Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education

It is now widely recognized that graduates need to develop employability and career management skills in order to enter and thrive in a global knowledge economy. *Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education* shows how engaging students in personal and career development experiences can result in powerful insights that translate into enhanced skills and attributes useful in all areas of life.

Personal Development Planning (PDP) is a method of recording achievements, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, reflecting on progress and setting clear goals and action plans. *Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education* explores PDP in relation to SOAR, a curriculum enhancement model used flexibly to integrate personal and career development with good academic learning and employability.

Packed full of useful practical features, this book enables readers to improve students' abilities to relate their learning and achievements to the requirements of both tutors and employers, and ultimately transfer and apply those abilities in future careers of lifelong learning.

Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education is essential reading for anyone involved and/or interested in implementing PDP, career and employability approaches in higher education and will be of particular interest to academics, those working in central support services departments, external examiners, quality assurance officers and policymakers.

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Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education

SOARing to Success

Arti Kumar

For Bal, unintentionally instrumental in the formation of my own career identity; and for Sanjeen, Umesh and Manoj: perfect proof of my SOAR principles

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Foreword

We live in a world where change is exponential and we are helping to prepare students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technologies that have not yet been invented, in order to solve problems that we don't know are problems yet. In short, we have a responsibility to prepare our students for a lifetime of uncertainty, change, challenge and emergent or self-created opportunity.

It may sound dramatic but the reality is that the majority of our students will have not one but several careers. They will have to change organizations, roles and identities many times. Many will have to invent their own enterprise in order to earn an income or create and juggle a portfolio of jobs requiring them to maintain several identities simultaneously. Most will be part of organizations that periodically have to transform themselves in order to survive and prosper. Preparing our students for a lifetime of working, learning and living in uncertain and unpredictable worlds that have yet to be revealed is perhaps one of the greatest responsibilities and challenges confronting universities all over the world.

Thinking about such things raises different questions to the ones we normally consider when we talk about employability, which tend to focus on what people know and understand now, rather than the sorts of capability, attitude, thinking and creativity that will enable them to prosper in an indeterminate and unknowable future. Ron Barnett argues that the essential features of performance in such a world are:

> understanding (how do we develop the knowledge to learn?), self-identity (what are the unique set of qualities, abilities, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that we bring to our engagements with the world?) and action (what repertoire of actions give us control over our own destiny?).[1]

Barnett and Coat[2] criticize higher education for its preoccupation with a knowledge and skills agenda, while ignoring the fact that what really matters is an individual's will to get themselves out of bed in the morning to tackle the challenges the day will bring and have the confidence to do something useful with their knowledge and skills. 'Our main consideration has to be what I am calling a "being for complexity." . . . The dispositions of enquiry for surviving, for engaging with will, with enthusiasm, in this extraordinary world we are in.'[3]

The introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP)[4] in UK higher education in the year 2000 represents a system-wide policy-driven attempt – grown from a small practice base – to focus more attention on the learner as an individual with a unique identity and set of qualities, dispositions and motivations that enable her to be and to act in this crazy world. But PDP is no more than a framework for learning through reflection and action. It needs to be given life, purpose and meaning by students and teachers as they interpret and use the ideas it contains in different learning contexts.

It is in the animation and meaning-making of PDP that SOAR has much to offer. SOAR stands for **S**elf, **O**pportunity, **A**spirations and **R**esults. It is a comprehensive tool to help teachers operationalize and contextualize the ideals of PDP. Different parts of the tool have the potential to promote personal enquiry, the discovery or re-discovery of *self* and the *building of identity* through participation and active engagement with *opportunities* for learning within and outside the curriculum (so much useful learning gained from experience outside the formal curriculum is ignored in higher education). The learning processes that the tool supports helps learners to develop realistic *aspirations and intentions* that can motivate and help them achieve the *results* they desire and help grow confidence in their own ability to meet future challenges.

In discovering what SOAR is trying to do I was reminded of Stephen Covey's inspiring vision of 'self' consciously interacting with the world:

> Between stimulus and response there is a space.
> In the space lies our freedom and power to choose our response.
> In those choices lie our growth and our happiness.[5]

It seems to me that SOAR can help us become more aware of our decisions, actions and their consequences in responding to the continuous stream of possibilities, opportunities, challenges and problems we encounter every day of our lives.

But it is not just an isolated view of self that SOAR encourages. Embedded in the concept is a social constructivist view of learning in which an individual's understandings are shaped and developed further as a result of interacting with others in work, study, play and other social situations. This chimes well with growing interest in more holistic concepts of the higher education experience as a means of preparing learners for a lifetime of living, working and learning in a complex world – regardless of the disciplinary contexts in which they learn.

