aspirations have been given an opportunity to manifest and to develop.

Some students have changed their aspirations as a direct result of the placement, others have returned from their WBL placement with a more mature attitude towards their studies and more motivated. This is supported by Harvey *et al* (1998, p 23) who observe that 'academic staff have witnessed increased maturity, motivation and confidence when students return to academic study'. James (2000) in his research into students' perceptions of their learning styles while on work experience argues with work reported by Fyfe (1996, in James, 2000) and Sadler-Smith (1996, in James, 2000) that students adopt a deeper approach to learning while on work experience. I would agree with James' argument, particularly with a short six-week experience; there was no significant evidence within this research, such as assignment results, that would support Fyfe and Sadler-Smith's view. However there was evidence that students became increasingly reflective; this was evidenced through their assignments, through their use of the PDP, and was reported informally by tutors. Generally student commitment to their chosen profession had increased, and their application to their third year studies improved.

In chapter one I made reference to Whitehead's (1989) critical questions: How do I understand what I am doing? How do I evaluate my work? How do I improve it? These have framed the research throughout. For example in chapters one, two and three I set out my ontological stance and how I identified the themes that needed developing. Within this chapter I develop this further. The evaluation of my actions has been ongoing and has been reported in chapters three, four and five. Improvements that I have made are clearly set out in chapters three, four and five where I reported each cycle. Further evaluation and improvements are reported in chapter six and will be further reported in chapter eight.

Positioning Myself within the Field of Action Research

The aims of this research are set out on page 26 and discussion of the developments of each cycle have been given in chapters three to six.

This section sets out to explain how action research provided the methodological framework. The approach I have used draws upon epistemological underpinnings (the study of what counts as truth or knowledge) and I discuss these at the end of this chapter.

It would be impossible within the space of a chapter to make a full review of the vast amount of literature on action research: I shall therefore summarise and draw on what I consider to have been the most influential. The methodology for this research is based on common elements of action research in the theories discussed by Lewin (1952); Cohen and Manion (1980 and 1994); Kolb (1984); Carr and Kemmis (1986); Kemmis and McTaggart (1988); McNiff and Whitehead (2002); and in the final reflexive stage Whitehead and McNiff (2006).

'Action research is a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p 5).

Action research theorists adopt a methodical, iterative approach to research, embracing a hierarchical cycle of problem identification, action planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. The insights gained from the initial cycle feed into planning of the second cycle, for which the action plan is modified and the research process repeated. This theory has been applied to HE by Zuber-Skerritt (1992) whereby the researcher is considered to be involved in the process with the ultimate aim to

'improve practice in a systematic way and, if warranted, to suggest and make changes to the environment, context or conditions in which that practice takes place, and which impede desirable improvement and effective future development' (1992, p 11).

The acknowledged founder of action research, Lewin, developed the basic principles and recognised the participatory nature of action research in relation to social change. Masters (1995) uses McKernan (1988) in her discussion in which she argues that action research as a method of inquiry has evolved and is rooted in scientific methodology of the late nineteenth century. In the late 1960s and early 1970s educational researchers began adopting action research

to improve classroom practice with teacher researchers becoming reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983). Stenhouse (1975) and Elliott (1993) became involved in action research and articulated the importance of a collaborative approach to research. This links closely with this research as it was from the outset collaborative, and intended as such.

Schon (1983), Stenhouse (1975) and Elliott (1993) first influenced me in my professional role as a teacher in secondary education when I was first introduced to action research, and then more recently when I worked towards my Master of Science Award in the 1990s. Adelman (1993) stated that one of the most difficult aspects of action research is identifying a teaching issue. Identifying an issue has never been problematic for me, what has been is identifying which issue should have priority and why, and then identifying the boundaries. One of the great benefits to me of action research is the way in which the focus can change as new themes arise; I find this an enjoyable challenge.

More recent proponents of action research have developed different ideas within the theory of action research. For example Elliott (1991) suggests that action research should be used to make change, and then see what happens. Jack Whitehead (1989) viewed action research as a methodology to improve personal practice asking the question; How do I focus on what I am doing? During the research stage I would argue that my research aligned more with the view of Elliott, in that changes were made, followed by evaluation, in a cyclical nature, as discussed below. However, in the reflective stage elements of Whitehead's approach became significant.

As action research improved my personal practice I incorporated self reflection in developing my living educational theory, an aspect of action research which Whitehead and McNiff have developed (2006) and continue to develop (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009). The aspect of developing a living educational theory involves researchers in examining their own actions to improve their practice. Noffke (in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 15) refers to this as 'a rich account of practice'. This certainly reflects the articulation of my account of practice. Carr and Kemmis (in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 80) develop this further and make the statement that 'it is mistaken to think that action research can be other than personal'. Carr and Kemmis (in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 80) view action research as 'transforming' participants 'through developing understandings

achieved through enquiry, investigation or research'. This also reflects my view of action research.

Action research produces both knowledge and new ways of 'understanding practice' (Noffke, in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 10). This reflects the research articulated in this thesis. My research not only produced knowledge to develop a changing understanding for those involved, but also helped me and others to understand the practice and had an impact on my personal growth; I discuss this further in the final chapter.

Action research methodology has provided me with a systematic, critical framework to underpin my research:

'through systematic, controlled action research, higher education teachers can become more professional . . . this in turn can lead to greater job satisfaction, better academic programmes, improvement of student learning and practitioner's insights and contributions to the advancement of knowledge in higher education' (Zuber-Skerritt, 1982, p 15).

I chose action research as it led me on a pathway to a framework. I followed the pathway because of the nature of the research and the need for collaborative, participatory working with different groups of people all involved in the WBL experience. The pathway led to forks in the road; one of these led in the general direction of action-research, but as I went along it, it continued to branch into other possibilities. By the end I found that I had followed a particular pathway which led to a framework. The reasons for taking the particular route that I followed was because of the nature of the research and because of the need for collaborative, participatory working with different groups of people all involved in the WBL experience. In the collaborative orientation it also resonates with Freire

'The starting point...must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people... [We] must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at an intellectual level, but at a level of action. (Freire, 1970, p 85).

The cyclical reflection of theory and practice to find practical solutions that would be owned by the staff within the School of Education, and improve the experiences of the stakeholders, therefore naturally led me to pursue my research based on action research.

Action research has enabled me to develop my knowledge systematically, work collaboratively, develop new processes and practices, and reflect on these at the end of each cycle, basing these reflections on collected data. Elliott (1991) discusses how action research can improve practice by developing the practitioner's ability to discriminate and make judgments in complex situations. Zuber-Skerritt's (1992) views on action research in HE helped to confirm my initial choice of this methodology, as did Coghlan and Brannick (2003). The work with teachers by Carr and Kemmis (1986) researching their own practice as insider researchers and McNiff's (2002) argument that action research should be educational and help people to make sense of their professional practice reinforced this decision. Lewin's (1946) description of action research reflecting small steps in spirals, has also influenced my research and is referred to in chapters three to six. Whitehead and McNiff's (2006) view of action research being framed by ontological values which transform into living standards of judgment and the importance they place on emerging living educational theories has contributed significantly to the reflective nature of my research.

As the research progressed methods of collecting the data have changed, as discussed in previous chapters: this also reflects the choice of action research as the methodology, and the recognition that as changes have been made, the themes arising from the research have moved and changed.

There are many rationales for action research, but I particularly felt empathy with that of Reason and Bradbury (2006). I will therefore use their summary to structure my discussion. They state that action research:

1. 'Responds to *practical and often pressing* themes in the lives of people in organisations and communities;
2. Engages with people in *collaborative* relationships, opening new 'communicative spaces' in which dialogue and development can flourish;
3. Draws on *many ways of knowing*, both in the evidence that is generated and diverse forms of presentation as we speak to wider audiences;
4. Is strongly *value oriented*, seeking to address themes of significance concerning the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the wider ecology in which we participate;
5. Is a living, emergent process which *cannot be pre-determined* but changes and develops as those engaged deepen their understanding of the themes to be addressed and develop their capacity as co-inquiries both individually and collectively.' (2006, p 233)

It is pertinent briefly to discuss each of the five points in the context of my research:

1. Chapter one discussed how the WBL experience had become a difficulty for the three degree programmes in the School of Education. The reasons for this were *practical* in that the co-ordinator had left without notice and there had been no time for anyone new to be trained. A new co-ordinator who could set up new systems and processes, and respond to the themes being raised by the students, was therefore a *pressing* requirement.
2. Action research provided me with a model of change involving collaborative working through shared educational values, based on the work of Lewin (1946) and Schon (1983). As I was new to HE I was reliant on my colleagues' experience and worked collaboratively with them in making the changes: 'Action research is conducted by a *collaborative* partnership of participants and researcher' (Somekh, 2006, p 7). While I had experience of co-ordinating WBL from my previous role it was not within the HE sector. I quickly realised that I needed to work collaboratively with stakeholders and draw on the experiences of others outside the University through scholarship. In particular Shilling (1989), Richardson and Blakeney (1998), Cameron-Jones and O'Hara (1999), and Blackwell *et al* (2001) influenced my thinking. The tutors associated with the undergraduate programmes which formed the focus for this research were also essential collaborators in the research and remained so throughout the development of the WBL experience, although there was some change within each stakeholder group.
3. In previous chapters I discussed the different methods I used to collect data, the focus on qualitative data throughout the research, but particularly in the first cycle, and the use of quantitative data in cycles two and three. This provided *many ways of knowing* and enabled me to triangulate the knowledge gained. As I developed and shared the framework I have been able to speak with confidence, drawing on the data to support the framework.

Winter (2002) states

'Action research is, above all, about deciding on courses of action Because the action research process itself involves deciding how best to intervene here and now, in this situation, with these various individuals, in the light of these

social and professional values, amidst the complex pressures of this organisational and political context'. (2002, p 39)

4. Lincoln and Guba (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) discuss some of the ways in which values can feed into the enquiry process of action research through: the choice of problem; the paradigm to guide the problem; the theoretical framework; data-gathering and data-analysis methods; context; the treatment of values already resident within the context; and the format(s) selected for presenting the findings. My research is *value-oriented*, based on my ontological values. These values have, through the process of this research, transformed into 'living and communicable standards of judgment' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2004, p 1). My values seek to develop the quality of the WBL experiences of undergraduate students in the School of Education at NTU and develop a framework which can be used by other Schools within the University and beyond. This focus on quality from the outset has now transformed into an emerging living educational theory which is discussed later in this chapter. The themes that are addressed in each cycle are, in my opinion, significant. Without the changes and developments made students would not all have had the opportunity to fully develop within their degree programme. This is a value intrinsic in the whole enquiry, that is, that the students had a right to a quality placement through the core value of social justice which links back to action research (Griffiths, 1998).
5. *It was impossible to pre-determine what the changes would be*, although some of the themes were evident at the first meeting I attended before starting at the University, discussed in chapter two. As the research has progressed through each cycle new themes have emerged. The stakeholders became engaged quickly: as their *understanding* of the process of WBL *deepened* they were able to identify further themes, and to address these from a knowledgeable stance.

Reason and Bradbury (2006, pp xxiv-xxv) show that the main characteristics of action research are:

- being participative and democratic;
- having emergent development form;

- involve practical themes;
- reflect knowledge in action;
- results in human flourishing.

All of these characteristics are evident in this research.

Reason and Bradbury (2006, p xxv) develop these strategies of action research practice recognising the importance of conversation. They identify three strategies:

- First person action research, where the researcher develops an inquiring approach to his or her own life within a framework of colleagues who provide 'support and challenge';
- Second person action research where we involve others in our inquiring approach often leading to the 'development of communities of inquiry and learning organisations';
- Third person research whereby a wider community is involved in the inquiry, but are not known to each other face-to-face.

The collaborative and individual nature of this research is also reflected in Somekh's (2002) article where she discusses the nature of collaborative second order and individual first order action research within a research project she was involved in.

Reason and Bradbury (2006) state that for action research to engage with each of these strategies it will be compelling and endure. This was not true of this research as third persons within a wider community were not involved. This is not to say that the research was flawed: it was simply not relevant to this situational research. However, the research *has* been a process of engaging with a wide range of other people over a significant period of time.

Reason and Bradbury's features of action research also resonate with those identified by Zuber-Skerritt albeit with different emphases. She states that action research is

'Critical collaborative enquiry by reflective practitioners who are accountable in making the results of their enquiry public, self-evaluative in their practice, and engaged in participative problem-solving and continuing professional development' (1996, p 147)

This again reflects the research in this enquiry which was collaborative in nature, provided opportunity for reflection and reflexive action. The research

also engaged the stakeholders through participative problem-solving in evaluating their current practice and how they wanted the new processes and structures to develop. Continuing professional development took place throughout, as did personal development which is reported in the final chapter. I have started to share my framework. I continue the discussion of how it is being shared in chapter eight. I have widened the enquiry further to research into the use of web logs to further enhance the support of students while undertaking their WBL experience.

Argyris (1993) discusses the process of organizational change as single-loop learning which he sees as present when goals, values, frameworks and, to a significant extent, strategies are taken for granted and any reflections are directed toward making existing strategies more effective. Double loop learning however takes place when the researcher is creative and reflexive, and challenges the basic assumptions behind existing ideas or policies. Argyris and Schon (1996, p 20) develop this further and show that single-loop learning is 'learning that changes strategies of actions or assumptions underlying strategies in ways that leave the values of a theory of action unchanged' while double-loop learning 'results in a change in the values of theory-in-use, as well as in its strategies and assumptions'. This research started as single-loop learning with a focus on improving strategies, but as the cycles have moved on it developed into double-loop learning with values transforming.

Insider-Researcher

Bird (in Brennan, 1992, p 141) identifies the 'outsider researcher' as possibly being more objective, while the 'insider researcher' can establish a greater rapport. Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p 22) link the researcher's role as insider or outsider to the researcher's ontological stance, that is 'If you see yourself as separate from other people, you may assume an outsider approach to research'. I would describe my role in this research as 'insider researcher'. My ontological stance enables me to view myself as a part of other's lives, in this research, that of the stakeholders; I was involved rather than an observer. There is some argument that the role of insider researcher can reduce the validity of the research. My involvement in WBL within my role could be seen to reduce the validity of my research and findings. However it could also be argued that complete objectivity is almost impossible within action research and therefore only scientific research is valid, such as experiments with controlled groups. This would not reflect the growth in action research or its potential to increase

validity as a result of the contextual understanding by the insider-researcher, the passion and understanding, and the added richness, honesty, and authenticity of the information that can be acquired from being known within the organisation. Indeed McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p 1) state that 'practitioner action research has much to offer in terms of informing good practice'.

Somekh (2006, p 61) discusses her role as insider researcher as 'daunting because of the additional workload involved, but it was also enormously exciting'. This certainly reflects my own experiences. Somekh describes her experience of being an insider researcher as one of the most powerful professional developments of her teaching career. I started to write a response to this as I felt her experience did not reflect mine, but as I have reflected further and considered my professional growth, I now find that I agree with her; this has been part of my journey. Ravitch and Wirth (2007, p 76) also describe their roles as insider-researchers as 'fuelled by a passion to facilitate systemic change'. Again, this is an accurate representation of my feelings at the start of the research, although it would be true to say that the passion did ebb and flow and could at times be mixed with feelings of exhaustion.

Ravitch and Wirth (2007, p 77) go on to discuss the dual role of the practitioner-researcher in negotiation between their roles of 'insider and outsider, facilitator and collaborator, participant and observer' with 'ongoing and complex choices that reflect as well as establish his or her positionality, identity/ies, and role(s) within the setting'. These are useful distinctions and ones that could easily be glossed over as part of the role of managing this dual aspect of the research, but which in fact gave richness to my role as action researcher and gave me the opportunity to hear concerns that I might not otherwise have been privy to. As I gained more experience of working within the School of Education the role of insider-researcher increased my understanding of the political situation and contextualised the research. Noffke (in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 8) makes the point that 'all forms of action research embody a political dimension'. I was able to develop a greater level of critical reflection including the ability to recognise participant subjectivity in interactions, as well as the ability to negotiate my role as insider action researcher. The whole process of the research has helped me in many ways, but most of all in the confidence I now have as a researcher in my own practice. Reflecting on Bird's (in Brennan, 1992) assertion that an outsider researcher is possibly more objective, I would

have to agree but only in some specific contexts. I developed a good rapport with my colleagues, and with members of the Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Group. Eikeland (2006, p 41) makes the point that 'practitioner/action research as insider researcher assumes that the insider position is legitimate'. My role as WBL co-ordinator did give the research legitimacy, but, although I would like to say I was at all times objective that would not – indeed could not – be true. However on reflection, my facilitative, as opposed to leading role in meetings, helped me to gain the objectivity I was perhaps lacking from the members of the focus groups. This is supported by Somekh

'The advantage of working in teams with insider-participants and outsiders collaborating together is that it is easier to adopt this broader perspective, not necessarily because outsiders bring specialist knowledge but because insiders are necessarily constrained in their analysis of the larger framework in which the site of study is located by being enmeshed in its institutional culture and assumptions' (2006, p 8).

