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Critical Voices, Critical Times

Online Proceedings of the University of Salford Fifth Education in a Changing Environment Conference Critical Voices, Critical Times September 2009

- Foreword (Chairs)
- Introduction (Debra Leighton and Eamon O'Doherty Editors)

Keynote Papers

Critical Research Pushing the Boundaries

Professor Sue Clegg, Director of the Centre for Higher Education Research Leeds Metropolitan University, UK

Killing off Mickey Mouse: Open Knowledge, Open Innovation

Professor Martin Hall, Vice Chancellor University of Salford, UK

Conference Themes

Theme 1. Giving Voice to the Student Experience: methods, approaches and evidence

Paper 1.

University School Connections in Australia: giving voice to the student experience
Brown, J. R. University of Newcastle, Australia

Paper 2.

Valuable Voices: Invaluable teaching/learning experiences
Bolt, S. and Dickie, L. Curtin University of Technology, Australia

Paper 3.

What Values Do Students in Hong Kong Attach to Experiential Learning Opportunities?
Lok, B., Fox, R. and McNaught, C. The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Paper 4.

Contexts and Narratives of Attrition for Child Branch Students in Nursing: An ethnographic performance
Dale H. and Holyoake, D. D. Wolverhampton University, UK

Paper 5.

Knocking on the Door: How do students enter the disciplinary community of practice? Hill, S. the University of Salford, UK

Paper 6.

The Foundation Degree Experience: Expressions of transformation and multiple identities
James, L and Wintrup, J. Southampton University, UK

Paper 7.

Changing Identities: Working Class Adults' Voices in Higher Education O'Doherty, E. the University of Salford, UK

Paper 8.

Coming to America: Sixth Form Students' Reasons for Considering Undergraduate Study in America
Schweitzer, B. and Mather, P. Ohio State University, USA

Theme 2. Emerging Technologies, the Curriculum and Student Engagement

Paper 9.

A SiMMERing Story: New approaches to professional learning for teachers in rural and regional areas of Australia

Boyle, M., Brady, J. and Broadbent, C. Australian Catholic University, Canberra, Australia

Paper 10.

The Use of Discussion Boards by First Year Business Information Systems 100 Students

Bolt, S. and Graber, M. Curtin University of Technology, Australia

Paper 11.

Making Research Count via Online Environment: An Action Research Study in a MSc in Public Health

Leggetter, S. and Sapsed, S. University of Bedfordshire, UK

Paper 12.

The Use of Classification Techniques to Enrich e-Learning Environments

Aski, B. A. and Torshizi, H. A. Islamic Azad University, Iran

Theme 3. Student Diversity and Critical Pedagogy

Paper 13.

Preparing Future Faculty for Multicultural Teaching and Learning as Everyday Philosophy and Practice

Alexander, I. University of Minnesota, USA

Paper 14.

Understanding the Pedagogical Significance of Higher Education in Further Education Colleges

O'Keefe, J. and Sanders, G. Academic Development, the University of Sunderland, UK

Paper 15.

Science or Science Fiction? The application of scenario techniques to the study of possible futures for learners in HE

Stephens, S. Letterkenny Institute of Technology, Ireland

Paper 16.

Open Enrolment Programmes at Salford Business School: Challenges and opportunities

Heinze, A. and Wells, S. the University of Salford, UK

Paper 17.

Can Teamwork Skills be Fairly Assessed in HE? Heinze, A. and Whatley, J. the University of Salford, UK

Foreword

Welcome to the online Proceedings of the Fifth ECE Conference held at the University of Salford September 14-16th 2009. We would like to begin by thanking everyone who participated in the conference in all the different ways that make such an event come together. We would like to thank the ECE committee members for their work, the administrative staff for their preparations and the peer reviewers for their expertise and time. We would also like to thank those colleagues who managed to find the time to write up their research papers and workshops for publication in these Proceedings. Because of unforeseen circumstances the Proceedings have gone on line a little late but nevertheless there are some contemporary issues that are central to the overall theme of critical voices and times which were the conference focus. Little did we know when we decided to focus on policy and the changing practices of teaching, learning and assessment in higher education that the bulk of the teaching grant for higher education would be abolished by a new coalition government and that market relations would be etched so deeply into higher education in the future.

These Proceedings therefore prepares some of the ground for reflection not only on issues of teaching, learning and assessment but reminds us that policies on higher education are socially and politically sensitive issues that make or remake governments. We write this as many students appear to have awoken from their slumber and have taken to the streets to demonstrate about something they believe is an injustice for future generations of students. Such a change in policy will affect the nature of the pedagogic relationship as the Vice Chancellor Martin Hall indicates in his keynote as the move from higher education as a public good, paid for by the state, alters to higher education as a private good and investment by the student. This attempt to shift the existing market analogue to a full blown market with students as customers will affect the teaching and learning practices in significant ways in the future. Some of the issues relating to such changing practices in higher education are addressed in these Proceedings and one which will be significant in the future is students' experiences of learning and teaching using evaluation systems. How do subjects, departments and universities obtain information on existing pedagogic practices and how are issues raised in such evaluations addressed? As Sue Clegg stated in her keynote what exactly is meant by student voice and are there not a range of student voices some more powerful than others? At present this is a powerful issue for universities as the National Student Survey has demonstrated. However, responding to student ratings of satisfaction may be more difficult than envisaged as the paper by Bolt and Dickie suggests and an interesting alternative through an ethnographic study is offered by Dale and Holyoake's paper.

