1. Introduction to the research project

1.1 Background

In 2007/8, the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (SC for PRS) collaborated on a research project with the Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences (CILASS CETL)\(^1\) which investigated and assessed the role, and the potential, of inquiry-based learning (IBL) in Theology, Religious Studies and Biblical Studies (TRS). This report presents the conclusions of this research. Preliminary findings were also presented at a workshop on IBL in TRS in May 2008, jointly organised by the two Centres.\(^2\)

The SC for PRS’ interest in IBL emerges in part from an earlier study which it commissioned on pedagogical research in the context of TRS.\(^3\) It is the view of both CILASS and the SC for PRS that learning through inquiry—that is, through self-directed research, with the support of academic and other staff—is a powerful and exciting way for students to develop both subject knowledge and a range of essential skills. The SC for PRS believes that IBL is a highly appropriate pedagogy for TRS, where the potential for truly innovative work, by learners and teachers alike, is considerable.

This research has reflected on this potential by mapping IBL activities in case study TRS communities and consulting the existing body of literature on IBL, particularly as it relates to the arts and humanities. This report, and the workshop which also formed part of the research project, draw conclusions based on this research which will contribute to a shared understanding of the potential and challenges associated with the practice of IBL in TRS, thus developing capacity to establish innovative approaches to IBL in this discipline. The SC for PRS also believes that the existing approaches to IBL in TRS departments which are detailed in this report are sustainable and transferable to different disciplines, including philosophy. We also look towards a future role for this research in informing other work on disciplinary differences in IBL at CILASS and beyond.

1.2 Methodology

Two qualitative research methodologies were employed throughout the project: documentary analyses and surveys of case study departments.

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\(^1\) CILASS is one of 74 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) first funded by HEFCE in 2005. Of these 74, a number of other CETLs besides CILASS have supporting and promoting active learning and student research as their core function. These are the Centre for Active Learning (CeAL) in Geography, Environment and Related Disciplines, University of Gloucestershire; the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Undergraduate Research Skills (CETL-AURS), University of Reading; the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA), Sheffield Hallam University; the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTRE), University of Surrey; InQbate, the Centre for Excellence in Enquiry Based Learning (CEEBL), University of Manchester; and the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research, Warwick University.


\(^3\) See Rebecca O’Loughlin, ‘The Relationship between Pedagogical and Discipline-Specific Research Methods: Critical Perspectives’, *Discourse* 7.2 (Spring 2008), 67-120. Available online at [http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/PrsDiscourseArticles/32](http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/PrsDiscourseArticles/32)
In terms of documentary analyses, I performed a literature review of IBL materials. It proved very difficult to locate materials on IBL specifically in relation to TRS; of course, this is a research finding in itself, and it is one which substantiates the rationale for this project. All resources consulted can be found in the bibliography to this report.

It was not within the scope of this study to map the practice of IBL pedagogies in TRS departments across the UK. Two TRS departments in UK institutions were chosen to be the subject of case studies. The Universities of Sheffield and Manchester were selected for focus, partly because these institutions host IBL CETLs. CILASS, the Sheffield-based CETL with which the SC for PRS collaborated on this project, has worked with the Department of Biblical Studies at Sheffield to develop inquiry-based activities for use in Biblical Studies. The University of Manchester is home to the Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning (CEEBL) which has worked with staff from the Department of Religions and Theology at Manchester to design inquiry-based curricula. Staff within the Religions and Theology department are also among the founders of the Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology, an inquiry-based doctorate which has been developed in collaboration with CEEBL, and also with the SC for PRS.

I also wanted to find out what the other IBL CETLs, beyond CILASS and CEEBL, are doing with TRS. The answer is: very little. 

However, in the course of my research at Sheffield and Manchester, and my literature review, I was able to identify other TRS departments where IBL is being practised, even if it is not labelled as such.

In terms of surveys, myself and Julie Gallimore, the SC for PRS’ employability consultant, conducted semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with staff and students from Biblical Studies at Sheffield in order to gather empirical data on their experiences and views of IBL. I interviewed staff on a one-to-one basis, and Julie interviewed the students in focus groups.

I also conducted semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with staff and students from Religions and Theology at Manchester, to the same end. I interviewed one staff member on a one-to-one basis, and I interviewed other staff members and one student together in one group, which also comprised CEEBL staff. For pragmatic reasons, this group interview was more informal than that which Julie had conducted at Sheffield and it was not recorded (although notes were taken).

Secondary focus group interviews with students from Biblical Studies at Sheffield, and with students from Religions and Theology at Manchester, conducted by members of staff from CILASS and CEEBL respectively, were also drawn upon in the consultation process.

Staff from CILASS CETL were also consulted in group situations and individually by email. Acknowledgement should also go to Lesley Walker, Arabic/French/German and Latin Coordinator at the Modern Languages Teaching Centre at the University of Sheffield, who met with me to discuss tandem learning as a form of IBL.

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4 Although reference to ‘enquiry-based learning’ (EBL) is common in the literature, I use ‘inquiry-based learning’ (IBL) throughout this report, for the reason that this is the spelling used by CILASS (as distinct from CEEBL, which uses the alternate ‘e’ spelling), with whom the SC for PRS collaborated formally on this project.

5 I contacted CETL AURS, who said they had no engagement with TRS. I also contacted SCEPTRE, the Centre for Promoting Learner Autonomy (CPLA), and The Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research but did not receive responses, and there was nothing on these CETLs’ websites to indicate engagement with TRS.

6 All participants were required to sign a consent form before taking part in interviews.

7 Thanks to Bob Petrulis of CILASS and Louise Golding of CEEBL for sharing the data.

8 Although it has its origins in modern language teaching, the SC for PRS believes that tandem learning is also an appropriate pedagogy for the TRS group of disciplines. In 2007, the SC for PRS commissioned a mini-project on interfaith tandem learning which will be reporting in 2009.
2. Introduction to Inquiry Based Learning and its potential benefits

2.1 What is Inquiry Based Learning?

Inquiry Based Learning, or ‘IBL’, refers to a range of pedagogical approaches which have student-led research at their heart. The term ‘IBL’ also accommodates the more widely known ‘problem-based learning’ (PBL). Both IBL, and PBL within it, fall under the wider umbrella of ‘active learning’. This diagram illustrates the relationship between the different elements:

In its simplest expression, IBL is ‘learning by doing’. Students learn by identifying and engaging with the questions and problems of their discipline, becoming participants in the research process. They direct their own lines of inquiry—which often means designing their own open-ended questions—and identify appropriate methods and resources with which to address them. The tutor acts as a ‘walking resource’, guiding the students’ inquiries without undermining the students’ autonomy, which is crucial in inquiry approaches. Teaching and learning are thus integrated such that staff and students become ‘partners in the learning process’.

Entire modules or programmes can be designed along inquiry lines, or discrete IBL activities can be incorporated into more traditional curricula. IBL complements a variety of existing teaching methods, including small group teaching, interactive lectures, problem-based teaching, case studies, and small and large-scale research projects. The centrality of the question—as opposed to a topic, as per traditional methods of teaching—is the common thread in all IBL activities. In light of the absence of emphasis on a set response to such a question, IBL has been described as ‘a pedagogy which best enables students to experience the processes of knowledge creation.’ In contrast to transmission teaching—where the tutor imparts knowledge to a reactive class—IBL espouses independent, self-directed learning.

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11 Spronken-Smith et al., ‘How Effective is Inquiry-Based Learning in Linking Teaching and Research?’.
CILASS has identified three main components to IBL:

2.1.a Collaborative inquiry
- Development of information literacy

2.1.b Networked learning

More details of this framework can be found at: http://www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/ibl.html. Its relationship and relevance to pedagogy in TRS is discussed later in this report, in the analysis section.

2.2 Advantages of using IBL

The SC for PRS considers that IBL is a useful pedagogy within our disciplines and warrants further investigation for the following reasons:

2.2.a IBL fosters deep learning
Research has shown that active learning methods such as IBL encourage deep learning in students, and that this enhances students' enthusiasm for learning. This stands in contrast to the surface learning fostered by traditional transmission approaches.

2.2.b IBL produces authentic learning
With IBL, the inquiries which students explore have emerged from their own interests and experiences, and are motivated by a desire to really know something, or to solve a real problem, which may be of relevance beyond the classroom, either in the public sphere or in students' future careers, or both. Consequently, students feel that they 'own' their inquiries, are more engaged with study, and are more likely to retain the knowledge which results from it.

2.2.c Students acquire a range of skills through IBL methods
IBL furnishes students with a range of transferable skills – personal, professional and intellectual. These include:

- research and information literacy skills
- critical thinking skills
- reflexivity
- creativity
- problem-solving
- leadership skills
- project management skills
- team working and interpersonal skills, including conflict-handling skills and time management skills

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These skills are essential in both academic and professional contexts and, indeed, in the wider world. The point which I particularly want to emphasise is that IBL satisfies both a pragmatic and an intellectual purpose. Students are more employable by virtue of acquiring these skills, but they have simultaneously developed academically because these skills are also genuinely intellectual. To put it crudely, IBL ticks institutional boxes but does not allow the employability agenda to take over, because the values at its heart are intellectual. IBL is, then, a powerful way of merging intellectual development with employability skills.

2.2.d IBL can have a positive impact on widening participation and diversity agendas
IBL has the potential to promote inclusive teaching and learning. It works with a student-teacher model which is based more on mutuality and equality than that in which transmission teaching is grounded. The student and the tutor are reconceptualised in IBL as co-researchers, rather than the tutor being regarded as the information-giver and the student as the receptacle. Furthermore, IBL employs non-traditional learning and assessment methods. To a degree, students decide how to do their research, and they have a say in how, and by whom, they are assessed. IBL thus complements the widening participation agendas of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK.

2.2.e IBL promotes a safe atmosphere for students and staff
Peter Kahn and Karen O’Rourke have pointed out that the small group work which is intrinsic to IBL fosters relationships between staff and students, which is important in mass higher education, where students can feel anonymous and isolated. IBL provides students with a safe environment in which to experiment with creativity; if the IBL exercise is properly set up, then getting it wrong should not feel too bad in front of friends and peers. IBL also creates an environment in which tutors can be reasonably comfortable to admit that they do not know the answer to a particular question.

2.2.f Student satisfaction with IBL methods is high
According to CILASS’ Interim Evaluation Report, students generally report positive experiences of IBL. Two-thirds of students surveyed by CILASS prior to the publication of the report found IBL enjoyable and motivating, and similar proportions attributed to IBL the positive outcomes of developing a good understanding of the questions and problems of their disciplines and reinforcing their interest in their disciplines. Three quarters of both undergraduates and postgraduates surveyed felt that the skills they had acquired through IBL would be useful beyond academic study.

2.2.g IBL strengthens the research-teaching nexus
Commenting on the role which IBL plays in the strengthening of the research-teaching nexus in higher education in the UK, Philippa Levy and Bob Petrulis comment: ‘When inquiry is seen as the common link between what students do as learners, and what scholars do as teachers and researchers, the distinction between learning and teaching begins to blur and possibilities for more integrated approaches to higher learning emerge’. Students are thus empowered to play active roles in the research communities of their disciplines.

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14 Kahn and O’Rourke, Guide to Curriculum Design.
3. Case Study institution A: University of Sheffield

The University of Sheffield is home to CILASS CETL and a Department of Biblical Studies, so it was an obvious place to begin my research. Using the methodologies outlined previously, I set about finding an answer to one of the key research questions for this project: how is the Department of Biblical Studies at Sheffield working with CILASS?

The results of this enquiry are covered here in two main areas. The first outlines the results of my general investigations into IBL in the Department, and the second looks at the six projects, funded directly by CILASS, on IBL, and focusing in greater depth on the Department’s flagship IBL module, The Bible and Field Archaeology.

I wanted to talk to students and staff at Biblical Studies at Sheffield generally about their teaching and learning experiences in relation to IBL, and specifically about the delivery and reception of modules explicitly flagged as IBL. In order to find out about the ‘Sheffield experience’ in general, in addition to consulting CILASS publications, the websites of both CILASS and the Department of Biblical Studies, and talking to CILASS staff about their work with the Department, I conducted a series of interviews. I interviewed individual staff members and the CILASS student ambassador for Biblical Studies, and I also organised focus groups of undergraduate students.

The student focus groups were conducted by Julie Gallimore, the SC for PRS’ employability consultant and an experienced focus group facilitator. Julie conducted focus groups with two groups of students from the Biblical Studies. One group had taken the IBL module on The Bible and Field Archaeology, which was developed with CILASS funding. This group were recruited to talk specifically about this module. The other group consisted of a general sample of students from the Department, who provided an overview of their learning experiences; the only condition for participation in this group was that the students had not taken The Bible and Field Archaeology module.

I also consulted the CILASS student ambassador for Biblical Studies, who was then a Level 3 single honours Biblical Studies undergraduate at Sheffield. As CILASS student ambassador, she worked with staff and students in Biblical Studies to promote and develop inquiry approaches in the Department.

Finally, I interviewed five members of the teaching staff at Biblical Studies about their teaching practices, with particular reference to inquiry pedagogies. My sample included staff working on CILASS projects and staff without any formal connection to CILASS. My results indicate that a high level of IBL is being practised in the Department, via both CILASS-funded projects and other projects and modules which do not label themselves as IBL, but which are underpinned by inquiry approaches.

The results of the investigations can be found here.

that research-based learning provides students with the context for deep, situated learning through peripheral membership of a community of practice. They also refer to Brew, Research and Teaching: Beyond the Divide (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 14-15, which offers a vision of Higher Education where academics and students research together ‘as members of inclusive, scholarly knowledge-building communities’.

17 See section 2 above.
18 See Appendix C for a sample of the questions I asked.
3.1 Generic student focus group

Julie Gallimore ran this focus group on 20.02.08. Four students attended. Their demographic was as follows:

- Female, level 3, single honours biblical studies student, 21 years old.
- Male, level 2, single honours biblical studies student, 20 years old.
- Male, level 2, joint honours biblical studies and philosophy student, 19 years old.
- Male, level 1, single honours biblical studies student, 24 years old. This student had returned to study after working for five years.