Using action research therefore helped me to develop my role as a reflexive researcher and I was able to use the cycles as an insider researcher to become iterative and dynamic. Ravitch and Wirth (2007, p 88) stated that 'reflexivity engenders a deeper criticism, a deeper layer of reflection, which I did not understand until I began to analyse the data'. This resonates with my own experiences. I used the action research framework to identify themes and plan actions, but at the same time I developed awareness that my study was research based on action, that things shifted (McKernan, 1988) and sometimes became muddy. There are times when there has been definite 'muddiness' and I have had to work through issues with the help of the focus groups and my colleagues.

'The negotiations through which we involve participants, resolve ethical and political issues, establish and develop the focus of the work, and construct strategies for agreeing interpretations of events; all contribute to what we learn from an action research inquiry' (Winter, 2002, p 38).

More about my role as insider-researcher is interwoven in the discussion below, particularly that relating to the sub-section on Ethics.

The Action Research Framework

The action research framework based on Carr and Kemmis (1986) used for each cycle of the research is shown below:

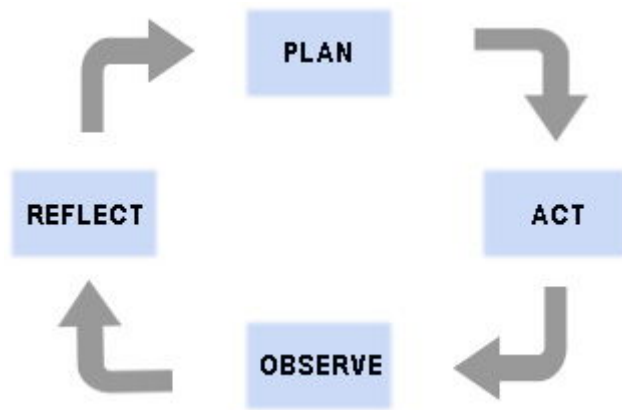


Figure 7.1: Action Research Cycle taken from Carr and Kemmis' (1986)

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) discuss the processes of action within the action research cycle as a time of risk. They recognise that planned decisions made based on evaluation come from ideas of action which, although critically informed, are essentially risky. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) also acknowledge the political and real-time constraints that researchers have to be aware of and that can arise unpredictably. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p 12) suggest that 'plans for action must always have a tentative and provisional quality: they must be flexible and open to change in the light of circumstances'. These comments certainly reflect my own experiences within this research. As actions were developed they were discussed with stakeholders and I learnt to be flexible in my discussions. Although many changes were made they were constrained by the social context in which I was working and had to reflect the needs of all the stakeholders. The action plan, referred to earlier and evidenced in Archive 2f, was written as a guide and agreed between myself and the PL. It was a working document and at times had to be changed to reflect circumstances.

Action research is based on choices and I have had to make many choices during the cycles of the research. Reason and Bradbury (2006) recognise there is no one right way of doing action research: there is such a diversity of action research that a wide range of choices result. Reason and Bradbury (2006, p 1) state that it is important to make the choices 'clear, transparent, articulate, to yourselves to your inquiry partners, and, when you start writing and presenting, to the wider world'. Gaventa and Cornwall (in Reason and Bradbury, 2006) identify the need for participatory research to take time to build knowledge, and test and refine it as part of the continuous improvement. I have articulated in

chapters three, four and five how the cycles provided time to build the knowledge, through testing and refining.

In each cycle of the research each of these stages can be clearly identified. I started by identifying the themes using a variety of methods. I then carefully considered the programme of action that needed to be taken, generally involving others from the stakeholders in a collaborative process. In some instances mini-cycles of action research within the over-arching whole process of the research have been reported. In selecting the programme of action to be taken at each stage, I frequently had to involve more than one stakeholder. One example is the development of the handbooks, which involved the focus groups, the tutors, and other agencies such as the University's Careers Service, to support the preparation of the stakeholders. It was important to empower those involved in the courses of action as one of my aims was to develop new processes and structures that would not only work within the School of Education, but could be shared with a wider audience.

Identifying the need for change through cycle one, putting the changes into place in cycles one and two, and evaluating the impact of these changes and making further adjustments based on research in cycle three, shows a spiral of continuous change and improvement based on action research. This reflects Carr and Kemmis' (1986) cycle of action research in figure 7.1. I found it important to follow this process in each cycle as there was so much to change, and it was important not to lose sight of each issue that arose. Figure 7.2 indicates how each cycle links together.

The observation and reflection time was important and sometimes difficult for me as I am not naturally reflective: using Honey and Mumford's learning styles questionnaire (1982), I identified myself as a theorist as I need to see how everything fits together and why. Trying to fit everything together has been important to me in this research and is illustrated in diagrammatic format in figure 7.3 below. However, it is important to state that while the model was broadly followed, the reflection stage merged into a reflection/evaluation stage. It is also important to say that while the cyclical nature of action research was followed, my research was carried out alongside my role as WBL co-ordinator, and it did not always take place in such a constrained way as the figures might suggest:

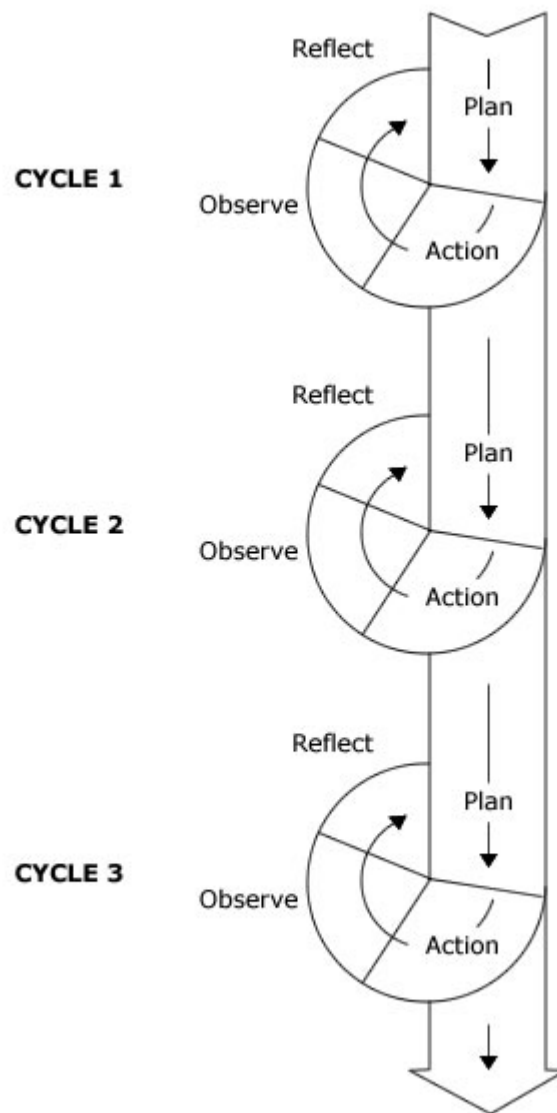


Figure 7.2: Action Research Cycles taken from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)

I have further developed this figure to reflect the framework I followed in figure 7.3 below:

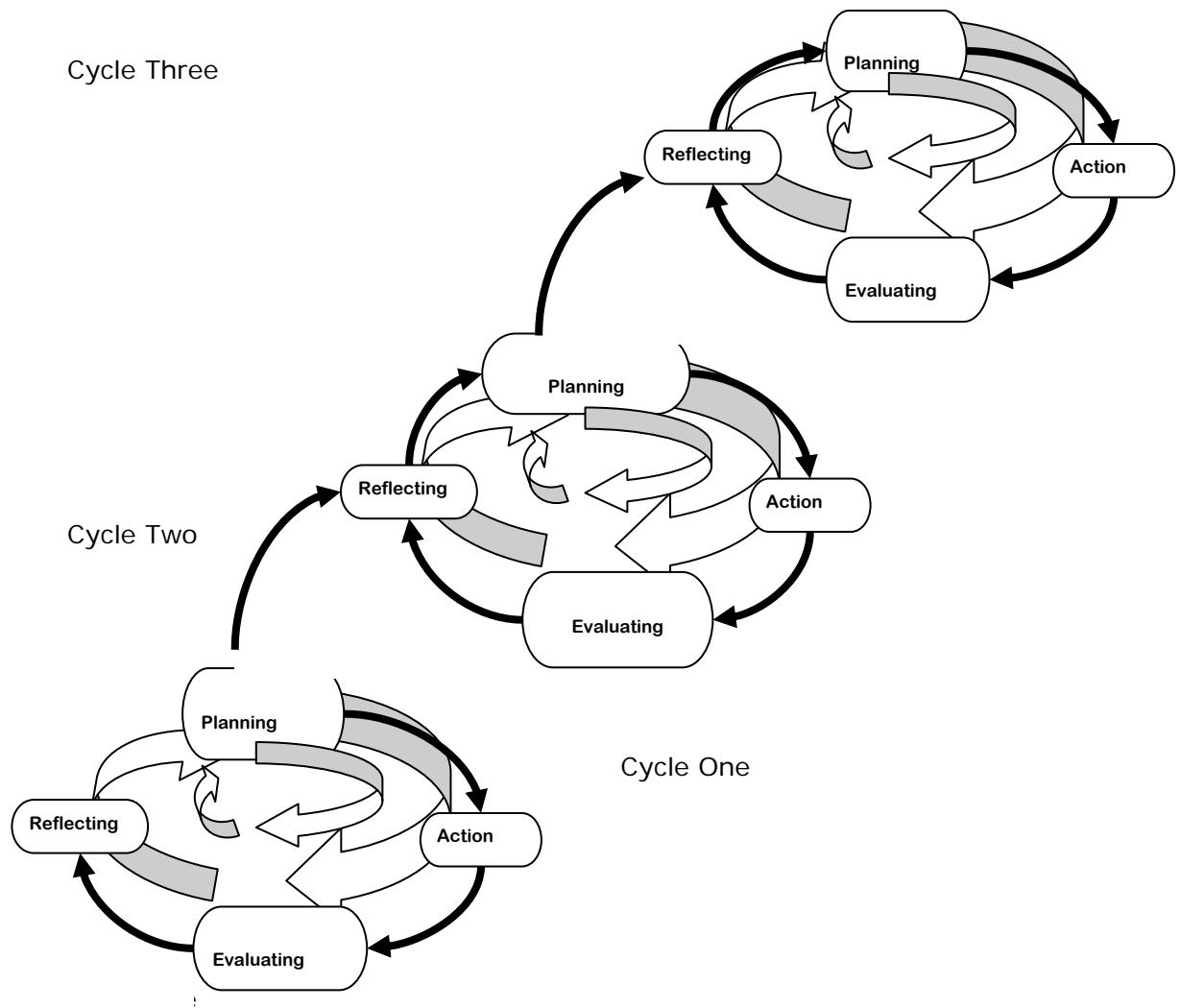


Figure 7.3: Depicting the Cycles of Main Research

Using an action research methodology has provided an opportunity to bring together action, evaluation/reflection, theory and practice, in collaboration with others to find practical solutions to the difficulties identified through the research (Reason and Bradbury, 2006).

Lincoln and Guba (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p 166) discuss four paradigms of research: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism. In widening my reading of action research and experiencing the process within the cyclical framework, I find it difficult to sit my research directly within any of Lincoln and Guba's paradigms which are focussed on large scale qualitative research. However, they then add to their list the paradigm of participatory research proposed by Heron and Reason (1997) and supported by Kemmis and McTaggart (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). My research fits most closely with the

characteristics of participatory research although such participatory research is seen by Kemmis and McTaggart as 'low-tech' research (Kemmis and McTaggart, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p 567).

Masters (1995) identifies three types of action research:

Philosophical Base	Technical Action Research	Mutual - Collaboration Action Research	Participatory Action Research
	Natural Sciences	Historical – hermeneutic	Critical Sciences
The nature of reality	Single, measurable, fragmental	Multiple, constructed, holistic	Social, economic. Exists with problems of equity and hegemony
Problem	Defined in advance	Defined in situation	Defined in the situation based on values clarification
Relationship between the Knower and Known	Separate	Interrelated, dialogic	Interrelated, embedded in society
Focus of collaboration theory	Technical validation, refinement, deduction	Mutual understanding, new theory, inductive	Mutual emancipation, validation, refinement, new theory, inductive, deductive
Type of knowledge produced	Predictive	Descriptive	Predictive, descriptive
Change duration	Short lived	Longer lasting, dependent on individuals	Social change, emancipation
The nature of	Events	Events are	Events are

understanding	explained in terms of real causes and simultaneous effects	understood through active mental work, interactions with external context, transactions between one's mental work and external context	understood in terms of social and economic hindrances to true equity
The role of value in research	Value free	Value bounded	Related to values of equity
Purpose of research	Discovery of laws underlying reality	Understand what occurs and the meaning people make of phenomena	Uncover and understand what constrains equity and supports hegemony to free oneself of false consciousness and change practice toward more equity

Figure 7.4: Masters' (1995) three types of action research

In using the criteria she has identified I would suggest that my research best fits into the mutual-collaborative action research type.

The paradigm of praxis within action research also reflects elements of my research. The concept of praxis implies 'informed and committed action' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p 190), 'but there is still scope for innovation' (Winter, 2002, p 40). To some extent I am following O'Brien's (1998, p6) illumination of this paradigm that 'knowledge is derived from practice, and practice informed by knowledge, in an ongoing process'. However, this paradigm rejects the idea that researchers are unbiased and argues that within action research the researcher is often the person to gain the most. This makes me hesitant, and I would ask: Was I biased? I keep coming back to this notion and reflecting on my own bias throughout the research. I will continue with my discussion of bias later in this chapter (page 270).

This again leads me back to the mutual-collaborative action research paradigm.

I started this section describing the action research cycle quoting Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p 12); action research plans are 'tentative and provisional' and should be 'flexible and open to change' depending on the circumstances. I then drew on Reason and Bradbury (2006, p 1) to show that with action

research there is no 'right way'. In chapter four, page 113, I refer to McKernan (1988) and his view that within action research the foci can change. In the previous section I mentioned the muddiness I sometimes experienced while undertaking this research. I would not want the reader to gain a sense that the muddiness was not important to this research and conclude this section by saying that my experience of action research is that there was confusion and muddiness. In order to explore this further, I will change the metaphor of uncertainty and confusion from muddiness - and wading through mud - to the experience of finding a way through a maze.

At the ECER conference (2009) Williamson presented a paper which she illustrated with an abstract picture of lines stopping, starting and crossing each other. This was helpful in showing her journey through action research. My journey would be similar. It is similar to a child's comic book maze where there are characters as a starting point and a final end with a reward such as a piece of cake; the challenge is for the child to follow the maze and work out which character reaches the end and eats the cake. For my experience the characters would signify the different starting points in the initial stages from which I had to make a choice of where I would start, sometimes reaching a dead end or, on reflection, realising I should have started with another 'character'. The maze represents the difficulties that I had to work through, finding my way without knowing the route, unable to get a view of the whole. To do so meant at times challenging my own and others' assumptions and practice, while deconstructing existing structures and practices and reconstructing them into something workable, reflecting the needs of the stakeholders and improving the overall experience. By deconstructing the existing systems and recognising the political arena in which this research took place I have reflected on the social intent of the research. Finding the best route was complex and at times contradictory. I have had to make sense of what I could see and work out. The walls of the maze were sometimes higher and sometimes lower. As we proceeded, I tried to construct a coherent narrative, all the while maintaining my own identity of researcher and co-ordinator in order to travel with my colleagues through the maze. It has been a difficult and challenging journey. Coming to understand and write about the process has been similar to building a viewing platform above the whole maze, so the journey we made can now be traced.

Collaboration

I have discussed previously in this chapter, and throughout chapters three, four and five, the collaborative and participative nature of my research. In chapter three I described how the Student Focus Group and Mentor Focus Groups were established, and how, although I did not set up a Tutor Focus Group, I worked closely with a variety of colleagues. In my discussion of collaboration, the concept of 'working with' is essential. The various participants contributed in different ways to the study, as I did. As Somekh (2002) states:

'true collaboration is only possible if there is an intention and belief that both partners will make an equal, but different contribution to the action research process, and each will change as a result of the collaboration'.
(2002, p 95)

This reflects my experiences of working collaboratively in this research. All stages were discussed with the various stakeholders, who contributed ideas about data gathering, to the initial analysis and decisions about the research focus of each cycle. I have reflected whether a Tutor Focus Group would have provided greater discussion, identified different themes, or enabled deeper critical reflection. As I reflect back I am not certain such a group would have added to the richness of the discussions that took place with colleagues and may have over-burdened them with additional meetings. Meetings can be too formal for nuanced and frank discussion. Indeed resentment is sometimes expressed if a meeting is seen as a 'talk shop'. Informal encounters, on the other hand, can be a fruitful space for deeper and wider discussion than is usual in meetings. Informal meetings happened easily with tutors. They would have been difficult to arrange with students or mentors.

