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Biography

Val Poultney works at the University of Derby and was the programme leader for the EdD from 2009 to 2015. She has led many flying faculty visits with a team of academics to various parts of the world and in particular many to Cyprus and Israel as part of her leadership work. She still teaches and supervises on the EdD programme and has had many Israeli and Arab-Israeli candidates successfully gain their doctorates.

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Leading the flying faculty: what do leaders of doctoral programmes need to know?

Abstract

This paper employs a reflexive methodology to critically examine the opportunities and challenges raised for a leader of a UK EdD programme when the home institution undertakes short periods of intensive teaching abroad, a model known as 'flying faculty'. The University of Derby had, until 2010-11 a large institutional partnership with Israel via its own Inter-College and UK EdD programme. Academics from the UK made regular trips abroad to teach and tutor doctoral students, working alongside an Israeli-based Professor. This paper identifies two key leadership themes arising from this type of work. The first is related to an academic team working abroad under pressure to deliver an intensive course in a short time period. The second theme looks at issues of sustainability of an EdD programme in this context, namely the maintenance of productive working relationships with the local Professor and student cohorts over distance and protracted time of study.

Key words: Doctor of Education, flying faculty, off-shore/off-site working, transnational education.

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Introduction: the wider context

The validation of a part-time doctoral programme in 1998-9 at Derby was the result of the institution's growing partnership with its then off-site provision at 'Inter-College' located in Israel. At that time the University had a burgeoning wider-participation agenda and a gap in its professional doctoral provision that would allow Israeli and UK part-time Masters Students to progress to level 8 work. The validation of the EdD in 1999 provided the opportunity for students from the UK and abroad to enrol on a doctoral programme and was a welcome addition to the institution's portfolio of postgraduate programmes. The course proved to be popular with staff and students alike, and participants would travel to the UK from Europe and America for the 'taught stage' (Stage 1) of the programme. At its largest there were over 160 students registered on the programme, with at least 60 participants located in Israel.

The cohort approach adopted for the first stage of the programme (Bista and Cox, 2014; Lei, Gorelick, Short, Smallwood and Wright-Porter, 2011; Maher, 2005; Rudman, 2013) proved popular with all students from the outset; and the opportunity to engage in research into their own professional practice (an essential component of programme design) proved to be an attractive element for all cohorts over the life of the programme. The programme comprised a UK cohort based in Derby, UK and a transnational or off-shore/off-site Israeli cohort based in the Middle East. This paper focuses on two key issues related to the leadership of the transnational part of the programme: first, the pressures on an academic team working abroad for intensive periods of time and second, professional working with an Israeli-based Professor on a doctoral programme over a sustained period.

Flying Faculty

Greater student mobility due to lower travel costs together with the increased demand for education as a tradable commodity has seen a growth in international students seeking UK qualifications over the past decade (OECD, 2009). As well as seeing a rise in international student mobility to the UK, it is now common practice for university programmes to be delivered 'off-site' by a team of academics. They travel (sometimes extensively) from the home institution to deliver courses through a period of intensive teaching supported by the use of a virtual learning environment to maintain contact with the students in and between visits (Smith, 2014). This provision is known as 'flying faculty' a term that until very recently has been firmly rooted in an Australasian context and from which much of the literature emanates (Gribble and Ziguras, 2003; Leask, 2004; Heffernan and Poole, 2004). Closer to home, Smith (2013, 2014), has conducted research into academics' experiences of their visits to host countries and the opportunities this has afforded them in terms of their own personal and professional development. Smith (2013, 2014) also documents some of the challenges experienced by academics undertaking work of this nature.

Research into 'flying faculty' has been steadily increasing as this mode of programme delivery has gained popularity. Smith (2014) identifies four key themes as related to:

1. Quality assurance,
2. Faculty teaching and learning practices,

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3. Professional development of academics
4. The challenges of undertaking flying faculty work.

In addition to Smith's (2014) four key themes listed above, it is interesting to note the paucity of academic leadership literature as specifically related to flying faculty work in general. The role of the programme leader at Derby was to lead a team of academics to teach and supervise a cohort of Israeli and Arab-Israeli doctoral students working and studying off-campus. In addition, this leadership role was required to establish, grow and maintain professionals' working relationships with and between university-based managers and administrators of the transnational programme and, crucially, with the locally-based Professor engaged by the University to support the Israeli cohort and the programme more generally. It is interesting to note that at the time when the university had a burgeoning Israeli programme from 1998-2009, administrators and managers were being required to change their normal practices to respond to this new market (Whitchurch, 2006). Programme leaders and managers overseeing the transnational programme were therefore required to establish multifarious new working relationships within the home institution to facilitate guidance and support for the academic team when working abroad. As an example, the programme leader was required to have knowledge about travel in the Middle East, insurance, admissions of international students to the institution, how to implement the International English Language Test (IELT) which required communication with a whole new team of administrators.