The questions were designed to encourage the students to talk about how they are learning. In particular, they focused on the students’ experiences of directing their own inquiries and research, the skills they perceive themselves to be acquiring as a result of engaging with particular learning styles, their thoughts on how different learning styles relate to information retention and recall, their views on assessment methods in the department, and the levels of support for learning offered by the department.

The students in this group were able to reflect on their engagement with a variety of learning styles, including IBL and PBL, and to articulate the different skills they were acquiring as Biblical Studies students. They were also able to relate the skills they had acquired to their employability. They had all thought about their future careers, and three had already made a clear career choice. All of the students demonstrated a clear enthusiasm for inquiry and all clearly enjoyed their studies.

The students were less emphatic and enthusiastic in their responses to the facilitator’s questions about their learning experiences than were the students who had taken The Bible and Field Archaeology. However, it is acknowledged that an archaeological dig in Israel is a particularly memorable learning experience which these students had not had the opportunity to experience and reflect upon.

3.1.a Learning experiences

When asked about their learning experiences, the group reported participation in a range of learning activities, including lectures, seminars, presentations and research. They reported feeling empowered by their tutors to learn. However, one student commented: ‘The learning methods are simple but they [the tutors] are trying to use IT more and get lectures to be more interactive. I’m not sure about this as I need time to absorb new things.’ When asked about their experiences of directing their own inquiries/research, the students talked about researching for essays and presentations. L3 was also engaged in research for her dissertation. The students felt that their degrees were giving them the tools to direct their own research. L3 was more confident than the other students to discuss research skills in detail and to talk about challenging the views of tutors. Comments included:

‘There’s a balance between directive study and openness to do your own thing.’
‘Only a curious person does this course’
‘My tutor is involved in IBL and we have discussed it and its sounds really interesting, and interactive learning is part of what we do.’
‘Inquiry is all about asking questions and going down different roads—we do that all the time’.

19 The group discussion lasted ninety minutes. Students were briefed about the project prior to the group and all signed a consent form (see Appendices A and B).
20 For the sake of brevity, the four students will be referred to in the text in the following way: L3 (the Level 3 student); L2 SH (the Level 2 Single Honours student); L2 JH (the Level 2 Joint Honours student); and L1 (the Level 1 student).
21 See INSERT LINK.
22 My emphasis.
There was, then, a sense among the students—and many of the academic staff I spoke to also—that IBL is not particularly new to TRS, because it has inquiry, critical thinking and argument at its heart, and is grounded in an epistemology which regards truth as contested, and which posits argument as the route to knowledge. However, although these comments substantiate the view that IBL and TRS are a ‘natural fit’, it is also the case that the students were working with a weak definition of IBL, one which may not do justice to its true nature at all.23

3.1.b Deep learning
When asked about how different learning styles relate to information retention and recall, the consensus among the students was that if a topic is interesting and has been the subject of debate in the classroom, knowledge of that topic is more likely to be retained. The point here is that student participation in scholarly debates, albeit in a seminar setting, was perceived to be crucial to knowledge retention. One of the students remarked: ‘Learning for an exam is easily forgotten.’ Another said: ‘Things are retained more when you care about them’, which recalls the claim that IBL is ‘authentic’.24

3.1.c Independent research and information literacy
All of the students believed themselves to be self-directing in terms of their learning, but they mentioned feeling overwhelmed by the choice of research sources available, and said that they welcomed guidance on reading lists. One student remarked: ‘It’s faster and easier when people tell me what to read.’ Another student said that because they had only seven hours of contact time with tutors per week, it was inevitable that the research they do after class is self-directed. This student would like their course to include more lectures. The students also referred specifically to information literacy skills. One said that they had learned ‘how to read effectively and fast’ as a result of their degree, and another agreed that, in Biblical Studies ‘you have to be able to analyse different perspectives fast’. Two of the students reported using online search tools and journals to speed up their research. This led to a discussion of electronic sources which included reference to information literacy and the value of different sources. One of the students said ‘It feels like we are given a lot of freedom to research sources but there’s lots of guidance [from tutors] about good sources and checking out what the agenda of an author might be. Sometimes they [the tutors] tell you sources to avoid.’

The group also showed a good understanding of the research activities of their lecturers.

3.1.d Assessment methods
When asked about assessment methods in the department, two of the students said that they were satisfied with the mixture of coursework and exams. The two remaining students described exams as ‘stressful’ and ‘frustrating’. All of the students felt that the creative learning methods endorsed by the department should be complemented by creative forms of assessment. The group discussed ways of making assessment more creative, including introducing oral methods of examination. L3 explained that her dissertation involves having to present her work and defend it, and she understands that this form of assessment can be difficult for some people. Another student, however, asked: ‘Why don’t we have oral exams? We are taught in this style so an exam would test this. I’d find it easier, as I’m more articulate speaking than writing’. The comment that ‘We are taught in this style’ is important, because it betokens the importance of consistency between teaching and assessment methods, which IBL practitioners need to be particularly aware of. It is unfair to use teaching methods which are disjunctive with the types of assessments the students have to undertake; by way of example, IBL modules which entail interactive classroom sessions may not be most appropriately assessed by a written exam at the end of the course.

23 A debate exists, for example, about whether researching for an essay question is IBL.
24 Insert link to introduction section
3.1.e Support for learning

When asked about levels of support for learning offered by the department, responses varied considerably. L1 said he had received ‘not very much’ support from members of staff but conceded that it was his responsibility to seek this more proactively in future. L3 appeared to have more productive relationships with staff, which was not surprising given that she had been in the department for the longest time. She said that the support offered ‘depends on the student. I’ve chosen to have in depth conversations with lecturers and have developed intellectual and social relationships with them. Not everyone does this’. Another student said of the tutors: ‘They are very supportive of you making your own efforts and exploring new things. It feels like there is a lot of freedom.’ Similarly, another student referred to ‘an interactive engagement [between students and staff] where you are being encouraged to think quickly and articulate an argument’.

L1 reported strong support from peers and from faith and friendship groups, and said that informal debates within these groups outside of class time had helped him to reflect on his learning: ‘We challenge each other and learn together as students.’ This student also said that his ‘Christian discussion group’ had been particularly useful in this regard, which suggests that there are ways of managing tensions between faith and inquiry for TRS students, which arise particularly within the context of the study of sacred texts. This adds an interesting, discipline-specific dimension to the question of the appropriateness of IBL for TRS. A variety of issues are raised in this respect, including whether or not topics in TRS are emotive such that they are less suitable for group discussion than topics in other academic subjects, because misinformation and intolerance is more likely to surface and cause offence in the TRS context, and also, whether learning styles such as ‘tandem learning’ can work in TRS, dependent as it is on students achieving sufficient objectivity about their own faiths to impart useful knowledge about them to others.25

3.1.f Group work dynamics

The students mentioned problems with working in groups, particularly some students dominating and others not doing their share of the work.

The students also engaged in a discussion of the specific nature of group work in TRS. One of the students spoke about the importance of mutual patience and sensitivity in seminars. This generated much conversation, with students saying that some of their peers lack these qualities, and find it difficult to receive feedback on their work and to cope with challenges to their opinions. Interestingly, one student claimed that to be a good learner in Biblical Studies ‘you need to leave your emotions at the door’. This contrasts with the opinion of the student quoted above that ‘Things are retained more when you care about them’.26 It betokens the view that the academic study of the TRS is unique because it has the potential to affect students’ personal, religious and moral convictions in a way that the study of other subjects does not. Whilst this means that inquiry approaches should be initiated with more caution in TRS than in other disciplines, it should also be regarded as an advantage of TRS that it brings students into close contact with what they regard as sensitive, even controversial, ideas, topics and materials. If a student cares about a topic because it has personal meaning for them, then they are more likely to engage with it. Using IBL to teach modules which deal with sensitivities and controversies in TRS may in fact encourage students to think about the importance of tolerance, respect and constructive criticism in debates.

3.1.g Skills acquired as a consequence of learning

When asked about the consequences of engaging in particular learning styles, the group were able to articulate a number of different skills they perceive themselves to be acquiring. These included planning and time management skills, and creative thinking skills. The students reported feeling encouraged by departmental staff to be creative, and being

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25 Insert link to tandem learning
26 See the ‘Deep learning’ section.
rewarded for looking at old problems in new ways: ‘There’s a lot of scope to be creative in what you study and how you present your work. In other subjects you are taught one way but in Biblical Studies there are no right answers; you have to formulate opinions.’

The students also said that they valued the development of their ability to argue and debate issues, and they repeatedly identified ‘questioning’ as a key skill and learning tool in Biblical Studies. One of the students said that they felt encouraged by their tutors to ask questions—of sources, of received wisdom, of the tutor’s own opinions. Apart from formal classes, informal conversations with tutors were regarded by one student as the best learning opportunity available: ‘these conversations are better than reading. They [the tutors] ask challenging questions that encourage learning’. This was echoed by the comment from another student that ‘In the first year they ask questions that seem to shock you into learning more’.

The facilitator also used the opportunity, when the students were discussing skills, to raise the issue of employability. All of the students had considered their future careers and all wanted to use the knowledge, as well as the skills, they had acquired as Biblical Studies students, in their working lives. One hoped to use the research and writing skills they had developed in a career in religious journalism. Another spoke about wanting to work in a church and support the community. Another wanted to become a teacher, and one was hoping to go on to postgraduate study.

3.2 Interview with CILASS student ambassador

The Department of Biblical Studies at Sheffield also boasts a CILASS student ambassador. The role was filled by a level three single honours student at the time I was conducting my research. She told me that her responsibilities consisted of advising students how to use the technical equipment in the CILASS facility and helping to plan the next stages of CILASS’ work with Biblical Studies. When I interviewed her on 11.10.07, she told me that Biblical Studies lectures are very small and informal, so tend to be inquiry-based. She suggested that, because Biblical Studies is an emotive subject, especially for religious people—and she estimates that seventy-five per cent of level three students in the department are Christians—students tend to want to speak out in seminars more than they might in other subjects.27 She talked to me about her personal experience of the difficulties which taking part in PBL exercises involving critical analysis of the Bible can cause religious students.

When I asked her about collaborative inquiry in Biblical Studies, she referred to the Paul and His World module, which includes assessment by group work. She mentioned the sense of dissatisfaction which some students had felt with those less conscientious than themselves, and said that the impetus to engage in productive group work tailed off towards the end of the semester.

Other than Paul and His World and the level three module, The Bible and Field Archaeology,28 she reported that there is very little group work involved in undergraduate Biblical Studies degrees at Sheffield. For this reason, she did not perceive there to be any reason for Biblical Studies to use the sophisticated technical equipment available at CILASS at present. In her view, the Biblical Studies curriculum would have to be restructured in order for the department to make proper use of the facilities.

27 Of course, it is not hard to imagine the opposite being true, with students being less inclined to express their views because of the controversial nature of some of the subjects studied.

28 The Bible and Field Archaeology is discussed at length in this report; see INSERT LINK
3.3 Staff interviews

3.3.a Hugh Pyper

Hugh Pyper is head of the Department of Biblical Studies and CILASS’ ‘academic champion’ in Biblical Studies, which means that it is his responsibility to promote and develop IBL programmes and methods in the Department. I interviewed Hugh on 11.10.07.

Hugh teaches a variety of undergraduate modules, including the level one modules Decoding the Bible and Creation to Revelation, and the level two modules The Bible in the Postcolonial World and Hebrew Texts. He supervises and examines level three dissertations. He also teaches on a number of postgraduate programmes.

Hugh explained that IBL has always been a part of the culture of Biblical Studies, and that excellence in IBL in Biblical Studies preceded—indeed was one of the reasons for—the establishment of the Centre for Excellence in 2005. In fact, Biblical Studies was in fact heavily involved with the original bid.

I asked Hugh about how CILASS’s framework for IBL, which encompasses the three themes of collaborative inquiry, information literacy and networked learning, relates to his teaching in Biblical Studies. Regarding collaborative inquiry, Hugh told me that he encourages the students to think of each other as resources. His classes include group work, but this is not assessed, and students are not required to work in groups after class. He reported that students have responded well to group research tasks, but he did mention the problem of disparity of effort in group work, a concern which was also raised by the students in the focus groups. As a pre-emptive measure, Hugh sets ground rules for group work, and encourages students to ask for help if they encounter problems. Should they do so, he attempts to offer solutions, but he also reminds the students that negotiating in groups is a life skill they need to acquire.

Hugh also recounted examples of his own collaboration with students. He has asked students to work with him on research projects in the past, and also invites their feedback on papers he wants to present at conferences. He regards the relationship between learner and teacher as a cooperative one, and said that the only reason he feels able to stand at the front of a class is because he has shown himself to be a good learner over the years.

Regarding information literacy, Hugh spoke about the value of even the most outlandish Biblical Studies sources for helping to develop students’ information literacy. His view is that the most effective way for students develop discernment when it comes to evaluating sources is to engage directly with those sources and to inquire in earnest into the reasons why they might have been written. And it is not simply material deemed worthy by the body of scholars which he wants the students to engage with: ‘The wackiest Biblical website is grist to our mill’; that is, an unreliable source in Biblical Studies can be the inspiration for a fascinating research project.

Hugh would like to see the department develop its programme of networked learning, and would like to use technology more in his own teaching. He referred me to the International Group Learning project which the department received CILASS funding to run, but explained that this is in its early stages.

Hugh also made the point that IBL gives students assessment options beyond the traditional essay, which recalls the point about the IBL’s potential for inclusivity.

Suggesting widespread practice of IBL in TRS departments, Hugh also mentioned a module he recalls from his time at the University of Leeds which was IBL-based. This module, which is still taught at Leeds, is called Religious Mapping. It involves students mapping religion and

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29 INSERT LINK
30 INSERT LINK
religions in given areas, for example, the University of Leeds campus itself, or the surrounding areas.  