PDP was proposed and developed to open up new ways of helping students prepare for an increasingly complex and uncertain world. The implementation of PDP is a 'wicked problem'. By that I mean the problem or challenge continually emerges from all the technical, informational, social and cultural complexity that characterizes teaching and learning. Such problems cannot be solved through simple, rational, standard solutions because the problem definition and our understanding of it evolve as we continually gain new insights and new potential

solutions are implemented. The creation of SOAR is a novel solution to the implementation of PDP based on the author's insights and experiences gained in facilitating PDP and guiding students in their career decision making.

When I helped develop PDP policy in 1999 I believed that it had the potential to put students as self-regulating independent learners at the heart of the higher education enterprise. The reality has been that PDP processes often emphasize the instrumental features of action planning, record keeping and reflection on action and performance, while other important features of self-regulated learning are often implicit and happen by default rather than design. All too often little consideration is given to the richness of the underlying motivations, values, beliefs, personal creativities and identity that underpin the sense of self-efficacy that drives and energizes what we do, particularly when we encounter the unknown. I am impressed with the possibilities that SOAR provides for recognizing and valuing the intrinsic motivations of learners rather than the extrinsic motivation of teacher assessment that currently overwhelms students' experiences and perceptions of learning in higher education.

SOAR is intended to inspire and if you are inspired by concepts it will certainly cause you to think about how you would facilitate the use of the ideas in your own teaching and learning contexts. Arti Kumar is to be commended for creating a tool that raises the profile of self in an academic world that all too often wants to treat learning and individuals' engagements with it as an abstract, emotionless experience, rather than the personally meaningful, emotion-rich experience it really is.

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Preface

This is a book about SOAR – a curriculum enhancement model you can use flexibly to integrate personal and career development with good academic learning and employability. SOAR is an acronym for **S**elf, **O**pportunity, **A**spirations and **R**esults: all essential, mutually supportive and dynamically related elements within this model, and I use it hereafter as shorthand for a process of personalized, holistic development. SOAR is not meant to devalue or compete with existing initiatives – rather to provide a complementary rationale and framework within which students can construct personal real-life relevance. The acronym itself is simple and positive.

The model allows much flexibility at local level in the sequence of delivery and interpretation of its variable elements. My aim is to enable staff in higher education (HE) to – in turn – enable students to achieve more of their potential. You can use many suggestions here to advance your own professional development while you apply the model for students' needs. You can tailor it to your subject or occupational field, or to the needs of special groups such as mature or international students.

Individuals can personalize this process to suit their circumstances and aspirations, through inbuilt requirements for reflection, action, analysis and lateral thinking. The focus on **S**elf enables individuals to discover and build their unique identity positively and proactively, through effective participation in learning **O**pportunities both within and outside the formal curriculum, and to form realistic personal **A**spirations based on sound information, achieving more intentional **R**esults as they move towards and beyond transition points.

In the diversity of student populations today we see the whole spectrum of abilities, attitudes and aspirations. Some may be capable of absorbing skills by osmosis from role models and their environment, but students' choices and chances of success are subject to many external variables – both assets and constraints. Enabling all students to realize their potential in line with realistic aspirations is too important to be left to chance or individual choice. Engaging them in formal experiences, using appropriate methods and resources, can result in powerful insights that translate into enhanced skills and attributes useful in all areas of life. The central focus here will be on developing students towards graduate-level employability and lifelong learning.

I have interpreted and broken down SOAR into a series of four thematic developmental stages (around the synergy within and between Self, Opportunity, Aspirations and Results), which iteratively build on each other. Each stage is facilitated by specific inquiry, information and guidance. The themes provide structure, direction and coverage for the design and delivery of formal interventions in curricula – equally applicable to programmes of study, modules/units, course components or assessment tasks. They are underpinned by a principled and productive set of concepts, and associated with practical learning and assessment activities that have worked with my students across different universities and subject areas.

Engaging students with SOAR elements in a coherent and continuous process (as set out in this book) can empower them to take control of, and deal constructively with, the variety of factors that influence their personal, educational and professional success in 'an age of supercomplexity' – a term coined by Barnett (1999) to express the idea that the information age has brought us a surfeit of data associated with *complexity*, but a situation of *supercomplexity* means that we are also faced with multiple frameworks of understanding, of action, and of self-identity (p. 6). He recognizes that every discipline and institution is currently challenged to educate 'for the formation of human being that is going to be adequate to conditions of supercomplexity' (p. 154).