In terms of quality assurance, one of the important issues for the University of Derby was to ensure parity of provision (Castle and Kelly, 2004; Stella, 2006) for UK and Israeli-based students. Programme mobility across borders afforded the institution opportunities for further research (see Ibbotson, Morgan and Davies, 2010), and to gain a better understanding of Israeli culture in a region often destabilised by on-going historical and political upheaval. As the EdD qualification was taught solely in English and the students required to read, think and write in English, it was necessary to recruit candidates who had gained at least level 7 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). However, most Israeli and Arab-Israeli students are multiliterate (Bensoussan, 2009) or at least bi-lingual (Arabic-Hebrew), and able to use English as a 'working language'. In a more recent study of students at the University of Haifa (one of Derby's then link universities) Bensoussan (2015) investigates whether speakers of minority languages are disadvantaged when reading academic texts because they often fail to reach the required standard when reading comprehension courses in English for academic purposes (EAP). She noted a link between self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation as a reason for why Hebrew speakers were more committed to higher level study than their Arab or Arab-Israeli counterparts. The Hebrew speakers also valued English as a useful and global language, a perspective not so highly shared with Arab speakers. These outcomes resonate with the experiences of the Derby programme leader and the EdD teaching team; successful candidates at doctoral level have been those committed to improving both their spoken and written English but above all, their powers of critical analysis, which is a vital component of doctoral study.

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While it is outside the scope of this paper to comment extensively on quality assurance issues, it is worth making clear that over the past two decades the terms 'cross-border education', 'off-shore' and 'transnational education' have been used interchangeably in this field. Much of the literature related to cross-border and transnational education emanates from the Australian perspective (Castle and Kelly, 2004; Dobos, 2011; Gribble and Ziguras, 2003), with most works focused on the benefits and challenges afforded to the academic undertaking the work abroad. From a UK perspective Smith (2014, 2013), provides data relating specifically to academics travelling abroad to work in short, intense periods in a host country. This resonates closely with the perspective outlined in this paper. Specifically absent from the literature are perspectives related to those academics who lead teams of other academics working abroad related to their own pre-journey preparation, leading on-site delivery of the programme and the level of support provided for them by their institution pre, during and post visit.

Preparation for leading the Flying Faculty

One of the key challenges for working off-site and teaching in a new context is related to the location where the delivery is to take place and the potential difficulties of teaching a UK doctorate to an international multilingual cohort of students. As with UK students, the EdD programme was extended to Israeli part-time students who themselves were in full-time employment and who wanted to research their professional practice. There was no requirement for UK academics to travel to Israel given the instability of the region but, for those who chose to make the journey, insurance and advice about travel was supplied by the university. The level of general information provided to academics chimes with the work of Gribble and Ziguras (2003). Their research findings also resonate with the informal mentoring approaches adopted by the EdD programme leader in the absence of more formal professional development given by the home institution. However, given that this informal 'on the job training' approach was an integral part of the transnational programme (and was largely successful in mentoring new colleagues) then it did not seem unreasonable to continue this practice. The programme leader and academic colleagues became expert in keeping abreast of the specific local contexts in which delivery of the programme took place which outweighed a more formal approach to staff development that essentially would only ever be generic in design.

The impact of tight timescales on teaching and learning

Both the UK and Israeli cohorts were taught, in the main, by the same team of UK staff during a single academic year (with approximately six weeks of intensive teaching in Israel). This led to a number of challenges for the team who were required to maintain the expected level of delivery and leadership of the home programme whilst dealing with the vagaries of international off-site teaching.

Some of the time abroad was ring-fenced for intensive tutorials with candidates and meetings with the Professor based in Israel. The composition of the teaching teams was kept small, in part limited by those staff appropriately qualified to teach on a doctoral programme and in order to maintain the economic viability of the programme. The composition of the Israeli

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cohort could range from anything from 12-32 students from a variety of backgrounds, religious cultures and professions. The programme leader organised and led all of the overseas teaching weeks (which took place in a number of venues over the years) and, with the agreement of the Professor, designed the teaching timetable. Over time, the programme leader was able to develop good working relationships with the students and the teaching team and the support of the local Professor was a welcome and valuable addition to the programme, especially where language and cultural challenges became evident (Dobos, 2011).