Theme 2 in the Proceedings addresses the issue of new technologies and student engagement and as always there are problems without a clear articulation of the relationship between pedagogic practices and new technology. The SiMMERing paper from Australia deals with this issue of articulation by indicating clarity in relation to improving self efficacy in teachers' practices and cognitive attainment in students during this project. Self-efficacy is a major conceptual area within psychology and by situating their project within this research literature they provide the specific form the articulation took in this project. Their study adds to our knowledge of how teacher self-efficacy in relation to the use of new technology can be improved. At the level of student engagement the evidence is less convincing and although interesting it is our view that issue of articulation between theories of learning and new technology in effecting change in student engagement and demonstrating social and cognitive change is still a question that requires fine tuning. Nevertheless, there are some interesting papers in this theme of technology and engagement.

Finally, the theme of student diversity and critical pedagogy demonstrates work in several areas such as Activity Theory, Critical Realism and philosophical practices for multicultural teaching. We hope that this collection aids your reflection on your own practices in teaching, learning and assessment and we hope you will join us or return to the University of Salford for the Sixth ECE conference in July 2011. (www.ece.salford.ac.uk)

Debra Leighton and Chris Procter Joint Chairs of Education in a Changing Environment Conference

Introduction

The Proceedings of the 5th ECE conference have been grouped under three themes:

Theme 1 Giving Voice to the Student Experience: methods, approaches and evidence

Theme 2 Emergent Technologies, the Curriculum and Student Engagement

Theme 3 Student Diversity and Critical Pedagogy

Central to the concerns of the 5th ECE conference was the concept of criticality and the view of the ECE committee that these are critical times for students entering Higher Education. Critical times in a number of ways because of the tensions inherent teaching, learning and assessing in an expanding system that requires students to pay part of their tuition fees and to take a student loan to finance their period of studentship. An expanding and more diverse higher education system, the development of new technologies that challenge the basis of the production of new knowledge (Castells, 1997) and the internationalisation of higher education are all present in many higher education institutions. The more recent collapse of neo-liberal financial capital and the effect that the implosion of this bubble has had on employment in many sectors that graduates would normally expect to seek employment are all critical areas for both students and teachers to contemplate. 2009 was seen as a critical time because of the imminent review of fees and funding and the envisaged further encroachment of market relations into higher education.

Our view, however, was that many of the issues that would be raised in the conference such as diversity, emergent technologies, formative feedback, transitions, learners' identities, engagement with and enhancement of student learning required different critical perspectives. Many of the ECE committee were influenced by a perspective that drew on the importance of the pedagogic relation rather than those of the market and customer. It was for this reason that we invited Professor Sue Clegg and Professor Murray Saunders as keynotes to address these and other issues from a critical perspective. It was a bonus for the committee that the Vice Chancellor, Professor Martin Hall, accepted an invitation to give a keynote and added a different dimension of critical thinking through his involvement in the area of open access. The three keynotes addressed different aspects of higher education from their critical perspectives and these are welcome and informative approaches to our understanding of change and higher education.

Professor Sue Clegg, in her keynote, talked of 'extending the boundaries of research into higher education' by using an extended and critical perspective to examine both old and new practices such as the 'student voice'. Professor Clegg indicated the need for a more complex theoretical approach to interrogating the changing practices of higher education and argued that a new book by Paul Ashwin (2009) 'extends the repertoire of theoretical resources brought to bear on analysing teaching and learning interactions in higher education.' Professor Clegg argued that different theoretical framing illuminated different problems and indeed in her own work on Personal Development Planning she demonstrated how by critically examining what would appear to be an innocuous concept aimed at benefiting the student, this could provide fertile ground for exploring issues of policy and wider social issues around studentship itself. In reframing and pushing boundaries she argued that we need to draw on a range of critical theories and perspectives to examine the social practices that have developed around an expanding system where the student is framed as a customer. This is an extremely useful conference address around issues of theory related to pedagogic practices which we are all involved developing, prolonging or changing.