There is no doubt that we need to prepare students better for transition into a world where work, life and employment conditions are changing, career concepts have changed, and students themselves have changed. Our practices in HE must accordingly shift their focus. My interpretation of SOAR elements is consistent with contemporary labour market realities, an emerging new personal and career management culture, and the needs of higher education institutions (HEIs) having to respond to new demands. In these circumstances, SOAR can lead to life-changing benefits for students themselves, for the institutions in which they study, the occupations they enter, the employers they work for, and for society at large. Can those of us who work in HE afford not to respond? This book does not just say 'why we should' but 'how we can' – but we will start, in Chapter 1, by looking at some specific drivers for 'why we should'.

Acknowledgements

Acronyms and terms explained

ABCD	Australian Blueprint for Career Development
AI	Appreciative Inquiry
AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (UK)
AGR	Association of Graduate Recruiters (UK)
BAPT	British Association for Psychological Type
CAPT	Center for Applications of Psychological Type (USA)
CDL	career development learning
CDSE	career decision self-efficacy
CMS	career management skills
CPD	continuing professional development
CRA	Centre for Recording Achievement (UK)
CV	Curriculum Vitae (Resumé in the US)
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
DOTS	Decision learning, Opportunity-awareness, Transition skills, Self-awareness
EBL/IBL	Enquiry/Inquiry-based Learning
EI	emotional intelligence
FRBS	financial and related business services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GWB	General Well-being
HE	higher education
HEA	Higher Education Academy (UK)
HEIs	higher education institutions (i.e. universities and colleges of HE)
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HR/HRM	human resources/human resources management
ICTs	information and communications technologies
LCR	Life-Career Rainbow (a graphic representing Super's life-span, life-roles approach to career)
LSI	Learning Styles Indicator
NLP	neuro-linguistic programming
PDP	Personal Development Planning (a UK government agenda for HE)
PFIG	Progress File Implementation Group

PPAD	personal, professional and academic development
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency (a government body set up to ensure standards are maintained according to quality criteria in the HE curriculum)
QCA	Qualifications Curriculum Authority
RoA	Record of Achievement (the national Record of Achievement was launched by the UK Government in 1991 to motivate and support personal and career development planning all through life, but it has been used mainly in the schools sector)
SDS	Self-Directed Search
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises (usually classed as those with fewer than 50, or between 50 and 250 employees respectively)
SOAR	Self, Opportunity, Aspirations, Results (a process model for integrating personal, career and academic development – and the main formula for this book)
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TDI	Type Dynamics Indicator
TGI	Teaching Goals Inventory
USEM	Understanding (of subject), Skilful practices, Efficacy (beliefs), Metacognition
VARK	Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, Kinaesthetic (styles of learning)
VLE	virtual learning environment
WBL	work-based learning

Assessment centres: usually the last stage in an employer's recruitment process, where candidates are put through a set of activities that are carefully observed and assessed according to pre-defined job-related criteria.

Behavioural competency: effective behaviours defined against key job performance criteria, enabling trained assessors to collect objective information about candidates through various tests and exercises at assessment centres.

Criterion referencing: a student's performance or grade is assessed by comparing his or her achievement against clearly stated standards or criteria for expected learning outcomes. It is not determined by comparison with 'performance' of other students.

Formative assessment: identifies a student's strengths and development needs with the aim of giving feedback (usually in words rather than grades) to improve them.

Ipsative assessment: a measure of an individual's present performance compared with 'personal best' performance in the past – generally arrived at through self-assessment.

Meta-skills: generic over-arching ability – e.g. self-awareness or self-assessment skills enable students to reflect and identify their level of ability, interest and use of other skill-sets such as communication, IT, problem solving, etc. Meta-skills are therefore vital in understanding the extent to which skills can transfer between one context and another.

Summative assessment: generally in the form of final results, marks or grades given at the end of a module, unit or course, allowing the learner to move on to further study or training.

A theoretical and applied model

Integrating and enabling personal, career and academic development

Chapter 1

Introduction

Working in UK HE for the past ten years, I have been part of the many debates and challenges we are facing as a result of external agendas and internal pressures to prepare students for life and work in our times. Throughout the 1990s academic and support staff have been drawn into the increasing desire and drive to produce more 'rounded graduates' equipped to work in rapidly changing, high-tech workplaces, in a global knowledge economy. Many of us are designing and delivering innovative curricula to address these issues and to meet the increasingly diverse needs of different stakeholders, driven by increased governmental and institutional pressures. Often we are working with a smaller unit of resource to meet the expectations of large numbers of 'non-traditional' students in the context of widening participation policies, globalization and internationalization.

In 1996 the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE, 1996) said, 'Most British people, most educators and most students now believe that it is one of higher education's purposes to prepare students well for working life.' Dearing (1997) made influential recommendations that stressed key skills and work experience. Further reports followed (e.g. Jackson, 1999; Knight and Yorke, 2003a), steering the HE system towards greater responsibility for the employability of graduates.

