

#### Example Four – A steep learning curve - my first field trip

This first year field trip was designed to introduce students to each other and provide an insight into what university research entails. This was also *my* first field trip as a demonstrator.

Having been given a brief outline of what the students were required to do, I set out with my group across the Cornish heath only to discover half of them were still stood by the coach. Here was my first and totally unexpected task: to organise my students. This forced me to assume a didactic style to ensure that students knew what to do and were able to complete the task in the time given which automatically lost their attention. To make matters worse the weather was cold and chaos quickly ensued when one student fell in a stream and another (only about 30 minutes later) was sick. Fortunately, my competent first aid and field work skills helped me feel in control of the situation and I was able to deal with both of the students with minimal disruption to the others. After this practical I spoke to the academic lead about how I felt many of the students were disengaged with the tasks. Unfortunately this practical is taught to a large cohort (220 students at once!) and these tasks are believed to be the best way to engage the students. Personally, I think that a better active learning environment can still be achieved and that like Brew (2006) such a large cohort is an 'opportunity for innovation'.

Now when I demonstrate on this module I divide the workload across my group and make sure that every member has their own role such as a scribe, measurer, etc. and that these roles are swapped within and between practicals. I also try to motivate students throughout the day because I believe, like many others, that motivation is vital in experimental learning (Morss, 2005). This is particularly needed because the tasks they are asked to complete are monotonous and the conditions they are working in can be challenging. Of course these are real research situations, so I try to draw links to my own experiences and remind them why these skills may be valuable to them in their future careers. I believe this is a good way to break down the mystique of university research, especially if it's directly applicable to them (Brew 2006). With experience, I now have a better repertoire of strategies to deal with any complications and I take time to carefully and clearly explain the instructions and make sure that they are all fully aware of any potential health and safety hazards. Of course these students are adults but as the majority have come straight from school environments I appreciate that they are still learning about what is expected of them at a university.

467 words

#### Literature cited:

Brew, A. (2006). *Research and Teaching: beyond the divide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Morss, K and Murray, R (2005) *Teaching at university: a guide for postgraduates and researchers*. Sage: London.

#### Other Information

Please use this space to provide any additional information that you would like to submit explaining why you have chosen to make this application and what the benefits for you will be in terms of your professional development. (Max. 200 words)

Having worked as a postgraduate teaching assistant and been involved in outreach and widening participation work at the University of Exeter for two years, I feel that this application suits my experiences and intention to stay in Higher Education. During this time I have gained confidence, knowledge and a repertoire of strategies to help me support and deliver learning which I look forward to developing in the future.