Finally, speaking more broadly about the ‘fit’ or otherwise of TRS with IBL, Hugh suggested that Biblical Studies is a ‘natural’ for IBL because the ethos of the subject is inquiry.

3.3.b Barry Matlock

Barry Matlock teaches and researches New Testament at Sheffield. Confirming my suspicions that IBL is widespread practice in the department but usually goes unflagged, he told me when I interviewed him on 06.02.07 that the department does not tend to use the term ‘IBL’ but has always emphasised student-led learning. Barry’s own level three teaching tends to emphasise student-centred, research-led learning. The level one teaching he is involved in is more contact-driven, and lecture-based, although students at this level do attend seminars. Barry also mentioned that Biblical Studies courses feature non-traditional teaching and assessment methods, including presentations and group projects, alongside essays and exams.

Barry suggested that the (compulsory) final year dissertation is the most obvious example of IBL in the Department. At present, students are required to present their dissertation findings to their year group; this accounts for five per cent of their mark. This lends a professional research element to the experience. Classes for dissertation students to come together to compare their experiences and discuss any problems are about to be introduced to the dissertation module, partly in response to some of the students reporting feelings of disorientation because they have never managed their own research projects before.

I asked Barry specifically about how, if at all, he feels that the three elements of IBL identified by CILASS—collaborative inquiry, information literacy and networked learning—apply to his teaching. He reported encouraging student collaboration in the modules he teaches, and promoting the development of information literacy skills through his teaching. In terms of collaborative inquiry, although his current teaching does not require students to take part in group projects, he has required students to do so in the past. His students have encountered various problems in relation to group work, including the disparity of effort which was mentioned by the students we interviewed, and by Hugh Pyper in his interview. Barry understands that this is frustrating for conscientious students, but he says that they appreciate that learning to work in a team is an essential skill in the workplace. In the past, when such problems have arisen, the students have managed the problem themselves. Barry prefers not to assess students by group activities, opting for essays and portfolios of shorter writing assignments instead. He has not collaborated on a project with his students but says he would consider doing so.

Regarding information literacy, Barry teaches a level one module on research methods. The point of this module is to introduce new students to the importance of a critical approach to sources. After all, as he points out, in TRS there is a proliferation of popular material, making it all the more important for students to have the appropriate tools to engage with it.

Barry has not yet used networked learning methods, but he is aware of the use of these methods by some of his colleagues at Sheffield.

On the subject of course design, Barry speculated that it would be more of a challenge to design an IBL course than it would be to design a course based on more traditional teaching methods.

Speaking more generally about the ‘fit’ or otherwise of TRS with IBL, Barry said that he did not feel that the discipline is more suited to IBL than any other within the humanities. He argued that the humanities as a whole lend themselves to student-centred pedagogies and group activities, since discussion of texts is a common theme.

See n. 83.
3.3.c James Crossley

James Crossley teaches a variety of modules at Biblical Studies, including language modules (Greek and Hebrew), the level one Fact or Fiction and Biblical World modules, and the level two module, Gospels. I interviewed James on 06.12.07.

James reported that interactive teaching methods are standard in the department. In his own teaching, he makes sure that he gives his students content, but he also encourages them to discuss and question ideas in class. He is emphatic about the importance of classroom discussion with level one students. Somewhat surprisingly, he says that at levels two and three, his modules are less explicitly student-led.

James also reported the customary problems associated with group working, with some of his students concerned that they are working harder than others. When asked about the likelihood of collaborating with students on research projects, James told me that he prefers to direct his own projects. He also expressed concerns about the controversial nature of his work, and the impact that could have on anyone involved in it.

With regard to information literacy, James reported a dramatic rise in the use of web-based sources amongst his students in recent years, especially Wikipedia. He also referred to the level one module on research methods which was mentioned by Barry Matlock in his interview. James reported that the module includes a lecture on the use of sources. In addition, he said that students attend an information literacy session run by the library at the beginning of their degree.

Speaking generally about the ‘fit’ or otherwise of IBL and TRS, James suggested that TRS is more disposed to inquiry approaches than are other disciplines. The reason James gave for this view is that TRS is a subject which evokes impassioned opinions in people.

James also made an important point about the pragmatic rationale for IBL. He said that student numbers are declining, and by pointing out that IBL enhances student employability, he implied a relationship between this decline and the perception that some degrees do not prepare graduates for the workplace. Although James did not draw this conclusion himself, it would be fair to say that this perception certainly extends to TRS degrees.

3.3.d Keith Whitelam

Keith Whitelam teaches on the level one Fact or Fiction module and the level two module, The Bible and Historical Imagination. I interviewed Keith on 06.12.07.

I asked Keith about collaborative inquiry, information literacy and networked learning in the context of his teaching. Regarding collaborative inquiry, he reported that classes for The Bible and Historical Imagination involve group work, but it is not assessed. Keith chooses to use group work less with his Fact and Fiction students, and he suggests that collaborative inquiry is more appropriate for more advanced students. ‘One or two’ of Keith’s own research projects involve collaborating with postgraduates.

Regarding information literacy, Keith told me that the Fact or Fiction module is entirely based around the development of students’ information literacy skills.

Keith also proactively engages his students in networked learning. He uses webCT to create online reading lists and PowerPoint presentations for his modules. He has also created a chat room, where students can ask questions and receive feedback from him and other students. He created the chat room with weaker and/or less confident students in mind, because it allows them to solicit feedback anonymously. His students download the online reading lists
and PowerPoint presentations, but none of them have used the chat room. Keith is considering setting an exercise which requires them to.

Keith told me that departmental staff use a range of teaching and assessment methods. He describes his own level one and level two teaching as PBL, and reports that using problem-based approaches has generated positive feedback from students. He regards PBL as the most appropriate pedagogical method, as long as it is supplemented with lectures to provide students with essential information, and to give coherence to modules. In his experience, students are more likely to retain knowledge when they can link it to a problem which they have identified and solved themselves; it is only really when the problem impinges on them, and when they are challenged by it, that they can really engage.

I asked Keith about pragmatic rationales for IBL, particularly related to the enhanced employability of students taking part in inquiry-based activities, and he said that he feels this is very important. He said that one of the advantages of the department's promotion of a variety of teaching and assessment methods is that it helps students to build up a bank of generic skills. He mentioned the self-assessment that all students are required to write at the end of each year. This self-assessment, a reflection on learning, accounts for ten per cent of the student's overall mark for that year, with the score for the self-assessment being given for process rather than content. Keith pointed out that, in addition to giving students an opportunity to increase their overall mark, the exercise also increases students' awareness of, and ability to articulate, the kinds of skills they have acquired.

3.3.e Diana Edelman

In addition to teaching The Bible and Field Archaeology, Diana teaches modules on the book of Samuel and on the Hebrew language. I interviewed her on 13.12.07.

Diana told me that there is a considerable amount of IBL occurring at Biblical Studies at Sheffield, including five IBL-based taught MAs. In terms of her own teaching, she reported that as a result of working with CILASS, she has introduced a portfolio of IBL exercises for the students on her Samuel module. The module also includes assessment by debate. Diana thinks that with more traditional, essay-based assessments 'good students could get away with doing almost no work and then get a first'. As a result of the changes she has made to the Samuel module, she says that students on the module are really reflecting on their work and learning more as a result. She told me that a group of students from this module meet in their own time to discuss the issues covered in the classes, simply because they are interested in them. She has also noticed that students on the Samuel module ask for more contact time with her.

Diana’s Hebrew language teaching does not use inquiry methods. Her comment that ‘When you teach a language, you teach a language, and that’s that’ contrasts with the views of tandem learning enthusiast Lesley Walker.

Diana echoes Keith Whitelam’s remarks about the power of active learning. She says that students are most passionate about, and most likely to retain, knowledge they have discovered themselves. She reports that students who have transferred from other universities are a little shell-shocked by the Department’s approach to teaching at first, but, in her experience, if they embrace it, they find it liberating.

One problem such students encounter relates to collaborative inquiry, specifically to group work and group presentations. In common with her colleagues, Diana is keenly aware of the way different personalities affect group dynamics. When she first introduced assessed group presentations, there was an outcry from the students, who were worried that their marks

32 I have siphoned off data from Diana’s interview which is specific to The Bible and Field Archaeology and presented it in the section of this report which is devoted to a discussion of this module (5.1.5.c). INSERT LINK

33 See 6.1.6.INSERT LINK
would be dragged down by the poor performance of others in their group. Diana points out to her students that they are likely to have to work in groups in their professional lives, and she emphasises that group management is their responsibility. She reasons that they are thereby learning real world, transferable skills which will enhance their employability. However, the students’ reactions, and a remark from one of her colleagues that the more capable students should not be punished—by being given low marks—for having the misfortune to be put in groups with less capable students, led Diana to devise a system whereby students can inform on each other confidentially.34 The students have taken advantage of this facility twice in five years; sometimes, they complain about the unfairness of group work but do not take the opportunity to inform on their peers when it is offered to them. Not doing so, Diana reflects, does indeed provide them with a learning experience.

In modules which include assessment of group work, Diana also asks the students what marks they think they should get, and she takes this into account when assessing them. She and the students negotiate how they will be assessed, deciding together what percentage her mark will count for and what percentage the student’s mark will count for.

When asked about the involvement of students in her own research, Diana describes education as a collaborative process which includes undergraduates. She talks about another module she has taught, The Bible and Archaeology, which involves giving students pictures of artefacts uncovered during archaeological digs, and asking them to identify them and then to present their findings to the group. She reports that some of the ethnographic information they produce is amazing. She says: ‘I am firmly convinced that you can learn from undergraduates. Some of the stuff that they can turn up is very creative. I look at teaching as an enterprise of sharing information, and my job as a teacher is to get students to discover things, but I also know that I learn from them’.

Regarding information literacy, Diana refers to a class on using the Internet which is part of the compulsory level one module, Decoding the Bible. During this class, students are taught how to evaluate and use online material.

### 3.4 Formal IBL provision

Notwithstanding the IBL which is occurring in the Department of Biblical Studies without being flagged as such, CILASS’ work with Biblical Studies has focused on the development of six IBL projects which aim to cover all levels of undergraduate study in the department, with the further aim of building a bank of resources and methods that can be used to extend IBL to other modules in the future. At the time of writing, the first three are in progress or complete, and the final three are yet to begin. Outlines of each project are given here. There is particular focus on Fieldwork Recording, with the outline supplemented with data from a focus group of students who took this module, and relevant extracts from staff and student interviews.

#### 3.4.a Fieldwork recording project

This is a particularly innovative project which is a noted success story for IBL and Biblical Studies, and it is CILASS’ most successful project with the department.35 For this reason, I will provide an extended reflection on it.

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34 First of all, Diana gives a mark for the group presentation. The students then complete internal group evaluations, which include an option to confidentially identify individuals in their group whom they feel have not worked as hard as they should. If the students decide to ‘rat someone out’, Diana gives that person a lower mark.

35 Diana Edelman and students from The Bible and Field Archaeology module gave a presentation at the ‘Finding Your Own Way’ workshop at CILASS CETL in May 2008. More information about this event, including the abstract and slides from this presentation, can be found at [http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/350](http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/350)
The CILASS funding for this project was used to purchase digital video cameras for use by students in the department, especially for those joining a three week dig in Israel as part of Diana Edelman’s level three The Bible and Field Archaeology module. The intention is for the videos produced by the students during the dig to be used to support further student inquiry when the political situation in Israel prevents students joining the dig. The cameras will also be used to support collaborative inquiry in future projects.

At the time of my research, the students from The Bible and Field Archaeology had been trained by staff in the University of Sheffield’s Learning Development and Media Unit to make and edit videos, had taken part in the dig, and were in the process of editing their videos.

On these pages, the project is examined through reflections on the videos produced, along with data from staff interviews and focus groups.

3.4.a.i Fieldwork Recording: the videos

Six students participated in the dig, and, working in pairs, produced three videos between them. What was noticeable immediately upon watching the videos was their professionalism, not to mention their educational and, it has to be said, entertainment value. The videos give the students the opportunity to apply and display their skills in ways which writing an essay does not. Apart from displaying Biblical Studies/Archaeology-specific skills in the videos, the students have also clearly developed technical skills as a consequence of making films. They also display team working skills in the videos, necessary for both participation in the dig and the production of the videos. The sections of the videos where the students interview academics also clearly involved the application of interpersonal skills.

One of the things that the videos convey most powerfully, in a way a written piece of work could not, is the authenticity of the students’ research in Israel. The videos document the participation of undergraduates in genuine research, illustrating vividly their membership of a research community. The students are researching with, conversing with, and interviewing academics. The knowledge and experience they have acquired as a result of actually ‘doing’ their subject is likely to be much more memorable than that they would acquire through reading about it. I was also struck, when watching the videos, by the students’ creation of original knowledge; for instance, in one of the videos, two students discovered vessels of significant importance to the dig. The dig director is recorded on the video as calling this ‘a once-in-a-lifetime find’ and ordering for the dig to be re-directed to the site of the find. Again, such knowledge is likely to be more memorable and empowering for the students because it has originated with them.

3.4.a.ii Fieldwork recording: staff and student interviews

As Hugh Pyper explained during my interview with him specifically on the Fieldwork Recording project, conducted on 13.12.07, The Bible and Field Archaeology was not designed as an IBL module, although it happens to be a brilliant example of IBL. During our first interview on 11.10.07, he told me that what makes this project particularly innovative is its allying of the disciplines of Biblical Studies and Archaeology, giving rise to a form of inquiry which one does not typically associate with TRS, which tends to be text- rather than field-based. Hugh described the project as PBL.