My experience is therefore based on responding to a series of UK reports and initiatives, the most significant of which is the Progress File, which defined requirements for all HEIs to offer Personal Development Planning (PDP) opportunities for their students. PDP is 'a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development' (QAA, 2001b). Although the main general PDP principles were centrally prescribed by government (more fully discussed in Chapter 2), there is much scope for developing university-wide, innovative, local approaches.

Such flexibility challenges all of us who work with an increasingly diverse student population in HE to decide what will be feasible and effective in our situations, and experiment with it. A number of related initiatives (e.g. e-portfolios, career management skills (CMS), employability, work-related or work-based/

practice-based learning, transferable skills and transcripts, entrepreneurship, professional development) seem to be jostling with PDP for position within HE.

These initiatives are often approached as disparate interests and abilities, involving as they do new players or refocused staff roles with different perspectives. Staff on a university-wide basis can contribute to PDP as a 'structured and supported process', and academics accustomed to teaching subject disciplines have usually been given responsibility for developing and coordinating initiatives. Engaging students in PDP processes is very different to teaching a subject, however. It is also different from 'training', which starts with professional or employer needs. If anything, the subject is the 'self', and the process may be collectively enabled in real or virtual environments, but needs to be uniquely realized by each student.

In this respect, PDP can form the core of any learning and teaching strategy, because all learning requires an investment of 'self', and this investment is best thought of as being generic or trans-disciplinary. This involves using student-centred pedagogy, giving feedback, motivating, effective questioning, facilitating self-help through dynamic interaction – it does not rely on a one-way flow of telling and instructing. The tutors are there primarily to enable learners to locate and utilize their own resources and strengths.

The implementation of PDP is raising many issues: What is the structure? Who should support/lead? How should the key terms and concepts be presented to students, to reflect contemporary needs? What is the common ground on which curriculum approaches can be constructed? What strategies will encourage students to engage – to reflect and record their achievements, exploit the resources and support available, develop a range of skills and derive the wide benefits intended by PDP? Can disparate needs be met and integrated within a single coherent, structured model? Do they lend themselves to course design and delivery consistent with HE academic values? I believe they can and do. This book addresses such issues.

PDP benefits should be operational across the UK HE sector by now, but there is much anecdotal evidence to indicate varying degrees of success and failure. A number of recent developments are still adding impetus to PDP: Burgess (2004) recommends that the Progress File/PDP framework be incorporated into new degree classification systems that provide a more detailed transcript representing student achievement in more meaningful ways for employers and other stakeholders. At the time of writing there is much anecdotal evidence that PDP concepts are spreading across Europe as well, and transcripts are likely to evolve as they feed into the 'Bologna process' which is seeking to make academic standards and qualifications more comparable and compatible throughout Europe.

The Leitch Report confirms the increasing importance of 'economically valuable skills':

> In the 21st Century, our natural resource is our people – and their potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential. The prize for our country will be enormous – higher productivity, the creation of wealth and

social justice. The alternative? Without increased skills, we would condemn ourselves to a lingering decline in competitiveness, diminishing economic growth and a bleaker future for all. . . . This challenge is formidable. . . . There is consensus that we need to be much more ambitious, and a clear message that the UK must 'raise its game'. . . . We must begin a new journey to embed a culture of learning. Employer and individual awareness must increase . . . this will be the best investment we could ever make.

(Leitch, 2006: 6,7)

These issues are not confined to the UK – a great deal of money, time and effort has been invested in attempts to transform HE by governments the world over. They want the curriculum to foster in graduates (citizens and workers) the skills and personal qualities needed to both compete and collaborate in a global knowledge economy. The global marketplace is paralleled by the 'internationalization of HE' – a phenomenon that has arisen due to the increasing mobility of students and graduates worldwide. HE curricula must value diversity *and* create unity.

Rationale

Although this book is grounded in UK experience, the SOAR concepts on which it is based are widely applicable and relevant. I am aware through collaboration and consultations with educators in the USA, Canada, Australia and Western Europe that similar conceptual frameworks are used marginally in many culturally 'Western' countries. However I believe that the potential of the SOAR model to empower all students is not widely utilized within mainstream curricula. My interpretation can stimulate new ways of delivering the model to students, and can be replicated in developing countries too, as they have similar needs within a global knowledge economy.

The skill-sets and concepts involved in personal, professional and academic development (PPAD) are not mutually exclusive – there is considerable harmony, synergy and transferability in the relationships and dynamics between them. That synergy can be conceptualized and animated by the SOAR process, but first we must create a shared understanding of its concepts and clarify what seems to be an increasing complexity and diversity of demands.

