

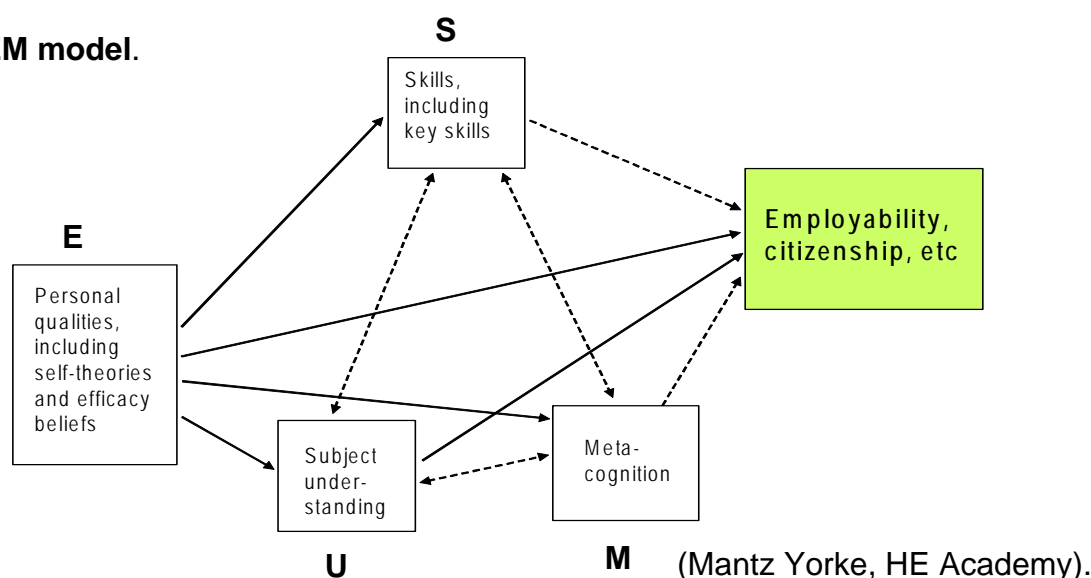
## Using discussion in classes.

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### 1. Student Academic Support – its background and its role.

- Retention focus.
- Targeted support.
- Collaboration with teaching staff, eg (joint) delivery of classes.
- Individual / small group appointments for students.
- Basis in USEM model (Widening Participation Strategy).

### 2. USEM model.



- Holism / contextualisation of approach helpful.
- Of the USEM model, self-efficacy is perhaps the most influential factor behind a student's persistence and success (Yorke et al, 2003).
- Focus on self-efficacy as a pre-condition to addressing skills issues.
- Also means that if there's an expert in the room, it probably isn't you.

### 3. Students' self-efficacy, expertise and mixed ability teaching.

- If students' self-efficacy is crucial to underpinning development of skills, skills development sessions could usefully begin by addressing students' self-efficacy – who they think they are, where they're coming from.
- Makes treating the class as a homogenous group even more dubious – need to find ways of working with the group as a collection of individuals.

### 4. Nature of discussion-based classes.

- **Self-assessment** – what have you been doing, how, why and what can you learn from past behaviours to inform future development?
- **Attitudes / approaches to the current task** – need to be grounded in individuals' strengths / weaknesses / motivations, so offering definitive 'right answers' unhelpful. Needs a range of suggestions – preferably a mix of ideas generated by the students in discussion with other ideas thrown in by the tutor.

- **Facilitating consideration of way forward** – encouraging each individual to draw lessons from group discussion to consider their next steps in the context of their personal strengths, weaknesses, time pressures, interest levels, etc.
- **Compromise to meet students' expectations** – especially if discussion-based classes are not a common feature of their course, so the class is not off-putting / unhelpful and has a chance of providing useful help. Requires a back-up plan for something more reassuringly didactic just in case of a completely inhibited, non-communicative group.

## 5. Examples.

- **Preparing for your Honours project:**
  - Session run twice during 'ReFreshers' in induction week, with different students each time.
  - Completely open format. Some key points in mind as the back-up plan but no fixed agenda. Students selected what they wanted to focus on as a group by pooling their personal lists of concerns / interests and selecting the most common items.
  - Different focuses each time – first session on research, second on project planning.
  - Discussion drew heavily on prior experience of equivalent experiences, eg managing a hefty workload / surviving with reduced tutor support.
- **Tackling degree-level coursework.**
  - Session run twice for different groups of access students.
  - First session much more conventionally structured around a series of activities to pull apart a coursework question and generate questions to stimulate research. Looked forward to degree-level work with minimal reference to current experiences in college. Limited opportunity for discussion at the end to reflect on the exercise and its benefits.
  - Second session much more open with less formal structure providing more opportunities for building on the students' current experiences in college – types of assignment they'd been set, their approaches – identifying solid foundations (where possible) and improvements (where appropriate).

## More information:

- USEM model: Yorke, M., et al [Transition into Higher Education: some implications for the 'employability agenda'](#). [online] Available from: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>
- Cook, T., [Heading them off at the pass: predicting retention problems.](#) [online] Available from: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>.
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