Hugh also spoke about the problems which the students on this module overcame. He said that they were unhappy about workload at first, but now report a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

I interviewed Diana Edelman, the leader of the Fieldwork Recording project, who also attends the dig with students, on 13.12.07. She told me that, before cameras were taken on the dig, students were assessed by the talk plans and dig diaries they kept during the dig, and by a written assignment which allowed her to judge how well they had grasped the dig technique and how curious they were in the field. She also assessed the students’ notes from the dig.
and from the lectures they attended in Israel. Finally, the students were marked on their attendance at pottery washing sessions and their participation in pottery reading and bagging.

Diana was concerned that when the cameras were taken on the dig for the first time, the video recording would make the students’ workloads unmanageable. The students start work every day at 4.30am, and attend evening lectures, which means that they finish work at 9pm. In response to this, Diana adjusted the assessment methods. She decided that the students should spend less time doing talk plans, and that the time which was freed up as a result (a week) could be used to make the videos, which should include interviewing the dig director and other members of staff on the dig. She also reduced the number of field trips the students had to go on.

In terms of assessment, Diana and the students agreed a mark for the videos between them. The students were allowed to take advantage of the confidential ‘ratting out’ option Diana has devised.36 They also voted to allow other students in their year group, to whom they showed the videos when they returned to Sheffield, to fill in feedback forms and assign marks to the videos. These marks were not taken into account, the point being to give the students the opportunity to receive wider feedback. The students then wrote their written assignments.

Diana told me that both she and the year group had been amazed by the quality of the students’ videos. During our interview, she reflected on the transferable skills and the confidence the students have developed as a result of making the videos, and about the positive effect this will have on their employability.

I asked Diana what the most challenging aspects of the exercise had been. She agreed with Hugh that the students had found the experience of editing the videos stressful, but reported that they were very proud of themselves at the end of the process and had given positive feedback on the module. Finally, building on what one of the students had said during the focus group about this module being, to all intents and purposes, restricted to students with access to their own computers,37 I asked Diana whether the video making part of the module undermined the inclusiveness of the module as a whole. She did not agree that the students had to own their own computers, arguing that they could have edited their videos on campus.

As well as talking to staff, I had a useful conversation with the CILASS student ambassador for Biblical Studies about the module during our interview on 11.10.07.38 She had not taken the module but has friends who did, and reported that one of the problems they had complained of was that they had not been trained to use the video editing software. This problem was compounded by the fact that they were not able to access technical equipment at the University over the summer vacation, and had to finish their videos in a rush when the University re-opened in the autumn. This contrasts with Diana Edelman’s views on the subject.

### 3.4.a.iii Fieldwork recording: student focus group 1

Naturally, the students who had taken the Bible and Field Archaeology module themselves were the richest source of data. The first of two focus groups to inform my research was convened by Julie Gallimore, who was commissioned by the SC for PRS to run a focus group with the students in February 2008.39 All six of the students attended.

The students were asked a variety of questions which were designed to elicit key information about their learning experiences as students on the module. They were asked about the process of making the videos and attending the dig, what they liked and what they found

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36 See 5.1.4.E INSERT LINK.
37 See 5.1.5.c.INSERT LINK
38 See 5.1.3. INSERT LINK
39 The focus group took place on 28.02.08 at the University of Sheffield and lasted ninety minutes. All students were briefed about the research project prior to the group, and all signed a consent form (see Appendixes A and B).
challenging about the experience, the levels of support offered by the department, and about their ability to retain and recall the knowledge they had acquired.

3.4.a.iii.i General reflections

The students described The Bible and Field Archaeology as ‘so totally different’ to any others they had taken. They spoke very positively about taking part in the dig in Israel, although they agreed that it had been an intense experience which left them physically drained. One student described it as ‘hard but also rewarding’. All of the students were pleased they had chosen the module. After the group, the facilitator said how impressed she had been with the students’ engagement with the content of the module. Her report comments:

The Fieldwork group gave powerful feedback on the value of their learning experience. The Fieldwork students are living proof that IBL is effective and empowering students to take on new challenges. The Fieldwork module presents a very intense, enjoyable and unique learning experience which all the students highly valued. They were all able to reflect on their personal development over the course of the module and felt it had inspired them to be better researchers on their return to Sheffield. From my perspective, the module gave them a real sense of their personal and professional capabilities.

3.4.a.iii.ii Reflection on the process of learning and the skills acquired

The students were able to articulate the holistic nature of their learning experience, commenting on their academic, personal, social, emotional and spiritual development during the module. They were also able to reflect on the variety of learning styles they were engaged with, including IBL and PBL, and they showed a good understanding of the portfolio of skills they were developing as a consequence of exposure to these learning styles, mentioning in particular research, ICT and presentation skills. The students spoke about feeling empowered to learn by these learning styles, and said that they had enjoyed directing their own research. One described it as an ‘interesting way of learning’, and another said ‘we all wanted to learn because it was fun’. One student also commented that they ‘prefer learning through experience and applying things taught through the degree’, which supports the notion of IBL being ‘learning by doing’.

The students reported that the module had enhanced their personal and social, as well as their academic, development. In particular, they spoke about enjoying the opportunity to navigate a new country, to debate politically and emotionally charged issues, and to develop relationships with their peers. One of the students said that the module had taken them out of their ‘comfort zone’ by throwing them into the vast cultural mix of Israel. The group as a whole said that visiting Israel had challenged their preconceived ideas about the region, and had reminded them of the importance of tolerating other people’s beliefs and articulating one’s own beliefs sensitively. They also liked the way being on the dig put their studies in context, and allowed them to see, smell and touch artefacts and tools that they would have otherwise only been able to read about.

The students were able to reflect on the value of peer learning, and said that they had welcomed the opportunity to develop their team working skills, and to support each other’s learning and personal development. They had enjoyed working in groups, and again spoke about the importance of respecting the opinions and ideas of others. According to the facilitator, it was clear from the discussion that strong friendships had been formed or cemented by the dig experience.

It was not clear from the discussions during this focus group that the students experienced the levels of overwork and frustration with technical equipment as staff and other students had reported. My interviews with staff and with the CILASS student ambassador included references to the difficulties the students had endured during the dig and the video-making process, but the students themselves did not focus on these issues to any significant extent at the focus group. They did mention difficulties with the cameras and the video editing software,
and they all described the experience as exhausting. One student also said that the assessment was not appropriately structured to take account of the effort the students put into the module, with insufficient credit being given to the more labour intensive parts of the module, such as the video-making. However, the students tended to focus more on the positive aspects of their experience.  

Comments included:

- One student described the module as ‘different, hands on, combining books with current reality’, betokening the authenticity of IBL.
- Another said ‘we get to see the practical application of the skills we’re learning’.
- Other comments included ‘I grew during it’ and ‘I felt a real sense of achievement on completing the project’.

3.4.a.iii.iii Being part of a research community

The students acknowledged the high levels of support they had received from academic staff on the dig, and reported feeling surprised that they were treated as their equals. The students had felt part a research community, and said that this had enabled them to appreciate Biblical Studies in a wider context.

Comments included:

- ‘Instead of feeling separated from academia, you are part of it.’
- ‘Researchers asked our opinion and took this into account. You didn’t feel silly saying anything.’
- ‘[We were] supported all the way through.’

3.4.a.iii.iv Employability

The students reported that the experience had enabled them see the relevance of their leaning and skills beyond university, and felt that it was bound to enhance their employability.

3.4.a.iii.v Technology

The students said that producing the videos had been a challenge, but they described the experience as an ‘amazing’ one. Some of them would have liked more time and support to make the videos, with one student saying that her lack of technical knowledge made her feel like she was ‘drowning’ in work when it came to editing the videos. Other students said they were happy with the levels of support and the time allowed for making the videos.

When they were asked how the module could be improved, the students focused on technical issues. One said it would have been easier to make the videos using digital cameras. Another said they would have appreciated two more training sessions on how to use the camera, with a third student saying that they had accidentally erased an interview because they were unfamiliar with the technology.

3.4.a.iii.vi Widening participation and diversity

Although all of the students would recommend the module to other students, two did cite the cost involved as a potential barrier to student participation, raising questions about the inclusiveness of the module. One said ‘the affordability is an issue for some students…it would be good if all could be involved…or it could be subsidised’.

40 Of course, it may be that sufficient time had elapsed between the dig and the video-making process and the focus group to allow the students to have become nostalgic about their experiences and more inclined to overlook the frustrations.
3.4.a.iv Fieldwork recording: student focus group 2

This focus group was facilitated by Bob Petrulis of CILASS on 07.11.07. Five out of six of the students who attended the dig came to the focus group.

3.4.a.iv.i Reflecting on the process of learning and the skills acquired

The students said that they had learned a great deal, and that they had acquired skills—they mentioned archaeology skills, video-making skills, interview skills—as they were using them, again evoking the notion of IBL as ‘learning by doing’. They talked specifically about learning through exposure to different cultures. One student said that being in the seat of Biblical history helped her to identify the political agendas behind many biblical commentaries, and in some sense, to establish a benchmark by which to judge them, via pieces of evidence which she had observed or collected.

Comments included:

- ‘I had so much fun.’
- ‘An amazing experience.’
- ‘It was fun work.’

3.4.a.iv.ii Membership of a research community

The students knew that they were beginners to archaeology and video-making, but they put a positive spin on this by saying that it meant that their work was original. They also said that giving them genuine responsibility on the dig ensured that they worked hard and that they really felt part of the dig.

3.4.a.iv.iii Assessment

One student said that she found the mark scheme for this module confusing (50% of the mark is given by Diana and 50% is given by the other students who attend the dig). She thought that the differences between the videos made this an unfair way of marking, because no-one but the pairs of students themselves had been privy to the work and thought processes involved in making the videos. She also added that, when marking her peers’ videos, it had been difficult to follow the mark scheme objectively because she had known how hard the people making the film had worked (because she had made her own). Another student echoed this, saying that she had marked according to the effort she felt had been put into the work, not according to its quality. Compounding her reluctance to give low marks was the fact that the students whom she was called to assess were her friends.

Another student disagreed, saying that it was important for the students to mark each other’s work. This student also argued that seeing everyone else’s videos gives you a better perspective on your own. The students who had raised the original objections agreed, but said that they did not think the mark allocation should have been split equally between Diana and the students. In response, another student said that he did not think that the solution would be to make Diana’s mark count for more; he felt that she was also too close to the project, and possibly should not have been involved in the marking at all. A fifth student said the videos should have been marked partly by Diana and the students, but then also by an external examiner, but one of the other students rejected this, arguing that only the students and Diana really knew about the project and the work involved.

Still on the subject of assessment, but approaching it from a different tack, one of the students remarked that to be given credit for using skills which they did not normally use at university, and to be given an opportunity to express one’s creativity, and for this to be assessed, was a welcome change from writing essays. This student felt that such an approach to assessment must be particularly atypical in Biblical Studies, since it ‘is known for being a scholarly
subject. Another student said she had initially been unenthusiastic about the assessment methods used in the module; she had been concerned that a significant proportion of her entire level three grade would be decided by the assessment of a skill—video-making—which she had not been properly trained in. However, she reflected that the students had been supported throughout the module, especially by Diana, such that making the films became fun. She said that her experience had been that making the films brought out and captured a part of her personality; she thought it would be difficult to describe writing an essay thus.

3.4.a.iv.iv Workload

The students agreed that producing the videos increased the workload for the module significantly and made the dig process more difficult. One said: ‘instead of digging, I was standing there with a camera doing ten thousand different jobs’. However, another student found the process of filming whilst on the dig a helpful one, because it had allowed them to pause and assess what they were doing and to check that it was worth doing. In this student’s experience, making the film increased their understanding of process and empowered them to direct their own activities on the dig.

The students felt particularly taxed by having to attend evening lectures and make notes after digs lasting six or seven hours. They found it hard to concentrate, although they did find the lectures interesting, and appreciated the lecturers’ attempts to involve them in the discussions. One student said she was glad that lecture notes were assessed because this had forced her to pay attention in lectures.

The students reported that work for this module had been evenly spread over the semester, and that this was in contrast to other modules, where workloads crescendo at the end of the semester. With The Bible and Field Archaeology, the students had had to meet deadlines from the very beginning.

3.4.a.iv.iv Widening participation and diversity

One student claimed that this module requires students to have an up-to-date computer; another agreed, arguing that students not in possession of their own computer would have had to have lived at the University to complete the module. One student had bought a new laptop in order to complete the module.

3.4.b Other IBL projects

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.\footnote{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.}

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.\footnote{See 5.1.4.a.INSERT LINK}

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,\footnote{See 5.1.5.c.INSERT LINK} 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.\footnote{This information is taken from my interview with Keith on 06.12.07. See 6.1.4.d. for more
data from this interview. .INSERT LINK}
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.

3.4.c Tandem learning at the University of Sheffield

Also worth mentioning in relation to IBL at the University of Sheffield is a project which the SC for PRS has commissioned on inter-faith tandem learning at the University. The project, which is being coordinated by Will Lamb, the Anglican Chaplain at the University, is developing and trialling learning materials for inter-faith tandem learning. In tandem learning, students work in pairs to share their knowledge of a particular topic with each other. Tandem learning is a form of IBL which has been used principally in language teaching, allowing two native speakers of different languages to work together to learn each other’s language, whilst gaining a sense of the cultural context of that language. The inter-faith tandem learning project works on the principle that this form of learning can be transferred to TRS to facilitate inter-religious and intercultural exchange. In practice, this means that two students, of different faith or cultural backgrounds, meet to share information about their faith or culture in an informal and supportive setting.

Like all forms of IBL, inter-faith tandem learning is based on the principles of learner autonomy and reciprocity. Students are responsible for their own learning, and for developing their own research and time management skills. They receive mutual support from the other learner, but also receive support from the learning materials being developed by Will Lamb and colleagues, which are designed to fill gaps in the students’ knowledge of their own religious and cultural backgrounds.

Tandem learning is particularly appropriate for TRS because it confronts the sensitive and controversial nature of the topics discussed in the TRS classroom by encouraging students to engage in structured conversations on a range of religious, ethical and spiritual issues, to reflect on religious diversity, and to treat others with empathy and sensitivity.