Professor Martin Hall, in his address, made the case for open access by drawing on the image of Mickey Mouse as intellectual property. This has dominated cultural industries through the extension of patents that ensure the licensing of the image and its use for a rent exchange. This he argues is akin to the business practices of large pharmaceutical industries. Professor Hall referred to this as a closed system of intellectual property in which value and profit dominated the relations of exchange. In opposition to this he argued for an open system based on the sharing of knowledge across institutions. In detailing the shift of education as a public good to education as a private benefit he argued that we needed to reconceptualise the production and sharing of knowledge across higher education institutions to ensure the maintenance of education as a public good. The alternative of education as a private benefit, in an age when complex social, political and economic problems require an interdisciplinary and cooperative approach from different experts to find solutions, is a

negative and backward step. The recent near collapse of neo-liberal financial institutions in the banking sector and the emergence of the taxpayer as the lender of the last resort means that the expansion of public goods and services will suffer. If we add to this the increase in fees to students and the increasing number of private universities in the UK combined with a cap on student numbers then education as a private benefit becomes more of a possibility. Professors Clegg and Hall bring a range of critical perspectives to the examination of the social practices in higher education that have been driven by policy over the past thirty years and their keynotes remind us of the importance of a critical gaze at those aspects of our daily practice that we take for granted.

In **Theme 1**, papers address the issue of student voice from different perspectives. As Sue Clegg argued in her keynote the issue of voice is complex and contradictory and in times of league tables and value for money student voice, whether through the NSS or within different evaluation contexts of higher education, can be used by different groups in pursuit of their own increased power base. In paper 1, Brown addresses the issue of University School Connections (USCs) and takes a critical approach to the development of the concept itself. If, she argues, this is perceived as a partnership the resulting practices are at odds with the expectations. This is in the area of student teacher education and she draws on qualitative research with students to describe their experiences and suggests that connections is a more useful term in describing partnership activities. In doing so she uses student voices to detail the different ways in which the practices developed between universities and schools are both used and experienced by student teachers. In paper 2, Bolt and Dickie describe the development of national and institutional evaluation tools that have been established to improve the feedback loop from the student to the teacher. However, many of these are inadequate as they are carried out subsequent to the completion of module or programme. They argue that a multi-method approach is appropriate in their own institution, given the diverse nature of the student population at universities and this is offered as a contribution to the critical approach to the theme of student voice in this conference.

In paper 3, Lok, Fox and McNaught explore the concept of experiential learning offered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong by using a qualitative methodology to carry out interviews with alumni. The aim of this project was to identify the value of these learning experiences when viewed a year or two following graduation for selected participant experiences. The analysis of the data was then used to understand the areas of experiential learning that appeared to have the most significant effect on the development of the students. In paper 4, Dale and Holyoake use an ethnographic approach to explore the voices and experiences of student nurses from Child Branch. In doing so they open up questions of hierarchy, positioning within a faculty of nursing and narratives of worth as understood by the students. This is an interesting approach, the use of ethnographic practices to observe and explore understandings, and has been a useful addition to our knowledge of schooling systems in education in the past. Hill, on the other hand, in paper 5, is interested in understanding the issues involved in entering a community of practice and draws on qualitative research carried out with students in Prosthetics and Orthotics. Through placement in professional contexts these students indicate that they are already being socialised into such practices prior to employment in the professional context. This is a key aspect of becoming in terms of professional engagement. In paper 6, James and Wintrup draw on the experiences of

Foundation Degree students who are work based learners to argue that the tensions involved in work based learning can bring problems related to identity. Studentship on Foundation Degrees such as this draw on competing narratives of employee and student and the certainties of habitual work routines can give way to uncertainty in acquiring new knowledge in a higher education context.

In paper 7 O'Doherty draws on Critical Realism and the work of Archer (2003, 2007) to explore a quite specific group of voices normally on the margins of higher education. What are the constraints to engaging in higher education for working class adults and how are these experienced by Access students? How do they go about negotiating difficulties in study and their changing role as a developing nurse or practitioner? How do they use support mechanisms, family and peer groups and how do they experience constraints that may well have been aspects of their identity since schooling? In exploring working class experiences he draws on the concept of site of engagement and explores agency through the narratives of success that these students draw upon. In paper 8 Schweitzer and Mather explore the reasons for an elite group of students from the UK wishing to study at undergraduate level in the USA. The students in the United Kingdom who are considering undergraduate study in the United States are interested in universities in the United States based upon their

perception of the quality of education, the ability to delay choosing a major, the opportunity for a liberal arts education and their perception of the availability of scholarships and other financial assistance.

Theme 2. New Technologies and Student Engagement

There are four papers in this theme and paper 9 by Boyle, Brady and Broadbent reports on a research project that aligned with the priorities of the National Centre for Science, ICT and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR), which, in 2006, was established to improve educational outcomes in Science, ICT and Mathematics for students in rural and regional schools. The Centre also aimed to ensure that teachers working in rural and regional environments would feel professionally connected and supported. Situated within the research literature on teacher self – efficacy and the use of new technologies they describe two phases of a research project that worked on teacher development in the use of Interactive White Boards (IWBs) in pedagogic practice. The research involved qualitative interviews, observation and survey. The outcomes from this project also show clearly the benefits that accrue when teachers in regional and rural communities receive specifically tailored professional on-site learning opportunities that address identified needs. These experiences allowed the teachers to move from the ‘novelty factor’ in using new technology in their classrooms to a clearer pedagogic understanding of the impact that ICT can have on their day-to-day work in the classroom. The interesting aspect of this is that the research attempted to evaluate the articulation of a development programme of IWBs and the effects on teacher self-efficacy and changes in student learning.