As already mentioned on page 244, Stenhouse and Elliott view collaboration as essential to action research. Similarly, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) state that for the methodology to be action research it must be collaborative. On the other hand, Ravitch and Wirth (2007, p 79) state only that 'it is important to develop a climate of collaboration'. My research would have been difficult without collaboration. It was from the outset collaborative: collaboration was established with the two focus groups, and some of the tutor team, but there were some tensions with colleagues.

The tutors who worked collaboratively with me were the PL and CLs who knew that change was needed and were keen to support the changes made and many of the teaching team. Ravitch and Wirth (2007) make an interesting

observation in terms of developing a collaborative climate. They discuss how preconceived notions compromise the researchers' ability to be objective and could constrain new relationships and dynamics. My experience was quite different because at the start of the research I was new to NTU and to HE and was establishing new relationships. I had little awareness of the micro-politics of the School of Education. Some staff were initially negative: in my journal, during cycle two, I wrote a comment at how surprised I was at some of my colleagues' reactions to the new module structure proposed by the head of department (12 November 2001) and how disappointed I was that one member of staff was so reluctant to teach on the new Professional and Personal Development modules (18 March 2002). However, as I developed understandings of the micro-political agenda within the School, this helped me to develop the collaborative climate and avoid pitfalls from misunderstandings, while being able to empower, provoke discussion, challenge and be more questioning. As Ravitch and Wirth (2007, p 82) found 'the research, because it was collaborative, became a tool of empowerment in terms of the development of [stakeholders'] voices'.

The stakeholders became reflective in their own practice as part of the collaborative process and, to various extents, change agents. The developments that took place reflect practical themes that emerged and were developed to result in a quality WBL experience for the stakeholders, which was an aim of the research. While action research is collaborative Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) argue that

'a distinctive feature of action research is that those affected by planned changes have the primary responsibility for deciding on courses of critically informative action which seem likely to lead to improvement' (1988, p 91).

There has been much personal and professional development for everyone involved, including me (Ravitch and Wirth, 2007). The feed back from the stakeholders is that they found the experience to be empowering, challenging, great fun and an opportunity to really examine their own roles and experiences and share these with others. The collaborative nature of using action research in this case strengthened the findings. As we worked together we were able to establish processes and structures that became integrated into the political context of the School of Education.

Tensions

Action researchers naturally live with tensions as they cross boundaries, uncovering themes that have been buried and ignored, or simply not recognized as an issue (Reason and Bradbury, 2006). Research in the first cycle identified the need to develop the curriculum, particularly in year one of the degree programmes, to provide a much greater underpinning for the WBL experience for the students: there were no specific learning outcomes or taught modules for the Applied Studies element of the degree programmes. In chapter four I discussed the revalidation process. A requirement of the University at the time was that all programmes must be revalidated every four years. We therefore began, in cycle two, to have regular meetings to discuss curriculum changes. The purpose of the meetings was to move to modular programmes, develop a new suite of key professional skills modules, redefine the 'education' part of the programmes, and bring the programmes up-to-date to meet the needs of the students and their future employers.

Tensions were quickly observed between colleagues who had developed the programme from inception. These colleagues resisted change to what they perceived as an 'excellent' programme that only required 'tweaking' for the purposes of revalidation, to new members of staff, including to some extent the head of department who believed that more radical changes were needed. Student evaluations reflected the latter view. At programme meetings my observations were that they became acrimonious at times. I noted in my journal (11 December 2001) that this led to staff marginalising themselves by withdrawing from the process, and, so to a certain extent, 'disempowering' themselves (Boser, 2006, p 17). Gradually a consensus of agreement emerged with the remaining staff, new modules were agreed to, and the Revalidation Management Team (RMT) was set up to develop the modules and write the documentation.

The collaborative nature of this action research did lead to tensions both within and between the different stakeholders. This is experienced by other action researchers, such as Somekh (2002 and 2006). Some further examples of tensions are given below:

- Some members of the Mentor Focus Group found it difficult to view the WBL experience as an integral part of the programmes. They wanted to focus on their own needs, and those of their

employer/subject area. By setting clear agendas linked to identified themes from the research, and focussing on reflecting and evaluating changes, the tensions reduced.

- Some of the student representatives from the Student Focus Group were focussed on the needs of their student year group. Earlier meetings led to occasional differences between the third year students who felt they had had a poor experience (evidenced in Archive 1a), and with the second year students who did not want to listen to the third year representatives, but wanted to move ahead quickly to ensure they got a better experience.
- There were tensions with tutors over the new curriculum design, some of which have been discussed in chapter four. Some of these were exhibited in meetings between the whole team, and others through the refusal to teach on the new PPD modules.

At times managing the tensions led to a need to deconstruct participants' values in relation to WBL, then gradually reconstruct them, bridging the views of the different focus groups and ensuring, in the reconstruction, that new values shaped the processes and structures we were designing. This again reflects double-loop learning (Argyris and Schon, 1996). For example, as discussed in chapter four, the PL believed in the need to 'black list' the providers who, in the students' view, did not provide a quality placement. I have also discussed the poor attendance of some students and the need to add the hours to be worked to the Learning Contract so that all parties had a shared understanding that this was a full-time placement. This was against the values of some lecturers and students who felt attendance was the responsibility and a function of the professionalism of the students. All colleagues agreed that the addition of hours to the Learning Contract had been positive on both attendance and quality of assignments (Minutes of Tutor Meeting, 21 January 2004). 'The research, because it was collaborative, became a tool of empowerment in terms of the development of [stakeholders'] voices' (Ravitch and Wirth, 2007, p 82).

Methods

'Research is a purposeful investigation, which involves gathering data and generating evidence in relation to articulated standards of judgment, in order to test an emergent theory' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p 12). The methods used for generating and testing the framework are discussed in detail in chapters three, four and five, but it is relevant and appropriate to pull together

the threads of the methods discussed here to explain how a rigorous and systematic base of data was collected. Whitehead and McNiff (2004, p 1) set out three processes of methodology which I shall use to focus this section: firstly to exercise self-critique in relation to judgments we made; secondly to invite 'critique through our networked communications with peers', and thirdly to present the research more widely to strengthen interconnecting networks. The third step has been fully reported in chapter six with the sharing of the framework, but in reading this thesis I also invite you, the reader, to engage in further critical discussion.

In this section I set out to be self-critical in the judgments I made in collecting the data, and the choice of data to support the evidence. The data was analysed in relation to living standards of judgment. At that point these standards were largely implicit. From the analysis, consistent themes emerged and were identified explicitly. These then formed the focus of the action plan and the developments that have been reported in relation to each cycle.

Through my meetings and conversations with the CLs and PL who became 'critical friends', I was able to develop 'networked communications with peers' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2004, p 1). This networking was further developed through setting up the focus groups which also became critical friends in the process of the developing research. I shall draw on these as I set out the methods below.

Cycle one focussed on gathering as much data as possible about the WBL experience and starting to identify themes for development and provide evidence to support the proposed changes and themes. This data was drawn on to construct evidence for the purpose of starting to identify the areas that needed to be developed. In the Methods section of chapter four, I refer to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) to discuss qualitative research in terms of interpreting interconnected collections of data to gain an improved understanding of a situation. They describe qualitative research as involving 'the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials' (2000, p 2) including interviewing: listed below are examples of qualitative research I adopted as reported in chapter three:

- Analysis of the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2000 (evidenced in Archive 2g) at which both student representatives and members of the

tutor team started to identify the areas that were causing difficulty in the placement. These were:

- attendance;
- distance students had to travel;
- problems for PED and BLSE students in the spread of the placement over forty five days;
- the type of work students undertook;
- usefulness of the learning contract;
- preparation of mentors, in terms of a shared understanding of their role and support given to the students;
- the role of the review days (PED and BLSE);
- the overall experience, particularly in terms of integrating it into the programme and the consistency of quality;
- Use of the evaluation document already in existence (evidenced in Archive 1a). This initial questionnaire had been issued prior to my taking up the role of co-ordinator with the PED and BLSE students. This questionnaire was designed along qualitative lines, being more a series of questions that would be asked in an interview. However, that said, the analysis of this evaluation aligned with the themes identified in the analysis of the meetings and also with the theme of preparation for the assignment;
- Interviews held with BAT/BICT students who had not been involved with the evaluation document indicated above (evidenced in Archive 2i). These interviews were analysed for emerging themes and triangulated (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p 5) with the initial questionnaire discussed above;
- Meetings held with a Student Focus Group set up specifically for this action research (Archives 2a-c). The minutes of these meetings were recorded by the Programme Administrator. A themed analysis of the minutes was then undertaken;
- Interviews and conversations with colleagues involved in the placement process – conversations recorded in diary format (evidenced in Archive 2e). Again, a themed analysis was undertaken.

As each set of data was analysed the emerging themes were then triangulated with existing data to measure the extent of each theme and identify variables. Some themes which had been identified, such as communicating with mentors,

then became a subset under an overarching theme, in this example 'Communication'.

These methods were mainly qualitative, but follow those identified by McNiff and Whitehead (2002) as well as Denzin and Lincoln (2000). Bryman (1988) explores three ways in which researchers who draw on qualitative and quantitative methods have combined them:

- qualitative work as a facilitator of quantitative work;
- quantitative work as a facilitator of qualitative work;
- both approaches are given equal emphasis.

In this research neither method facilitated the other, therefore the third approach reflects my research and enabled triangulation of data. Reason and Bradbury (2006) also suggest action researchers may use multiple qualitative research methods, such as interviewing, focus groups, and social network data gathering. They recognise that in the course of inquiry action researchers might also include network analysis and surveys depending on how best to accomplish practical and other outcomes that are deemed necessary by those involved in the research.

Brennan (1992) supports mixing methodologies and identifies various factors for consideration, namely:

- the importance that is given to each approach;
- the timing of using each approach, that is are they used simultaneously or consecutively;
- the stage in the research when each method is introduced or ceases to be used.

By using qualitative data in cycle one I was able to start to identify the main themes that needed to be actioned. Meetings with stakeholders enabled me to start to determine causal relations between themes that could not be easily identified elsewhere. (The way in which these were used in the research process is discussed in detail in chapters three, four and five). It could be argued that although I moved towards collecting qualitative data in chapter four such data still incorporated an element of quantitative research because I was measuring how many students said what, even while I was still concerned with uncovering their perceptions of the WBL experience.

In the Methods section of chapter four, I discuss the need for more quantitative data. I continued to use the qualitative methods discussed above, but I also felt it was important to introduce quantitative methods. Denzin and Lincoln make a distinction with quantitative research: qualitative researchers 'stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researchers and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry' (2000, p 3). They see quantitative researchers as placing emphasis on the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. In my use of quantitative data I drew on my understanding of contextual social constructions of reality. I wanted to investigate variables that had emerged from that understanding.

By the end of cycle one I wanted to make greater use of quantitative methods of collecting data. The qualitative data was proving useful and enabled me to identify themes and causal relationships. I knew that changes being made were having a positive impact on WBL, but I found it difficult to quantify this other than by analysing quotations and examples. I was also concerned lest I was hearing only what I wanted to hear, and lest others were saying to me only what they thought I wanted to hear. I therefore moved to more quantitative methods of research. By making this choice in my research methods I also wanted to use the quantitative data to triangulate the research data already collected through qualitative methods. This choice of blending the two methods is supported by Borda (in Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p 33): 'we know that rigour in our work can be gained by combining quantitative measures, when needed, with relevant, well-made qualitative methods'. Also Winter (2002, p 37) states 'theory in action research is a form of improvisatory self-realisation, where theoretical resources are not predefined in advance, but are drawn in by the process of the enquiry'. This reflects Whitehead and McNiff's (2004) stage of self-critique relating to judgments made discussed earlier in this section.

By introducing the questionnaires in cycle two, I was also able to give other students the opportunity to have their voice heard. The involvement of a greater number of students through the completion of the questionnaires resulted in new themes being identified and provided firm evidence that confirmed my own intuitions. It also enabled new solutions to be tested and tried again. I have given some examples of new themes in earlier chapters, but examples are the suggestion by a student to include a copy of the assignment brief in the handbook (evidenced in Archive 1b), and the need to have job

descriptions to give students and employers more focus (evidenced from comments in Archive 1f).

The questionnaires that I developed (discussed in detail in chapter four, pages 116-120) comprised three questionnaires that focussed on specific areas of the WBL experience that we needed more quantitative data on:

- Overall placement evaluation;
- Quality of placement evaluation;
- Review and Evaluation Days.

Not all aspects identified in cycle one needed to be addressed in the questionnaires, although there was some repetition. An example is the need for handbooks for each of the stakeholder groups. I wanted to ascertain that the handbooks were helpful to the stakeholders, as they took considerable resources to produce. Through the questionnaires I was able to elicit this information and use the data to provide evidence to support the financial cost to the programme of producing these handbooks. I also wanted to give students who were not part of the Student Focus Group the opportunity to give their opinion on specific areas, such as pre-placement, during placement, and post-placement, as discussed in chapter four, page 117 (these can be seen in the final questionnaire design, Appendix 3, and the responses in Archives 1b-e). This strategy also ensured that bias was reduced and was able to validate the conclusions you had reached on the basis of evidence from the Focus Group.

In designing the questionnaires I used the model proposed by Black (1999). He advocates the following stages:

- State your questions and hypotheses, then identify possible variables;
- Determine the overall design structure;
- Identify the sample;
- Design instruments;
- Carry out plan, collect data;
- Analyse data, draw conclusions and evaluate process. (1999, pp 230-240).

Within the action research framework I also needed to ensure the questionnaires were valid. Black (1999) uses the notion of construct validity as

being an aim to maximise the consistency between concept, construct and operational definition. In order to try to ensure construct validity I asked two research experienced colleagues to evaluate the questionnaires for consistency within the desired constructs; they took on the role of critical friends. I then sought comments from the Mentor Focus Group and piloted the questionnaires with some of the students in the Student Focus Group who had already been on placement as discussed in chapter four.

I also wanted to achieve reliability, so that I would get the same construct validity in the following years with students on the same programmes. The pilot was informative, and I did need to reword some of the questions which had been ambiguous. I also took advice from my critical friends, discussed earlier on page 117, in layout and additional questions. These critical friends expressed concern that I was asking a number of open questions that could result in a large number of responses that would be difficult to classify. This, however, was my aim – to give a wider number of the students' voice in the research. This is supported by Black (1999, p 233) who discusses 'divergent' questions that fit to the open questions I designed and allowed and encouraged students to identify new themes. This was a good decision as the comments that were made in these sections of the questionnaire helped to clarify my own thoughts, enabled a deeper level of critical reflection, and raised new themes that had not been addressed. For example, the comment from two students that the briefings should be earlier in the process resulted in me reflecting on the time-scale with the stakeholders and ultimately bringing the student briefing forward.

I used the information I collected to analyse the situation and start to 'identify problems and hypothesize solutions based on theoretical insights that could be tested by planning and implementing action strategies' Somekh (2006, p 11), and to generate a theoretical framework and ultimately to identify a living educational theory. I then shared this theoretical framework more widely to develop and strengthen interconnecting networks (Whitehead and McNiff, 2004).

The data archive was stored carefully both electronically and in a hard copy storage system. The list of the data archive can be found on pages 13-14. Key evidence has been included in the Appendices to help the reader in following the text. The systematic storage of the data became important and enabled me to access it easily to interpret, analyse and identify key themes. Once I had

identified the key themes, shown in figure 3.2, I was able to categorise the data using each of the headings, with an additional heading of 'miscellaneous'. The miscellaneous data comprised aspects which were not included in the themes and were not specifically relevant to my research claim.

Bias

To reduce my own bias I worked closely in the design of the questionnaires with the Student Focus Group and also shared them with the Mentor Focus Group. However, as an insider-researcher it is difficult to work within a climate that is bias free. It can become difficult to know if those you are seeking information from are going to say what you want to hear, are deceptive, or set out to flatter you as the researcher, or whether you are going to interpret what they say to fit your viewpoint. There are times when I comment in my journal on having to keep quiet at meetings so as not to lead the conversation and only discuss themes that I wanted to discuss, rather than themes that needed to emerge from the stakeholders.

Reflecting back I did have bias in that I wanted to design a useful framework that could be shared with others, so I would want to believe it was working. I was also biased by my previous experience of co-ordinating WBL and the ontological and epistemological values that I had brought with me from the secondary school system which sometimes clashed with HE values, such as autonomous learning by HE students. These values of justice, caring and respect are set out earlier in this thesis.

Did I gain the most? Action research is also about working as a team, and as the research developed, moving through the different cycles, all stakeholders were empowered to make changes and began to develop both professionally and personally, but I cannot quantify what they personally gained as the research does not provide data relating to this. The data collected throughout the research provides evidence to support the gains the students made.

In discussing bias I draw on Whitehead and McNiff (2006) who draw on Habermas (1979) and state that I have made my claim to new knowledge in good faith, and believe that the account of my research within this thesis is a true and honest account supported by data gathered over three cycles and written with a commitment to honesty.

