Inquiry-Based Learning in Theology and Religious Studies: an Investigation and Analysis: 3.4.a.iv Fieldwork recording: student focus group 2

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This focus group was facilitated by Bob Petrulis of CILASS on 07.11.07. Five out of six of the students who attended the dig came to the focus group.

3.4.a.iv.i Reflecting on the process of learning and the skills acquired

The students said that they had learned a great deal, and that they had acquired skills-they mentioned archaeology skills, video-making skills, interview skills-as they were using them, again evoking the notion of IBL as 'learning by doing'. They talked specifically about learning through exposure to different cultures. One student said that being in the seat of Biblical history helped her to identify the political agendas behind many biblical commentaries, and in some sense, to establish a benchmark by which to judge them, via pieces of evidence which she had observed or collected.

Comments included:

- 'I had so much fun.'
- 'An amazing experience.'
- 'It was fun work.'

3.4.a.iv.ii Membership of a research community

The students knew that they were beginners to archaeology and video-making, but they put a positive spin on this by saying that it meant that their work was original. They also said that giving them genuine responsibility on the dig ensured that they worked hard and that they really felt part of the dig.

3.4.a.iv.iii Assessment

One student said that she found the mark scheme for this module confusing (50% of the mark is given by Diana and 50% is given by the other students who attend the dig). She thought that the differences between the videos made this an unfair way of marking, because no-one but the pairs of students themselves had been privy to the work and
thought processes involved in making the videos. She also added that, when marking her peers’ videos, it had been difficult to follow the mark scheme objectively because she had known how hard the people making the film had worked (because she had made her own). Another student echoed this, saying that she had marked according to the effort she felt had been put into the work, not according to its quality. Compounding her reluctance to give low marks was the fact that the students whom she was called to assess were her friends.

Another student disagreed, saying that it was important for the students to mark each other's work. This student also argued that seeing everyone else’s videos gives you a better perspective on your own. The students who had raised the original objections agreed, but said that they did not think the mark allocation should have been split equally between Diana and the students. In response, another student said that he did not think that the solution would be to make Diana's mark count for more; he felt that she was also too close to the project, and possibly should not have been involved in the marking at all. A fifth students said the videos should have been marked partly by Diana and the students, but then also by an external examiner, but one of the other students rejected this, arguing that only the students and Diana really knew about the project and the work involved.

Still on the subject of assessment, but approaching it from a different tack, one of the students remarked that to be given credit for using skills which they did not normally use at university, and to be given an opportunity to express one’s creativity, and for this to be assessed, was a welcome change from writing essays. This student felt that such an approach to assessment must be particularly atypical in Biblical Studies, since it ‘is known for being a scholarly subject’. Another student said she had initially been unenthusiastic about the assessment methods used in the module; she had been concerned that a significant proportion of her entire level three grade would be decided by the assessment of a skill-video-making-which she had not been properly trained in. However, she reflected that the students had been supported throughout the module, especially by Diana, such that making the films became fun. She said that her experience had been that making the films brought out and captured a part of her personality; she thought it would be difficult to describe writing an essay thus.

3.4.a.iv.iv Workload

The students agreed that producing the videos increased the workload for the module significantly and made the dig process more difficult. One said: ‘instead of digging, I was standing there with a camera doing ten thousand different jobs’. However, another student found the process of filming whilst on the dig a helpful one, because it had allowed them to pause and assess what they were doing and to check that it was worth doing. In this student's experience, making the film increased their understanding of process and empowered them to direct their own activities on the dig.

The students felt particularly taxed by having to attend evening lectures and make notes after digs lasting six or seven hours. They found it hard to concentrate, although they did find the lectures interesting, and appreciated the lecturers’ attempts to involve them in the discussions. One student said she was glad that lecture notes were assessed because this had forced her to pay attention in lectures.

The students reported that work for this module had been evenly spread over the semester, and that this was in contrast to other modules, where workloads crescendo at the end of the semester. With The Bible and Field Archaeology, the students had had to meet deadlines from the very beginning.

3.4.a.iv.iv Widening participation and diversity

One student claimed that this module requires students to have an up-to-date computer; another agreed, arguing that students not in possession of their own computer would have had to have lived at the University to complete the module. One student had bought a new laptop in order to complete the module.
1. Introduction to the research project

2. Introduction to Inquiry Based Learning and its potential benefits

3. Case Study institution A: University of Sheffield

3.1 Generic student focus group

3.2 Interview with CILASS student ambassador

3.3 Staff interviews

3.4 Formal IBL provision

3.4.a Fieldwork recording project

3.4.a.i Fieldwork Recording: the videos

3.4.a.ii Fieldwork recording: staff and student interviews

3.4.a.iii Fieldwork recording: student focus group 1

3.4.a.iv Fieldwork recording: student focus group 2

3.4.b Other IBL projects

3.4.c Tandem learning at the University of Sheffield

4. Case Study institution B: University of Manchester

4.1 Students Facilitating and Validating Peer Learning

4.2 Engaging with Early Christian Communities: An IBL Approach

4.3 The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology

5. Analysis

5.1 TRS and the CILASS framework for IBL

5.2 The disciplinary culture of TRS

5.3 Pragmatic considerations: employability, IBL and TRS

5.4 Conclusions and notes of caution

Bibliography

Appendices

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