In essence these requirements boil down to nothing more or less than the need to develop each student as a whole person, to enable individuals to find and lead the lives they want to live (as long as their aspirations are not illegal, immoral or unhealthy!). This book invites you to engage your students in more holistic development, through a SOAR model that enables them to value and exploit learning derived from a wide range of experiences and opportunities, and to view learning broadly for the linked purposes of personal growth, intellectual ability and preparation for future careers of rapid change and lifelong learning.

Through a focus on 'meta-learning', SOAR can provide solutions for key issues:

- enabling students to learn about learning: to assess their own learning in and through multiple contexts and identities;
- bridging across what seem like disparate and competing agendas;
- meeting the needs of different stakeholders (staff, students, employers, government);
- clearing conceptual confusion, which often acts as a barrier to productive partnerships;
- delivering holistic and integrated development to all students, leading to aspirations of lifelong learning and (graduate) employment;
- integrating initiatives that engage both staff and students in PDP–CPD (continuing professional development) processes;
- generating pedagogy and practical learning tools that result in holistic development applicable in all areas of life.

Readership

I speak to you, the reader, assuming you are in some way involved and/or interested in implementing PDP, CMS and employability approaches in HE. The book will be most relevant and useful if you are an academic: lecturer, personal tutor, coordinator or researcher; or if you work in a central, support services department: a careers professional, learning support /education developer, librarian or counsellor; or if you are an external examiner, quality assurance officer or policymaker.

External stakeholders (e.g. employers, professional bodies, policymakers) will gain ideas of what is being done and can be done to enhance curriculum development, and how they can contribute.

Staff working in other sectors (further education, schools) and in related departments such as work-based learning (WBL), placement offices, volunteer bureaux and job shops should find that the SOAR concepts and applications give their work a new coherence and relevance.

You should find material of interest in this book regardless of prior knowledge and experience. No specific ability will be assumed, but for the activities to work a conviction of their relevance and value, and an ability to facilitate (and model) optimistic developmental processes will be required. In sharing my experience of resolving the many tensions that can occur in this area, I hope you will find your own ways of integrating these principles into the design and delivery of interactive approaches that suit your subject, students and circumstances. As you apply this model you will gain a fuller understanding of content and process, and your students will bring the model to life with their personal experiences.

A parallel process and dual benefit is at work here, as subtext. If you use the SOAR model for students you will be able to apply the same principles to your own personal and professional development. The new UK National Professional Standards Framework proposed by the 2003 White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, has been launched by the HE Academy. It calls for the sector to demonstrate defined activities, core knowledge and values in supporting student

learning. The intention is to apply it within CPD requirements for academic staff in HEIs, as is the case in most other industries.

When you are seen to be involved in and supportive of CPD processes yourself (for instance as preparation for your career reviews or performance appraisals), students perceive the value of PDP processes (reflecting, recording, improving) in a new light. They see the relevance of forming good habits that will have a tangible pay-off in the future as well.

In this respect, survey findings reported by Michael Arthur in *New Careers* resonate with me:

> Our exploration suggests that affirming the new careers, promoting knowledge accumulation, seeking out career communities, getting ahead of the problems and following the progress of people's career journeys can all be helpful to the individuals we seek to serve. So can seeing for ourselves the same career possibilities we see for others. Let us have fun, work well, learn new things, and support each other as we go. Let us be part of the new career landscape as well.
>
> (Arthur, 2003: 9)

In broad and general terms personal and career development may be thought of as a fundamental human need. Without doubt you will have applied the principles described in this book in your own life by default, if not by design; you therefore have the potential to engage learners in developmental processes, and may already excel in doing so. There are challenges, however. Many of us may have got our present jobs through random, unplanned experiences and influences, varying in the extent of their usefulness and relevance. Most of us grew up in a world where graduate jobs and their corresponding 'career ladders' were not as elusive as they seem today. We are under pressure now to go beyond the sort of happenstance we may have experienced, and to provide structured approaches that will progressively empower students to thrive in a rapidly changing, more uncertain world.

Relationship between 'SOAR' and 'DOTS'

SOAR is my broad, eclectic interpretation of a model which will be familiar to careers professionals in the UK, where it is popularly referred to as DOTS or new-DOTS, and typically understood as an acronym for Decision learning, Opportunity-awareness, Transition skills and Self-awareness. In practice the 'DOTS' are not usually 'joined up' in this order, however – a more logical way of introducing students to the elements within the structure of careers programmes is usually in the following sequence, which assumes that students need to develop skills and knowledge in these four areas:

1 **Self-awareness**: '. . . awareness of the distinctive characteristics (abilities, skills, values and interests) that define the kind of person one is and the kind of person one wishes to become.'