Ethics

While discussing my role as action researcher it is important to discuss the ethical stance that I took. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) discuss schools as organisations with power structures where knowledge is socially constructed: this reflects HE and the School of Education at NTU where this research was carried out. Griffiths (1998, p 67) distinguishes educational research as being 'research which has an effect on education' and as such 'cannot escape ethical and political themes'. Earlier in this chapter I explained why I see myself as an insider-researcher. Zeni (in Noffke and Somekh, 2009) explains that the insider role does not necessarily create an ethical threat. Zeni (in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 257) states that 'the bonds of caring, responsibility, and social commitment that engage action researchers with other stakeholders may be the most appropriate basis of ethical decision-making'. This is reflective of my position within this research.

My role was an insider-researcher, and a senior lecturer with responsibility for the co-ordination of WBL in the School of Education. Somekh also recognises the role of ethics for the insider researcher, 'Ethical practices are of paramount importance, given the blurring of insider and outsider roles and the unusually open access this gives the researchers to personal and micro-political data' (2006, p 7).

The relationships I established did not exist prior to the start of the research as I was new to the post; relationships were therefore established as the research developed. I draw on Eikeland's view of ethics as resonating with that of my ontological and epistemological value of caring

'the principles and aims that should guide us in our relations to others, if any, [the stakeholders] and with how to reason practically about what to do. What should we pursue, protect, and care for above all, how and why?' 2006, p 38).

My ethical responsibility towards the stakeholders was essential while also maintaining a professional role which met the terms of my contract for the University. I was not being paid specifically for the research which has, I believe, helped in maintaining ethical responsibility to the stakeholders.

As researcher it can become difficult not to constrain the responses and involvement of those being interviewed; I do not believe this happened, and certainly the triangulation of research gathered from the stakeholders supports

this. Bryman (1988) identifies five ethical stances: absolutist, consequentialist, feminist, relativist and deceptive. My role within this research most closely aligns with is that of consequentialist; based on Bryman's principles of mutual respect, non-coercion, non-manipulation, and not based on deception. These are my values and can be seen in my willingness to listen and also in that I would be comfortable with any of the participants and stakeholders reading this thesis. I am not worried about deception and/or manipulation being detected – because none exists. My research also reflects the feminist ethic identified in Collins (1990) that believes researchers should reflect ethics that stress personal accountability, caring, empathy, the opportunity for individuals to express their beliefs, and the sharing of emotion, again linking to my ontological and epistemological values.

Education research within NTU is framed by the British Educational Research Association guidelines, and part of the PhD registration process is to confirm that these guidelines are being applied. I followed the guidelines, but would add additional points relating to ethics below.

At the first meeting of each group I explained the research and how the data would be used. The research was therefore overt, rather than covert. I agreed with all those taking part in the research that I would not identify individuals without their permission, and would not use quotations that would identify individuals. Hitchcock and Hughes point out that 'insider' researchers can find it more difficult to carry out ethical research than 'outsider' researchers who are able to 'maintain greater distance from the inquiry and at the end of the research will leave the scene' (1995, p 45). I also asked for verbal consent from colleagues to allow me to use data from meetings, or questionnaires within my research. On reflection I found myself in many different situations with different stakeholders and should perhaps have kept reminding them of my research, but this would have become staged and I would question how relevant this was once the initial statement had been made. This reflects observations by Punch in Denzin and Lincoln (1994) who found that while informed consent is necessary, telling everyone in every meeting may be counter productive to the aims of the research. Although some of my observations are reported, I have taken care to ensure it would not be possible to identify who these related to. This supports the term 'collaborative integrity' which Ravitch and Wirth (2007, p 83) refer to in their research.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) argue that there can be a clash of role with participant observers moving between the roles of 'insider' and 'outsider' between observing and collecting data, and then analysing the data. This does not reflect my experience. This may be due to the co-ordination of WBL being part of my role and therefore developing it became part of my day to day job, rather than thinking 'today I'm going to be a researcher'. The conversations I had, questions I asked, and meetings I attended, were part of the development of the WBL experience, and while not covert, I did not arrive at meetings and announce I was there as a researcher: I was there as the Applied Studies co-ordinator who was collecting data to develop this aspect of the students' experience.

I have discussed the process that I used to collect my data: there were no times when I formally recorded observations. All of my observations were informal and recorded in my journal, or more formally as minutes by administrative staff, so that while observing I was at all times a participant in the discussions. It would have been easy to listen to informal conversations and record these, but I made a point of not doing so. I have been critical of my own practices and have been aware of disconfirming data, such as that from students who indicated their experience was not satisfactory, and have ensured that I followed this up, rather than dismissing it. In chapter four, page 115 I discussed why I made the decision to use questionnaires, and I explained how these were administered and analysed. McNamee (2002, pp 3-4) raises the issue of researchers using the 'data collection phase to explore themes that are only tangentially related to the intended research'. I did not consciously do this. It would have been easy to take different paths, but I had to remain focussed on the themes identified and the action plan and agreed with the PL (evidenced in Archive 2f).

I do not believe I abused any of the data: while some comments on the students' questionnaires, and informal comments from staff about incidents on visits, could have taken me away from my focus, I worked hard to not allow this to happen. The research did not involve me in uncovering any personal data that could have been misused.

Ravitch and Wirth (2007, p 84) introduce the concept of not moving too quickly ahead with research, or taking a more solo role based on an 'ethic of listening carefully to the [stakeholders'] ideas and integrating them into the various

stages of design and implementation'. I have been aware of this ethic and believe I have treated all 'voices' in the research ethically.

Christians in Denzin and Lincoln (2000, pp 138-140) discusses the code of ethics under four headings:

- *Informed consent* – as stated above I informed the stakeholders about my research, and asked for their consent which given by all concerned. However, I do have some concerns because only verbal consent was given, and this was done in a general way, rather than by each individual. There is also the concern that, in giving examples of some of the tensions that existed during the research, it may be possible to identify individuals. However, not to report some of the examples may lose some of the 'story' and some of the understanding of the reader of the context of the research. I have, however, removed two examples where staff could more easily have been identified. Boser (2006, p 12) in her discussion on ethics and power in community research makes the statement that 'participants cannot give informed consent to research activities in advance, because the full scope of the process of the research is not determined in advance by one individual'. This reflects this research and the comments I have made about muddiness, and developing an action plan that would focus the research, but was, to some extent, flexible.

Homan questions the principle of informed consent within universities as 'there may be an expectation that students will participate in research by tutors that compromises the right to decline' (in McNamee and Bridges, 2002, p 24). When I formed the Student Focus Group, I informed them about the research: they were pleased some action was being taken at programme level to improve the quality of their WBL they were keen to take part. However, when the questionnaires for students were handed out for completion this was done by CLs and, in retrospect, I would question whether I should have included a section setting out that this was part of my PhD and they had the right not to complete it. I question this in my reflections because without data derived from the questionnaires I may not have identified the themes that these revealed. If I depended upon my position to get the questionnaires completed by the students, I did so

without believing I was compromising ethical guidelines and do believe that, in maintaining student anonymity with the general questionnaire and the Review and Evaluation Days questionnaire, I have not compromised my ethics or collected and misused any personal data.

I have at all times endeavoured to demonstrate respect for all persons in this research (Pring in McNamee and Bridges, 2002; Norton in Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007). Gorman (in Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007) questions whether subjects can withdraw from the research at any time. I find this difficult to respond to in some respects: a) I did not state this to the stakeholders verbally, but b) because this research took place in cycles with different students on WBL each year with different placement providers. Some members of the focus groups naturally changed, as did the students; there were also some changes in staffing.

Griffiths (1998, p 41) discusses the risk of 'exploitation and betrayal', and links this to giving 'voice' to subjects and the fine line that researchers tread between the two. Following this argument I would question whether I am being over analytical about my observations. I have not sought permission individually from members of staff to report on my observations, but I have also attempted to cover identities where specific examples are given. I feel some unease in reflecting whether I reminded colleagues and members of focus groups sufficiently that I was carrying out research for my PhD because the research has taken several years. This unease has been raised through reading Griffiths (1998, p 135) who reports ethnographic research by Bhatti (1995) where the teachers in the research 'over the period of some years' forgot she was the researcher: this may have happened here.

- *Deception* – I did not intend to deceive anyone in this research, and trust that the values and ethics that I have maintained throughout reflect this.
- *Privacy and confidentiality* – I have addressed this issue above and would add that the way in which I have reported the research has not involved the use of pseudonyms (Christians in Denzin and

Lincoln, 2000) as I have not included any direct quotations attached to any named persons – all quotations from the data collected are anonymous.

- *Accuracy* – the data collected is accurate. I have not used any fraudulent materials, or intentional omissions that would affect the outcome of the research (Christians in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). However, I find this a slightly more difficult issue and have revisited it several times. Griffiths (1998) discusses some themes that educational researchers are faced with and argues the point, which I agree with, that all researchers are human and as such will react differently to different sets of events, as will those who take part in the research. She uses various examples to compare educational researchers with scientific researchers who are able to repeat their research under similar situations. Had I followed a different methodology, involved different people with different interests and backgrounds in the focus groups, developed my research tools differently, and used control groups, would it have produced different results? Possibly, because we are all human and we do all react differently. In terms of the observations that I made were these truly accurate, indeed were the minutes of meetings? - how many times do we receive minutes and think 'that is not exactly what happened'? We can all interpret observations differently. The questionnaires have been accurately analysed, but have I, in choosing the focus for the questionnaires, given opportunity for the students to report freely and accurately their experiences? This was the purpose of the open questions; to provide opportunity for the students to be more reflective and open in their answers.

One aspect of the ethics underpinning research that I felt was relevant to this research, touched on by Hopkins (2002), is the need to feed information back to students, and in this case, colleagues and mentors. These stakeholders were part of this research within the collaborative nature of action research. Working in HE we are often asked how we feed back changes we have made following their evaluations to students, and what importance we place on this process. The cyclical nature of action research provided opportunities to feed back and to discuss the research findings as the research progressed. We have frequently started focus group meetings with reflecting on the changes made and the impact, if any, this has had to

the development of WBL for students. I have often referred to the changes made at briefings to mentors, tutors, and students, by saying we have introduced [this] because It has also provided opportunity for dialogue on further improvements. For example at one mentor's briefing the issue of how we sent out the Mentor's Handbook was raised and I was able to respond by drawing on the process of the research, by describing the methods we had tried in the previous year to send these out, and why we had therefore used the process in this year – I was then able to ask for their suggestions on how we could improve this distribution process and try a new alternative the following year. Norton (in Campbell and Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p 163) makes the point that it is important for researchers to 'think ethically' rather than follow a set of guidelines. My view is that both are important.

I conclude this discussion of ethics within this research with a quotation from Zuber-Skerritt:

'The action researcher needs to follow a vigorous intellectual discipline ensuring that the conclusions of the work are broadly based, balanced and comprehensively grounded in the perceptions of a variety of others'. (1996, p 17)

By following ethical guidelines I have achieved this and the ethical stance I have taken is evidenced throughout this document.

Power

Arguably, what I have included and what I have decided not to include is in itself 'an exercise of power' (Garrick and Rhodes, 2000, p 274). There is extensive literature on power and power relations within action research. The nature of participatory action research, based on collaboration, could 'assume equal voice among all participants, neglecting the potential for a power imbalance among research participants' (Boser, 2006, p 10). Noffke makes the point that in action research the visions of change by action researchers work 'through and often against existing lines of power' (in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 8).

The literature that aligned most with this research was that by Somekh (2002) and Ravitch and Wirth (2007). Somekh, who developed her own personal understanding of power from the work of Lukes (1974), discusses a research project in which she was involved with school teachers. She discusses the

complex role of power and the 'perceived' power that HE researchers may have had over the teachers based on the assumption that the University partner had a greater depth of knowledge, research expertise, higher salary and national or international reputation. She then puts this into the context of the research, the higher pay the school teachers actually had, the lower 'power' lecturers in Faculties of Education in HE had compared to other faculties in universities in the UK, and the traditional view that lecturers in education are seen as teacher trainers rather than researchers. Power continues to be an important aspect to her research and in 2006 Somekh (2006, p 7) states 'There always needs to be a recognition of how power is constituted and accessed with the partnership (of research) and an aspiration to establish equality of esteem'.

Ravitch and Wirth (2007) in their school based research, found resistance from teachers to be a major hurdle both in the perception of their role as expert and in their role as developing researcher. Their experience was that there had to be adjustment and an opportunity to create trust. As roles changed, negotiations with collaborators took place and power became more balanced, they found the collaborative element of the research developed. This was not my experience. I was not an expert researcher, in working in HE, or in WBL for undergraduates, nor seen as one (then). However, I had other aspects of knowledge and experience to offer and believe that I was seen as a change agent rather than an expert within HE at the start of the research. I was aware of the power balance and this is discussed further below.

The table below takes Somekh's areas of power (2002) which I have linked to the stakeholders in this section:

Stakeholders	Knowledge related to WBL	Research Expertise	Salary	Reputation
Students	1 st yrs – little knowledge, but eager to 'get it right' 2 nd yrs – increased knowledge 3 rd years – experience of WBL and able to share 'good' and 'weak' aspects of the provision within their experience	Limited, willing to learn	None	All student representatives for their programme, so some reputation with the student group
Mentors	Varied, keen and enthusiastic	Little	Low-High (some on higher salaries than the lecturers)	Good, some from large industries with good local reputation such as Rolls Royce and John Lewis
Tutors	Good	Little to strong	Middle – more than the students, but less than some of the mentors	Good
Researcher (Myself)	Good	Little initially, but grew throughout the research	Middle, less than some mentors, less than some colleagues, but more than students	Little known at start, but grew throughout the research

Figure 7.5: Power

As can be seen from the table in figure 7.5, all participants had varying amounts of power. These changed over time. Looking at Somekh's main terms of power, students would appear to be the least powerful, but this does not apply to my research. Boys *et al* (1988, p 206) argue this point 'the student has little

influence except through complaint or deciding against entry'. However this comment, made in the era before new universities and the increase in vocational education in HE would not stand up at NTU in 2009 as the student is respected as the end-consumer. Indeed NTU's Strategic Plan sets out to create a 'gold standard' for the students, and as such, their complaints are listened to and acted on. In addition through this research they were also consulted and assured that their evaluations would be heeded. McNiff and Naidoo (2007, p 46) reported that 'pedagogical relationships in education became power-constituted hierarchical relationships in which the teacher's knowledge was superior to the student's'. However, in this research while the tutors' knowledge in some aspects may have been superior to the students' my ontological values of justice and caring, together with my value of respecting the students and their individual experiences and aspirations were demonstrated through encouraging student input via the Student Focus Group, and the completion of the questionnaires. My values are also evidenced in the equal worth I gave to student comments and contributions to the research.

I found myself deferring to the students a great deal, particularly during the first cycle when their experiences were so important in the reflection of what needed to be changed. As the research progressed students in the Student Focus Group became empowered and participative. By introducing the questionnaires in cycle two students beyond the Student Focus Group impacted on the research. The wider student audience may not have been aware of their power to change the placement, but each year, when I led the student briefings, I would talk to the full cohort about the changes made from the evaluations the previous year, and identify how important their contribution was to the on-going developments of the WBL element of their programme.

Students had a clear voice throughout the research cycles which in turn increased their power. Initially this was loaded with their concerns at the poor WBL experience the third years had received. There were various opportunities for them to express their concerns as outlined earlier. At Programme Committee meetings, which were minuted and passed through the University system student power is also evident. As the research cycles moved on students became increasingly interested in my reports at Programme Committee on the proposed changes and reflections on development. These meetings provided a valuable opportunity for students to voice their concerns. As the research progressed and the students' experiences improved they became more assured

and assertive, with all the qualities of a voice that is used to being listened to. Ultimately they expressed praise for the developments that were taking place relating to their WBL experience. The level of power continued as the evaluations were analysed and the information used to elicit new themes that needed development.

Students were possibly least powerful over the changes to the curriculum, which were discussed in detail in chapter four. Students were consulted and had an opportunity to have input. For these changes it was tutors that were the most influential in terms of power because of the greater experience in developing the curriculum. The difference in perceived levels of power in this context is based on knowledge. This is supported by Gaventa and Cornwall (in Reason and Bradbury, 2006, p 72) who state there is an 'assumption that better knowledge will have greater influence', linked with power. With some themes that arose I was able to use the power of the students to move forward areas where tutors had expressed concern, thereby perceiving and using power as a positive attribute. For example, initially setting up the discussion area of the VLP discussed in chapter four was time consuming and therefore expensive for the VLP team. They were not convinced the cost was going to be offset by the benefits and were not initially willing to help. However, I was able to use the voice of the students to push this innovation forward, and interestingly, the development was then held up as an example of good practice by the VLP team and developed further to form part of the University wide VLP for all staff and students. The students' power over the curriculum has developed retrospectively as their knowledge has developed: they have experienced the new curriculum and have the opportunity to feed back through the module evaluation system in place across the University.

Power was gained by the different groups working collaboratively, in that the students gained power by being part of the Student Focus Group, and would have had much less power working on their own, individually. This also applies to the Mentor Focus Group. Each group was empowered while the research was ongoing and were able to deconstruct then reconstruct whole areas of the WBL experience relevant to their own concerns and knowledge. This empowerment grew as the stakeholders' construction of knowledge grew.

