

PodMag Script: Week 4 January 2014

Intro music

K: Hi, welcome to the first PodMag of 2014. I'm Karen Foley! And at this point we'd usually hear from Dave Middleton, but unfortunately I don't know where he is.

Sounds of a door opening and closing.

D: oh hi Karen. Good. You haven't started yet.

K: well actually Dave I have. Anyway, where have you been???????????

D: I had to have a shower before we got started.

K: Well, didn't you have one before you left.

D: I haven't been home yet.

K : What? Today?

D: No, since the last time we recorded.

K: But, Dave that was before Christmas. What happened?

Flashback

K: Right have a lovely Christmas, Dave. I'm off. See you in the New Year.

D: Yes, Merry Christmas Karen. I'll just pack up here, and then I'm off to Middleton Towers.

Door closes. Dave hums a Christmas Carol. Sound of door being rattled

D: Why won't this open. It seems to be locked. Help, help (fade)

Back to present.

K: So you were locked in here the whole time? How did you survive?

D: It was tough Karen, very tough. But, you know what, the show must go on, so what's happening, on this edition.

K: Well?????, we've got a lot of things happening this year.

D: OK. let's tell our listeners about our upcoming training workshops.

K: Now, hopefully, everybody listening....

D: Both of you.

K: We have lots of listeners now Dave. And, hopefully they are all looking forward to the Student Connections conference.

D: Yes it's going to be the biggest event of 2014.

K: But, over the holidays a couple of students contacted me to say that although they like the idea of the conference, they were nervous about getting more involved.

D: I can understand that, Karen. I know a lot of students think that we all find doing presentations really easy. But, I still get nervous myself whenever I'm doing a paper???, or even doing this.

K: Absolutely Dave. And that is precisely why we are going to have the Activate Workshops.

D: Activate? What's that all about?

K: Right, well we had this idea that students have loads of creativity and ideas about social sciences. But, they might not be very confident presenting them in public. Even people who are confident, might not be too sure about doing it online.

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D: So, we want to turn your interest into activism. In short, we want to activate you.

K: So we thought that it would be a great idea if students and staff could get together in a safe online environment to explore whether they want to get more involved in the conference.

D: Will everybody who comes on the Activate programme have to be a presenter then? I can imagine that might put a few people off.

K: No, of course nobody will be forced to take part. All you have to do at this stage is sign up for an hour's session to find out how you can get involved.

D: Okay, that sounds a bit less scary. So, its an hour online to find out what you could possibly do at the conference, but you will be under no obligation?

K: That's right, Dave. We'll be running the Activate Workshops throughout January and February?

D: So, what kind of things will students be able to do, Karen?

K: That's one of the exciting things Dave.??? They might present a paper, design a poster, be a blogger, make a podcast or a short video. Or, they might chair a session. The possibilities really are endless.

D: But again Karen, I think some students may be worried that they can't do any of these things.

K: Of course they will. But that is what the workshops are for. If you're interested, but not sure, then come along, find out what its all about and take it from there. There really is absolutely no obligation.

D: Well I might come along myself.

K: You'd better, you're running them. Didn't you see the message from the Dean?

D: Oh no, the Dean!

K: What's the matter Dave?

D: Do you remember we asked the students to send us questions for the Dean?

K: Yes, what did you do with them?

D: I had to eat them on Christmas Day. I had no food in here. I'd already finished that half eaten mince pie that was in the bin.

K: Oh Dave...

D: It was nice actually. No wait, what's this? Here's the list of questions.

K: Where are you going now?

D: I'm off to talk to The Dean. See you in a few minutes.

Door closes, Dave runs up stairs.

K: Poor Dave. Trapped in here for the whole of Christmas. How did your Christmas go? Did you study or party or do a bit of both. We really would love to hear from you. Dave has been very upset at the lack of emails, so come on drop us an email to podmag@open.ac.uk, and make Dave a happy man. Hold on though. This door doesn't have a lock. How could Dave have been locked in here?

D: Okay, I'm in the Faculty headquarters. I've managed to slip past the dean's private security detail, and I'm outside his office. Damn, I wish I'd worn a tie now.....

Interview with Kevin Hetherington

K: Come In

D: Oh good morning Kevin

K: good morning Dave,

D: Happy New Year to you

K: and a Happy New Year to you too, hope you had a good festive season

D: I did indeed and you to?

K: I did too yes but we are back at work now

D: We are indeed and we are here today to talk about some questions that have been submitted for the Podmag by some of our students, so thanks very much for agreeing to see us today. We have a really good one to get us underway. This is from Kat Underwood and Kat wants to know, when you were young and were dreaming of what you wanted to be when you grew up did you picture where you are now or was it another profession calling your name?

K: Well when I was young, when I was at school I had really no idea what I wanted to do and I left school when I was 17 and my first job was working as a storeman in an electrical wholesale company.

D: And did you ever at any point in that journey have a dream that you would one day be the Dean of Social Sciences.

