

## **LDHEN Symposium: submission to deliver a workshop**

### The Educative: the importance of informal learning in Higher Education

Broadly speaking, the history and the future of a community are inextricably woven together by a set of underpinning beliefs and values. In order for these to be perpetuated, each individual must undergo educative development and also take some responsibility as an educator through a process of informal learning. Ideally, the educative functions through continuous reflection: we deliberate on past experiences in order to inform current actions with a view to affecting the future. As Erben has argued, “although lives are empirically unpredictable there is a real sense in which selves conduct their existences as though an empirical future is likely” (1999,p87).

Bournemouth University has a well established system of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) developed over the last six years and now highly regarded both nationally and internationally. Currently, there are 118 PAL Leaders across the institution: second year undergraduates from a range of disciplines who work as university employees, either singly or in pairs, supporting a cohort of freshers throughout their first year. PAL Leaders are facilitators or mentors but never teachers. They work as intermediaries between the school and the first year students to promote understanding of the curriculum and development of social awareness. Although the leaders themselves have progressed ‘in time’, in a sense they also regress, through reflection, in order to empathise with their first year colleagues. In so doing, they become true deliverers of the educative because they are not only able to re-live the first year experience, but also to build on it. Adding to or subtracting from the status quo as originally perceived could suggest one way in which this particular community of practice (Wenger 1998) retains its value consensus whilst simultaneously evolving dynamically.

PAL Leaders have the opportunity to achieve accreditation for their work by compiling a portfolio of evidence and reflection assessed against criteria within seven learning outcomes. Biographical methodology has been used to examine the content of ten of these portfolios based against a number of themes that reflect the educative. In my workshop, I would like to discuss the role of PAL in the face of reduced contact hours and examine two areas that my research highlights as potentially problematic for first year students: the concept of independent learning and social adjustment to a new community.

Erben, M (ed) 1998 *Biography and Education* London: Falmer Press

Wenger, E. 1998 *Communities of Practice* Cambridge: University Press