I found that tutors had more individual power over the research than other stakeholders. I had quick and easy access to my colleagues so never saw the necessity of setting up a Tutor Focus Group, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

By working collaboratively with the different groups I was able to listen for 'truth' by triangulating what was being said and thereby trying to ensure that the themes that arose were the themes that needed to be addressed in the research.

On reflection, the RMT discussed in chapter four, page 132, probably had significant power as a group of tutors as we were making decisions that would impact across the degree programmes. I would assert that we were acting on the overall decisions made by the full tutor team with whom we consulted throughout the revalidation process.

The PL also had power as he had the full oversight of the degree programmes. However, in my view he used this power wisely and put his trust in the research to bring about the changes that were needed. He used his power to support the research, for example in obtaining funding for breakfast briefings for the mentors and paid for part-time lecturers to attend the tutor briefings. The way he used his power to support was helpful to the research.

My own power changed throughout the research. I was reliant on all stakeholders for information, discussion, planning, reflections, actions, and support. This reflects Somekh's (2006, p 87) experiences 'by undertaking this kind of participatory action research, I had much more potential power to effect change than I had anticipated'. In being reflexive in my research I also sought to be aware of my own potential influence in the meetings. Drawing on Sanguinetti's (in Garrick and Rhodes, 2000, p 233) discussion of power and her experience of action research she stated that in her role as facilitator 'I had more power than the others to make judgments about what was significant and to shape the process and outcomes'. This is true of my role and I was aware of this as discussed above. I also had power as the arbiter of what was true, once I had listened carefully. I took on board what people said, and I changed my own views, but in the end I had the responsibility to make the decisions. So I decided, in the end, which judgments were the right ones.

There were others who influenced change, particularly through the micro-politics within the School. For example, the head of department was influential in the curriculum changes in cycle two. She had a clear vision that for us to 'survive' in the increasingly competitive market, we needed to move to a modular delivery of programmes, and ultimately to a joint honours degree programme where students could pick and mix their choices of modules across several

subjects. The support of the head of department and the PL for programme development was important for the research. This is reflected in Elliott's (1991) early work, reported in Somekh (2006), who found in his research that teachers needed the support of senior management.

Internal and external drivers also impacted on the research. For example HEFCE influenced the introduction of the PDP which is discussed in chapter two, page 45. Without the funding and directive that all undergraduate students had to use the PDP by 2006, this may not have happened. The new VC and Senior Management Team had various influences using their power in driving forward the need for a quality WBL for all students, and the need to ascend the league tables in the area of 'employability'. CASQ used their power to implement a new policy informing and guiding the WBL for all students within the institution and provide seminars to develop this aspect of the University's provision.

The power therefore changed over time and has ebbed and flowed depending on the issue that was being addressed and reflected/evaluated at the time. I therefore believe all stakeholders had power; they were able to influence the structure and processes that were put into place.

Trust

I was able to build up trust with the stakeholders. I worked closely with each of the groups: mainly with mentors and students through their respective focus groups, with the tutors as individuals, and attendance at meetings to which I was regularly invited (or able to request attendance at when I needed to work collaboratively with them), Programme Committees, and team meetings for each of the degree programmes. On reflection I note that trust developed at different times with the groups. With the tutors, I felt I had to 'prove' myself. I was unknown with no research reputation. Colleagues were aware of my previous experience with WBL in secondary education, but I felt initially that some were unsure how useful this would be in HE. As I made changes, and students' complaints about their WBL experience started to cease, my colleagues developed increasing trust in me.

The process of building up trust was similar with the students. To some of them I was an ex-school teacher and I had to develop my own reputation at the University. My first meeting with the Student Focus Group was rather tense, possibly due to my own lack of confidence in my new role. However, I was able to talk this through with the programme administrator who had attended the

meeting, and reassure myself about my existing knowledge and experience; the following meetings were much improved.

I trusted myself and my own ontological and epistemological values. O'Hanlon (2002) discusses changes a researcher goes through from false consciousness through activities which recognise and expose constraints to freedom. This is a process I have been through and have been conscious of carrying responsibility to make the right decisions, some of which have been political, and transforming what existed. O'Hanlon (2002) argues that action research cannot predict success but provides a form of reasoning from which researchers can make informed choices and judgments. She calls on the researcher to develop *phronesis*, practical wisdom based on ethical principles and suggests that we should question the moral aspect of research. Similarly Carr and Kemmis (1986) also discuss changes informed on a moral or ethical level. Elliott (1991) draws on a range of studies to show the development of values through action research. Garrick and Rhodes (2000, p 276) discuss the transformation that can take place through research, including the 'complex transformations of value'. I did not articulate the values of the stakeholders at the outset of this research, but was aware of a transformation of values as it progressed. For example some colleagues who held liberalist views and appeared to place little value on the WBL experience communicated that they felt it got in the way of the students' learning. However, they became more supportive as they were able to see the developments. Gradually they engaged with the discourse, experience the development of students' knowledge through their WBL and draw on this in their third year modules.

Standards of Judgment

In chapter one I state that my ontological values have emerged and been transformed into critical living standards of judgment against which I have been able to test the validity of my claims. I state in chapter one that my values are justice, caring and respect. These are my embodied 'foundation values that give direction to [my] other values' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p 86). These values have transformed into my educational pedagogy and have informed the practices that have been developed, which in turn continue to inform my ontological, pedagogical, epistemological and methodological values.

In chapter two I set out my aims for my research. I now set these out as the living critical standards of judgment by which my research can be judged:

- 1. Explore the difficulties students experience relating to a short WBL, and the difficulties of providers in ensuring a quality WBL for these students.** In chapter two I set out my background and my ontological values that were developing at the outset of the research. In chapter three I provide evidence, supported by data, that I explored the difficulties that students and providers were having at that time relating to WBL. I also discuss my emerging living educational theory. In chapters four and five I articulate how I have continued to explore the difficulties through meetings with the focus groups and the analysis of questionnaires which supported the evidence I was presenting.
- 2. To provide a focus on quality experience, for students undertaking a short WBL as part of their degree programme.** Throughout this thesis I have referred to my emerging living educational theory which relates directly to this standard of judgement. In the following section I draw these discussions together to articulate my living educational theory which directly relates to this standard of judgement.
- 3. To focus on three undergraduate programmes within the School of Education at NTU to examine the WBL process.** In chapter two I introduce the reader to the research which focuses on three degree programmes. At the start of chapter three I further describe these programmes. In chapters three to five I articulate the developments and the final framework which I articulate as significant to this research.
- 4. Investigate the preparation of the main stakeholders in ensuring a quality short WBL experience.** In chapter one I define 'short WBL' and also articulate my emerging living educational theory relating to quality WBL. In chapter three, figure 3.1, I identify the main stakeholders. Throughout chapters three to five I articulate how I carried out this investigation using a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. I set out how I have analysed data collected to support the evidence that was arising from my investigation.
- 5. Explore curriculum changes to provide a supportive framework for students undergoing a period of WBL experience.** In chapter three I explore through the analysis of data and evidence generated the need for changes to the curriculum. In chapter four I articulate changes to the curriculum to support the students' WBL experience. I do this by presenting and critiquing a range of curriculum development theories, then setting out the theory that we developed to support the curriculum changes. In chapter

four I articulate the newly validated curriculum and in chapter five I articulate how the curriculum sits within the framework.

6. Develop a research based framework for effective practice in WBL for students on an undergraduate programme. In chapters three to five I articulate how I have developed the framework, supported by research, and present the framework in chapter five. In chapter six I articulate how I have continued to research aspects of WBL, such as web logs to support the students on WBL, and continue to evidence effective practice for students.

In chapters three and four, when I discuss the methods of data collection and developments that I made to WBL I state that these were related to my ontological values. Through this research these values have transformed into my epistemological values and living critical standards of judgment (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). Within this thesis I have articulated how I have improved the quality of my practice and linked this to my values.

These values are implicit in all areas of my life, but until undertaking the final stages of this research I had not 'named' them, nor had I linked them overtly to my professional role. In chapter two when I discuss the WBL experience of students prior to working at NTU it can be seen that these values are implicit. At that time I recognised a sense of injustice in the process of their WBL experience which was a contradiction to my ontological values. I started to make changes where I could to ensure that the individual and unique needs of my students were linked to their allocated placements. So my values of caring, respect, and justice were implicit in my ontology of relationship at that time. By supporting and valuing the students and their learning experiences I was showing respect for the students. In the writing of this thesis I have endeavoured to demonstrate courtesy to others. My critical comments on various views that have been expressed by others are never turned into perjorative comments about individuals or their values.

I have discussed how the transformation of my ontological values into living standards of judgment occurred, and the implications of this for my own practice. These living standards of judgment show that my contribution is a legitimate one to educational knowledge (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006).

The Emergence of a Living Educational Theory

Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p 29) state that 'in broad terms it is possible to say that when you claim that you have a theory, you are making a claim to knowledge'. Throughout this thesis I have used the term 'quality', defining this in the Terminology Section on page 13 as 'an experience that meets a minimum standard, unless explicitly stated otherwise'. I have also articulated 'quality' as central to the WBL themes within each cycle of the research, as shown in figure 3.2. Throughout the reflective stages of the research I have theorised what I actually mean by the term 'quality' and what the minimum standard should be for WBL within the School of Education at NTU, and possibly beyond. This demonstrates that being reflective has resulted in new learning.

Whitehead and McNiff refer to 'living educational theories'. The theses they have supervised, for example those of Caitriona McDonagh and Margaret Cahill (accessible at www.jeanmcniff.com) refer to the living educational theories of the researcher. My viva voce highlighted the need for me to articulate my living educational theory. After reflective critique and after re-reading McNiff and Whitehead's writings on action research and having accessed some of the theses they have supervised, I have come to realise that my living educational theory is implicit within this research: the theory of what 'quality' really is for WBL for undergraduate students following non-vocational programmes. McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p 1) state that 'it is generally acknowledged methodologically that research is undertaken in order to generate theory'.

The emergence of my living educational theory is a reflection of the deeper understanding I now have. It is also a reflection of the transformation of my ontological and epistemological values from which this theory has emerged. Whitehead and McNiff (2005, p 1) would describe this as the 'living realisation of our lives as a creative work of art'.

The emergence of this theory is referred to in chapter two, where I set out my background and previous experience of WBL. The values that I now recognise I held at that time have been transformed through the research. These values are embodied in my living educational theory. When I state that the articulation of my values has emerged from my research I say this because a theory needs to be supported by a robust evidence base, and justified and tested against this evidence base (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). I view my theory as emerging

rather than complete, because it continues to develop as circumstances change. Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p 30) propose three different kinds of theory 'propositional, dialectical, and living'. My theory reflects the 'living' theory which differs from propositional theory which describes an objective, empirical approach (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). My living educational theory positions me, as the practitioner researcher, at the centre of my own educational research. This links back to Whitehead's (1989) question I have already reflected on: How do I improve my practice?

In chapter six I stated how I have started to disseminate my framework both internally and externally to the University. Seminars and meetings were an opportunity to test the validity and legitimacy of my claims and also to share my emerging living educational theory which I justified with the evidence base I had produced as a result of this research.

My living educational theory which has emerged from my living practices is supported by the evidence presented in this thesis and is systematically related to my values of justice, caring and respect. By sharing my research with a wider critical audience, and by receiving critical feedback, this has in turn helped to strengthen my claim and my evidence base. This process has become important to support my claims that I have improved my practice. It is through reading Whitehead and McNiff (2006) and through questions at my viva voce, that I have been encouraged to theorise my practices. This process of theorisation has given me the confidence to articulate my emerging living educational theory which I have been able to test and support with evidence that has been generated as part of my claim to knowledge.

My theory is that for a quality WBL for undergraduate students on a non-vocational programme, in the School of Education at NTU, and possibly beyond, students should have an entitlement of:

- Advice and guidance – this should be provided by the University in preparation for their experience, and during their placement by their mentor and University tutor;
- Approved placements by the University. This should meet the approved level of health and safety following guidance from the CVCP, QAA's Code of Practice and the University's policy and should be free of discrimination;

- Negotiated programme of study – this should be supported by a learning contract/job description that is linked to the University programme’s learning outcomes and is shared, agreed and understood by the University, the provider, and the student;
- Support should be provided during the placement from a trained mentor and their University tutor who is someone familiar with the programme and understands the assessment requirements. There should be regular contact with the University, a clear process of contacting the University should problems occur whether during term time or during holidays, a list of contacts provided to the students and provider and regular visits depending on the location of the placement and the length of WBL;
- Assessment and recognition of learning that is clearly understood by the student. The mentor needs to know what their role in the assessment will be, and receive training where necessary/appropriate;
- Appeal procedure – that is explained to the students as part of their WBL briefing, and shared with the mentor;
- Underpinning values that support the WBL experience and the expectations of this part of their studies;
- A level of WBL experience that should accurately reflect the student’s stage of learning and be appropriate to their needs and aspirations;
- Opportunities to put theory into practice and develop new learning.

Epistemology

Action research deals specifically with integrating practice within organisations through collaborative and participatory research, based on reflection and action. Epistemology explores what counts as knowledge. I take my lead here from Reason and Bradbury’s (2001, p 2) statement that: ‘A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives’. Similarly Elliott (1989, p 84) suggests that action research is a ‘form of practical enquiry aimed at generating wisdom about how to realise educational values in action’. Earlier I quoted O’Hanlon (2002) who conceptualised such wisdom in terms of *phronesis*. This section sets out to draw together the evidence of how I know.

For me the epistemology underpinning action research recognises that action research should be practical, contextualised, explicit about assumptions and values, collaborative, and ‘do-able’ by practitioners not just experts. In other words, knowledge is not only about establishing facts. It is also about the

articulation of a set of values and understandings. These values and understandings are only realised and put into operation in context. The facts, values and understandings are tested for truth and validity by weighing evidence of their effects in practice. I have demonstrated this throughout this thesis and will continue to do so because WBL is increasing its profile in HE and this has impacted on the research as it has progressed.

I have referred to my ontological values of justice, caring and respect, which through the research have transformed into living standards of judgment and my epistemological values. My values have influenced the development of the framework and my living educational theory. Living theory is grounded in the personal knowledge of practitioners, which I have articulated throughout this thesis, and draws on the researcher's ontological values.

Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p 87) identify four aspects of educational research:

1. *'to identify and articulate clearly' what is being studied.* I do this through the articulation of the six cycles of research and linked to the question 'how do I improve my practice' as set out in chapter one and articulated in chapters three, four and five;
2. *'to explain the intellectual practical processes involved in its study'.* I demonstrate this through discussion of the literature, identification of emerging themes and the articulation of the developments that have been made during the research;
3. *'to generate evidence via those intellectual and practical processes'.* I present my evidence through data collection, analysis and categorisation and articulation of the developments made to WBL. It is also evidenced through discussion in chapter six of the continuing action research and further cycles and developments. Underpinning this is the articulation of my living standards of judgment, discussion of how I have tested the validity of the framework and my emerging living educational theory;
4. *'to articulate their claims to knowledge in terms of the standards they use to judge the validity of the evidence'.* I have articulated my own ontological values as living standards of judgment. I have also articulated the significance of my own practice and shown how I have influenced and continue to influence others.

I have included the new knowledge I have generated which is sustained and systematic, reflecting each cycle of the research. and articulated how I have come to know. I have framed the research with an action research methodology and demonstrated originality, significance and methodological rigour.

Gaining knowledge or understanding, that is, learning, is an integral part of broader changes whose roots are found in participation in collaborative research, in which the individual, already established within an organisation, is both active and acted upon. In action research knowing is a means to the ends of recognition and identity. It is not an end in itself, and the search for it opens up wider, more variable levels of collaboration with different groups; in this research, with stakeholders. This interaction with others throughout the research has provided an opportunity to critically argue for and test changes and developments which have transformed the experience of those involved into something that is measurably improved; as evidenced in the analysis of the questionnaires in chapters four and five. Through these interactions we have created new knowledge both 'individually and collectively' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p 23). I stated earlier that I was an insider researcher and that my ontology is as a part of others' lives and as interacting with the world, rather than as separate. As an insider researcher I have created new knowledge with others, namely those involved in this research: colleagues and members of focus groups. Working together we improved the WBL experience and developed new knowledge, processes and a shared emerging understanding.

It is the dissemination of knowledge that enables personal and external recognition and through this a determination of one's own identity within the sphere in which participation is experienced. For me, my identity as a teacher and researcher has developed as a direct result of my research. I understand, articulate and try to embody my values in the way I carry out my work. The process of articulation has been one in which I have become sharply aware of values and perspectives that I once understood only dimly. It has been like focusing a picture. Not only are the outlines clearer, but also details can be seen which were barely visible previously.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified action research methodology as providing a frame for the research. I have aligned this framework in relation to my own

research using diagrams and discussion. I have discussed and defended my decisions for data collection. I have identified how and why I have used both qualitative and quantitative data. I have also discussed different paradigms of research, and explained how research reflects mutual collaborative action research within the paradigm of praxis. I have explained the epistemology for this research and how the collaborative nature of the research led at times to tensions. My discussion on power, linked to the different stakeholders identified in the research, also includes my views on truth, bias, and values. I have considered my role as insider researcher and discussed some of the tensions I experienced. I have produced evidence of new practices and my emerging living educational theory and discussed how these relate to my ontological values. I have presented my living standards of judgment, framed by my values, from which this thesis can be judged.