This issue of how new technologies enhance engagement and improve student learning is reported in paper 10 by Bolt and Garber. In this paper, the researchers present their findings about the relationship between students’ different levels of engagement with discussion boards and their learning outcomes. Also, consideration is given concerning how best to enhance students’ learning through the use of discussion boards. They are interested in the pedagogic implications for using blended learning and conclude that to use the technology effectively pedagogical consideration must be given to the nature of student participation and instructional design issues. In paper 11, Legetter and Sapsed use both face to face and new technologies on an online MSc in Public Health to teach students. The major challenge identified is enabling the distance-learning students to engage with the attending students and the teaching team to enhance their learning experience. They used an action research approach to evaluate differences and change pedagogic practices to enhance learning. They situated the enhancement of learning within the communities of practice literature. Findings suggest that knowledge and understanding of the research process is a challenge for a large number of students regardless of where they were previously educated.

In paper 12, Torshizi and Aski reported on a data mining study for online students. With the growth of e-learning sites and indeed the growth of privately run commercially driven e-learning sites they look at data mining classification techniques to evaluate the predictive capacity of such techniques. They used four classification methods comparing the results that analysed learners’ profiles. Their conclusions were that those methods which had used the Simple Bayesian or Decision Tree Algorithms had more accurate results and could be used as useful agents for leading the learners to have better improvements in an E-learning environment. There are several ethical and educational issues with this paper. There is no doubt that data mining is an issue in the modern world from supermarket loyalty cards to international car manufacturers to banks and other financial institutions. However, the use of learner profiles to analyse outcomes in educational systems draws on anonymity as a key aspect of outcomes in relation to social class, gender, disability and ethnicity. In other words the learner profile and outcomes are kept separate from the learner identity in attempting to generalise from the outcomes of specific groups of individuals.

In this way, it may be deduced that under attainment may be the result of policies and practices within the institution if wide disparities are evident. To draw on learner profiles and then to indicate that the individual learner may benefit from feedback via this method seems to me to be a leap in the dark. Such work is normally carried out by individual subject tutors in terms of feedback on essays, assignments and practicals. The practice of teachers is to have knowledge of their students and to strive for ways that will encourage and engage learners in developing their skills and knowledge in the subject. This is a key aspect of the pedagogical relationship established within higher education and developed most notably in the practices of the Open University through its tutorial based system. There are significant dangers both from the ethical

point of view in the use of data mining as the pedagogic relationship, it appears to me, cannot be based on a commercial contractual relationship and from the ways in which the feedback from data mining is transmitted to the student or students there is the danger of students' doubts about their abilities being reinforced. Nevertheless, it is apparent that aspects of data mining are being explored for their commercial value in a number of e-learning sites.

Theme 3 deals with diversity and critical pedagogy and paper 13 by Alexander addresses the issue of preparing staff in a higher education system for teaching a diverse student population. This article reports on how one teacher moved from the "teaching problem" of inadequately incorporation of Multicultural Teaching and Learning (MCTL) in the Preparing Future Faculty course "Teaching in Higher Education" into the "teaching possibilities" that come with attending to practical theory, multicultural teaching and learning theory, adult learning theories, and student voices in a research-driven course redesign. Alexander's approach is informed by a number of critical theorists including Brookfield.

In paper 14, O'Keefe and Sanders challenge us to view higher education critically through the lens of Further Education by drawing on the experiences of students on a Foundation Degrees. The models developed by FDTL5 "Engaging Students with Assessment Feedback" which was based at Oxford Brookes University disseminated the models and practices and this paper reports on their use and evaluation in the context of a partnership Foundation Degree. In paper 15, Stephens presents a study that utilised scenario techniques to explore possible futures for learners in Institute of Technology (IoT) sector of Irish higher education towards 2020. A six stage modified scenario development design was used to develop and subsequently test a series of sixty scenario statements. The results were presented at a seminar held at the site of inquiry. In order to provide a coherent interpretation of the findings a positive scenario was written. The feedback from the seminar and the work of a Delphi panel was used to guide the writing of the scenario. One of the scenarios proposed, scenario 8 is not considered except in the conclusion where a future shock might destabilise higher education policy within a European Community context. Of course, this is precisely what happened to the bubble in the US and Ireland that was based on construction and the expansion of credit built on the shaky ground of a boom in the housing market. While the Irish higher education system and the public sector, in general, feel the squeeze of reduced salaries and increased tax, unemployment among skilled and professional workers has increased bringing the sceptre of emigration once again. The Irish higher education system will reduce in size for the next twenty years as the Irish taxpayer, as lender of the last resort, pays for the financial sector's recklessness. In paper 16, Heinze and Wells situate the development of Open Enrolment courses in Salford Business School within the policy developments in higher education over the last thirty years. They argue that this study illustrates a number of university wide issues, which actually reduce the competitiveness of the institution in the executive education market. Recommendations for improvement are included. In paper 17, Heinze and Whatley explore the issue of assessing teamwork and make a series of recommendations informed by discussion in their workshop about transparency and fairness in team working contexts.