Having a limited amount of time to deliver Stage 1 of the programme increased both the intensity of the delivery and the length of the teaching day. As delivery of the programme was not at a local university and mainly at various hotel conference rooms, there was no 'host' academic institution or staff to receive the UK team, so opportunities for students to gain experience of postgraduate ways of working in a university context were not available. Travel arrangements, accommodation and agreements regarding the use of conference facilities were organised by the home institution with the programme leader often taking responsibility for not only the content and delivery of the teaching programme but also for any changes to the domestic arrangements. Challenges around internet connections, wifi and access to university platforms for emails and resources repositories such as the library and databases were a common feature of the teaching landscape. In the UK, maintaining good communication with overseas colleagues via, for instance, email and internet video-conferencing was often difficult due to the erratic connectivity that often precluded Israeli student representatives and the Professor from engaging in programme meetings held in the UK. These issues impacted heavily at times on the leadership of the programme from a quality assurance perspective and have been noted elsewhere (Dobos, 2011; Heffernan and Poole, 2004; Smith, 2014).

In addition to the tensions and challenges described above it was often apparent that tutors experienced a form of 'culture shock' (Smith, 2014), especially when working abroad for the first time. Drawing on the work of Kim (2001) she describes this 'culture shock' (finding ways of dealing with a new situation) as an opportunity to demonstrate behaviour associated with the cyclical stress-adaptation-growth model 'where the inevitable stresses of contact with a new culture act as an opportunity to 'draw-back-to-leap' (Smith 2014: 119). This work intensification over protracted teaching days was experienced especially by new tutors, combined with the limitations in some students' learning due to language and cultural differences and the availability of academic staff as a resource for students until very late each evening. More experienced staff were able to prepare new colleagues for such an experience but in practice everyone at some stage struggled with being 'on duty' over a long period of time. On return to the UK many tutors would have teaching commitments early the following week. There was never a formal arrangement to retrieve 'time back' but staff were advised to factor it into their diaries at a later stage if at all possible; Debowski (2003) considers this point to be part of a larger university policy on off-shore working. Many tutors, however, welcomed the opportunity to engage with level 8 teaching, supervision, to make new contacts and embraced it wholeheartedly seeing the whole intensive experience as a positive contribution to their own personal and professional development (Dobos, 2011; Leask, 2004; Smith, 2014). Leading these intensive teaching weeks over many months and years helped the programme leader to build

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her personal and professional resilience and to amass a comprehensive knowledge-base of how to lead and manage academic teams to successfully deliver the doctoral programme off-site.

For the programme leader and for other members of the team, the UK work continued unabated and any 'free time' was taken up with emails and other academic activities. This is recognised by Debowski (2003) and Bodycott and Walker (2000). Adapting pedagogies to create space for tutors to act as facilitators rather than being centre-stage in delivering content 'transmission style' would engage the students in a different way and improve their own learning independence. Behaviour of students was at times viewed as challenging for UK tutors: erratic arrival times to sessions, use of mobile phones by students during sessions with some choosing to make coffee during teaching all contributed to tutors uneasiness about their own academic performance. These all became 'normal practice' after a few visits for them but the role of the local Professor was integral to maintaining the status quo when these differences in expectations were experienced and commented upon by UK tutors.

Developing professional working relationships over distance and time

Building rapport and a reciprocal working relationship with the Professor had come earlier for the programme leader in her initial visits to the Middle East as lecturer on the programme. In a leadership role it was vital to have the instructional leadership (Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, 2001) capabilities to deliver the programme and to mentor inexperienced colleagues as well as being mindful of more authentic, conscious leadership traits (Jones and Brazdau, 2015). It became important to develop a more relational form of co-leadership, rather than the traditional behaviourist approach to leadership (Bush, 2003) essentially a collective approach to teaching and learning that would deliver the same quality of programme as received by UK EdD students. In practice this meant developing an understanding between the programme leader and the Professor to be sure that the same quality of provision was being afforded to all students on the programme, regardless of where delivered and by whom and at what stage the student was within the programme. As an example, for moderation purposes, assignments submitted for Stage 1 of the programme from Israeli students would be comparable with their UK counterparts. This would be verified by external moderation processes from the programme external for Stage 1.