The next chapter is my final chapter. It briefly summarises the research to date and acknowledges that the research will continue. It examines the limitations and strengths of this research and where I see the future developments.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings of the research and an explication of the frameworks developed. I shall conclude this chapter and the research by discussing what I consider to be the themes for future research.

The Main Findings – A Summary

The original contribution to the field of educational research made by this study is demonstrated by the development of a unique framework for the School of Education at NTU to support staff, students, and mentors in organising and experiencing a high quality short (six week) WBL experience. The framework was developed using qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The significance of my claim is the development of a framework for quality WBL and the articulation of my living educational theory. McNiff and Whitehead (in Noffke and Somekh, 2009, p 319) draw on Habermas (1976) in establishing the validity of knowledge claims. This includes

‘comprehensibility, truth in the sense of providing sufficient evidence to justify the claims being made, rightness in the sense of justifying the normative assumptions in the research, and authenticity in the sense that the researcher shows over time and in interaction that they are genuinely committed to what they claim to believe in’ (2009, p 319).

I believe this research demonstrates each of these aspects. I have written this thesis to provide a comprehensive articulation of my research spanning six cycles of action research. The claims I have made are supported with evidence, and justified within chapters three to six which report on each of the six cycles. I have discussed the truth of my claims in chapter seven. The articulation of my ontological values and the transformation of these into standards of judgment discussed in chapter seven, together with the authenticity of this research discussed in chapter one, demonstrate a genuine commitment to developing the experience of students.

A framework has been developed that is welcomed by WBL co-ordinators across the University, by those outside NTU and by the NTU team working on developing the ELCE framework. Aspects of the framework may also be appropriate for WBL co-ordinators both in the further education and secondary school sectors.

I have previously discussed Kitson's argument against sandwich degrees, stating that 'the theoretical benefits of the sandwich year are not delivered in practice, especially for students' (1993, p 52). He argued that 'shorter periods of industrial based work may provide a more effective learning process for students' (1993, p 60). This research demonstrates that a shorter period has, in fact, proved to be effective for all stakeholders.

The research developed from student dissatisfaction regarding the quality of their WBL experience. The WBL element of three undergraduate programmes formed the equivalent of one semester of their second year of undergraduate studies. Their dissatisfaction was supported by written evaluation and reports from student representatives at Programme Committee meetings. This research has spanned six cycles of action research and involved considerable collaboration between identified stakeholders. Action research cycles took place, with mini cycles developing as the research progressed. These mini-cycles developed partly as a result of dissemination of the framework, and partly as my research has developed into the use of web logs to support students on WBL.

The Limitations of this Work

It was the intention from the outset of this research to develop a framework that could be used to provide a quality WBL experience for students within the School of Education, and could be shared with other Schools within NTU. As the research has progressed and the framework has developed it is clear to me that this framework could be applied to other HEIs. Changes may need to be made to the framework to reflect the individual nature of different institutions, but the basic framework is flexible and can be adapted. The framework is also sufficiently flexible to be applicable to the secondary and further education sectors, as evidenced by my presentation at the NTU Collaborative Conference. This had not been anticipated, but has become evident as the research developed and I recognised the limited extent of research relating to short WBL in these settings. My seminar at the Collaborative Conference in July 2008, reporting usage of web blogs to support WBL, is also applicable to FE students. Conversations with colleagues in secondary schools indicate that the framework would fit neatly alongside the WBL element of the new 14-19 Vocational Diplomas launched in Britain in September 2008.

At this stage the research has been shared across the University at various seminars, through presentations at conferences, and through various opportunities, such as the development of the ELCE project.

However, it is important to recognise that this was in many respects small scale research, within one School, in one University, albeit over a substantial period of time with approximately 300 students across the first three cycles of research and with more students in cycles four to six.

The Strengths

WBL has increased in importance in HE and is now linked to the employability agenda. There is now more focus on the relevance of undergraduate programmes in the development of our knowledge-based economy, particularly as the global market place becomes increasingly competitive.

The significance of this research is the development and dissemination of a framework to underpin the WBL element of the undergraduate non-vocational programmes and the articulation of a living educational theory. The research has enabled the development of opportunities for students that exceed the aspirations and recommendations of the Dearing proposals (1997).

During the period of the six cycles many changes have been made and many new processes and structures put into place. The intention from the outset was to develop a framework that would last, but that would be sufficiently flexible to be responsive to changes and developments within the undergraduate programmes. This has proved to be the case, and as changes have been made to the programme, the six week WBL experience has remained integral to the degree programmes; in addition the documentation, systems and processes put into place during the research continue to be used.

In articulating my research it has been my intention to establish the authenticity of the evidence and demonstrate the truthfulness of my claim to knowledge. The account provides evidence that the WBL experience of all stakeholders has improved, particularly that of the students. I have provided evidence that this has been legitimized by internal and external bodies such as the internal quality audit and the QAA quality inspection referred to in chapter five. Actions undertaken have also been accepted by my peers, the students, and the mentors, providing further legitimization of the research.

The research has enabled a far more sophisticated understanding of the workplaces our students are placed in, and working with the Mentor Focus Group has enabled us to build a much clearer focus for the preparation of our students. The development of the curriculum, articulated in chapter four, has allowed more effective preparation for WBL, while providing a more focussed opportunity for the development of key life skills which are explicit and embedded within the curriculum. We have linked these developments to the Personal Development Planner that all students have access to, and promote life long learning and employability through WBL which allows students to take on different roles within organisations and develop their key skills.

I believe that the research is methodologically robust and have provided evidence to support my claim. My research draws on existing research and develops this further. My account is contextualised, sincere, honest and truthful (Habermas, 1987 in McNiff and Whitehead, 2009) and reports logically on cycles of action research. Its significance lies in the fact that I offer a new living educational theory, grounded in my ontological and epistemological values that have emerged from the research and can be used by myself and others (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). I have articulated my living standards of judgment and have held myself accountable for my research through collaborative working and dissemination of outcomes. I have shown that this account has personal validation through continued self-evaluation and critical reflection. I have demonstrated institutional validation by sharing my claim to knowledge and have demonstrated social validation through sharing my claim to knowledge with critical friends and more widely through seminars both internal and external to the University. This will continue through the process of the viva voce for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and through the process of testing the validity of the knowledge claims against the University criteria for this Award and my living standards of judgment.

Implications for Future Developments

It would be difficult to leave this chapter without identifying where I think WBL needs to develop in the future. WBL is gaining a higher profile. The thrust by the Government of new Vocational Diplomas in secondary schools, with integrated WBL, will have an impact on HE institutions, as increasing numbers of students will come from a more vocational background. This will inevitably raise their expectations for integrated WBL as part of their degree programme. In addition research such as Purcell *et al* (2004), ESECT (2005a), HEA (2006), and

HECSU (2006) is providing information on how important WBL is to employers, particularly SMEs. This research also points to the importance of developing key skills, which often takes place during WBL, when securing employment. A greater range of research into WBL may help to continue to develop this aspect of the undergraduate and post-graduate student experience in promoting discussion on how educational structures could be adjusted to facilitate WBL, how employers can be more widely engaged, and the processes required to identify what needs to be done to develop the management of WBL further.

With the development of the ELCE project at NTU, and the highlighting of the inequality of WBL experience across the University this may be an opportune time for senior managers to consider whether we need a separate skills centre managed outside, and independently of, the established Schools which would also have responsibility for WBL. This issue is also raised by Bridges (2000) and Universities UK and CSU (2002). This is currently being investigated by the University and visits to universities where this has been successfully introduced, such as Bournemouth University, are being made at the time of writing (2009). Such a centre would help streamline approaches to employers and help us to be more pro-active in our engagement with employers.

Working as a member of the ELCE project has highlighted the lack of cohesion across HE of WBL in terms of the credit rating. This is an area for further development, but Universities such as NTU may want to establish greater consistency internally before this discussion is held nationally. This is also discussed by Brennan (2005) and the HEA (2006).

Some of the themes raised by the HEA's document 'Where Should the HE Sector Focus Attention?' (2006) previously discussed in chapter six, are still pertinent as areas for discussion across NTU and other institutions. Consideration is also required on how to communicate change across Universities so that staff remain up-to-date.

In September 2008 a new Virtual Learning Environment was made available to staff and students which has an eportfolio tool. This may prove useful to the students in WBL who will be able to develop and record their reflections, experiences, and key professional skills. It is possible to upload text, images and video clips which will challenge the teaching team to reconsider the assessment for the modules. The tool also enables students to share their eportfolio with others which will be a welcome advantage to students and a

further development of opportunities for peer support. While the tool was in a pilot phase (2008-09) I made a successful bid internally to be able to pilot it with our students. This has involved planning how the tool can be used, piloting it with a small group of students on WBL, evaluating its effectiveness with students and making changes ready to share more widely from September 2009. I have already presented my interim findings at the Fusion Conference (January 2008), and the NTU Learning and Teaching Conference (April 2009), and will be presenting the final findings at the Information Technology in Teacher Education (ITTE) Conference, 2010.

I have referred to the assessment process related to the WBL experience and the comments from students relating to assessment and identified this as an on-going theme. I have also explained the developments that we made to provide additional support for the students relating to assessment. Within the WBL research it was not within my power to change the assessment process, but I do acknowledge this is a concern for the students and am currently involved in action research with a colleague from Sheffield Hallam University investigating assessment and feed back for students which may be applicable to WBL assessments. This is a new spiral of research and interim findings have been reported at the Higher Education Authority Conference, Manchester, 2009 and the European Conference of Educational Research, Vienna, 2009.

I conclude this section with brief reference to the newly published framework for HE 'Higher Ambitions: The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy' published on 3 November 2009. This document provides the strategy for HE for the next decade and reflects some of the discussion in chapter two on social justice, the vocational versus liberal debate, and on the role of HE in the provision of a competitive workforce for Britain to succeed within the global economy. This framework will provide a focus for further debate on some of the issues I have raised in this thesis such as student engagement, employability, the role of WBL, and the further development of WRL.

Final Comments

I have often heard the term 'My Journey' used to describe the process of research. I have been on a journey, but would more describe the process I went through as a chrysalis opening to be a butterfly or moth. When I started the research I was new to the University and my knowledge of research was limited. At times I struggled to create and recognise my own identity. I have

moved 'from experiencing myself as a living contradiction' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009, p 169) to living through my values. During the first years of undertaking this research I would describe myself as a 'teacher'; this has gradually changed through 'teacher and researcher' to 'practitioner researcher' as confidence in my own abilities as a researcher have grown. McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p 2) argue that there is a 'reluctance' amongst scholars to acknowledge teachers as educational theorists. It is not until the final stages of writing this research and considering the significance of my emerging living educational theory that I would consider myself as moving towards being an educational theorist. This research, and the emergent living educational theory indicates that I now also view myself as 'teacher as theorist' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005, p 1). I include on page 362 further evidence of my research journey and my legitimisation as a researcher through conference papers I have given at international and national conferences and articles that have been published in peer reviewed journals.

This action research established a framework for quality WBL experience for undergraduate students; moving from a situation where this was a weak aspect of the student experience, to one where 97% rated it as satisfactory to excellent. It has also provided a vehicle for me to identify and articulate my living educational theory. Along the way I have developed my personal interest in action research, particularly that related to the development of my own knowledge and learning, and research-informed teaching. I have found the whole experience of working towards my PhD both empowering and emancipatory. This reflects the findings of Somekh:

'Action research also necessarily involves powerful personal-professional learning for the participant researchers about the impact of their own assumptions and practices on work outcomes and relationships with colleagues'. (2006, p 8)

Nearing the completion of this major piece of research, I have found that having gained the skills and knowledge at this level I am transformed into a butterfly/moth with wings to fly with. I have moved from lacking in research confidence to venturing into research-informed teaching with increased confidence and enjoyment. I feel I can now attend research meetings and use the right 'language', make appropriate contributions and engage critically with other researchers. I have formed alliances in research with staff within my own University and beyond. My growth of researcher identity is now evident. I represent the School of Education on the University's Research Informed

Teaching Committee, the College's Research Committee, and the Joint Inter-College Ethics Committee. I have encouraged colleagues to present their research at conferences and have now become a reviewer for TEAN, and for the NTU Learning and Teaching conference. I also support a new researcher at Wolverhampton University.

A key challenge for me was not to set boundaries based on my previous experiences of managing WBL in a secondary school, to open myself to new experiences and draw on data to produce evidence to support my claims to knowledge rather than imposing more limited solutions from my prior experience. I have had to question carefully the meaning of the data I collected as part of the reflective process to share the processes; not everything has gone smoothly.

Throughout the research I have discussed my findings with colleagues who became critical friends so that my inexperience in HE, particularly at the start of the research, did not stop me from seeing the contradictions in my own practice or challenging proposals which were not supported by research. There were times when I had to challenge existing systems and assumptions, but I have viewed this as part of action research.

In the introduction I referred to Whitehead and McNiff's (2004, p 10) definition of action research 'action research is about change – in the people who value and believe that change brings progress and personal, professional and social development'. This is certainly true here and the account that you have now read shows how the process of change has included personal, professional and social change.

Other researchers might have made different choices, but I can defend my choices and have the evidence to support them. If I were asked if I would make different choices, the answer would be 'no'. The results from the data collected and the evidence produced within this thesis show that I have met my original aims and I am confident that I have made a contribution to knowledge, new practices and new theory and to improving the WBL experience for the stakeholders within this research.

While working towards this PhD I have also been involved in research into e-learning and have my first research paper published in the Electronic Journal of e-Learning, a peer reviewed journal. I have formed an alliance with a colleague

at Sheffield Hallam University and successfully applied for funding to ESCalate, the education subject centre for the HEA, for joint research into the role of assessment and feed back for first year undergraduate students which will be presented at the Higher Education Academy Conference, Manchester 2009, and the European Conference for Educational Research, Vienna, 2009. This has resulted in being asked by ESCalate to launch a Special Interest Group. I have also developed the use of Web logs, discussed in the previous chapter, to research the use of this Web 2.0 technology to support trainee teachers in becoming self-reflective practitioners. I have presented papers on this later research at the International Federation of Information Processing Conference in Prague, June 2008, the ALT-C International Conference, Leeds 2008, and the ALT-C International Conference, Manchester, 2009. In September 2009 a research article I had co-written was published in *Learning, Media and Technology*, a peer reviewed journal. I could not have considered any of these ventures before starting my PhD and developing as a researcher as part of this process.

Research for me is about constructing knowledge, producing evidence-based claims, and developing living educational theories which can then be shared with others and influence future developments. I have evidenced and documented how I have constructed knowledge relating to the aims set out in chapter one and the need to widen the field of research, relating to WBL. I have checked my framework against theories in the literature and have shown that 'my knowledge claims have theoretical validity' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009, p 63). I have collected and analysed data to provide a rigorous and authenticated evidence base (McNiff, 2007) to support my claim. I have presented my research as a logical educational enquiry. I have shared my findings and engaged in critical discussion with a scholarly audience both within and outside the University. I have identified my own critical living standards of judgment 'against which to test the validity of my claim' (McNiff and Naidoo, 2007, p 52) which are grounded in my ontological, epistemological, methodological and pedagogical living standards of judgment. I have demonstrated how the transformation from my ontological values into my living standards of judgment has evolved.

Having constructed this knowledge and established a framework and living educational theory of practice based on research. It is now my responsibility to share this and submit my research findings for critical scrutiny within the HE community. I have intrinsic motivation underpinned by a sense of responsibility

to share this with others. What I now need to do is aim to publish the framework in appropriate journals. I hope that others will engage with this framework and a scholarly dialogue will develop. I know that I have contributed new knowledge to the field of WBL.

O'Hanlon states

'The researcher's understanding of the subject after investigation at doctoral level will invariably deepen and become more complex and meaningful and may lead to a changed perspective on the subject which unconsciously motivates subsequent action in an innovative or novel direction' (2002, p 112).

This is true of my experiences. I have established a reputation across the University as a person who has sound knowledge about the WBL experience and who has developed a framework based on research informed evidence. This is evidenced through requests to lead cross-university seminars focussing on WBL, through colleagues seeking my advice when setting up their own WBL structures and processes and by the number of downloads of my documentation on the CASQ web site. I have developed myself personally and professionally and by changing my thinking I am 'contributing to new, improved cultures' within the University (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009, p 168) and I am influencing others' thinking. I have moved through various stages of passion and excitement with my research. I am excited about developing new Web 2.0 technologies to support the students' experience during their WBL experience, and in developing the use of technologies for reflections of their WBL. I have developed professional relationships with different people involved in this research, which will last for many years. I know I have improved the experience of the students and have evidenced this through this thesis by contributing to new educational practices within the School of Education at NTU. The changes that I have made have been valued, as evidenced by comments from students at Programme Committee Meetings. I am finding this intrinsically satisfying and worthwhile, being both intellectually stimulating and educationally worthwhile. I have now shared my account which is based on honesty, with you, the reader, and believe that the coherence, structure, and evidence produced will help you to see the truth and authenticity of this research (Habermas, 1976, in McNiff and Naidoo, 2007). Reason and Bradbury (2006, p 4) state that action research is 'emancipatory, it leads not just to new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge'. I certainly know that my experiences and personal development reflect this statement. I now put forward this thesis for critical

scrutiny to be judged against the standards for a PhD and the living standards of judgment set out in this thesis.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Key Skills For Undergraduate Courses – School Of Education

Communication:

Speaking clearly, precisely and confidently;
being sensitive to, and being able to use different modes of
communication according to the needs of the audience;
being able to interpret the significance of communications from other
people.