Debra Leighton and Eamon O'Doherty (Editors)

Fifth ECE Keynote Address 1

Pushing the boundaries: critical research in higher education
Professor Sue Clegg

Introduction

I have chosen the metaphor of pushing at boundaries of research into higher education to suggest that I think the boundaries of research are too narrowly drawn, and that we are not asking sufficiently challenging questions. Boundaries help to define, but can also limit. Extending boundaries, therefore, implies pushing them back. I have used 'extending' rather than 'crossing' because that might imply leaving the territory. I want to suggest interrogating the complexities of higher education involves being in multiple places and is a space where we can ask critical questions

My definition of research into higher education is very broad. It covers work that can be described as being 'about' higher education and as well as work that is 'for' higher education in the narrower sense of research into improvement, whether this is understood as making things better for students or making higher education more productive (Malcolm & Zukas 2001). For me the aim of research into higher education, is to come to an understanding of higher education and to ask difficult questions, not simply utilitarian ones about 'what works'. Although the what works questions can be important, we are likely to be seriously misled unless the grounds of asking are properly understood and theorised (Clegg, 2005a). Moreover, because we are insiders, researching into higher education presents us with particular problems in moving beyond our own everyday lived common sense. Posing critical questions involves noticing the oddities of the field, observing and questioning the rules of game, and this involves establishing a certain distance between us and our research subject. In his study of academic life *Homo Academicus* the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues:

The sociologist who chooses to study his own world in its nearest and most familiar aspects should not as the ethnologist would domesticate the exotic but .. exotiscise the domestic ..through a break with his initial relation of intimacy (Bourdieu, 1988, xi).

In other words we need to make the familiar unfamiliar and to ask questions about what is specific to the field of higher education itself. Bourdieu's domestic metaphor is telling because when women began to interrogate the 'domestic' whole new fields of feminist inquiry were opened up. Similarly Edward Said's (1985) monumental study of 'Orientalism' first published in 1978 challenged our notions of the exotic. So to make our own familiar settings 'exotic' is a way to render them 'other'. For example Lisa Lucas (2006) in her book *The Research Game in Academic Life* shows how the relatively recent game of research selectivity is widening status distinctions both between universities and also within them, often to the detriment of both students and academics.

I want to suggest, therefore, that we need to question not just old ideas and hierarchies but also look critically at some of the newer practices, and newer orthodoxies; especially ones (perhaps like the idea of the student voice) that we have become attached to, and I want to argue that in order to do this we need a more extended theoretical and critical vocabulary.

My address therefore falls into three main parts:

- in the first I hazard some general observations and ask questions about the field and consider the theoretical resources available to higher education researchers
- in the second I turn to the sorts of questions we ask and take examples from my own research and use this to trouble the idea of the 'student voice'
- and the final part I want to suggest some reasons to be cheerful.

Theoretical resources

Theory has an odd and unsettled relationship in debates about teaching and learning. It has recently resurfaced in debate about the scholarship of teaching and learning which has been criticised most notably by Graham Gibbs as lacking in sophistication and knowledge of previously published work. His challenge has produced much soul searching - but also some sophisticated responses including from Pat Hutchinson and Mary Huber who reject the notion of theory in the singular. Problems remain however (<http://www.issotl.org/2008proceedings.html>). Malcolm Tight (2004) reviewed the published literature outside North America under the headings of 'teaching and learning', course design' and the student experience' and found that only a third showed any evidence of engagement with theoretical resources. This is a remarkable absence. Given the complexities of higher education systems, the characteristics of students, the multiple purposes of higher education, and the number of questions that can be asked about student learning, it seems highly unlikely that one form of theory will suffice (or indeed a singular verification strategy). Indeed, the sorts of questions we ask are shaped by our theoretical starting points.

Much of the early research into higher education emerged, not surprisingly, out of a concern with the learning experiences of students. A dominant tradition of research evolved which has become known as the 'approaches to learning and teaching' perspective based on phenomenographic studies of how students and teachers experience particular phenomena. Much of this work focused on students' intentions to learn, and conceptions such as deep and surface learning, starting from a qualitative approach.

The approach has been so influential that Mike Prosser and Keith Trigwell are able to claim that:

The combination of evidence that, on the one hand, a deep approach to learning is desirable and a surface approach is less desirable, and on the other hand, the learning context (and in some cases student perceptions) can be changed by university teachers and administrators to afford one or other approach, forms the basis of a powerful tool to improve the quality of students' learning (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999 p. 98).