2   **Opportunity-awareness**: '. . . awareness of the possibilities that exist, the demands they make and the rewards and satisfactions they can offer.'

3   **Decision learning**: '. . . increased ability to make realistic choices based on sound **i**nformation.'

4   **Transition skills**: '. . . increased ability to plan and take action to implement decisions.'

(Watts and Hawthorn, 1992)

Central to both the SOAR and DOTS models is the reflective-active dynamic between Self and Opportunity, the internal world of the self interacting with and reflecting on the external world of opportunity. The latter is a place to conduct inquiries, develop skills and experience, generate, clarify and test aspirations and achieve desired results. It is in making these connections that Aspirations (the A of SOAR) are formed and implemented, and Decisions are made (the D of DOTS). The Results achieved (the R of SOAR) through this process are implemented in particular at Transition points (the T of DOTS). The main result we are aiming for in HE is to enable students to develop their potential in a more holistic sense, towards graduation and beyond. In the SOAR model, Results drive personal change, transfer and transition skills, closing the feedback loop to a higher level of self-awareness.

The DOTS model is underpinned by social science theories that have evolved over the past century, attempting to explain career choice and identity in relation to changing times and perspectives (Watts *et al*., 1996). The *new*-DOTS version recognizes that the DOTS cycle is not a one-off process at the point of transition from university; rather DOTS processes are recurrent in our times, when transitions within and between jobs are more frequent. There are current attempts to develop or generate career theories even further. I adopt a critical approach to theories in this book (and with students). I use them sometimes to inform practice, and often to encourage reflection, discussion and critical thinking. They are not to be regarded in a strict scientific sense as 'received wisdom'.

The DOTS model gives rise to both the process and content of many career development learning (CDL) programmes. The SOAR variant aims to:

1   re-focus DOTS in line with contemporary concepts and needs;

2   broaden the CDL framework to integrate personal, professional and academic development, thereby enhancing employability;

3   interpret SOAR elements against a broader range of theories, case studies and survey findings, focusing on positives (see next section);

4   link theoretical concepts with practical examples for you to experiment with in class and online;

5   show how appropriate pedagogy can develop a range of skills and attributes without diluting academic standards.

SOAR and the principles of Appreciative Inquiry

I like the notions that come from Appreciative Inquiry (AI) for their applications in positive self-development. Originally developed by Dr David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva (1987) in a paper they published at Case Western Reserve University in the US, AI was applied to organizational change, asking 'What is working well – and why? How can we replicate or do more of this, to create more successes in the future?' These questions are less threatening than a deficit model that asks 'What's wrong, and who is to blame? How shall we fix the problem?'

While the AI approach does not ignore problems, it sees 'problem solving' and 'conflict resolution' as deficit approaches that unduly emphasize negative issues. When people focus on identifying things that are 'wrong' and 'correcting problems' they ultimately slip into a negative culture of fault-finding and criticism. One approach many of us will be familiar with is a SWOT analysis, which attempts to identify both positive and negatives – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. AI reframes this to become a SOAR approach that focuses on the positives – Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results. The differences between SWOT and SOAR are mainly those of vocabulary and emphasis, but these differences can add up to much better attitudes and outcomes.

When I encountered the action research process and principles of AI it struck me that it was in harmony with the approach I was using. When students use SOAR to discover their strengths, they can align optimistically with opportunities that are suitable, generate aspirations congruent with their identified 'profile' and achieve better results. AI works by asking participants about their achievements, what has worked well for them or is working well now, and carrying their best practices (known) to travel forward into the future (unknown).

As Marcus Buckingham says in his books *The One Thing You Need to Know* (2005) and *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001), sustained individual success comes from both focus (on strengths) and the ability to filter the complex information and choices available in today's world of super-complexity. Finding, naming and claiming their strengths enables students to both focus and filter, to aspire and make appropriate decisions, and achieve effective results at transition points.

A word of caution: although I advocate focusing on strengths, we should not ignore our development needs. The focus on assets does not gloss over or under-estimate the external constraints that often limit or determine our own and students' choices. I experienced this at the end of my degree (many years ago) when I was advised by a well-meaning programme leader to apply for high-flying, mega-buck jobs – all of which were impossible to reconcile with responsibility for my three boys, and restrictions on my ability to travel or move house. I was grateful for her interest in me and her confidence in my abilities, but there it ended.

For students who have disabilities or special needs, there is a wealth of information and guidance available in careers services and learning support units – but students need to have these services explained and signposted so that they

feel encouraged to access relevant help early on. Through a SOAR process they may discover both the nature of their need and a means of accessing their inner resources. There are ways of dwelling positively on what is possible and what students can do rather than wallowing in problems and what they cannot do.