Information Communications Technology:

Using a range of software such as word processing, spreadsheets,
database, etc;
Develop skills in presenting information from different sources to
different audiences;
Using a range of hardware such as printers, computers, scanners, digital
cameras, etc;
Being able to use email and Internet to explore, develop and exchange
information.

Working with Others:

Plan complex work with others, agreeing objectives, responsibilities and
working arrangements;
Establish and maintain co-operative working relationships;
Assume responsibility, co-operate, and promote good relationships;
Review work with others and agree ways of improving collaborative work
in the future;
Show positive responses to change;
Develop a vision of the future based on reflection of changing values and
perspectives;
Engage with human feelings and be able to deal with conflict.

Knowledge and Skills

seek out information
evaluate a range of literature sources
analyse and evaluate a wide range of concepts and theories related to
your chosen subject area.

Autonomy and Responsibility:

Recognise your own strengths and weaknesses and those of others;
Agree targets and plan how these will be met, using support from
appropriate people;

Take responsibility for own learning by using planning and seeking feedback and support from relevant sources, to help meet targets;
Review progress and establish evidence of achievements, including how you have used learning from other tasks to meet new demands.

Planning and Problem solving:

Appraise and analyse situations;
Employ critical skills to solve problems.
set and achieve meaningful goals;
frame priorities;
reflect upon the predicted and actual outcomes of an action plan;
take clearer and firmer control of your own life;
respond flexibly to changing circumstances.

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

KEY SKILLS: UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE
Communication	<p>Students must demonstrate they are able to use specialist vocabulary in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to a group discussion about a complex subject. • Make a presentation about a complex subject, using at least one image to illustrate complex points. • Read and synthesise information from two extended documents about a complex subject. One of these documents should include at least one image. • Write two different types of documents about complex subjects. One piece of writing should be an extended document and include at least one image. 	<p>Students will need to develop the ability to organise and articulate opinions and arguments in speech and writing using relevant specialist vocabulary.</p>	<p>Students must provide at least one extended example of meeting the standard below. Their example must show they can use written, oral and visual forms of communication, and demonstrate some confidence in their use of specialist vocabulary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for using communication skills over an extended period of time. • Monitor progress and adapt their strategy, as necessary, to achieve the quality of outcomes required in work involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One group discussion about a complex subject; ○ One extended written communication about a complex subject. • Evaluate their overall strategy and present the outcomes from their work, using at least one formal oral presentation, including the use

			of two images to illustrate complex points.
Application of Number	<p>Students must plan and carry through at least one substantial and complex activity that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and interpret information from two different types of sources, including a large data set. • Carry out multi-stage calculations to do with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Amounts and sizes; ○ Scales and proportion; ○ Handling statistics; ○ Rearranging and using formulae. • Interpret results of your calculations, present your findings and justify your methods. You must use at least one graph, one chart and one diagram. 	Students may develop a range of numerical skills through their placement.	<p>Students must provide at least one extended example of meeting the standard below. The example must show they can formulate and test hypotheses, and draw conclusions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for using application of number skills over an extended period of time. • Monitor progress and adapt your strategy, as necessary, to achieve the quality of outcomes required in work involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deductive and inferential reasoning; • Algebraic manipulation. • Evaluate their overall strategy and present the outcomes from their work, including use of charts, diagrams and graphs to illustrate complex data.
Information Technology	<p>Students must plan and carry through at least one substantial activity that includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and use different sources to search for, and select, information required for two different purposes. • Explore, develop, and exchange information and derive new information to meet two different purposes. • Present information from different sources for two 	Students may develop a range of information technology related skills through their placement.	<p>Students must provide at least one extended example of meeting the standards below. The example must show they can use IT to handle text, images and numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for using IT skills over an extended period of time. • Monitor progress and adapt your

	<p>different purposes and audiences.</p> <p>The work must include at least one example of text, one example of images and one example of numbers.</p>		<p>strategy, as necessary, to achieve the quality of outcomes required in work involving the use of IT for two different, complex purposes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate your overall strategy and present the outcomes from your work using at least one presentation, showing integration of text, images and number.
Problem Solving	<p>Students must provide at least one substantial example of meeting the standard for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an awareness of the relevant theoretical data in addressing problems and formulating possible actions. • Explore a complex problem, come up with three options for solving it and justify the option selected for taking forward. • Plan and implement at least one option for solving the problem, review progress and revise your approach as necessary. • Apply agreed methods to check if the problem has been solved, describe the results and review your approach to problem solving. 	<p>Students may develop a range of problem solving skills through their placement.</p>	<p>Students must provide at least one extended example of meeting the standard for the following. The example must show they can explore at least two problems, one of which must be followed through to conclusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an ability to process empirical and theoretical data in addressing tasks and formulating possible actions. • Develop a strategy for using skills in problem solving over an extended period of time. • Monitor progress and adapt their strategy, as necessary, to achieve the quality of outcomes required when tackling one complex problem with at least three options. • Evaluate their

			overall strategy and present the outcomes from their work using a variety of methods and justifying their chosen position having drawn on relevant theoretical perspectives.
Working with Others	<p>Students must provide at least one substantial example of meeting the standard for the following. In addition they must show they can work in both one-to-one and group/team situations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan complex work with others, agreeing objectives, responsibilities and working arrangements. • Seek to establish and maintain cooperative working relationships over an extended period of time, agreeing changes to achieve agreed objectives. • Review work with others and agree ways of improving collaborative work in the future. 	Demonstrate the ability to plan as part of a team, carry out roles allocated and fulfil agreed responsibilities.	<p>Students must provide at least one extended example of meeting the standards below. The example must show they can work in one-to-one and group situations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for using skills in working with others over an extended period of time. • Monitor progress and adapt their strategy, as necessary, to achieve the quality of outcomes required in taking a leading role in managing at least one complex group activity. This may require working through difficulties and conflicts. • Evaluate their overall strategy and present the outcomes from their work in at least one group situation.
Improving own Learning and Performance	Students must provide at least one substantial example of meeting the standard for the following. In addition they must have an understanding of their own preferred learning style and strategies.	Students will develop skills in improving their own learning and performance through their placement	Students must provide at least one extended example of meeting the following. The example must show they can learn through independent and directed forms of

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree targets and plan how these will be met over an extended period of time, using support from appropriate people. • Take responsibility for own learning by using the plan, and seeking feed back and support from relevant sources, to help meet targets using their preferred learning strategies. Improve their performance by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Studying a complex subject. ○ Learning through a complex practical activity ○ Further study or practical activity that involves independent learning. • Review progress on two occasions and establish evidence of achievements, including how they have used learning from other tasks to meet new demands. 		<p>learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy for using skills in improving own learning and performance over an extended period of time. • Apply their preferred learning style and strategies and work with these to organise an effective work pattern including working to deadlines.. • Monitor progress and adapt their strategy, as necessary, to achieve the quality of outcomes required in at least two different complex learning activities. • Evaluate their overall strategy and present the outcomes from their work, including a synthesis of what they have learned from two different complex learning activities.
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Appendix 2A: Student Handbook – Contents Page

INTRODUCTION

AIMS

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SECTION TWO - SELECTING YOUR PLACEMENT

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What must the University offer you?

Placements in Schools

IMPORTANT POINT

SECTION THREE - HOW DO I ORGANISE A PLACEMENT?

Preparation

Timetable for Preparation

SECTION FOUR – THE INTERVIEW

Preparing for the Interview

The Interview

Completing your Learning Contract and Job Description

A Checklist For your Interview

SECTION FIVE - ACCEPTANCE OF A PLACEMENT BY THE UNIVERSITY

SECTION SIX - ORGANISING AN OVERSEAS PLACEMENT

SECTION SEVEN – PROGRAMME SPECIFIC INFORMATION

B.Sc.(Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology

B.A.(Hons) Business, Leisure and Sport

B.A.(Hons) Psychology and Educational Development

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SECTION NINE – DURING THE PLACEMENT

ATTENDANCE

SECTION TEN – AT THE END OF THE PLACEMENT

SECTION ELEVEN – SPECIAL SITUATIONS

SECTION TWELVE – DOCUMENTATION

SECTION THIRTEEN – RECORDING YOUR ACTIONS

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UNIVERSITY CONTACT DETAILS

SECTION TWO – GENERAL INFORMATION

SECTION THREE – PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

SECTION FOUR – ROLE OF THE MENTOR

SECTION FIVE – ROLE OF THE ORGANISATION

PRIOR TO THE PLACEMENT

END OF THE PLACEMENT

DURING THE PLACEMENT

SECTION SIX – UNIVERSITY ASSIGNMENTS

SECTION SEVEN –THE LEARNING CONTRACT AND JOB DESCRIPTION

SECTION EIGHT – PROGRAMME OUTCOMES (KEY SKILLS)

SECTION NINE – FINAL NOTE

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Page

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Placement Dates

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SECTION TWO - ASSIGNMENTS

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The Visit to the Organisation:

Learning Contract and Job Description

Report

Additional Support For Students

Students Who Will Not Receive A Visit

PLACEMENT STUDENT REPORT

PLACEMENT VISIT REPORT FORM

Placement: Record of Telephone Conversation(s)

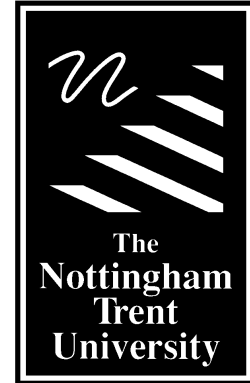
Review of Placement Providers Health and Safety Arrangements – form to be completed by Tutors during placement visit.

ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

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Appendix 3A: Placement Evaluation Questionnaire

(NB This is a simile of the original questionnaire)



Department of Education

Placement Evaluation 2001

Instructions: This evaluation form will be used to inform planning for next year, it is therefore important you answer each question as carefully as possible.

Section 1: Pre-placement Preparation

1. How useful did you find the initial Placement briefing held last March?

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 Very
informative

What additional information would you have liked at that time?

2. Did you use the Student Handbook when planning your placement? YES/NO

3. If YES, how helpful did you find the Handbook?

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 Very
informative

What additional information would you recommend and/or what changes would you recommend to help future students?

4. Depending on the course you are taking you will have received additional input from your tutor regarding your placement. Having completed your placement, would you have welcomed additional information? YES/NO. If YES, please list the type of information you would have liked below:

5. How useful did you find the Health and Safety/Pre-Placement briefing? Please comment on how this can be improved bearing in mind that this forms a compulsory element of your placement:

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 Very
informative

Comments:

6. Was there any additional information you would have welcomed in your placement pack issued at this briefing? What additional information would you recommend and/or what changes would recommend to help future students?

7. Is there any additional help/support the University staff could have provided you with prior to your placement? Please list below:

Section 2: During the Placement

Initial Telephone Call/Email

Did you receive a telephone call/email early in the placement?

YES/NO

If NO, would you have found this helpful/supportive?

YES/NO

Tutor's Visit

Did you receive a visit from your Tutor?

YES/NO

Had you completed your Student Report Form prior to this visit?

YES/NO

Were you clear about the purpose of this visit?

YES/NO

Did you use this visit as an opportunity to discuss any difficulties you were experiencing on the Placement?

YES/NO

Did you find the visit helpful in terms of focussing on your assignment and refocusing on the purposes of your placement?

YES/NO

Did your Tutor also meet with your Mentor?

YES/NO

Overall Comments on the visit, ie how beneficial was it to you, how could it have been improved if at all, etc

Was there any additional information you would have liked prior to the Visit? YES/NO

If YES, please list below:

Did you need to contact the University? YES/NO

If YES, please give details on the reason and how easy/difficult you found this.

Did you at any time require your Tutor to attempt to mediate/resolve any difficulties you were experiencing?

YES/NO

If YES, please give brief details below, including the problem and the action your Tutor took.

Did you feel the difficulties were resolved appropriately?

YES/NO

If NO, please give details on how this could have been improved

Did you use the discussion facility on your VLP (this was explained to you during your Health and Safety briefing and an instruction sheet was enclosed in your Placement Pack.

If YES please comment, ie how did it help/ease of use.

YES/NO



Section 3: Post-Placement

To what standard do you believe the following personal qualities/skills were developed during your placement period?

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Communication				
Information Technology				
Numeracy				
Working with others				
Improving Own Learning and Performance				
Problem Solving				

Do you believe that your placement year will improve your employability on graduation? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Do you agree with the proposition that your placement was:

An integrated part of the course? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

A Partnership between University and employer? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

Supervised effectively by your employer? YES/NO/DON'T KNOW

State 3 good points relating to your placement experience:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

State 3 bad points relating to your placement experience:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Have you been asked to provide feed back to your organisation

YES/NO

If No, have you considered that this may be useful, particularly if you have been involved in a specific project?

YES/NO

If YES, have you now done this?

YES/NO

Please give below any additional comments you would like to make about any aspect of your placement experience – positive comments on how the University could improve this aspect of the course would be appreciated.

NAME (Optional)

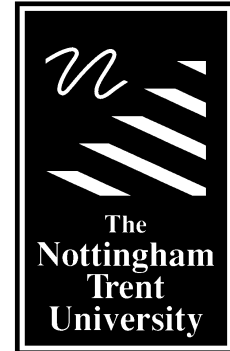
DEGREE PROGRAMME (Please complete)

Please remember to update your Personal Development Planner (accessible via your VLP) with details of your work experience.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. Please return it to your Course Tutor, or your Course Administrator.

Appendix 3B: Quality Evaluation Questionnaire

(NB This is a simile of the original questionnaire)



Department of Education

QUALITY OF PLACEMENT

EVALUATION 2001

Instructions: This evaluation form will be used to inform planning for next year, it is therefore important you answer each question as carefully as possible. This evaluation will not be passed to your placement and will remain confidential to the University.

On completion of this form please pass it to your Course Leader, Helen Boulton or your Course Administrator. Thank you.

Did your mentor meet with your Tutor during the placement visit?

YES/NO

How would you describe the overall role of your mentor? *Eg supportive, challenging, able to contact easily?*

Do you think your mentor could have improved their role?

YES/NO

If YES, how? Please be specific.

Were you provided with suitable opportunities to gather information for your assignments? YES/NO

If NO, how could your placement have better provided for this aspect of your placement?

During your placement did you have any difficulties that you asked your mentor to support you with?

YES/NO

If YES, do you feel your mentor dealt with them satisfactorily?

YES/NO

If NO, please give details of the difficulty and how your mentor could have improved their support.

Section 3: Post-Placement

Overall, how would you rate your placement in terms of quality?

Poor 1 2 3 4 5 Excellent

If you have rated it less than 3 please give additional information about why you did not feel it was satisfactory and how it could be improved for future placements.

Would you recommend this placement to another student on your course? YES/NO

If NO, please be specific about why you feel it is unsuitable.



Please give below any additional comments you would like to make about any aspect of your Placement experience – positive comments on how the University could improve this aspect of the course would be appreciated.

Name

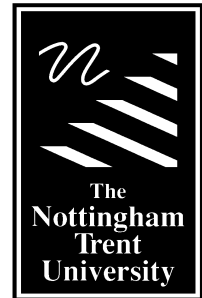
Course

If you have any difficulties with your placement that you feel the University should be aware of, but are reluctant to put down on this questionnaire, please contact the Placement Co-ordinator, Helen Boulton (email: Helen.boulton@ntu.ac.uk; telephone 0115 8483515)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. Please return it to your Course Tutor, or your Course Administrator.

Appendix 3C: Review And Evaluation Days Questionnaire

(NB This is a simile of the original questionnaire)



Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education

Applied Studies – Review and Evaluation Days Evaluation Document

Instructions: This evaluation form will be used to inform planning for next year, it is therefore important you answer each question as carefully as possible.

On completion of this form please pass it to your Course Tutor, Helen Boulton or your

Course Administrator. Thank you

Section 1: March Review Days

HOW USEFUL DID YOU FIND THE MARCH REVIEW DAYS?

Providing General Support for your Placement

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very useful*

An opportunity to share experiences with others on your course

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very useful*

An opportunity to discuss you assignment(s) with relevant tutor(s)

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very useful*

Please answer the following questions relating to the planning of these days:

Did you have sufficient notice about the Review Days? YES/ NO

Did you find the information posted to you prior to the placements helpful?

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very useful*

Is there any additional information you would have welcomed prior to the Review Days in March?