K: No I don't think I ever imagined that until fairly recently actually.

D: We had a number of students asking a very similar question – Lynn Blundell, Deryl Bower, Nicky Harrison and Alan Campbell all wanting to know what is going on at the moment with regards to the post graduate curriculum in Social Sciences.

K: Yes I know, this is a question that a lot of students have been asking us and what I can say is yes, we plan to re-launch a post graduate curriculum in the near future particular in the areas of psychology and criminology.

D: Ok, just to keep us focused on the current curriculum; El Milner asked can we have greater linkage between modules.

K: That's a very good question El. We are approaching that in a number of different ways. As you probably know, we are doing a number of things to think about how modules link up and how they relate to each other within qualifications, certainly that in some cases for example in psychology and the new psychology degree Q07, will have a greater degree of linkage within its core module. The other ways in which we are trying to get students to think about their qualification rather than just their module is through things like the qualification online sites where we try to give students who are studying for a particular qualification an opportunity to think about and look at the kind of questions they come across in the modules.

D: Excellent, that question about the use of different opinions does kind of lead rather nicely into a question we got from Karen Bowler which is do you think Max Weber factor value distinction is still relevant today?

K: Oh gosh, now that's a question I probably have not thought about for twenty years. Max Weber, for those who do not know, was a sociologist, Social Scientist really writing in Germany sort of at very end of the 19th century into the 20th century as well as the key figure within Sociology and he developed a view that what we were seeing within modern society was an increasing emphasis on rationality as a way of organising life and he believed that modern societies were characterised by different spheres of life – economics, politics, science, law and so on, but had their own take on rationality but he did not believe that one still shouldn't still have a value orientation that one should still be orientated towards studying things because of one's values but then should study it and try and understand it objectively. So there has always been a range of different perspectives around this and I think it is fair to say that the long tradition that the Open University Social Science faculty has had, has been one that would perhaps would be sort of be at some variance to Weber but we have always prouded ourselves on what I would guess would be described in broad terms as critical social science. We want to sort of understand it and see some of the problems there, some of the ways that which power operates, some of the inequalities and so on and it is important for social scientists, we believe that one should engage with the world in that kind of way. So I think there are many people who would say that whilst Weber had some useful things to say about how one treats facts objectively and uses evidence to understand the world that one can't always divorce that from ones values and beliefs.

D: Ok, so that was quite a longish answer.

K: Yes, as I say its twenty years since I have had to think about that kind of stuff so that's a very interesting one.

D: Ok, let's just follow that up then because I think you have probably used about fifty words being generous. Two people actually asked the same question, Mandy Claire Worrell and Jen Jenersawrus Wake, I think the jenersawrus might be a nickname, asked the same question which is kind of relevant to what you have just said so why do all social scientist use fifty words when five will do?

K: It's probably because social scientists are trying to sort of understand the world from a particular perspective with a particular training with a particular way of approaching things that requires them to use a specialist language.

D: OK, Dean Markham , who says he is a sociologist and a teacher says I don't half spend a large proportion of my time explaining both what I do and what Social Science is all about. What do you spend most of your working time doing?

K: I would like to spend more of my time explaining what Social Science is to people. I seem to spend most of my time in management meetings not in the swimming pool as I think you have eluded to in a previous podcast!!! We do not do that. I do get some opportunities to go outside and meet with people in other areas. We are always looking to think about developing how we engage with the wider community but alas, most of it I'm chained with the desk or the computer or I'm in a committee meeting.

D: OK, final question then, these have been really good questions, so I think we should thank the students for that. This is from Jane Ross who says if you were on desert island disks what would be the one track, the one book and the luxury you could not live without?

K: Oh gosh, I would have to think about that one a bit. The track, and this would be probably be a bit obscure for many people would be no side to fall in by the raincoats, the novel that perhaps I've read more times than any other is the crying of lot 49 by Thomas Pinchen, as to the luxury item, I'm on a desert island here I think I would want the treasure map with the X marked on it as my luxury item.

D: OK, thank you very much for those answers and thanks to the students for providing the questions. Kevin Hetherington thank you very much.

Door opens

D: Wow, those security guards have got no sense of humour.

K: What have you done now?

D: Nothing. I overheard one of them say he was thinking of packing it in to live off his wits, and said that half a living is better than no living at all!

K: So they took objection to being called half wits. What happened?

D: They chased me down here, but they stopped when we reached that sign on the stairs that says 'unfit for human habitation'.

K: Well Dave, that's all we have time for this week. **Just one thing though.**

D: Okay, Karen, what was it?

K: Could you just pass me the key to the door. We don't want you getting locked in again.

D: Sure. That's strange, where's the lock?

K: There isn't one Dave. You weren't locked in here. You just overslept again.....

D: **Anyway** listener, don't forget to keep in touch and sign up for the Activate Workshops, where apparently you'll be able to meet me!

K: We hope you've enjoyed this episode of The PodMag. Catch you next time.