It became apparent over many years working abroad that Israeli students required dual support for their studies (from the university and the local Professor) and in the early phase of the programme language and cultural differences provided a challenge to learning as described earlier. The university was clear that the programme delivery was to be in English but the temptation for students to read, think and write in Hebrew did begin to impact on their progress, especially as they frequently wrote in Hebrew and translated their work into English. The Professor had many roles within the programme and his skills and attributes were an integral component of the programme (Dobos, 2011). Establishment of expectations from the UK university perspective around academic standards, communication and the nature of working relationships had to be forged and maintained over time. The literature is still scant on how academic leaders manage short intensive periods of teaching abroad, especially with regard to some of the specific challenges faced by the team of academics (Seah and Edwards,

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2006). The issue of acculturation (Bodycott and Walker, 2000) experienced by the teaching team also extends to the local Professor and the UK programme leader. Working in the off-shore context can place any academic in a minority position although this was never an issue voiced by either the Professor or experienced to a point of concern by the programme leader. What was never made clear were the respective leadership positions of each incumbent; the Israeli cohort naturally aligned with the Professor because he was designated as their advocate (as they saw it) and because he spoke Hebrew, the language common to them all irrespective of other languages they could speak. However, they turned to the programme leader with questions about the programme structure, issues of timetabling and similar.

Therefore overall responsibility for leading the programme off-shore fell to the programme leader, who provided information to students about such issues as programme structure, university and programme regulations, and the best ways of communication alongside academic teaching. Much of this work was done pre, during and post visit. The opportunity during the week of teaching to gain a better understanding of Israeli and Arab cultures, their preferred learning styles and a smattering of local knowledge helped to forge a measure of trust and positive working relationships with students and the Professor.

Professorial and Programme Leader Leadership

In the UK context the term 'professor' is applied to academics who have reached the pinnacle of the academic staff hierarchy. There is a requirement to demonstrate a track record of research and publications, to be an authority in the field and, in UK higher education, to demonstrate a form of educational leadership as part of the professorial role (Evans, 2017). In North America the title is used more widely and includes associate and assistant professors, titles which are now increasingly applied to posts in the UK. There appears to be some consensus (Evans, 2017; Evans, Homer and Rayner, 2013) that professors should engage in some form of academic leadership of others, but exactly what that should be is still poorly defined. There is no consensus across higher education about what professors should do, or how they should lead (Evans, 2017).

In the flying faculty context there was similarly no role definition for the Professor, beyond a support role for the student cohort which was taken to mean broadly academic and pastoral support. As there was no formal agreement as to what activities required leadership an 'ad hoc' arrangement evolved regarding tasks to be done prior to any off-shore visit. This meant that such tasks were normally completed by the programme leader. As leadership is a relational exercise one might normally expect to observe a 'leader-follower model' (Meindl, 1995: 334) or a specific academic group who are being led in a particular way, perhaps related to teaching or research. While the Professor in question did not have a managerial/administrative role as defined by Whitchurch (2006) he did have a designated role in Israel to undertake admission of students to the programme, to support students and to accompany them when they travelled to the UK for *viva voce* examinations. Other leadership tasks were undertaken as required, a type of reciprocal leadership relationship which was never formally designated to either professor or programme leader role. Evans et al (2013) observe that not only do professors make academic leads but also those academics in more junior roles such as senior lecturers. As

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the role of programme leader is carried out by a senior lecturer in this context then we began to see that:

> …academic leadership is not a simple and straightforward concept – it remains unclearly or inexplicitly defined, and our study in its entirety showed it to be subject to multiple interpretations (Evans et al., 2013: 685).

Evans (2017: 125) has also noted the paucity of leadership development for professors over time:

> 'Leadership development is not generally offered to new (full) professors – an omission, given the focus of their work – and something that could make the role more effective.'

She further notes from her research data that there is a lot of negativity on the part of non-professorial academics towards professors, symptomatic of the need to develop professors' leadership skills (or at least have some common definition of what that should cover) which might constitute evidence for a lack of preparation for professorship. This particular flying faculty scenario may have compounded this issue as the home institution did not at any stage offer either formal guidance around who was 'in charge' or clarify who was accountable or responsible for the smooth conduct of the week's teaching.

Conclusions: implications for management and leadership

As the University of Derby oversees the final cohort of students to completion from 2009, it is timely to reflect on some of the leadership lessons which have been learnt over the last decade. While professorial leadership issues remain largely unresolved in terms of clarity (Evans et al., 2013; Evans, 2017), leadership roles for programme leaders or co-ordinators are better defined by job description, but only in a specific UK context. With a flying faculty model there are many leaders responsible for the effective delivery of the programme off-shore: university managers, administrators and the academics themselves who have been under scrutiny here. In part related to quality assurance matters, the leadership identity as linked to the incumbent's role is a missing factor in helping to establish off-shore partnerships. At the time of delivery between 2000-2009 quality assurance measures relating to the student experience for EdD candidates both in the UK and at distance were conducted separately from those in place for PhD students (Poultney, 2010). The EdD programme was located in a faculty and not administered under the same conditions as experienced by PhD students. Since 2011 better alignment of the EdD with the PhD route through a common administrative pathway has provided greater quality control for all doctoral students irrespective of their doctoral route and location, yet if future off-shore ventures were to be undertaken these administrative roles would need to be more greatly defined.

