Inquiry-Based Learning in Theology and Religious Studies: an Investigation and Analysis: 4. Case Study institution B: University of Manchester

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Having researched IBL provision at Biblical Studies at Sheffield, I wanted to look at the situation in another institution. I thus began a second case study, this time of the Religions and Theology (R and T) Department at the University of Manchester. I met with members of R and T staff involved in IBL projects, and attended a student focus group related to one such project. I also met with staff from CEEBL, which is the IBL CETL hosted by the University, and which funds some of the projects on which R and T staff are working.

I met with staff from R and T and CEEBL on 18.01.08. Those present were Karen O'Rourke (then Associate Director of CEEBL), Julia McMorrow (Humanities Coordinator, CEEBL), Louise Goldring (Student Sabbatical Officer, CEEBL), Elaine Graham (Professor of Social and Pastoral Theology at R and T), Katja Stuerzenhofecker (part-time lecturer at R and T, and Associate Lecturer at the Open University) and Chris Baker (Part time lecturer/honorary research fellow at R and T and Research Director of the William Temple Foundation).

At a later date, I met with Kate Cooper, Senior Lecturer at R and T, who uses IBL in her teaching. In addition to the four members of staff from R and T whom I met in person who use IBL in their teaching—Elaine, Katja, Chris and Kate—I was also made aware of the use of these methods by two other members of staff at Religions and Theology.

At the meeting with CEEBL and R and T staff, it became clear that IBL practices occur with some frequency at R and T. Some of this is funded by CEEBL, and some of it is not. The conversation focused mainly on two projects being coordinated by Katja and Elaine, which I outline below. We also discussed designing and delivering an IBL curriculum. Elaine explained that some of the staff at R and T opt to use ‘hybrid IBL’, integrating IBL exercises into existing courses, which otherwise remain lecture- and seminar-based. The group agreed that this is far easier than designing an IBL course from scratch.

Speaking about the importance of tutors changing their focus from directly imparting knowledge to their students, CEEBL staff commented during the meeting that ‘it is very hard to let go’. In their experience, tutors feel a tension between covering the curriculum—they referred to this as ‘content tyranny’—and allowing the students to direct their own learning. Katja agreed with this, telling the group that she has experienced problems with her students not imbibing sufficient content. She worries that students who have taken IBL modules will have acquired lifelong learning skills, but little subject content, at the end of their degrees. Julia said that this is the most common criticism of IBL. She and the other CEEBL staff responded by saying that the trigger for imbibing the content is the setting up of the inquiry; that...
is, pitching the problem appropriately and making sure the inquiry is adequately structured, and that students can access support from tutors when they come to tackle it. They added that sometimes tutors’ fears about students not imbibing content are exaggerated.

An overview of the IBL projects taking place at Manchester is given on the following pages.

Students Facilitating and Validating Peer Learning Engaging with Early Christian Communities: An IBL Approach The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology

Footnotes

- See 4.2.
- One of these was John Zavos, who was not able to meet with me, but who did confirm via email that he uses IBL methods with his students.

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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