Conference presentation from an undergraduate perspective
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On the inside cover of the programme for ‘The UCLan University Conference’ (8-11th June 2009) is a quotation from the American educator Robert Hutchins (1899-1977), which reads as follows: ‘Education is a kind of continuing dialogue, and a dialogue assumes, in the nature of the case, different points of view’. This, I feel, encapsulates my contributions to both the UCLan Conference and the Newport NEXUS Conference (15 -16th June 2009) which I also presented at; for, although both conferences were this year’s key forums in the debate over research-informed teaching, I hoped my own presentations would be of value for those interested in a student’s perspective.

My first presentation was on home ground at the UCLan Conference. This was a four day event, organised by UCLan’s Learning Development Unit, which emphasised ‘Partnerships, Elevation and Shared Identity’, and I was not only thankful to Carol Banks (Journal Editor) for ‘elevating’ me to conference speaker on behalf of Diffusion, but thankful to all the delegates who attended for giving me the opportunity to share my experiences with them. As I made my way in for the keynote session, I began to think how strange it would be standing up addressing the group in a Greenbank seminar room, rather than sitting down, listening to a Lecturer. By the time I was due to speak my nerves were paramount, and as I began I suddenly felt worryingly unprepared. The session was organised by Helen Hewertson (Centre for Research-informed Teaching at UCLan) and chaired by Professor Stuart Hampton-Reeves (the Centre’s Director). I presented alongside Claire Mashiter (also from the Centre for Research-informed Teaching); Claire was speaking about ‘The Student Internship Scheme’ and I was to cover ‘The Undergraduate Research Journal from a Student’s Perspective’. However, although I was amongst some familiar faces, this wasn’t enough to calm my nerves.

Attending this session were some important contributors on the subject of research-informed teaching, including Professor Alan Jenkins (Oxford Brookes), who gave a wonderful keynote talk, and Professor Simon Haslett (University of Wales, Newport). As I stood there in front of
everyone words momentarily failed me; so I resorted to reading points from my prepared notes, points which were informative, if nothing else. So my first presentation didn’t quite go as well as I wanted it to.

A week passed before my next conference presentation at the University of Wales, Newport, and during the long journey from Preston to Newport with Stuart (who was to chair the NEXUS symposium as well), Claire and Helen Day (another member of UCLan’s Centre for Research-informed Teaching), I reflected on how I could avoid having to resort to reading from notes. Although I’m not a big fan of PowerPoint presentations, I thought putting the bullet points up on screen (and out of my comfort zone) would serve to illustrate what I had to say rather than dictate me. So I opened my laptop and spent the next hour putting together a visually attractive presentation, opting to include posters, images and photographs taken at the *Diffusion* 1:1 launch (which I'm sure some of the camera-shy contributors to the first issue wouldn't thank me for), in order to enhance my commentary. Saving the presentation to my memory stick, I suddenly felt (over?)-confident, and I couldn’t wait to get in there and show Newport what *Diffusion* was about.

Newport campus was stunning, and the panoramic views were breathtaking. We found our way to the conference reception in time for lunch, after which Stuart and Professor Hefin Rowlands (Director of Research at Newport, the Nexus conference co-organiser with Simon Haslett, and the keynote speaker for our symposium) offered to help me prepare my presentation in the lecture theatre and to ‘acclimatise’, as Stuart kindly put it. It all sounded rather daunting. The theatre was, admittedly, state of the art, but I wasn’t sure if I was comfortable presenting so formally with a microphone in front of what looked to be a fifty or sixty seat capacity room. However, I persevered, and I was glad I did. As the room continued to fill, I gained a new sense of confidence, reminding myself that this was a rare opportunity to speak at a prestigious conference; to put it simply, I should be extremely grateful! In fact, my presentation was over before I could even take it all in and, although I can’t remember all of it, the guys congratulated me on a much more successful presentation this second time around and praised my bravery for interacting with the audience at the beginning, something which shocked even me!
Presenting at these conferences has done me the world of good. I wouldn’t have counted myself as a shy person before anyway, but I am now much more confident that I could, and definitely would, present again if given the opportunity. Now I have experienced it, I certainly understand why people would want to do it for a living. Scary at times but always a thrill, this is something I want to do over and over again.