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[CH] Supporting Arts and Humanities Student Development and Progression through Integrating Reflection into Personal Tutoring

[A] Introduction

Reflective learning involves '*learning how to take perspective on one's own actions and experience...to allow the possibility of learning through experience*' (Amulya, 2004, p1). Reflection has a strong tradition within education, nursing, and professional studies (Rogers, 2001) but is less common within the Arts and Humanities. As reflection's potential for supporting student progression and holistic development is increasingly understood (Hughes, 2004), different ways that reflection can be embedded in personal tutoring across disciplines has begun to be explored (Bassett, 2014).

This case study examines how reflective practices were integrated into personal tutoring in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Warwick in 2018/19, and the positive impact this had on students' experiences of personal tutoring and wider learning. It also discusses how reflective learning resources were co-designed with students. The study shows that teaching students how to reflect on their holistic development through personal tutoring helps empower them to manage their academic, personal and career progression at university and beyond.

[A] Personal Tutoring in the Faculty of Arts at Warwick

The Faculty of Arts at Warwick employs a pastoral model of personal tutoring (Earwaker, 1992; Thomas, 2006; Lochtie et al., 2018), where students meet their personal tutor once per term. The everyday management of tutoring is largely devolved to departments. Personal tutors have significant autonomy over personal tutoring practice. A review of personal tutoring at Warwick in 2017 revealed that many tutors felt passionate about the role and how it supports students, but others felt unsure about its purpose and were awkward about elements of its delivery. Correspondingly, the review showed that students' experiences of personal tutoring were mixed (Gracia et al, 2017).

At a strategic level, in 2017 we also noticed that student satisfaction with academic support had begun to decline across the faculty, as indicated by shifting academic support scores in the National Student Survey (NSS) and feedback from student representatives. We believed, from student feedback evidence, that this stemmed from changing student expectations around 'value for money', including in relation to wellbeing and careers support. Our project exploring the possibilities for embedding reflection in personal tutoring thus aimed to create:

- greater consistency in personal tutoring practice;
- clarity around the purpose of the personal tutoring;
- enhanced academic, personal, and careers support for students;

- improved student satisfaction.

[A] Co-creating Reflective Portfolios

Co-creation with students, defined by Bovill as ‘a collaborative approach to the design and creation of learning and teaching experiences’ (Bovill, 2013, p463), is a central element of Warwick’s educational philosophy (Warwick Education Strategy, 2018). For this reason, we recruited a small group of personal tutors and students from the School of Modern Languages and Cultures (SMLC) to help us co-create reflective materials for use in personal tutoring. We recruited personal tutors who were interested in developing their practice and students from the Student-Staff Liaison Committee. We asked the students what questions personal tutors should ask when meeting tutees at the start of term.

Using the answers and ideas generated, we subsequently designed a Personal Development and Progress Portfolio. We chose the portfolio model because it enabled continuous dialogue between the tutor and tutee based on their mutual reflections on the student’s strengths, achievements, and areas for improvement across the academic year (Hughes, 2004). This portfolio took the form of a series of self-assessment forms which prompted students to reflect upon their learning experiences and their academic, personal, social, and employability progression. A system was designed where students would be asked to submit this form electronically, via our attendance system Tabula, to their personal tutor before their scheduled termly personal tutor meetings. This would then provide the basis of the conversation between tutor and tutee in the meeting. The number of questions asked of students increased incrementally as they progressed in their degree, culminating in questions around engagement with Student Careers and Skills and their own critical reflection on their academic progress and transferable skills development.

In the SMLC the portfolio was introduced to a trial group of first-year students in term 1 of the 2018/19 academic year. In other departments in the faculty that year, the portfolio was provided as an optional resource that personal tutors could employ in their practice if they wished. In 2019/20, disciplinary tailored versions of the portfolio that was trialled in SMLC were adopted in Classics, English, Theatre, and Film and TV. In the same year, the portfolio was rolled out to all year groups in the School of Modern Languages (ca.360 Undergraduate (UG) students). At the time of writing, all departments in the Faculty of Arts at Warwick (ca. 2929 UG students) are now delivering some sort of reflective portfolio.

[A] Evaluating success of the reflective portfolios

Evidence suggests that the portfolio was successful in reaching the objectives of our project. In SMLC students gave a 96% satisfaction rating for academic support in the 2018/19 internal Warwick Student Experience Survey (WSES, 2018). This success was echoed across the faculty, especially in departments where the portfolio was widely implemented, with student satisfaction for academic support in the National Student Survey (NSS) overall rising 8.8% between 2017/18 and 2018/19. Graduate Outcomes improved in the same period. In 2020, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2020) ranked SMLC third in the UK on the basis of a recent graduate outcomes survey. Evidence suggests that students especially welcomed the way that the portfolio enables them to track their progression and understand different facets of their educational gain while at university. It also suggests that they value learning the skill of reflection. One student reported that 'the forms help me to keep track of what I've achieved to date on my course. I never really thought about how what we are doing in our modules is actually developing our skills'. All student feedback highlighted the benefits of a scaffolded approach to the reflective portfolio, in which students were supported to reflect critically on their achievements on the course. At the Arts Faculty Education Committee, Heads of Department Forum, and departmental meetings, academic staff have expressed praise for the introduction of the reflective forms and how they give personal tutor meetings structure and promote student engagement.

[A] Conclusions

[B] Implications for learning

Our project identified that Arts and Humanities students can benefit significantly from reflecting on their academic progress and holistic development as part of their university learning. It also identified that by scaffolding – by which we mean the development of a framework in support of – personal tutor meetings we enabled students to learn how to reflect on their experiences of learning and life at university.

We believe that this is just the beginning and that there are many more ways in which reflection can be integrated into personal tutoring. For example, another student who provided feedback on the portfolio noted that one of the downsides of portfolio was that: 'I'd like to be able to have more freedom to write a longer piece like a blog rather than being constrained by the set questions.' This suggests an appetite for more free-flow text as part of the portfolio. Up until now the portfolios have also been text based but in the future they could be done in the form of vlogs, audio recordings or graphic images. This could open up exciting avenues for creativity, especially in the Arts and

Humanities context. Equally, technology could assist in enabling easier engagement with the portfolio for students and easier data management. It could also perhaps facilitate student engagement with the portfolio before they arrive at university and enable it to be made exportable to students when they graduate, and to potential employers.

In summary, our project demonstrated that there is a firm place for reflection in personal tutoring. It showed that engaging in reflection and learning reflective skills can have a range of benefits for students, and that there are a multitude of ways that reflection in personal tutoring can be developed to boost student experience but also equip students to be more self-aware. The methods our project employed – co-creating reflective resources with students and using reflective forms to facilitate and structure student reflection through personal tutoring – are easily transferred to other disciplines as well as personal tutor systems in different university contexts and, as the case study has shown, enable materials to be tailored to the needs of different study populations and disciplines.

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