While informal mentoring was found to be sufficient in terms of supporting new colleagues travelling abroad to teach, the same is not true of the Professor and programme leader. As

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universities are largely unclear across the sector as to the designation of a leadership role for the professoriate in 2017, there was no discussion of how leadership roles were to be allocated between the UK and Israeli staff in teaching this programme abroad. Over time an establishment of an informal reciprocal partnership developed between the Professor and the programme leader. This left space for uncertainties to develop and for responsibilities to be reduced due to a paucity of formal agreements and arrangements. Reflecting on the issue of parity for students, it would be fair to say that Israeli, Arab-Israeli and UK students had a largely comparable academic experience due to the same programme team from the UK delivering the programme at both sites, a quality assurance measure supported with robust internal and external moderation procedures outlined by University regulations.

In theory, and to some extent in practice, the role of the local Professor is an effective one in relation to language difficulties, culture, and pastoral and academic support for international students. In terms of managing and leading the programme there was no role for the Professor with the UK cohorts, as there was for the programme leader. The joint leadership endeavour off-site was largely based on measures of trust, reciprocity, communication and commitment between the staff involved. Yet the issue for leadership is a wider one; key university personnel such as managers and administrators were also integral to these flying faculty endeavours and were required to maintain a constant commitment to the cause over protracted periods as is normal with doctoral study. The reality is that over time staff changed, momentum slowed and partnerships waned as the Professor left for pastures new. The remaining Israeli students (in supervision stage) were transferred for supervision exclusively to UK tutors and many over the years journeyed to the UK for extra tuition with the programme team.

For any institution considering engaging with off-shore provision, there are some salient points of learning especially for those academics involved in leading programmes abroad. The following short accounts reflect on what has been learnt by the Ed D programme team and especially with regard to leadership. These are organised at three levels: programme, institutional and personal.

1. *Institutional level*
   Validation of an international or off-shore programme has to take into account how the home institution will plan, build and maintain an appropriate architecture for the programme currently and in the future. The location and delivery of the programme is better situated within a university setting wherever programme delivery takes place to encourage a focus on learning and engagement of students. In terms of staffing a senior academic lead who has oversight of all off-shore programmes, including any academic staff who are employed in off-shore contexts. This would be a leadership role overseeing a team of academics (UK and off-shore based) maintaining overall parity and quality with UK-based programmes and for building and maintaining programme leadership and academic capacity. In a similar vein, an administrative provision is a key resource, with an experienced administrative lead able to support and work closely with programme teams.

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2. *Programme level*
   Maintaining a link between programme level and institutional level would be a core role for the academic and administrative lead described in (1) above. While the role of any programme leader is varied, a key feature in this context would be how the programme leader organises the academic team to meet periods of work intensification (working for long periods abroad and during each day) balanced with UK work commitments. Co-ordinating support for less experienced colleagues when working off-shore and any training prior to visits aboard are integral to the smooth running of the programme. Organising any reciprocal leadership arrangements with the off-shore academic; a useful feature of the validation process could include an 'operational manual' clearly setting out the roles and responsibilities of UK programme leader, off-shore academic leader and the lead of the administrative team. Extending an offer for off-shore students to visit the home institution from time to time is a welcome feature especially if students are to graduate in the UK.

3. *Personal level*
   The leadership of a doctoral programme off-shore (and in the UK) is rewarding but often challenging in equal measure. The opportunity to teach in a different country and work with a range of international students is a great privilege. However, the leadership of the programme is quite different in the off-shore context compared with the UK and can be particularly challenging around arrangements for working abroad. These include issues such as liaison with the home institution (over travel arrangements), co-ordination of the off-shore academic lead with travel and timetable for teaching, engaging with students from different cultures and overcoming language barriers. Often it is the minor irritations that challenge personal leadership capacity – the intermittence of Wi-Fi, attitudes to time-keeping (academics and students), the intensity of work and maintaining team harmony to name just a few. Developing resilience and a confidence in decision-making can benefit one's own personal approach to programme leadership making it an ultimately rewarding experience.

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