Inquiry-Based Learning in Theology and Religious Studies: an Investigation and Analysis: 3.4.b Other IBL projects

Rebecca O’Loughlin

3.4.b.i Course Pack Upgrading

Ultimately, the aim of this project was to facilitate student engagement with IBL, although this was IBL in a weaker form than that at the heart of other CILASS-funded departmental projects. The project consisted of the development of an electronic resource pack of digitised materials to support student inquiry in Biblical Studies, and was led by Professor Loveday Alexander from Biblical Studies in collaboration with University of Sheffield library staff. The project was thus particularly attuned to the emphases on information literacy and networked learning in the CILASS framework for IBL. An electronic course pack and online resource list have been created, but plans to develop a WebCT course to improve access to web-based resources and discussion boards, with a view to adding an element of collaborative inquiry to the project, were not achieved. The project is now complete. Apart from its quantifiable outcomes, the process has led to a closer relationship between the Department and the University Library. Loveday Alexander reported that the online course materials have received positive feedback from students, who had had difficulty locating printed copies of course materials. She did, however, say that the students found the technology cumbersome and difficult to use.41

3.4.b.ii Database of Art and Artefacts

The leaders of this project are Diana Edelman and Cheryl Exum. The aim is to facilitate student inquiry by providing access to a searchable digital repository of images relevant to Biblical Studies—that is, to a database of copyright cleared images—beginning with those supplied by departmental staff. Ultimately, it is hoped that students will be able to add materials to the database themselves, in addition to being able to access and interpret images uploaded by staff. A database will thus have been created which is accessible to everyone in the Department, and possibly in other departments such as Archaeology. Biblical Studies students will, then, have had the learning experience of adding materials to the database whilst creating a reusable resource for themselves and future students. During our interview on 11.10.07, Hugh Pyper described this as PBL, for the reason that students are required to solve the problems of how to find, classify and upload the images.42

At the time I was gathering data, the appropriate software had been sourced, and images had been collected and were in the process of being uploaded. The hope was to use the database in Diana Edelman's modules on Biblical World (level one) and The Bible and Archaeology (level two), but Hugh Pyper reported during our interview that the project had not yet been integrated into any teaching, having stalled as a result of copyright issues.
3.4.b.iii Cascade Learning

This project is about cross-level peer support. The plan is to use the CILASS funding to revive the department's lapsed cascade learning scheme, whereby level two students supported level one students in their learning, and level three students supported level two students. According to Keith Whitelam, the project leader, mature students found the system particularly useful in terms of socialisation and support when the department used to run it. This time around, IBL techniques and activities will be used to enhance the programme, with a particular emphasis on information literacy. At the time I spoke with Keith, the project was not yet underway, although focus groups with students had been planned to find out what they would consider useful.

Keith had also mapped some of his own ideas. For level one students, he thinks that an induction to the department, and guidance on the use of handbooks and essay writing would be helpful. He plans to make the scheme more project-based for level two and three students. Keith reflected that, now that the department has video cameras and video editing software, and students who know how to use it, it might be useful to have students making videos about the department, and Biblical Studies which could be put on the departmental website and/or shown at open days. In particular, the videos could be used to display the kinds of skills the students are developing; not necessarily just Biblical Studies skills, but generic skills which they could apply to all kinds of employment. Keith is not sure how the students will feel about getting involved in such a project. He predicts that if it is not assessed, they may not do it. The previous cascade learning system was assessed.

3.4.b.iv Textual Studies

The point of this project is to enable students to compare texts and videos which report the same event in different ways, and then to draw comparisons between this and Biblical texts. This project is about editorial work and eyewitness accounts, about how different people observe and record the same event in different ways, something which the Bible is full of examples of. Hugh Pyper, the project leader, told me that the project is in development, having had a slow start as a result of copyright issues associated with Biblical material. Its launch was planned for 2008.

3.4.b.v International Group Learning

This project, which is led by Hugh Pyper, melds collaborative inquiry with networked learning. It seeks to initiate inquiry across universities in different countries, possibly using the access grid technology available at CILASS-or 'mega-video conferencing' as it may be better described-which allows groups of people in different parts of the world to take part in the same seminar. The plan is to link up a seminar group in Sheffield with one in the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, with students in both groups doing presentations on a Pauline text and then discussing in plenary the influence of local context on how the text is read and interpreted. The fact there are no access grid nodes in Stellenbosch could be problematic. The project is not yet underway and needs further development.

Footnotes

- I spoke briefly with Loveday about this project during a visit to the Department of Biblical Studies on 13.12.07, but she was unable to take part in a formal interview.
- This information is taken from my interview with Hugh on 11.10.07. See 3.3.a for more data from this interview.
- This information is taken from my interview with Keith on 06.12.07. See 3.3.d for more data from this
interview.

- See 3.3.d.
- See 3.3.a.

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