

...with James Hartley

Research Professor, Keele University

One person who inspired you

Can I be greedy and share the honours? Peter McKellar was Head of the Department of Psychology at Sheffield when I first went there as an undergraduate. Harry Kay was appointed Professor in my second year, and he later became my PhD supervisor. Peter was lively, imaginative and fascinating. Harry was more ascetic, and interested in more academic things. I hope that I reflect the best of both of them!

One book that has left its mark on you

Philip Jackson's (1968) *Life in Classrooms* was – and still is – an amazing read. Jackson sat in the back of primary school classrooms for over two years, observing, before putting together his notion of 'the hidden curriculum' – what children learn in addition to the academic content. At primary school, children learn to cope with crowds, delays, denial, power, praise and

constant peer and teacher evaluation. They learn how to protect their self-worth and how to beat the system. University students do this too. We all do.

One moment that changed the course of your career

At grammar school I gained A-levels in English, French and history a year earlier than most, and so I went on to do 'Scholarship' French and history before going to university. Somehow I failed the French and was given a compensation O-level (when I already had an A). All my acceptances for university places to study French went for a burton. Only Sheffield would have me to study English, French, history and some other subject – which became psychology. In the second year I moved to the single-honours psychology stream – and never looked back. I still have occasional nightmares, some 50 years on, about not having done enough work for French. That

says a lot about the power of exams.

One problem with today's undergraduates

It is now 20 years since the start of the National Curriculum in this country. This means that students are taught from a prescribed set of notes, regularly assessed, and know how many marks each question on an exam paper is 'worth'. Today's students are brought up expecting university teaching and learning to follow the same path. They think that if a topic is not going to be on the exam, it should not be taught or studied. And, as students now have to pay for their university education, they are even more instrumental and more afraid of following their own paths. There are, of course, some wonderful exceptions.

One picture of the future

New technology is revolutionising teaching and

learning (as well as everything else). It currently allows students, teachers and researchers greater access to the literature and tools of communication, but it can be used to trivialise assessment. In writing academic papers we will soon get rid of copyright laws, peer review and printed journals. New technology will negate the need for having universities as buildings and centres of expertise as we currently know them.

One desirable change in academic psychology

I would join with John Radford in liking to see a 50:50 split between women and men psychology



Professor James Hartley
j.hartley@psy.keele.ac.uk

undergraduates. The current 80:20 split fosters unnecessary prejudice and stereotyping by both sexes – which seems hardly appropriate in our discipline.

One piece of advice for postgraduate students

Write/edit/polish something academic every day.

resource

Hartley, J. (2008). *Academic writing and publishing: A practical handbook*. Abingdon: Routledge.

'This book tempers advice with evidence and, en passant, hopefully shows that academic writing can be readable.'

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