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45 This information is taken from my interview with Hugh on 11.10.07. See 5.1.4.a. for more data from this interview. INSERT LINK
46 The team involved in this project presented a poster at the ‘Finding Your Own Way’ workshop at CILASS CETL in May 2008. More information about this event, including the abstract for this poster session, can be viewed at http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/350
I met Lesley Walker, who coordinates undergraduate modern languages teaching at the University of Sheffield, and who pioneered tandem learning in the languages at Sheffield, to find out more about tandem learning. Lesley is an enthusiastic advocate for tandem learning but said that it is very labour intensive for the students. When I asked for her views on whether tandem learning could work in TRS, she had a number of concerns.

First of all, she pointed out that language students are experts in their own language, but that students from particular religious backgrounds are not necessarily experts in those religions. Potential problems arising from this could, however, be moderated by the use of accompanying learning materials—an online resource, a textbook—as reference points, which is something the inter-faith tandem learning project coordinators have recognised. Another solution would be to situate tandem learning conversations in TRS in a module which includes lectures to provide content and clarify questions raised during tandem conversations. These measures could also be used to address another point which Lesley raised: that students affiliated to a particular religious tradition are more likely than language students to have an agenda, in the sense that they may want to promote their faith and would therefore be more likely to present a biased picture of it to their tandem partner. Lesley also expressed concerns that culturally-rich words are used in religious dialogue, which may make it difficult for students to understand each other; again, some form of resource or a taught element would help to offset the negative consequences of this.

4. Case Study institution B: university of Manchester

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.

4.1 Students Facilitating and Validating Peer Learning

Katja Stuerzenhofecker is working on a collaborative pedagogical research project with CEEBL to develop a progression model for IBL in undergraduate education. This project is called Students Facilitating and Validating Peer Learning and is aimed at the development of students' skills in facilitating and engaging in peer-learning activities, without involvement from tutors. The peer learning activities which the students are required to facilitate, and to validate the outcomes of, include group work and classroom discussions.

Katja has based the project around a level two, inquiry-based module she teaches called Religion, Culture and Gender. She tells me that the module endorses a student-led approach to learning which requires students to become actively involved in knowledge-creation. Previous experience has shown her that the students need support and preparation to be able to take this on, so two seminars are held at the start of the module to introduce them to the basics of facilitation and to give them the opportunity to negotiate their own ground rules for group work and group discussions. Students are also given the opportunity to discuss and decide on a peer validation mechanism of learning. These activities are rooted in a constructivist epistemology and standpoint theories. The module is assessed by a portfolio of work, which includes a learning journal. The students also present their work at admissions events. Katja feels that the module has been successful because the students have approached the diversity intrinsic to the TRS classroom in positive, sensitive ways.

In order to find out more about the experiences of Katja's students, I attended a focus group evaluation for the Religion, Culture and Gender module, facilitated by Louise Goldring of CEEBL. Only one student—a female, level two student—attended; she will be referred to as Student A. Fortunately, because the she was very engaged, the interview yielded some interesting data, although the extent to which it could be considered representative is debatable.

4.1.a Group working

Student A told us that Religion, Culture and Gender involved extensive amounts of group work, both during and after classes. Students were required to work in groups during lectures, and to give group presentations. When asked whether the CEEBL-run introductory workshops

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50 One of the students from the module—the same student who attended the focus group evaluation for the Religion, Culture and Gender module which is detailed in this section—also presented with Katja on her experiences of the module at the ‘Finding Your Own Way’ workshop at CILASS CETL in May 2008. More information about this event, including the abstract and slides from this presentation, is available at http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/350

51 Katja shared this information with me during the group meeting at CEEBL on 18.01.08.

52 The focus group took place on 01.01.08.
prepared the students for facilitating their own group work, Student A said she had enjoyed them but that some of her peers had considered them little ‘high-schooly’ and a waste of time. She felt that they would have been useful for people who did not know others in the class.

4.1.b Student-led discussions

Student A enjoyed the discussions and got a great deal out of them, saying that she learns and understands things better if she teaches them herself. She feels that oral presentation is one of her strengths, and reported that the feedback Katja had given her for her presentation was the best she had received since starting her degree. She commented: ‘I remembered more from Religion, Culture and Gender than any other course I’ve done at university’ because ‘that’s my way of learning; I really suit it’.

She felt it was a good idea to make students present to other people in the class, but recalled that some of her peers were very nervous about doing so. If someone really did not want to present, Katja was happy for them to take on an alternative role during presentations, perhaps writing on the board or handing out leaflets. Student A also pointed out that marks given for the presentations make up a very small proportion of the overall mark (two per cent), and that the marks are not given for the actual presentation in any case, but for the students’ reflection on the process of presenting. Student A said: even if a student’s presentation itself was a disaster, as long as they wrote a good reflective piece on it, even including comments like ‘I was too scared to talk’, ‘they would still get full marks’. She reflected on this system during the interview, making the point that it does not put those who do not want to speak at a disadvantage.

The facilitator asked Student A whether she felt that the review session at the end of the introductory workshops, or indeed the workshops as a whole, should have included exercises designed to help students who felt uncomfortable leading the discussions. Student A found it difficult to answer the question because she is comfortable speaking in public, but she did say that everyone has different strengths when it comes to learning, and there was ‘something for everyone’ in this module. She mentioned essays at this point, perhaps meaning that the variety of assessment methods used in this module gives students of different abilities equal opportunities to achieve high marks.

Students generally seemed nervous about speaking up during the discussions, even when they were being led by someone else. Student A reported that the same individuals spoke up in class after class. Some members of the class did not speak at all, and Student A thought that something should have been done to help them. She reflected that people’s confidence to speak up during the discussions depended on how competent the people leading the discussions were. In discussions led by someone enthusiastic, more people were willing to participate, but when discussion leaders gave dull or awkward presentations, their peers found it difficult to interact.

The facilitator asked Student A whether her peers’ reluctance to speak up was a problem unique to student-led discussions, or whether it a problem in all classroom discussions, including those led by the tutor. Student A replied that all discussions were affected. When asked if there might have been a particular reason people did not speak out, Student A pointed out that the module includes controversial content. Speaking up in Religion, Culture and Gender classes may have resulted in the disclosure of a very personal, and perhaps contentious, view, and for this reason, it was easy to be intimidated into silence. Short of the tutor pointing to people and telling them to speak—which she did not do—Student A did not know how this problem could have been avoided. She did say that people talked more when they were split up into smaller groups. She said: ‘This is an issue of confidence; it’s a personality issue that will crop up year after year with this course. There will always be shy people.’ Student A thus identified one reason why collaborative inquiry, as an expression of IBL, should be set up carefully, regardless of discipline—students’ lack of confidence—but she also identified a subject-specific reason; that is, the controversial content factor involved in TRS education.
The facilitator asked Student A how she and her peers had felt about having to write points which emerged from the discussions on the blackboard or overhead projector, and what they thought about using PowerPoint. Student A reported that all of the students had seemed happy to use PowerPoint, and had produced some excellent presentations. To her mind, they felt less comfortable writing discussion points on the blackboard or the overhead projector because they found it difficult to identify and summarise the most important points. Katja had to pick on someone every time. Student A nonetheless found it helpful to have ideas written on to the blackboard, because this helped to sustain the discussions, and also helped the students to retain information. Student A made the point again that this is her preferred way of learning, making a distinction between herself and ‘old school academic’ people, for whom reading a book would have been preferable. She said that such people were obviously uncomfortable in the discussions. Indeed, she noticed that a lot of people dropped out of the module after Katja explained in the introductory lecture that students would be required to use blackboards, PowerPoint, and that the module would be inquiry-based. Student A remarked that these people did not want to ‘do that kind of learning’. To her mind, TRS is ‘such an old-fashioned subject and such an academic course; some people expect, and just want, to read books’. These people want to do their own work, and do not want to interact with other students. This being the case, she commented: ‘I wouldn’t have expected theology to have done this sort of learning but I’m glad they did because I like it’.

4.1.c Networked learning

This module included a webCT component. An online calendar was provided for students to check deadlines, and assignments had to be submitted through webCT. Katja also recorded lectures and made them available online, but Student A did not listen to them because she would not have known how: ‘I’m just not an Internet sort of person’. She said that training to use the various systems involved was adequate, but she felt that the module focused too much on networked learning. She said ‘I personally do not like computers’, and explained how daunting it had been to submit a 75,000-word learning journal online.

4.1.d Workload

Student A said emphatically that the module had involved far too much work. Although she learned more from this course than any other, and enjoyed it more than any other, she felt that having to produce a 75,000-word learning journal was not a reasonable expectation for an undergraduate module. By doing only what was requested, without doing any extra work, she produced a journal of this length.53

Learning journals had to be updated on a weekly basis, and Student A found that doing this took up all of the time she had allocated for home work, for all of her modules, each week. This had had a detrimental effect on her work for other modules, and prevented her revising for exams. She reported that all of the students had agreed that the workload for this module was too heavy.

4.2 Engaging with Early Christian Communities: An IBL Approach

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Katja has based the project around a level two, inquiry-based module she teaches called Religion, Culture and Gender. She tells me that the module endorses a student-led approach to learning which requires students to become actively involved in knowledge-creation. Previous experience has shown her that the students need support and preparation to be able to take this on, so two seminars are held at the start of the module to introduce them to the basics of facilitation and to give them the opportunity to negotiate their own ground rules for group work and group discussions. Students are also given the opportunity to discuss and decide on a peer validation mechanism of learning. These activities are rooted in a constructivist epistemology and standpoint theories. The module is assessed by a portfolio of work, which includes a learning journal. The students also present their work at admissions events. Katja feels that the module has been successful because the students have approached the diversity intrinsic to the TRS classroom in positive, sensitive ways.

In order to find out more about the experiences of Katja’s students, I attended a focus group evaluation for the Religion, Culture and Gender module, facilitated by Louise Goldring of CEEBL. Only one student—a female, level two student—attended; she will be referred to as Student A. Fortunately, because she was very engaged, the interview yielded some interesting data, although the extent to which it could be considered representative is debatable.

4.2.a Group working

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54 One of the students from the module—the same student who attended the focus group evaluation for the Religion, Culture and Gender module which is detailed in this section—also presented with Katja on her experiences of the module at the ‘Finding Your Own Way’ workshop at CILASS CETL in May 2008. More information about this event, including the abstract and slides from this presentation, is available at http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/350

55 Katja shared this information with me during the group meeting at CEEBL on 18.01.08.

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The facilitator asked Student A whether she felt that the review session at the end of the introductory workshops, or indeed the workshops as a whole, should have included exercises designed to help students who felt uncomfortable leading the discussions. Student A found it difficult to answer the question because she is comfortable speaking in public, but she did say that everyone has different strengths when it comes to learning, and there was 'something for everyone' in this module. She mentioned essays at this point, perhaps meaning that the variety of assessment methods used in this module gives students of different abilities equal opportunities to achieve high marks.

Students generally seemed nervous about speaking up during the discussions, even when they were being led by someone else. Student A reported that the same individuals spoke up in class after class. Some members of the class did not speak at all, and Student A thought that something should have been done to help them. She reflected that people's confidence to speak up during the discussions depended on how competent the people leading the discussions were. In discussions led by someone enthusiastic, more people were willing to participate, but when discussion leaders gave dull or awkward presentations, their peers found it difficult to interact.

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4.3 The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology

The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology (DPT) is a practice-based research degree which utilises IBL methods. It admitted its first cohort of seven candidates in the academic year 2006-7. Since then, numbers have grown rapidly. The DPT is offered by Anglia Ruskin University with the Cambridge Theological Federation, and the Universities of Manchester, Wales, Lampeter, and Birmingham. The DPT approaches participants’ own professional contexts as a central research resource. These contexts usually include religious ministry, health care, education, social and community work, charity/NGO work, or psychotherapy, but they may also include industry or business.58 In this section, I will outline the way the DPT works.

4.3.a Methods

The emphasis of a professional doctorate lies in reflective practice. Professional doctorates have been described as being designed for the ‘researching professional’ rather than the ‘professional researcher’ (the latter being used to describe traditional PhD students).59

The DPT emphasises learning through doing, and uses real-life examples to stimulate the students’ inquiries, including case studies, problem-based workshops and fieldwork visits.

57 Students are not required to submit assignments of 75,000 words for this module, but this was the word count Student A’s assignment reached.
58 See The University of Manchester: Religions and Theology, What is the Doctor of Practical Theology? The University of Manchester: Religions and Theology. [accessed 7 Sept 2008]. http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/subjectareas/religionstheology/postgraduatesudy/practicalt heology/whatisthedpt/
Fictitious action-research scenarios are also part of the curricula, pointing to the usefulness of action research as a means for incorporating IBL into TRS. According to its architects, students do not need to be religious to undertake the DPT but they should be interested in the role of religion, theology and ethics in forging ‘action-directing worldviews’. In keeping with the collaborative inquiry element of IBL, the DPT also includes peer group working.

According to the DPT pages of the R and T website, students on the DPT are required to keep a learning journal, which is a record of their reading and research. The point is to cultivate the students’ writing skills and to integrate their theoretical work with reflection on their own practical context. The latter helps students to see that their work commitments and research interests need not exist in tension. Elaine Graham, who directs the DPT at Manchester, has written that the learning journal is a particularly powerful learning method for students who have been away from higher education for some time because it provides a space for experimentation and for ‘finding a voice’. One may infer from this that this form of IBL is well-suited to the needs and abilities of mature students.