Assumptions underpinning the SOAR model

- Students are unique individuals full of potential.
- The world is full of opportunities, but access to these is unevenly distributed and differentially available to individuals.
- There is no single predetermined 'opportunity' that suits an individual in every way, and conversely there may be many choices that are suitable and possible.
- How students draw on their potential to seize different opportunities depends mainly on their motivation, ability and personality.
- To interact with the world in an effective way and make informed choices, students need to enhance self-awareness and self-efficacy in relation to external reference points such as tutors' expectations and employers' requirements.
- Focusing attention on each stage of the SOAR process as an optimistic inquiry and 'subjective reality' can make it 'appreciate in value'. A strong sense of self gives students a way of using holistic potential, a means to filter out unsuitable choices and to focus on those that fit them.
- This is a recurrent process, in a changing world. They will need to be flexible and review strategies as appropriate, but use their unique (and changing) profile to continually act as a guiding 'map' in their journey through life.

Structure of chapters

In Chapter 2 I define SOAR principles in relation to key concepts, intentions and implications related to PDP, CDL, employability and skills agendas. In the UK, staff working in these and other subject and functional areas could (and in some HEIs have) come together to collaborate in implementing PDP. However, conceptual confusion often acts as a barrier to productive partnerships in delivering the integrated benefits envisaged by the PDP agenda. This brings with it a fundamental need to coordinate, and create a common vocabulary with which to discuss and implement the main aims. For the purposes of this book, it is also fundamental to realizing the potential of the SOAR process.

The SOAR model has provided a structure for programmes I have designed and delivered successfully with students across many disciplines in different universities. In Chapter 3 I give an outline of a generic, accredited and assessed module designed for the penultimate year of degree programmes. I indicate how this can be tailored to meet the needs of different subjects, give examples of congruent teaching, learning and assessment methods, and suggest a way of scaling it up or down to different levels of study.

The SOAR elements then lend structure to the rest of this book. The focus on 'Self' (the S of **S**OAR) in Part 2 enables individuals to develop a range of skills and attributes associated with 'self-awareness'. This is essentially about articulating one's strengths within a 'Self-MAP' that can be used to navigate stages in the journey through life (Chapter 4). MAP provides an opportune acronym – it stands for Motivation, Ability and Personality, the main facets of an individual profile. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are devoted to each of the MAP elements in turn.

The focus on Opportunity (the O of S**O**AR) in Part 3 takes 'Self' into the external world, and enhances the skills associated with 'opportunity-awareness': exploring and exploiting options, to learn and develop. Students analyse the extent of fit between their identified profile and the requirements of various options, occupations, organizations, industry sectors and alternative opportunities that are realistically available to them (Chapter 8). In a broader global sense students need to understand the demands of the changing world in which they will be implementing their aspirations (Chapter 9).

The formation of realistic and achievable Aspirations (the A of SO**A**R) in Chapter 10 puts the spotlight on decision-learning, making choices in learning and in work that are based on sound information about **S**elf matched with **O**pportunity. The processes of decision making, problem solving, researching and action planning are shown to be intimately connected and capable of improvement.

The SOAR process is punctuated by means-goals or Results (the R of SOA**R**) and culminates with end-goals at the transition stage for life beyond university. At that point **r**esults gained through the SOAR process need to be demonstrated – through self-promotion on applications and self-presentation in person (at interviews and assessment centres). This stage draws together all the previous elements (Chapter 11).

Finally, Chapter 12 is about transfer skills, review and further development. As 'self' looks back to look forward and measure results (the 'distance travelled' or 'value added' by SOAR) we tutors also need to seek feedback and evaluate the impact of our interventions.