Overall, how useful would you rate the Review Days?

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very informative/ useful*

Please make any suggestions on how we could improve the March Review Days

Section 2: May Review and Evaluation Days

HOW USEFUL DID YOU FIND THE MAY REVIEW AND EVALUATION DAYS?

Providing General Support for your Placement

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very useful*

An opportunity to share experiences with others on your course

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very useful*

An opportunity to discuss your assignment(s) with relevant tutor(s)

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very useful*

Please answer the following questions relating to the planning of these days:

Did you have sufficient notice about the Review Days? YES/ NO

Did you find the information posted to you prior to the placements helpful?

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very informative*

Is there any additional information you would have welcomed prior to the Review and Evaluation Days in May?

Overall, how useful would you rate the Review Days?

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 *Very informative/ useful*

Please make suggestions on how we could improve the Review Days.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. Please return it to your Course Tutor, Applied Studies Co-ordinator, or Course Administrator before leaving university today.

Appendix 4A: Developing Academic Skills Module Specification

Nottingham Trent University Module Specification

Basic module information		
1	Module Title:	Developing Academic Skills
2	Module Code:	SPPD11002
3	Credit Points:	15
4	Duration:	September to February
5	School:	Education
6	Date:	

7	Pre, Post and Co-requisites:		
	These are modules that you must have studied previously in order to take this module, or modules that you must study simultaneously or in a subsequent academic session		
	<u>Pre, Co, Post</u>	<u>Module Code</u>	<u>Module Title</u>
	None		

8	Programmes containing the module				
	<u>Level</u>	<u>Core/Option</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Programme Title</u>
	1	Core	FT or PT	STPE00 2	BA (Hons) Psychology and Educational Development
	1	Core	FT or PT	STBL00 2	BA (Hons) Business, Sport and Leisure
	1	Core	FT or PT	STBT00 2	BSc (Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology

9	Overview and Aims
	<p>To provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acquire a range of ICT and research skills that will support and enhance their learning; • introduce and explain the importance of on-going personal and professional development.; • an opportunity for students to develop their academic communication skills; • an opportunity to define and explore tools and techniques related to research methods.

10	Module Content
	<p>This module will provide opportunities for students to develop a 'toolkit' of academic competencies to support their learning throughout the course. It will introduce students to appropriate skills which will be useful to their life long learning.</p> <p>The course will include the following skill development:</p>

- academic presentation, report writing, Harvard Referencing, researching, use of spreadsheets for analysing data, and personal development planning;
- an introduction to academic tools such as email and the Virtual Learning Portal will also be provided.

11 Indicative Reading

Bell, J. (1999) *Doing your research project* (3rd edition), OU Press
 Evans, K.M. (1984) *Planning Small Scale Research*, London, NFER
 On-line help and software manuals
 Ulrick, L. and Blattner, P. (2000) *Using Microsoft Excel 2000*, Indianapolis, Que

12 Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes describe what you should know and be able to do by the end of the module

Knowledge and understanding. After studying this module you should be able to:

- show judgment in undertaking specific tasks using a range of tools available to enhance their learning;
- work within clear tutor-directed and specific guidance;
- communicate effectively using electronic means;
- define and explore tools and techniques related to research methods.

Skills, qualities and attributes. After studying this module you should be able to:

13 Teaching and Learning

Range of modes of direct contact

This indicates the range of direct contact teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. lectures, seminars

Lecture, practical workshop, tutorials, electronic mail, Virtual Learning Portal.

Total contact hours: 30

Range of other learning methods

This indicates the range of other teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. directed reading, research

Independent learning tasks, directed reading, directed tasks via Virtual Learning Portal.

Total non-contact hours: 150

14 Assessment methods

This indicates the type and weighting of assessment elements in the module

<u>Weighting</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>
100%	Coursework	Portfolio of work demonstrating the skills developed during the

course.

Diagnostic/ formative assessment

This indicates if there are any assessments that do not contribute directly to the final module mark

Oral formative feed back

Written summative feed back.

Further information on assessment

This section provides further information on the module's assessment where appropriate

Appendix 4B: Problem Solving and Personal Planning

Nottingham Trent University

Module Specification

Basic module information		
1	Module Title:	Problem Solving and Personal Planning
2	Module Code:	SPPD13001
3	Credit Points:	15
4	Duration:	February to June
5	School:	Education
6	Date:	

7	Pre, Post and Co-requisites:						
	These are modules that you must have studied previously in order to take this module, or modules that you must study simultaneously or in a subsequent academic session						
	<table><thead><tr><th><u>Pre, Co, Post</u></th><th><u>Module Code</u></th><th><u>Module Title</u></th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>None</td><td></td><td></td></tr></tbody></table>	<u>Pre, Co, Post</u>	<u>Module Code</u>	<u>Module Title</u>	None		
<u>Pre, Co, Post</u>	<u>Module Code</u>	<u>Module Title</u>					
None							

8	Programmes containing the module				
	<u>Level</u>	<u>Core/Option</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Programme Title</u>
	1	Option	FT and PT	STPE00 2	BA (Hons) Psychology and Educational Development
	1	Option	FT and PT	STBL00 2	BA (Hons) Business, Sport and Leisure
	1	Option	FT and PT	STBT00 2	BSc (Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology

9	Overview and Aims
	To enable students to acquire a range of problem solving and personal planning techniques that they can use throughout their course and post-course. They will be encouraged to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• develop a range of strategies to use for personal planning and problem solving;• develop skills in monitoring and reflecting on their progress;• develop skills in selecting suitable and appropriate methods of problem solving and personal planning techniques;• develop skills in evaluating their overall strategy.

10	Module Content
	In the working environment of the 21st century employees need to be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and think about where they need to develop and improve their skills for the workplace. Problem-solving situations are around us all of the time. This module will help students to focus on developing their problem solving and personal planning skills. It will make them aware of a range of theories to help them with problem solving and personal planning. It will also encourage them to: develop and apply a range of strategies; <ul style="list-style-type: none">• explore fundamental concepts and theories;

- monitor and reflect critically on their practise;
- evaluate the strategies they use;
- use a range of methods designed to encourage both reflection and analysis.;
- present the outcomes using a variety of methods.

11 Indicative Reading

Foster, T.R.V. (1998) *101 Ways to Generate Great Ideas*, London: Kogan Page
 Hutchinson, J. and Karsnitz, J. (1994) *Design and Problem Solving in Technology*, Albany NY: Delmar
 Adair J, (1997) *Decision Making and Problem Solving*, Institute of Personnel and Development
 Napier, R.W. (1993) *Groups, Theory and Experience*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin
 Stevens, M. (1996) *How to be a Better Problem Solver*, London: Kogan Page
 Wilson, G. (1993) *Problem Solving and Decision Making*, London: Kogan Page

12 Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes describe what you should know and be able to do by the end of the module

Knowledge and understanding. After studying this module you should be able to:

- define and explore fundamental concepts and theories when developing a range of strategies to use for personal planning and problem solving;
- appreciate alternative strategies available for solving problems and personal planning
- work within clear tutor-directed and specific guidance when developing skills in monitoring and reflecting on their progress;
- show judgment in evaluating their overall strategy and presenting the outcomes using a variety of methods.

Skills, qualities and attributes. After studying this module you should be able to:

- demonstrate problem-solving skills when selecting suitable and appropriate methods in problem solving and personal planning;
- work in small groups focused upon a range of simulated activities through which participants have the opportunity to develop and critique their own team-working skills;
- evaluate problem-solving strategies, techniques and solutions.

13 Teaching and Learning

Range of modes of direct contact

This indicates the range of direct contact teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. lectures, seminars

Lecture, discussion, workshop, tutorials, group work.

Total contact hours: 30

Range of other learning methods

This indicates the range of other teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. directed reading, research

Directed reading, case studies.

Total non-contact hours: 150

14 **Assessment methods**

This indicates the type and weighting of assessment elements in the module

<u>Weighting</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>
100%	Coursework	Portfolio of work demonstrating the skills developed during the course.

Diagnostic/ formative assessment

This indicates if there are any assessments that do not contribute directly to the final module mark

Oral formative feed back.
Written summative feed back.

Further information on assessment

This section provides further information on the module's assessment where appropriate

Appendix 4C: Communication Module Specification

Nottingham Trent University Module Specification

Basic module information		
1	Module Title:	Communication
2	Module Code:	SPPD12001
3	Credit Points:	15
4	Duration:	February to June
5	School:	Education
6	Date:	

7	Pre, Post and Co-requisites:						
	These are modules that you must have studied previously in order to take this module, or modules that you must study simultaneously or in a subsequent academic session						
	<table><thead><tr><th><u>Pre, Co, Post</u></th><th><u>Module Code</u></th><th><u>Module Title</u></th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>None</td><td></td><td></td></tr></tbody></table>	<u>Pre, Co, Post</u>	<u>Module Code</u>	<u>Module Title</u>	None		
<u>Pre, Co, Post</u>	<u>Module Code</u>	<u>Module Title</u>					
None							

8	Programmes containing the module				
<u>Level</u>	<u>Core/Option</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Programme Title</u>	
1	Option	FT and PT	STPE00 2	BA(Hons) Psychology and Educational Development	
1	Option	FT and PT	STBL00 2	BA (Hons) Business, Sport and Leisure	
1	Option	FT and PT	STBT00 2	BSc (Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology	

9	Overview and Aims
	To enable students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Produce a variety of communication such as written documents and oral presentations,• Use specialist language with confidence,• Communicate to a variety of audiences and in different contexts,• Use electronic forms of communication such as email.

10	Module Content
	This module will provide students with an opportunity to develop their communication skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• they will develop an awareness of audience, and the ability to use their specialist degree language in context;• gain confidence in using correct referencing techniques;• develop their problem-solving skills when synthesising and evaluating research information;• develop their ability to use a range of images to illustrate information;• use presentation software to enhance their presentation skills and generally develop their presentation skills and techniques;

- develop their confidence in interview technique through role-play.

11 Indicative Reading

Baune, D. (1996) *Making Presentations*, Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff Development
 Honey, P. (1988) *Improve Your People Skills*, London: Institute of Personnel Management
 Pamphilon, S. (1997) *Presentation Skills Explained*, Orpington: Harcro
 Smith, L. (1998) *What every graduate needs: developing personal skills in higher education: an introduction for students and tutors*, Norfolk: Peter Francis Publishers, for the Centre for Research into Human Communication and Learning
 Williams, L. (2000) *Readymade CVs: a source book for job hunters*, London: Kogan Page

12 Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes describe what you should know and be able to do by the end of the module

Knowledge and understanding. After studying this module you should be able to:

- show judgment in producing a range of business documents, e.g. CV, letter of application for work placement
- Show an understanding of important communication techniques and processes including the importance of ICT as a communication tool
- demonstrate problem-solving skills when evaluating and synthesising information

Skills, qualities and attributes. After studying this module you should be able to:

- communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, while developing an awareness of audience
- work within clear tutor-directed and specific guidance when preparing and giving an oral presentation, making use of presentation software to support and enhance the presentation

13 Teaching and Learning

Range of modes of direct contact

This indicates the range of direct contact teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. lectures, seminars

Lecture, discussion, workshop, tutorials, group work.

Total contact hours: 30

Range of other learning methods

This indicates the range of other teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. directed reading, research

Role-play interview, electronic email, practical use of computers, directed reading.

Total non-contact hours: 150

14 Assessment methods

This indicates the type and weighting of assessment elements in the module

<u>Weighting</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>
100%	Coursework	Portfolio: comprising a range of written documents demonstrating development of communication skills.

Diagnostic/ formative assessment This indicates if there are any assessments that do not contribute directly to the final module mark
Oral formative feed back. Written summative feed back.
Further information on assessment This section provides further information on the module's assessment where appropriate

Appendix 4d: Career Planning Module Specification

Nottingham Trent University Module Specification

Basic module information		
1	Module Title:	Career Planning
2	Module Code:	SPPD34001
3	Credit Points:	15
4	Duration:	September to February
5	School:	Education
6	Date:	

7	Pre, Post and Co-requisites:		
	These are modules that you must have studied previously in order to take this module, or modules that you must study simultaneously or in a subsequent academic session		
	<u>Pre, Co, Post</u>	<u>Module Code</u>	<u>Module Title</u>
	None		

8	Programmes containing the module				
	<u>Level</u>	<u>Core/Option</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Programme Title</u>
	3	Core	FT or PT	STPE00 2	BA (Hons) Psychology and Educational Development
	3	Core	FT or PT	STBL00 2	BA (Hons) Business, Sport and Leisure
	3	Core	FT or PT	STBT00 2	BSc (Hons) Business and Information Communications Technology

9	Overview and Aims
	<p>This module is designed to enable you to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and assess your individual skills, competencies, values and interests, and to demonstrate how these can be related to your career decision-making process, • develop a thorough understanding of the range of opportunities available to you upon graduation and the ability to access and to utilise resources effectively, • develop your understanding of the recruitment and selection process and your ability to significantly influence this, • devise a realistic and achievable action plan for career planning.

10	Module Content

The module will provide an introduction to the main theories of occupational choice, an exploration of the role of self-assessment in career planning, defining the concept of personal transferable skills, and assessment of relevance to career decision-making. Introduction to options after Graduation, information available at The Careers Service, exploration of how these can be used most effectively and an insight into the roles and skills required for graduates in the 21st century. An exploration of effective job search strategies, the recruitment and selection process. An introduction to the concept of action planning.

11 Indicative Reading

Hawkins, P. and Winter, J. (1995) *Skills for Graduates in the 21st Century*, Association of Graduate Recruiters

Harvey, Moon, and Geall, (1997) *Graduates Work: Organisational Change and Students' Attributes*, Birmingham, Centre for Research into Quality, University of Central England

AGCAS, (2000) *Your Degree in...Where Next?* Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, The Prospectus Series, Manchester: Central Services Unit

12 Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes describe what you should know and be able to do by the end of the module

Knowledge and understanding. After studying this module you should be able to:

- articulate, critically evaluate and reflect coherently upon your ideas in relation to relevant concepts and theories when identifying your own portfolio of skills and their relationship to career choice.

Skills, qualities and attributes. After studying this module you should be able to:

- research, utilise, analyse and critically evaluate a wide range of literature sources.
- demonstrate diagnostic, planning and problem-solving skills when analysing the nature of the graduate employment market and changing roles for graduates in 21st Century.
- utilise, as appropriate, a wide range of subject-related, analytical and research-based skills when identifying a range of key competencies sought by employers that significantly influence the recruitment process.

13 Teaching and Learning

Range of modes of direct contact

This indicates the range of direct contact teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. lectures, seminars

Lectures, Workshops, Group Exercises

Total contact hours: 30

Range of other learning methods

This indicates the range of other teaching and learning methods used on this module, e.g. directed reading, research

Independent learning tasks, directed reading, directed tasks via Virtual Learning Portal, interview role-play, CV case studies and mini careers projects, development of personal development plan.

Total non-contact hours: 150

14 **Assessment methods**

This indicates the type and weighting of assessment elements in the module

<u>Weighting</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>
100%	Coursework	Individual task 75% Group presentation (25%)

Diagnostic/ formative assessment

This indicates if there are any assessments that do not contribute directly to the final module mark

Oral formative feed back

Written summative feed back.

Further information on assessment

This section provides further information on the module's assessment where appropriate

APPENDIX 5 – Evidence to Support Legitimacy of Researcher

Conference Papers:

BOULTON, H and HRAMIAC, A and IRWIN, B (2009) Development of learning communities for trainee teachers through the use of online reflective blogs, In: *European Conference on Educational Research*, Vienna, 28-30 September

HRAMIAC, A and BOULTON, H (2009) Lost in Transition: Perceptions of Assessment and Feedback from School to University, In: *European Conference on Educational Research*, Vienna, 28-30 September

BOULTON, H. and HRAMIAC, A., 2009. Developing reflective practitioners through the use of blogs: a collaborative approach to learning communities. In: *ALT-C International Conference, Manchester, 8-10 September 2009*.

BOULTON, H. and HRAMIAC, A., 2009. Understanding students: prior experiences and expectations of assessment and feed back. In: *The Higher Education Academy Annual Conference, University of Manchester, 30 June - 2 July 2009*.

IRWIN, B. and BOULTON, H., 2009. Analysing the development of professional identity in blogging discourse. In: *Improving Student Learning Symposium, Imperial College, University of London, and 7-9 September 2009*.

BOULTON, H. and HRAMIAC, A., 2009. Developing reflective practitioners through the use of blogs: a collaborative approach to learning communities. In: *ALT-C International Conference, Manchester, 8-10 September 2009*.

BOULTON, H. and TEPPER, J., 2009. Promoting deep and reflective learning through portfolios. In: *Symposium: The Future is NOW, Nottingham Trent University, 14 January 2009*.

BOULTON, H. and TEPPER, J., 2009. Promoting deep and reflective learning through portfolios. In: *Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, 2 April 2009*.

BOULTON, H. and HRAMIAC, A., 2009. Lost in transition. In: *ESCalate Special Interest Group: Assessment and Feedback, Sheffield Hallam University, 8 June 2009*.

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