Indeed, the DPT emerged in response to the ‘diversification and expansion [of higher education], especially in the range of postgraduate, post-experience, and in-service professional development courses, with a steady rise in part-time and distance attendance’, which itself arose as a result of changing relationships between universities and employers, including greater recognition of work-based learning and transferable skills appropriate to the labour market, and also a result of the government’s promotion of lifelong learning. One of the consequences of the massification of higher education has been that universities have had to adapt their recruitment strategies, their pedagogical approaches, and the range and type of awards they offer. The DPT, then, and, I believe, the IBL methods on which it is based, endorse and facilitate widening participation in higher education. Furthermore, it has been argued that the DPT, and professional doctorates in general, cater for a wider range of people than do traditional PhDs, which are directed at people who want an academic career. Professional doctorates, by contrast, it is said, offer ‘advanced training for a wider range of career paths whilst retaining an explicit research focus directed towards enhancing such professions’ knowledge base and understanding’. Graham points out that the DPT is based not on applied research but on a process of ‘practice-theory-practice, or a spiral or circle of experience-analysis-practice’; that is, the focus is not on how professional context or individual practice can be informed by research, but on how practice informs research and serves as a primary ‘knowledge base’ for doctoral study.

The DPT, and professional doctorates in general, are not about research training and career preparation as are traditional PhDs, but about professional practice and professional development.

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63 See The University of Manchester: Religions and Theology, What is the Doctor of Practical Theology?
64 Elaine attended the group meeting at CEEBL on 18.01.08, and some of the data in this section comes from conversations during that meeting.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 304.
development for aspiring academics, as are traditional doctorates, but are rather focused on ‘research-based career development’.\(^{71}\)

In Graham’s view, practical theology can be considered a form of action research. She writes that the dynamic of action-research begins with current practice, moves on to engaging in new learning through a process of inquiry, observation or reflection on practice and dialogue with existing conceptual paradigms, leading to a re-evaluation of extant understandings.\(^{72}\)

Given that it works from practice-theory-practice, Graham argues that the DPT may have a wider impact than a traditional PhD because its aim is to effect changes in the candidate’s professional organisation, to influence understandings of best practice within that professional context, and to enhance the candidate’s personal and professional development. That is, the point—of the DPT, and of practical theology in general—is to change things, not just to produce research.\(^{73}\)

When I met with Elaine at CEEBL, she made the point that this makes practical theology an ‘easy fit’ with IBL. She has observed that there are similarities between the core aims of IBL and current understandings of practical theology as an experience-based form of learning.\(^{74}\)

### 4.3.b Assessment

According to their architects, professional doctorates such as the DPT allow for greater flexibility in terms of modes of assessment and forms of research output.\(^{75}\) The assessment for the DPT is via a portfolio of work which candidates develop during the course of the degree. This includes shorter pieces of work including a literature review, a publishable article, a research proposal and a self-evaluation based on the learning journal (altogether totalling 30,000 words), and an extended research dissertation of 40,000-45,000 words.\(^{76}\)

On a related point which evokes concerns that IBL is ‘learning lite’,\(^{77}\) Elaine has posed the question: ‘will the professional doctorate be regarded as a ‘soft option’ in relation to the traditional PhD?’\(^{78}\)

### 5. Analysis

The case studies in this report indicate that there is significant interest in, and enthusiasm for, IBL amongst TRS academics and students. Overall, I feel confident in asserting that there is a considerable amount of IBL being practised in TRS departments in the UK which is not being flagged as such. When I first began interviewing staff, I started by asking if they used IBL in their teaching. Most said that they did not, and then went on to describe their teaching

\(^{71}\) Bennett and Graham, ‘The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology: Developing the Researching Professional in Practical Theology in Higher Education’, 1-21 (pre-publication copy supplied by Elaine Graham); citing Bourner, Bowden and Laing, ‘Professional Doctorates in England’, Studies in Higher Education 26.1 (2001), 65-83 at 71. I was given a copy of the Bennett and Graham article in its pre-publication format by Elaine Graham, and the page references I cite were correct in that copy. However, readers should be aware that the page numbers in the published version are different (Journal of Adult Theological Education 5.1 (2008), 33-51).


\(^{73}\) Graham, ‘The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?’, 305.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 307.

\(^{75}\) Bennett and Graham, ‘The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology: Developing the Researching Professional’, 4. See note 54 for guidance.

\(^{76}\) Ibid.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 33.
activities in terms which left me in no doubt that they were using IBL. (This raises questions about whether IBL can be defined straightforwardly and whether it must be named, or whether because it already forms a part of TRS curricula, it would not benefit from a label in this context. The Department of TRS at York St John University, for instance, uses considerable amount of IBL in its modules, especially placement-based learning, but it does not name it IBL.)

The case studies, and evidence that came to light about IBL activity in other institutions, suggest that IBL works well within the disciplinary context of TRS, but that notes of caution, some of which are necessary precisely because of this disciplinary context, are required.

My research suggests that, in general, two different types of IBL are being practised in TRS communities:

- entire modules based on IBL;
- hybrid IBL, where discrete IBL exercises/resources are integrated into traditional curricula.

Having explored the practice of inquiry pedagogies in TRS departments in case study UK HEIs, and having established that these practices are relatively common when they are named, and more so when they are not, I will turn now, as a theologian, to reflect on the results of my case studies with the following question in mind: do epistemological and methodological affinities exist between IBL and TRS which make IBL a particularly appropriate pedagogy for TRS?

5.1 TRS and the CILASS framework for IBL

I will begin by reflecting on the disciplinary culture of TRS in relation to CILASS framework for IBL. It is my view that IBL is a particularly appropriate pedagogy for TRS particularly in the light of this framework, which encompasses the three themes of collaborative inquiry, information literacy and networked learning.

5.1.a Collaborative inquiry

CILASS regards collaborative inquiry as one of three key components of IBL. The CILASS website claims: “A broad range of intellectual and transferable skills-related benefits are associated with group-work and other participatory forms of learning.” Of what relation is this to TRS? As my case studies have illustrated, one of the main ways in which knowledge is created, discussed and disseminated in TRS is through collaborative endeavour and small group work. From the onset of their studies, TRS students are introduced to working in groups. They engage in collaborative learning in the context of small group teaching and seminars throughout their studies, and, as my case studies have shown, there is also some existing good practice in terms of peer group learning. Assessment by group work and group presentation is also commonplace in TRS, whether that be in the context of IBL/hybrid-IBL

79 A point about language helps to explain this situation. The term ‘IBL’ is used in TRS communities with far less frequency than IBL itself is practised. This betokens a disciplinary suspicion of acronyms, and particularly those related to teaching and learning, and perhaps also an unwillingness to bracket one’s teaching practices off in this way.
81 This includes undergraduates and taught postgraduates, and arguably, research postgraduates, who may be collaborating on a project, or simply gathering with peers in research seminars.
modules such as those on which the case studies focused, or of modules which would not be typically labelled IBL.  

5.1.b Information literacy

CILASS lists the development of students’ information literacy skills as the second key theme of IBL. A useful definition of information literacy is ‘knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner’.  

Students are arriving university with far higher levels of computer and web literacy than ever before, but this does not mean that they are information literate. This is of crucial importance in TRS, where students are increasingly encouraged to use the Internet for research, but are faced with a bewildering amount of frequently inaccurate information from religious and anti-religious organisations. Trying to research TRS on the Internet is a minefield, and this may make students reluctant to use Internet-based methods. Despite this, very little work has been done on information literacy from the standpoint of TRS, with most material coming out of information science and education. The proliferation of popular material which exists on the Internet and in the wider media related to religion and spirituality means that it will be of particular gain to TRS communities to assimilate the sorts of ‘higher order’ information literacy capabilities being considered by CILASS.

How can tutors help to develop students’ skills and confidence in using the Internet to research TRS? First of all, CILASS’ collaboration with library staff to develop students’ abilities is something which could easily be copied within TRS departments by staff wanting to introduce inquiry into their teaching. It could be as simple as a departmental requirement that students attend information literacy sessions run by the library. Secondly, staff can create online resources for students to ensure that they have access to reliable sources. An example is the database of art and artefacts being created for students at Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield.

Thirdly, staff can directly address the proliferation—but also the potential—of questionable material in classes devoted to the discussion of information literacy in the context of the discipline. Again working in liaison with librarians, staff can help students view such material as research fodder and can provide guidance on how to use it. It is also possible to turn dealing with questionable material into an inquiry exercise; imagine, for example, students working in groups to figure out how to distinguish between sources, perhaps comparing different websites’ reports of the practice of self-flagellation in some religious orders.

Fourthly, staff can educate themselves and their students about the electronic tools which exist to help TRS students sift through the enormous amounts of data available to them online. As Meriel Patrick, lecturer in Theology and Philosophy at the University of Oxford and metadata editor at

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82 When I was at undergraduate in TRS at the University of Leeds, the Department ran two undergraduate modules (and continues to run them) which further evidence this point. Christian Theology and The Religious Mapping of Leeds both include significant collaborative elements. Christian Theology includes an assessed group work project which also incorporates a peer assessment component. It also uses online communication tools to facilitate group work. Religious Mapping is a fieldwork module, and requires students to organise themselves into a group which meets regularly and which has overall charge of planning and managing a research project. It is assessed by team report and group presentation, and again, this includes a peer assessment component. Group work is also facilitated by online message boards in this module. See also n. 31.


84 One of my interviewees referred to this as TRS’ ‘bigger lunatic fringe’, in comparison with other disciplines.

85 See 5.1.5.b.
Intute: Arts and Humanities, has pointed out in a very useful article about information literacy in TRS and Philosophy, the problem with online TRS and Philosophy resources is that there is so much material, without the same quality controls that apply to printed materials. However, because students will continue to use the Internet as a study tool, regardless of whether their tutors want them to, Patrick argues that the proper response from tutors is to shepherd them in their use of it. In her article, she provides a useful list of ways tutors can help develop their students' information literacy skills. In particular, she recommends two subject gateways, the Virtual Religion Index and the Wabash Center Internet Guide to Religion, and the lists of resources in the Teaching and Learning Resources section of the American Academy of Religion's website. Naturally, Patrick also recommends Intute: Arts and Humanities, which describes itself as a 'free online service providing access to the very best web resources for education and research.'

Intute provides free access to a database of thousands of online educational resources which are selected and evaluated by subject specialists. The arts and humanities pages of the website include a TRS database. Intute also provides a service called Internet Detective, which is an interactive tutorial designed to encourage careful evaluation of online resources. Intute also produces a booklet on Internet Resources for Religion and Theology.

In addition to gateways, Patrick recommends digital libraries, many allowing free access to key theological texts. She also mentions the ATLA Religion Database, explaining that it indexes the contents of hundreds of journals and essays from anthologies. Online collections of journals may also be of interest, including JSTOR or Taylor and Francis Journals, which are freely accessible to members of subscribing institutions via an Athens username and password. Patrick also recommends online reference works, websites containing religious statistics, and reputable theological blogs.

Finally, tutors should bear in mind the importance of making sure that any technical barriers to students developing information literacy skills, such as lack of access to equipment, are

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88 See http://www.intute.ac.uk/
90 Ibid., 14. See http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/detective/ As Patrick explains, Internet Detective is part of the Intute Virtual Training Suite, which is a collection of over sixty free, mostly subject-specific online tutorials intended to help students improve their Internet research skills. Each provides a tour of key online resources in that field, plus advice on finding and evaluating further websites. The Religious Studies tutorial also includes a section for teachers which suggests how the tutorials might be used in a classroom setting (see http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/).
92 Ibid. Patrick recommends the Internet Sacred Text Archive (http://www.sacred-texts.com/) and the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (http://www.ccel.org/).
5.1.c Networked learning

CILASS has identified the third key element of IBL as networked learning. Networked learning includes the production and use of multi-media materials and Web 2.0 materials, including information-sharing, web-based communities and hosted services, such as social networking sites, wikis and folksonomies.

The SC for PRS has built up bank of information on e-learning activity in our subject areas. Our website includes discipline-specific e-learning pages; the resources page and the bibliography illustrate the extent to which e-learning is being practised in TRS (and Philosophy) and signpost useful resources. We also employed an e-learning project officer in 2007/8 to carry out surveys with students and staff in UK TRS communities to assess the nature and extent of e-learning in the discipline. The results of these surveys were published in a report in the special e-learning online edition of Discourse, the Subject Centre journal. This can be accessed at http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/PrsDiscourseArticles/74.

Surveys of twenty-nine TRS staff suggest that e-learning is common practice in TRS. TRS academics reported high levels of usage of the following e-learning facilities: online course materials, VLEs, and online discussion forums. They reported moderately high usage of online multimedia such as podcasts, and a similar number said that they require their students to submit assessments online. Some use of blogs, wikis, e-portfolios, computer-mediated interactive forms of assessment (such as online quizzes) and computer-mediated interactive forms of teaching (such as the use of interactive software with avatar characters, like Second Life) was also reported.

Other interesting results from the TRS respondents include:

- 50% agree or strongly agree that they try to incorporate the use of ICT in learning and teaching wherever possible; 21% disagree.
- 58% agree or strongly agree that they try to encourage colleagues to use ICT in their learning and teaching; 10% disagree or strongly disagree with this claim.
- 89% agree or strongly agree that they try to encourage their students to engage with ICT; 4% disagree with this.

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96 See http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/elearning/e_resources.html
97 See http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsd documentaries/397
98 (Referring to TRS respondents only): 24% of respondents reported the practice of compulsory e-submission of assessments in their departments, with a further 17% of respondents reporting active encouragement of this practice. 28% of respondents reported that e-submission of assessments is not an option for students in their department. 28% of respondents reported that provision of online resources is compulsory in their department, with another 38% reporting that, although not compulsory, provision of online resources is actively encouraged. A further 28% said that provision of online resources is supported, and 7% said such provision is available but not supported. 38% of respondents reported compulsory use of VLEs in their department; 24% reported that such use is actively encouraged; 21% reported that is supported; 3% that it is available but not supported; 10% that it is unavailable; and 3% of respondents did not know if VLEs were used by their departments. Regarding online discussion forums, 7% of respondents said that the use of such forums by students is compulsory in their department; 31% said that it is actively encouraged; 28% that it is supported; 24% that such forums are available to students, but that their use is not supported; 7% said that such forums are unavailable to students; and 3% did not know. None of the respondents reported the compulsory use of blogs, wikis, e-portfolios, online multimedia such as podcasts, computer-mediated interactive forms of assessment or teaching in their departments, but the survey indicates that such practices do exist in TRS departments, and that they receive varying levels of support.
• 83% agree or strongly agree that ICT makes learning easier for students with physical disabilities.