And, even more simply, Noel Entwistle to state that:

Increasingly, this research is indicating ways of improving teaching in higher education in ways which directly affect the quality of student learning. (Entwistle, 2001 p. 593)

It also inspired phenomenographic enquiries in to other aspects of higher education and proved immensely popular with practitioners

In terms of its theoretical resources, however, this approach is limited in the numbers of question it asks. Crucially, from my perspective the focus on conceptions of learning and teaching neglects all the broader social questions we might want to ask of higher education and higher education systems. These systems are constantly in flux and reshape what it means to be an academic and the nature of studentship itself. Numerous writers have pointed to the ways in which the idea of studentship is being subtly transformed from one who studied texts, studentship in a discipline, to the idea of studentship as the production of 'autonomous/self-directed/flexible lifelong learners, and also increasingly as consumers.

Indeed, the whole policy discourse of higher education is now encapsulated in terms like 'employability', or in the Australasian context 'graduate attributes'. These configurations shift what counts as knowledge and how it is judged - indeed, they are 'changing the subject' of higher education, as Erica McWilliam, wickedly notes, rather than academics having a relationship to their own work or with their students, what increasingly counts is 'the degree of intimacy that academics have with the record' (McWilliam, 2004, 159). Understanding these sorts of trends makes the question of the resources for theorising even more compelling.

One example of how this is being addressed is in an important new book Paul Ashwin (2009). He has made the case for extending the repertoire of theoretical resources brought to bear on analysing teaching-learning interactions in higher education, and shows how by drawing on different theories (eg activity theory and symbolic interactionism) we can highlight different aspects of the teaching-learning relationship. He draws on Bernstein (2000), for example, to highlight the ways disciplinary knowledge practices are transformed into

curriculum, and to highlight the distinction between discipline-as-research, discipline-as-curriculum, and as pedagogic practice. This sort of approach might produce a more sophisticated take on the debates about the research-teaching nexus for example by recognising the ways in which there are real distinctions between the two and looking at the hierarchies involved in the translation rules. Ashwin also argues that we can use Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus to illuminate the origins of different institutional cultures, and of course Diane Reay and her colleagues (Reay, David and Ball, 2005) have used Bourdieu to analyse and deconstruct the idea of student choice, and more recently in her work with Gill Crozier (Reay, Crozier and Clayton, 2009) to look at how the habitus of different institutions supports or inhibits the development of students' social and learning identities. Ashwin emphasises that different theoretical framings extend the range of questions and also that empirical research in turn poses challenges for how we develop theory. So neither his, nor my argument, is for some overarching theoretical synthesis but rather for pushing at boundaries and acknowledging that different theoretical perspectives will illuminate different problems

The questions we ask

I now want to turn to the sorts of questions we ask. I want to draw in my own work where I have taken seemingly 'mundane' and ordinary practices in higher education and asked both theoretical and empirical questions about them. My local examples have some characteristics specific to the UK, but the overall theoretical argument and the tendencies they describe, I would suggest, do not. Although I (like many others) have analysed what might seem perverse developments in higher education such as managerialism, what I am increasingly interested in are the contradictions within what seem like progressive moves and in the ways some 'problems' come to dominate our agendas and not others.

The example I'm going to use is research into 'personal development planning' which attempts to improve learning for students by helping them reflect. Personal development planning (self regulation in the North American literature) covers a range of practices whereby we ask students to think about what they are doing, to analyse and reflect, and then to plan future actions in order to improve their learning. There is a level at which this seems such an obviously good and sensible thing that it hardly merits attention. I was intrigued, however, for a number of reasons. Firstly, because in the UK it has been implemented across the whole sector, the only pedagogical technology which is mandated by the Quality Assurance Agency. Secondly, because it has attracted a flurry of interest around the question of 'what works' leading to the commissioning of the first 'systematic review' of the literature in the higher education field, and thirdly, because in my work with staff in different disciplinary areas I was very aware how difficult reflection is and that, moreover, that students 'fake it' retrospectively writing up what look like reflections, often the very day before they are required to submit them. So the impetus was policy orientated, research orientated, and practice based

When I first started thinking about personal development planning I rapidly realised it was what Marx describes as a 'chaotic conception' in other words although it seems like a simple unitary thing, it is in fact a complex and analytically incoherent amalgam. An analysis of the HEA 'Guides for Busy Academics' - short 'how to do it' summaries written by enthusiasts illustrates the problem. Personal development planning covers everything from dissertation preparation, work on CVs, the development of meta-cognitive competency, reflection in numerous guises and so on, the list is extensive. Now of course, if one is a practitioner this all makes perfect sense, the repertoire of strategies one might use to engage students is likely to vary by discipline and orientation. As an object of research about 'what works' this lack of conceptual clarity and precision, however, leaves a lot to be desired. Put simply, in the case of personal development planning starting with the concrete deceptively simple question, does 'it' work, is unlikely to be amenable to sensible analysis, because we don't know what the 'it' is. So the systematic review which concluded that personal development planning has positive effects on student learning, student attainment, and approaches to learning is not especially helpful, since it also concluded that it was not possible to know 'how or why' personal development planning was producing those effects reported.