Style, content and pedagogy

This book draws upon a wide range of concepts and examples to show how curricula can accommodate practical activities with an evidence base. Due to the encompassing nature of the SOAR framework, I adopt a broad-brush approach with references to more in-depth reading if you want more information. Each chapter contains exemplar material, making connections between theory and its applications, suggesting practical activities and reflective exercises that are based on skills audits, survey findings, case studies, readings and Internet material – linked to constructively aligned outcomes and pedagogy. I encourage you – and students – to take a critical stance to theory, to test it against real-life experience.
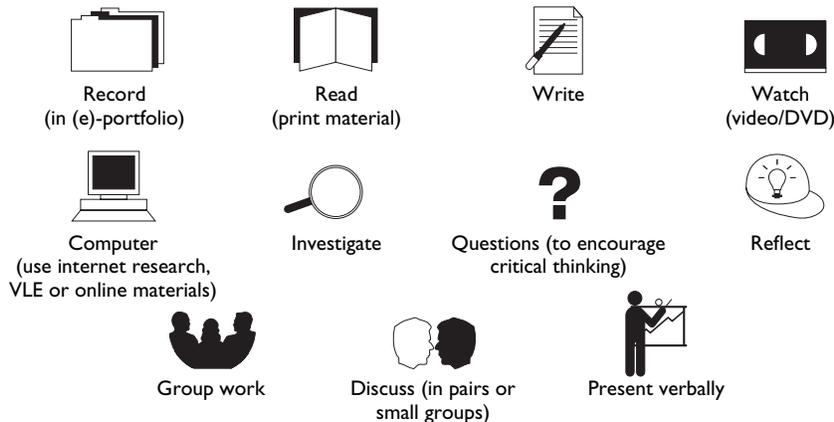
Facilitating students through a SOAR process of reflective and experiential inquiries provides a way of scaffolding student development (Vygotsky, 1978)

investing in 'self as hero in the journey of life' thereby developing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2001) and intentionality (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1989). These are essentially social and personal constructionist approaches to learning, where subjective realities and opinions are constructed through and within encounters with others in different social contexts (Berger and Luckman, 1966). The pedagogy lends itself to action research, and has been used and evaluated with different groups of individuals, in both real and virtual learning environments (VLEs). The methods may be innovative for some, but are not extreme or difficult to incorporate. They are offered in the spirit of AI as indicative and flexible inquiries: as you and your students apply them the results 'appreciate in value' through the SOAR process and ideally achieve balance or congruence between elements.

I use many external reference points to inform individuals' SOAR reflective processes – bringing together perspectives from employers, students and tutors. I have found that my careers colleagues have the necessary dual focus to mediate between perspectives, especially between students and their futures, between HE experience and employers' requirements – and I am grateful to many who have shared their knowledge and stories generously with me. To illustrate the points I make I have occasionally used examples from my own life-career pathway. As such this book represents the place I currently occupy in my thinking and I hope this corresponds with the 'state of the art'. I encourage you also to use your career trajectory as a reference point, and of course get students to use theirs.

As PDP requires students to write about themselves in reflective accounts, I sometimes model a more personal, conversational and informal style of writing here than may be usual in academic publications. As a result there are different voices and viewpoints in the book, and a change of voice is signalled by icons that act as navigational beacons. The voice can change from autobiographical to descriptive to analytical to pragmatic and to speculative, depending on the material and its purpose. I hope this variety will generate ideas rather than prove disconcerting.

The following icons are used to alert you to exercises directly addressed to students, and to signal what that type of exercise might require.

Record (in (e)-portfolio)	Read (print material)	Write	Watch (video/DVD)
Computer (use internet research, VLE or online materials)	Investigate	Questions (to encourage critical thinking)	Reflect
Group work	Discuss (in pairs or small groups)	Present verbally	

The book also has a companion website, www.routledge.com/professional/ 978041542360-1, where you will find some sample worksheets that you can download as pdfs and use with students, figures in colour you may wish to project in order to support, illustrate and develop ideas or exercises, and live links to relevant websites and online resources mentioned in this text.

SOAR can bridge the divide in conceptual terms between disciplines, and between terms such as academic, vocational, personal and professional – and integrating between bipolar positions is a key success factor in implementing the model. The development of skills in all these areas can be those of a higher order, as you will see throughout this book. We can apply quality standards and pedagogical principles to personal and career development as to any other subject.

Chapter 1: Summary of main points

- SOAR is a process model for holistic, integrated and personalized learner development.
- SOAR is related to a range of concepts – chief of which are the DOTS framework, widely used for careers education, and Appreciative Inquiry.
- The model can provide solutions for many issues facing HE today, and has been developed, tried and evaluated over the past few years as a response to requirements in the UK for HEIs to deliver the Progress File/PDP agenda.
- This book is for you if you are interested or involved in designing, delivering or formulating policy for HE curricula – anywhere in the world where pedagogy needs to be enhanced to deliver personal development, career management skills and employability.

You will find in this book:

- (re)-definitions of key terms and concepts in the context of our times, with a focus on contemporary working conditions;
- an inclusive conceptual framework for personalized development, underpinned by theories that give your work an intellectual evidence base;
- practical applications of the model, as it gives rise to both content and process that can be integrated into course and programme design;
- a reconciliation of skills development with pedagogical issues in HE;
- a practical resource, with ideas and activities you can adopt or adapt and use with students;
- examples of teaching, learning and assessment methods that engage students in developmental processes, enhance employability and self-efficacy;
- suggestions for further reading and references to useful, freely accessible web-based materials.