

# Paradigm transitions in education



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## Introduction – professional context

For this piece I will look to investigate the transition to paperless education to coincide with the opening of a new sixth form centre. Alongside the research question I will look into the relevant epistemological, ontological and methodological paradigms and how they influence my professional practice. During this piece I hope to reflexly look into my personal experience, my Habitus (Bourdieu, 1993) and how this has affected the decisions made in the pursuit of this goal to become paperless.

I have worked with education for the last 11 years having the predominant section of , my career being in the secondary education sector. I was recently appointed to the position of Head of Deeside Sixth form centre, which is a brand new £15 million build to enhance the provision of A levels for North Wales and beyond. The building is a XXX square feet and is part of Coleg Cambria, which is one of the largest Colleges in Wales with some 20,000 students.

The new role has not only changed my lens in terms of sector, with a move from secondary to further, but also significantly changed my role within the organisation, by moving from a position of middle management to senior management. This has challenged my epistemology of A level provision, specifically within the field of preparing students for positive progression to employment or university.

With the building of this new Sixth form centre, I made the claim that we would have ‘cutting edge IT facilities’ (Deeside Sixth Website), and this gave me the perfect opportunity to make large investment in ILT (information for

learning technologies). The centre had a large budget of IT facilities with some 800 log-ins around the building. Because of the large investment I was able to look at ways of developing pedagogy to best suit 21st century education. This large investment coupled with the overarching drive to become more sustainable as a college, made me look into the options of reducing paper use.

In order to allow this reduction in paper use and to prepare current A level students for future employment and education, as a new Sixth form centre I have decided to make a transition from a paper based curriculum to an electronic curriculum, which makes use of Google as a learning platform including Google Classroom as a VLE, thus allowing online work submission, marking and feedback. This should best prepare students for university, where their studies will be largely dependant on this format and an employment world, which is under rapid change and has a growing reliance on technology.

As head of a brand new sixth form centre this decision has fell solely with me and during the planning phase there has been no staff engagement or student voice, due to not having a staff team or student body during the planning phase. To allow retrospective planning and ensure smooth future transition this piece will look at staff and student opinion of the transition to paperless and outline stage for further progress to the ‘ Holy Grail’ of paperless education.

Paradigms

Having come from a natural science background the idea of paradigms is a novel idea, which has made me challenge my own thoughts and feelings about epistemology and how the phenomenology as opposed to the cartesian philosophy may be more applicable to the social world of a school or college.

To start with a definition of a paradigm, Oxford Dictionary defines it as ‘ a world view underlying the theories and methodology of a particular scientific subject’. A more grounded description would be simply a belief system that moulds the way we think and act about all aspects of life.

Upon commencement of this unit I was faced with the philosophical viewpoint that “ There is no such thing as absolute truth and absolute falsehood. (Rowland, H, 1899), which brought about some dissonance in my understanding of the world. Previously, the idea of my research falling into a certain ontological perspective other than positivist seemed absurd, however upon making my way through some of the numerous philosophical opinions and approaches within the area of educational research, my ‘ lens’ has widened and allowed me to embrace some of these theories and their application in the social setting.

The term “ paradigm’, which can largely be derived from the work of Kuhn (and his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* published in 1962) and can broadly be described as the ways in research be investigated and interpreted. Further work by Patton (1978) in Sparkes (Ed.) (1992, p. 11) takes the idea of a paradigm a step further and refers to it as a “ world view”. This ‘ world view’ has shifted throughout the progression of this unit

to acknowledge the strengths and applications of the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm shift, would show strength for the work of Kuhn, Kuhn argues that changes in paradigm is brought about by a “ series of peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent revolutions”, and in those revolutions “ one conceptual world view is replaced by another”. (Kuhn, T 1962). I don't feel I am in a position to fully move away from the positivist paradigm, but I feel my ‘ Lens’ has significantly altered.

As previously mentioned, my natural science background has largely ingrained the positivist paradigm with my outlook and this has embedded in my professional practice. Positivism is an epistemological standpoint that looks for experimental testing , where controlling bias and the importance of subjectivity is vital. Ledoux (2002, p. 34) defines natural sciences as “ disciplines that deal only with natural events (i. e. independent and dependent variables in nature) using scientific methods”. According to work Büchel (1992), the birth of natural science was initiated by those who questioned earlier explanations about the world and wanted systematic / scientific methods for research.