The problem with programme evaluations is that they tend to find that some things work in some circumstances and not in others. Practitioners, of course, want to know how and why, because without insights into what is working, they are left simply with a list of interventions that are unlikely to be replicable

in their context, and may, or may not, produce positive results. Despite the procedural rigour of the review it told us very little that is useful to practitioners, and offers no theoretical insight into the mechanisms producing the results because the object under scrutiny was not properly theorised in the first place. We do not know whether the reported outcomes were produced by the same or different mechanisms, or even if the term reflection is being used with any consistency, and given cultural variations it appears extremely unlikely that this is the case.

In contrast, my own research with my colleagues, Sally Bradley (Clegg and Bradley, 2006) and Serena Bufton, (Bufton and Clegg, 2007) took a rather different tack enquiring into how staff and how students understood personal development planning. This research produced a much more nuanced account of disciplinary orientations and practice. It showed, not surprisingly, that where practitioners had well understood models that stemmed from their own practice, for example in social work and education, then personal development planning as a pedagogy was embedded and successful. However, where it was not consonant with the values of the discipline or the profession, there were tensions. This was not just a question of personal orientation or disciplinary preference. Personal development planning has increasingly become associated with utilitarian notions of employability and understandings of pedagogical practice are being reframed in terms of policy. The discourse of employability shifts ideas about purpose of higher education with a focus on producing flexible individuals for the labour market. This is not to say that employment is not a legitimate goal in participation in higher education, but it is to note the way policy can reposition what goes on in higher education. Personal development and reflection has moved from domains, therefore, where it was well understood, embedded and under the control of knowledgeable practitioners, to one where everyone has to be able to demonstrate its place in the curriculum. This shift is part of the general issue of a greater internalisation of the audit culture; McWilliam's (2004) familiarity with the 'record', being able to record and show where something has taken place, rather than seeing it as something that might appropriately be embedded as part of the pedagogy.

Of course, this insistence on demonstrating might have advantages for students and 'make' (and I use the verb advisedly) staff aware of what they are doing, but we should pause to also ask what might be lost. An educational practice 'reflection' with roots in all sorts of progressive educational ideas, many of which I would entirely endorse, changes its meaning by becoming the subject of an external and regulatory gaze. The dangers of inauthenticity in all this are evident. Reflection has become something that we all have to do, what Kathryn Eccelstone (1996) described as a mantra. Unsurprisingly students in our research described the process of 'faking it', producing something that looks like reflection on demand, usually just before a tutorial or hand-in date, and producing some pretty awful writing in the process. The students' accounts also made us think about how time is experienced and gave us insight into why students 'fake it' rather than reflect and plan. Students describe their first year as being lived intensely in the present (as any parent or teacher can tell you). Most did not experience their present in terms of the future, so planning was a very problematic activity for them. It was only when the panic started, sometimes in the second year and even more worryingly in their third, and when the future present of actually graduating started to implode into consciousness that they retrospectively recognised that planning might have been a good idea.

So what began as my mundane subject 'personal development planning' sent me on an excursion into:

- theoretical deconstruction
- a critique of evidence-based policy
- a meditation on time
- and latterly, with Miriam David, (Clegg and David, 2006) returned me to thinking about different meanings of the 'personal' and especially the politics of the personal in feminism.

This work does not speak directly back to practice at either pedagogical or the policy level, but it can be used as part of the meaning making against which sensible policy making might occur. In recognising diversity and in resisting unitary interpretations, it is also an invitation for practitioners to think about the meanings of time for students and the ways it might be different from our own.

So thinking about researching the student voice, if we take some of the features from the above and relate them to the idea of the student voice we can begin to appreciate the complexity and indeed the impossibility of the concept. It is another chaotic conception and indeed in the 'singular' a highly ideological one ripe it seems to me for theoretical interrogation. So I'm just going to suggest some of what Erica McWilliam calls the 'wicked' questions we might want to think about. The first is about the origin of the idea of voice and voicing which were highly political and to do with previously marginalised groups claiming a voice, the most obvious example is feminism. Women claimed a 'voice' as a political collective and that in turn was to transform whole areas of the social sciences and humanities sparking a chain of historical and other research into hidden voices. As soon as the political subject 'woman' proclaimed its voice, however, women of colour, lesbians, working class women and many others were quick to point out that the voice involved was particular – often white middle class and metropolitan. In other words the singular of a political project led to the articulation of multiple voices and the fracturing of a political, and any semblance of theoretical, unity.