• 68% agree or strongly agree that ICT makes learning easier for students with specific learning difficulties.

• Respondents also recognised a link between enhanced employability and ICT skills, with 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that is important for students job prospects that their course provides them with experience of using ICT. 3% of staff disagree with this claim.

• 97% agree or strongly agree that traditional methods of teaching such as lectures and seminars can benefit from the use of ICT. None of the respondents disagree with this claim (the remaining 3% of respondents describe their position in respect of this claim as neutral).

• 85% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the claim that the use of ICT is not appropriate to teach their subject area. None of the respondents agree or strongly agree with this claim.

• 55% of respondents agree or strongly agree that their students are enthusiastic about the use of ICT in learning and teaching; 3% strongly disagree with this claim (the remaining respondents remained neutral on this point).

Respondents were also given a space to mention anything else about e-learning which they wanted to share. One said that e-learning empowers students, motivates them, and develops their skills. Another four respondents said that e-learning empowers students who lack confidence. One respondent also referred to e-learning as a democratic alternative to classroom teaching, because ‘students can engage with each other without what is sometimes a more combative classroom environment where quieter students can be intimidated’.

To supplement these results, and those derived from my case studies at the Universities of Sheffield and Manchester, I would like to reference two other examples of e-learning in TRS which came to the attention of the SC for PRS’ e-learning officer. One, an example of e-learning in Theology, is the work of Sara Parvis and Jessie Paterson, who are based in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. They use blogs with students of all levels, including taught postgraduates, as a preparation tool for face-to-face interaction in seminars. Students take turns to write a blog on that week’s set text(s), and others in the class add shorter comments. The point of blogging in this context is to encourage the free flow of discussion, and to empower students of different cultures, learning styles, and sometimes languages, to participate in the seminar. At the later levels of undergraduate study, blogging takes the place of essay-writing, with students being required to post three formal commentaries instead of writing an essay. Shorter comments are still invited from other students, thus continuing the practice of more informal shared learning among the students. According to Parvis and Paterson, blogging has been found to enhance face-to-face teaching and discussion at all levels, and to encourage the students both to develop new skills and to develop the traditional skill of close textual analysis in an engaging form.

The second example is of e-learning practice in Religious Studies. The ‘Religions in Wolverhampton’ module which is taught at the University of Wolverhampton uses e-learning to help students explore their local religious environment. The module draws on a variety of technologies to support learning, including a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), interactive white boards in classroom activities, and a website. Students have responded to these approaches positively, reporting increased motivation, developed competencies, and a sense

of empowerment as a result of them. Students have also made connections between e-
learning, the consequent development of their ICT skills, and their enhanced employability.  

‘Religions in Wolverhampton’ also takes an open minded view of students’ use of Wikipedia. Indeed, the role of Wikipedia in learning and teaching is subject to considerable debate in higher education. I encountered a variety of opinions on this issue in the course of my research; some tutors told me that they ban all reference to Wikipedia in assessments, but others are more tolerant of its use. It is my view that it is possible, and valuable, to use Wikipedia constructively in higher education. Although it is reasonable, I believe, for students to use Wikipedia as a starting point to further research, its main value as a learning and teaching resource lies in its potential to be a tool for the development of information literacy skills. This makes it a particularly useful resource for TRS, for reasons I have already mentioned.

A number of practical examples of how Wikipedia can be used in this way come to mind. Students can grade and edit Wikipedia entries on TRS topics, create articles, and link appropriate pages together, probably in supervised classes. Such activities are particularly appropriate for group work, and are thus ideally placed to be IBL exercises for use in TRS. Another useful exercise would be to ask students to write a short piece on a topic in TRS that they know something about, and then to critically assess the Wikipedia entry on the same topic and compare it with their own.

5.2 The disciplinary culture of TRS

Having argued that the ‘fit’ of TRS with the CILASS framework for IBL is a good one, I will now consider in more detail the disciplinary culture of TRS as it influences its relationship with IBL, and with active learning in general. The point is to identify the methodologies and epistemologies intrinsic to TRS to determine whether the disciplinary culture of TRS makes it a ‘natural’ for inquiry approaches.

TRS, like all arts and humanities disciplines, has the search for new knowledge as its core intellectual and epistemological endeavour. The vast majority of TRS departments are

100 Deirdre Burke, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at Wolverhampton, gave a presentation on this module at the SC for PRS’ ‘E-learning in Dialogue conference’ (14-15 May 2008). A webcast of Dr Burke’s presentation is available online at http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/elearning/webcast.html Please see the SC for PRS website’s e-learning project pages at http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/elearning/elearning_in_dialogue.html for more information about the event.

101 Of course, although Wiki articles are dynamic, and constantly changing, with quality of information being determined only by a growing consensus over time and by collaborative updating, it is also the case that certain pages are ‘watched’ by editors for bad edits and inaccuracies.

102 Tutors may, however, judge Wikipedia’s rivals to be more appropriate resources for such exercises. These include Citizendum, an online encyclopaedia which is edited by named experts, which includes subject sections, and which employs community managers; and Knol, which is a collection of articles on specific topics which are written by a named single author, whose permission is required to allow others to edit their article. Knol also provides multiple articles on the same subject. It may also be useful to mention at this point the Almond Springs website, www.christianleaders.org. This website came to my attention as a result of Michael Jinkins’ review of it (Michael Jinkins, ‘Theological Dot Education: A Review of the Almond Springs Web Site www.christianleaders.org’, Teaching Theology and Religion 5.1 (Feb 2002), 49—55). The point of the website is, according to its owners, ‘to stimulate theological reflection on the uses of technology in theological education’. Jinkins says in his review that the website holds particular promise for theological education, ‘especially for the teaching of pastoral and practical theology, church leadership, finance and admin, Christian education and homiletics’ (50).
situated in research universities. Research is at the core of TRS, and ideally, both tutors and students are valued as parts of the researching community. Learning methods which have research at their heart are, then, likely to work well within the discipline.

Indeed, all of the TRS academics I spoke to during the course of my research endorsed student-led learning and used some non-traditional forms of teaching and assessment, such as presentations and group projects. The majority reported good feedback from students. The academics also told me that IBL helps to strengthen the relationship between teaching and research. This is supported in the literature. Jane Robertson and Carol Bond have found that in ‘hard’ disciplines, many academics think that students need to acquire a sufficient basic knowledge before they can contribute to discussions, but in ‘soft’ disciplines academics expect students to participate in their disciplinary community from the beginning.\footnote{Healey, ‘Linking Research and Teaching’, p. 74, citing Jane Robertson and Carol Bond, ‘Being in the University’, in Barnett, Reshaping the University, pp. 79-91. For the distinction between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ disciplines, see 6.2.1.} Engaging students with research via IBL is, then, one important way to help bridge the gap between teaching and research. Mick Healey writes:

One type of active learning that focuses on student direct engagement with research is IBL. Both research and teaching can be seen as different forms of inquiry. Several voices are now calling for developing research-teaching linkages in communities of inquiry in which staff and students are ‘co-learners’ in the process of academic inquiry.\footnote{Healey, ‘Linking research and teaching’, p. 75.}

The students I spoke to understood the disciplinary culture of TRS, reporting feeling valued as part of a research community and empowered as learners as a result of inquiry methods. They also said that IBL enables them to engage better with learning and to retain more knowledge, primarily because their inquiries have developed in response to a desire to really know something or to solve a real problem, and are likely to be of genuine relevance to other people, and to their own future careers.

To clarify, it is my view, based on the results of my research, particularly the case studies and my literature review, that IBL is an appropriate pedagogy for TRS because:

- It is consistent with the ethos and methodology of TRS;
- It is consistent with the epistemology of TRS.

5.2.a The ethos and methodology of TRS

paradigm consensus or ‘soft’ disciplines consider knowledge as recursive; scholars use new lenses to explore intellectual territory already mapped out by others. Knowledge is also concerned with particulars, qualities and understanding.\textsuperscript{109} She says: “Soft” disciplines are characterised by idiosyncratic curricula, weak boundaries, independent research efforts and tolerance for unusual ideas or methods.\textsuperscript{110} The relevant point here is that because it is a ‘soft’ discipline, TRS has a greater affinity with IBL than do ‘hard’ disciplines because teaching and learning practices within TRS are likely to be interpretive and constructive. Further to this, a culture of dialogue, inquiry, argument, critical reflection and arguably, action direction,\textsuperscript{111} characterises TRS, and is similarly resonant in inquiry approaches.

In addition, the lack of an agreed methodology by which academics and students do TRS helps to make the discipline receptive to new methods of learning, teaching and researching, including IBL. Mike Fearn and Leslie Francis have made the point that the absence of core subject matter in TRS may be causally related to the absence of a universally agreed methodology. As they say, linguists, historians, sociologists, archaeologists, philosophers, and psychologists may all teach in TRS departments.\textsuperscript{112} The QAA Benchmark Statement affirms this: ‘Much of the excitement of the discipline lies in its contested nature. What should or should not be regarded as belonging to the subject, what methods should be used, the different results that come from adopting different presuppositions - these are some of the issues.’\textsuperscript{113}

Although there is no one method for doing TRS, it is nonetheless possible to narrow learning, teaching and research in TRS down to a few key methods, which happen to correspond with many methods used in IBL. These include documentary analysis, qualitative research (primarily used in Religious Studies), interpretative methods, phenomenology, action research, and observation research. In addition, TRS teaching is heavily seminar-based, thus suggesting that an affinity with collaborative working—a central feature of IBL—characterises the discipline. TRS also has a tradition of requiring undergraduates to complete dissertations, which are good examples of IBL.

5.2.b The epistemology of TRS

It occurred to me when I began my research that competing epistemologies within TRS may affect the reception of IBL in the discipline. I wondered whether I would encounter traditional systematic, philosophical theologians who regard knowledge as a priori, based on absolute truth—God in many cases—who would have an epistemological suspicion of the free-flowing nature of IBL, which, in some of its expressions, is constructivist, and regards knowledge as that which is created, not that which is already in existence and awaiting discovery. One of the academics I spoke to referred to the existence of two theological camps, one of which consists of theologians who engage with culture, and the other of theologians who regard themselves as standing outside of culture. He predicted that the latter group would regard practical theology, for example, which starts with the idea that knowledge is born of human situations and which is consonant with IBL in a number of ways, as ‘flaky’.

However, I did not encounter any such opposition to IBL; all of the academics I spoke to, whether in formal interviews or not, understood TRS to be a subject in which conclusions are

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} TRS can be taught as an applied subject, hence the development of the discipline of practical theology. Although not all TRS is applied, where it is, its praxis methodology echoes the methodology of IBL.
\textsuperscript{112} Mike Fearn and Leslie J. Francis, ‘From A-level to Higher Education: Student Perceptions of Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religious Studies’, Discourse 3.2 (Spring 2004), 58-91 at 61.
reached through a process of debate, and were of the opinion that this makes it an appropriate discipline for IBL. I imagine that if I had argued for IBL as necessarily constructivist—which I do not believe it to be—opinion would have differed.

In terms of epistemology, then, the following points should be borne in mind:

- IBL is appropriate for disciplines, such as TRS, in which truth is contested and in which argument is the route to knowledge. The status of appeals to authority—that they are not acceptable—means that learning in these disciplines is necessarily inquiry-based.
- Expanding on this point, TRS is not prescriptive. ‘Right answers’ cannot be derived in TRS in the same way as they can, for instance, in Maths. On the contrary, in TRS, answers are arrived at through a process of discussion. IBL, which in some senses, but not all, takes away the concept of the single right answer yet insists that individuals defend their answers, seems ideally suited to such a discipline. This consonance between TRS and IBL is also important in light of concerns amongst TRS academics that their students are arriving at university expecting to be spoon-fed information. IBL, especially if it is practised with students from level one, is one way to address these concerns.

5.2.c IBL and established pedagogies in TRS

Necessarily, pedagogies already exist in TRS which complement the ethos, methodology and epistemology of the discipline as described here. These established pedagogies have evolved partly in response to what we might call the special ‘issues’ unique to TRS, such as insider/outsider issues, potential challenges to faith engendered by the academic study of TRS, self-disclosure and emotion-arousing in the classroom and during unsupervised study, and encounter with people from different religious and cultural backgrounds to one’s own. Crucially, these issues may also give rise to three particular foci in IBL which are supported by existing TRS pedagogies: experiential inquiry (reflecting on, and subjecting to scrutiny, one’s own values, beliefs and practices), practical or active learning, and a focus on the process of learning.

As the popularity of the DPT suggests, active learning via practical theology may be one route into IBL for TRS tutors and students, since this form of ‘doing’ TRS is already established in the discipline, and encapsulates many of the values at the heart of IBL. Experiential learning via working with faith-based and voluntary organisations is also common practice in undergraduate TRS. Reflection on the process of learning is also built into many TRS modules through the use of learning journals and self-evaluation questionnaires. The ‘real life’, reflective learning which is a key feature of IBL is, then, already being practised to a considerable degree in TRS.

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114 It is a mistake to assume that IBL cannot be used to reach factual certainties.
115 The SC for PRS organised a conference on this topic, ‘Spoonfeeding or Critical Thinking: A Level / Higher to First Year Progression in Religious Studies and Theology’, on 3-4 July 2008. It provided a space for academics, teachers and representatives from qualifications and curriculum authorities to debate this problem. Abstracts and slides from the presentations are available on the SC for PRS’ website at http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/313, and write-ups of the presentations were published in a special issue of the Subject Centre’s journal, Discourse (8.1 (Autumn 2008)), which is also available online at http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/discourse/8_1.html
116 See 5.2.2.c., p. 39.
117 For an example of PBL in TRS, see Howard Worsley, ‘Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and the Future of Theological Education: A Reflection Based on Recent PBL Practice in Medical Training Compared to Emerging Trends in Residential Ministerial Training for Ordination’, Journal of Adult Theological Education 2.1 (2005), 71-81. Worsley outlines two problem-based scenarios for use in ministerial theological education. In one, candidates assume the role of a vicar who has to solve the problem of low levels of attendance at their church, and in
5.3 Pragmatic considerations: employability, IBL and TRS

Complementing the affinity between IBL and the disciplinary culture of TRS is a sound pragmatic reason for encouraging the engagement of the discipline with inquiry pedagogies. The sorts of learning generated by IBL enhance students’ employability, which is very important in non-vocational subjects like TRS. But what is crucial is that IBL enhances students’ employability in a way which does not prioritise the pragmatic at the expense of the intellectual. In fact, because IBL merges intellectual development with employability skills, there is no conflict between the two. IBL does not allow the employability agenda to take over because the values at its heart are still intellectual (research skills, information literacy skills, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, reflexivity, skills related to collaborative inquiry, and so on). The skills students acquire therefore have both academic relevance and relevance in the job market and in wider society.

5.4 Notes of caution

The conclusions of this report are that:

- IBL is an appropriate pedagogy for TRS;
- There are significant reasons why exploiting the affinity between IBL and TRS should be a priority for TRS departments, and;
- That there are a variety of means of so doing, as learning and teaching activities at the Universities of Manchester and Sheffield illustrate.

Before drawing this report to a close, it is important to identify some notes of caution which may affect the engagement of TRS with IBL. However, these are not discipline-specific; my research suggests that there are no obvious reasons why IBL should be more difficult to apply in TRS than in other disciplines. Indeed, as I have shown, it suggests quite the opposite.

5.4.a Content

A potential criticism of IBL is that it is insufficiently intellectually rigorous—‘learning lite’. Some of the staff I spoke to expressed concerns that IBL does not allow students to imbibe sufficient subject content. Conversations with CILASS and CEEBL staff confirmed that this is a common worry amongst academics. Whilst it can be legitimate, it can also be based on a misconception that IBL is a pedagogy which requires the tutor to stand back from the learning process completely. IBL does not support this. Bill Hutchings has argued that IBL is flexible enough to be a means by which clearly-defined and finite pieces of knowledge are acquired; it does not have to be relativist.\(^1\) Similarly, Kahn and O’Rourke have noted:

> It is unrealistic to expect that students will never wander from the main thrust of an open-ended enquiry, and so facilitation will be important to bring them back on course...The balance appears to be a delicate one—too much tutor

the other, they assume the role of an inner city vicar who notices that a homeless project is attracting Christian volunteers who are meeting to pray, and that a local youth group is meeting for alternative worship (76).

intervention and the EBL process is stifled, too little facilitation and the students may feel anxious or unsupported.\textsuperscript{119}

They suggest that facilitators can achieve this balance by:

...asking open-ended questions that provoke further discussion... supporting students, motivating them to engage with the task and valuing their ideas and contributions, encouraging students to reflect on their experiences, monitoring progress... challenging student thinking, encouraging them to extend their boundaries and to seek new ways to work with problems and situations [and] developing an atmosphere of trust in which students are willing to share and exchange ideas or work co-operatively.\textsuperscript{120}

The atmosphere of trust to which Kahn and O’Rourke refer is particularly interesting in the TRS context, since it is to be hoped that creating such an atmosphere would be an existing priority for the TRS tutor, who has to manage not only a diverse classroom—especially in terms of the religious affiliations and cultural backgrounds of students—but also explicit discussions of this diversity, often with reference to individuals who are present.

Where there are well-founded concerns that students are not imbibing content, it may be that the question or problem they are exploring has been set up incorrectly by the tutor and needs to be reframed. The trigger for imbibing content is the setting up of the inquiry properly; that is, designing the question or problem correctly and pitching it appropriately. The question or problem can be designed by the tutor or the student, or by both together, depending on the capabilities of the student. Christopher Justice \textit{et al} list the following as characteristics of a good IBL question: it must be interesting, analytical, problematic, complex (having more than one answer), important (topical or relevant to the real world), genuine (the student has to really want to find out the answer, not simply set up a question which will allow them to prove something they already believe), and researchable.\textsuperscript{121}

In particular circumstances, IBL exercises require augmentation with more structured, including taught, activities such as lectures. Certainly, a number of the staff I spoke to felt that it is important to include traditional lectures in inquiry courses, to ensure that students do not miss out on important facts. Consequently, they teach using a hybrid of lectures and IBL exercises.

Finally, problems with content can be minimised by introducing IBL as early as possible in degree courses, when students are still forming their learning habits. Other small measures, such as ensuring that IBL is practised in small groups—no more than ten students is ideal—and that students keep learning journals, can also help.

\textbf{5.4.b Group work}

One of the concerns expressed by many of the students I spoke to was that the collaborative work integral to IBL can be difficult to manage. In particular, students had experienced situations where one person in a group does very little work, and the others have to work much harder than they feel is reasonable to make up for it. Less commonly, students complained about one student dominating group work. Students may also feel under confident or overshadowed in group tasks. These situations become more problematic when group work is assessed. CILASS’ Interim Evaluation Report also reports issues of concern for students relating to the dynamics of group work,\textsuperscript{122} suggesting that this is a general problem. Many of the students surveyed by CILASS, particularly undergraduates (although

\textsuperscript{119} Kahn and O’Rourke, \textit{Guide to Curriculum Design: Enquiry-Based Learning}.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} HEFCE/CILASS, \textit{HEFCE CILASS Interim Evaluation Report}, appendix three.
postgraduates also expressed high levels of dissatisfaction), were ambivalent or unhappy about working in groups. This trend has been widely observed.

Some of the tutors with whom I spoke have developed strategies for minimising these problems, such as the confidential ‘ratting out’ option used by Diana Edelman at the University of Sheffield. More often than not, however, tutors told me that they respond to this problem by reminding students that they are likely to have to work in teams in their future employment, and should regard their experiences at university as a trial run, which they themselves are responsible for managing.

5.4.c Perceived lack of support for students

Although findings from CILASS’ Interim Evaluation Report suggest that the majority of students respond positively to inquiry pedagogies, less engaged undergraduates report feeling abandoned by their tutors in IBL courses. They experience a lack of support or structure in inquiry courses, and struggle academically as a consequence.

It is important to remember that IBL is a new approach for many students, some of whom will feel disorientated by the expectation of independent student learning intrinsic to the pedagogy. The CILASS Interim Evaluation Report advises: ‘successful IBL activities should be carefully designed to provide needed structure and contact, as well as links to what students perceive as authentic, real-life tasks and situations.’ Tutors should not make unrealistic assumptions about their students’ capabilities, designing IBL exercises which stretch their intellectual capacities just enough, but not too much. They should also remember that IBL is not a pedagogy which absents tutors; on the contrary, it requires them to take very seriously their responsibilities of facilitation and support.

5.4.d Design and sustainability

My research suggests that academics perceive it to be a greater challenge to design IBL curricula than to teach through lectures. IBL is also considered to be a greater drain on resources, including staff, than more traditional methods of teaching. Echoing this, in CILASS’ Interim Evaluation Report, staff reported concerns about the amount of time needed to design and deliver IBL courses.

There are a number of ways these concerns may be addressed. Again, hybrid IBL is likely to be easier to design than modules based entirely on IBL, and may also be easier to staff. The

123 Ibid., appendix six.
124 Spronken-Smith et al. report that students are at first uncomfortable with IBL partly because they are unhappy working in groups (see Spronken-Smith et al., ‘How Effective is Inquiry-Based Learning in Linking Teaching and Research?’). See also David Plowright and Mary Watkins, ‘There Are No Problems To Be Solved, Only Inquiries To Be Made, In Social Work Education’, Innovations in Education and Teaching International 41.2 (May 2004), 185-206.
125 See 5.1.4.e.
126 This is supported in Mary Whowell, A Student Guide to Enquiry-Based Learning (July 2006). CEEBL. [accessed 7 Sept 2008]. <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/ceebl/resources/general/studentguide_july06.pdf>. Whowell argues that conflict management is part of the group work process.
127 See 4.f.
128 See, for example, Plowright and Watkins, ‘There Are No Problems To Be Solved’, 196. This paper reports students in social work who had been exposed to IBL feeling anxious about their own subject knowledge and desiring more contact time with tutors to provide them with a background to the subjects they were inquiring about.
129 HEFCE/CILASS, HEFCE CILASS Interim Evaluation Report, appendix six.
130 Ibid., appendix three.
employment of postgraduate teaching assistants is another way to relieve the burden on staff. Anecdotally, I have also heard it argued in response to claims that IBL is difficult to staff that non-subject specialists should be recruited to facilitate sessions. The idea is that, because the point of IBL is for students to conduct their own research, tutors do not need subject knowledge because it is not their place to provide information. Indeed, those who make this point regard it as disadvantageous for subject specialists to facilitate IBL precisely because they may be tempted to ‘teach’. However, I do not agree that this is a solution. On the contrary, I believe that IBL sessions need to be facilitated by subject specialists because IBL does not advocate the complete withdrawal of tutors from student learning activities. The purpose of this non-abandonment of students is that if a student’s inquiries become too tangential, there is a subject specialist at hand to recognise the error and guide the student back on course. Furthermore, I am not persuaded that subject specialists would be inclined to ‘teach’.

Practitioners new to inquiry approaches may take heart from the comments of Virginia Lee et al.:

...most instructors grow into inquiry-guided learning rather than instantaneously transforming their teaching like a light switched on. Some instructors may begin by articulating clear learning outcomes as a guide for instruction. Others may jump in, try out an interactive teaching strategy, like the way students respond, and then gradually refine it. Others may begin by assigning a project and then realise that they need to provide students more explicit instruction in how to do it. And so inquiry-guided learning proceeds by fits and starts.

5.4.e IBL, widening participation and diversity

Finally, one of the major appeals of IBL relates to the widening participation enabled by its democratic conceptualisation of education. IBL works with a less hierarchical and more inclusive student-teacher model than does traditional ‘transmission’ teaching. Furthermore, its endorsement of non-traditional learning and assessment methods gives students who do not do well in essays and exams a chance to succeed academically.

However, there is a danger that this potential for inclusiveness could be under-exploited, or even squandered, as a result of excessively heavy student workloads. The students I spoke to claimed that the IBL modules on which they are enrolled have disproportionately heavy workloads. CILASS’ Interim Evaluation Report also notes students’ concerns related to workload. These findings are supported by the claim made by Spronken-Smith et al. that

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132 Virginia Lee, David B. Greene, Janice Odom, Ephraim Schechter and Richard W. Slatta, ‘What is Inquiry-Guided Learning?’, in Virginia Lee (ed.), Teaching and Learning Through Inquiry: A Guidebook for Institutions and Instructors (Virginia: Stylus, 2004), pp. 3-16 at p. 15. Also useful is Jenkins et al., Reshaping Teaching in Higher Education, which includes strategies for course design (pp. 63-71). Amongst its recommendations are developing students’ understanding of research (by making them aware of their tutors’ research and so on) and developing their ability to carry out research (by having them present work at simulated research conferences and so on)—on this point, I would suggest that students be encouraged to present work, perhaps in groups, at real conferences, as was the case at the ‘Finding Your Own Way’ workshop at CILASS CETL in May 2008).
133 See 4.d.
134 See 5.c.
135 HEFCE/CILASS, HEFCE CILASS Interim Evaluation Report, appendix three.
students perceive higher workloads in IBL modules.\textsuperscript{136} The irony is that the very students who could benefit most from the equalisation of opportunity brought about by the use of non-traditional learning and assessment methods, alongside more traditional ones, may be so disadvantaged by overwork in IBL courses that any such opportunity is redundant.

This is in fact a thorny political issue. Some staff with whom I spoke responded to these concerns by arguing that, although students endure heavier workloads with IBL modules, this furnishes them with a greater number of skills, which in turn leads to an enhanced C.V., thus offsetting the problem. I do not feel that this is a satisfactory way to respond to a student struggling with overwork. I have more sympathy with the argument from other staff with whom I spoke that IBL modules make better and more structured use of the hours allocated to them than do other modules. It may be the case that other modules simply do not build in a structure which would make proper use of the hours allocated to them. In either case, however, students endure an imbalance, and this is in need of redress.

Specifically in terms of assessment, it is important that IBL practitioners do not over-assess students, or design assessments which are discordant with the IBL activities in which they have participated throughout the course. A concern expressed by students cited in the literature I have reviewed, and echoed in my own research findings, is that methods used to assess IBL modules are disjunctive with the forms of learning nurtured by IBL. CILASS’ Interim Evaluation Report found that students feel that IBL activities encourage valuable learning, but that exams and other assessments test knowledge which is not emphasised in IBL assignments and activities. The Report comments: ‘IBL strategies may be more appropriate for high-level cognitive processes such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis rather than the recall of facts’.\textsuperscript{137} Kahn and O’Rourke write that:

\begin{quote}
...a range of assessment methods will usually be desirable, matching the complex open-ended nature of an enquiry...assessment should, ideally, be generated as a natural product of the enquiry rather than as a separate exercise...[for example] records of group meetings may serve both to sustain the group process and provide evidence for assessment.\textsuperscript{138}
\end{quote}

Finally, I also remain concerned that IBL courses presume a certain level of ICT literacy and access to ICT facilities which may not in fact be the case for students from particular socio-economic backgrounds.

\textsuperscript{136} Spronken-Smith et al., ‘How Effective is Inquiry-Based Learning in Linking Teaching and Research?’.
\textsuperscript{137} HEFCE/CILASS, \textit{HEFCE CILASS Interim Evaluation Report}, appendix six.
\textsuperscript{138} Kahn and O’Rourke, \textit{Guide to Curriculum Design: Enquiry-Based Learning}. 