If we think of the student voice the contradictions are even more striking. Voice is not something students (unlike in the 60s) are themselves currently collectively asserting. Rather in a period of low levels of student mobilisation others (reforming academic developers, managers, policy makers) are mobilising the 'student voice' for their own ends. Although it has become fashionable at some conferences for selected students to speak, as if they represented some sort of authentic voice. In my own work on academic development I have become intrigued by the ways students views get mobilised and reframed. McAlpine, Jazvak-Martek and Gonsalves (2008) argue that course ratings and psychologically informed research on student learning tended towards a deficit 'teachers need fixing' model. So students' views are re-represented for reformist political effect. Given the diversity among students the idea of the student experience is not only a chaotic conception, it is also one that needs to be considered in its concrete historical circumstances when the student as paying consumer has come to be a familiar trope. Even if we think it is a good idea and a useful corrective to the power of academics to shape the curriculum, listening to student voices and how to capture such voices remains highly problematic.

The evidence based approach and most high profile is obviously the National Student Survey, but as the highly public spat between Paul Ramsden and Lee Harvey (THES, 2008) exposed the fitness for purpose of that particular instrument is contested. There are issues of what is being measured (satisfaction or learning), its reliability and validity, and its openness to manipulation in a context where league tables are a pernicious feature of press coverage of higher education, all of which make the NSS rightly controversial. Interpreting what students are saying in both pedagogical and research contexts rather involves an attention to the plurality of voices and the contexts in which they are speaking and writing. So as I have suggested reflection as a genre does not ensure authenticity, it also involves performance to the script. As any of you who have wrestled with even small amounts of qualitative data know interpreting research data is equally difficult, which is why we need theoretical informed critical work. This is why much more work that attends to the complex relationships between policy, institutional framework, local culture and the voices of different students is now being produced.

I'm sure looking at the programme there will be many examples at this conference, so I'll mention just one example from the corpus of work produced by Carole Leathwood (2006) from her longitudinal study of students at London Metropolitan University, which among other findings point to the subtleties of non-traditional students understandings of support and independence not as a binary but as mutually interdependent. She draws on a range of theoretical perspectives in her work including feminist theory to question how current pedagogical and institutional practices position different students, and are likely to advantage and disadvantage them. She points out that the idea of 'independence' makes asking for help difficult, not being independent is seen as being in a state of lack or as being deficient, or as one of my respondents put it when seeking help 'I've had to swallow my pride'.

This sort of critical work is not going to deliver easy solutions for either policy makers or practitioners, but as I hope I've made clear the apparent simplicities of the evidence based movement don't either. Indeed because they pretend they do they are likely to be more dangerous. There is no one-to-one relationship between research and practice and this is not a unique problem for higher education. When we think about higher education we should bring with us some of the sophisticated theoretical understandings from other policy

areas and professions and engage in some boundary crossing as well as boundary pushing. This may involve theoretical borrowings as well as dialogue

Conclusions

So in conclusion, I hope I've demonstrated that there are many, and to mind, interesting, questions to be asked especially about policies and practices that appear mundane and ordinary. I also want to suggest on the basis of this that there are some reasons to be cheerful. The complexities I have indicated above and the range of theoretical resources at our disposal make this exciting time to be researching into higher education. My arguments expand the range of questions rather than pretending we have all the answers. Certainly, it has always struck me as the enemy of any form of intellectual enquiry. Pushing at boundaries and expanding our critical repertoire is an exhilarating project. We have started asking some of the right questions but there is much work to do. My insistence on theory is, however, not vain glorious and, while I am not a relativist, I am cautious about my own theoretical commitments and would endorse a plurality of approaches in what is a young field. Val Hey describing academics' commitments to this and that theory notes:

how often their own cherished analytical rationality is broken up by glimpses into the imagination of more provocative thinkers. I have come to the conclusion that it is not so much that we self-consciously assemble all the resources for the making of research imaginaries as those vivid ideas (and frequently their authors) come to haunt us. (Hey, 2006, p. 439)

I certainly have multiple hauntings and associated intellectual vulnerabilities and I'd encourage you to have them too. The danger of my argument for extending the boundaries of research into higher education is that it risks collapsing into a sort of grab-all theoretical eclecticism, but that, in my view, is a risk worth taking. The bigger danger is that we stop asking questions that challenge us, and that we become complacent in the questions we ask about higher education and with that complacency comes the danger of accepting other people's descriptions about the purposes of higher education, and confining ourselves to research that pretends to tell us how to do things better. I don't believe we should confine ourselves to these sorts of questions, nor do I think it produces good research. That, at its core, is why I believe we should be pushing the boundaries and engaging in critical research into higher education and that is why I was delighted to be invited to speak at the opening of your conference

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Fifth ECE Keynote - Address 2

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Killing off Mickey Mouse: Open Knowledge, Open Innovation.

The copyright world of Mickey Mouse

The theme of this presentation is the case for open access, both as a set of principles for the ways in which we use information and communication technologies for teaching, research and engagement in higher education, and also as a formative concept for the university, now and into the future.

In order to frame this question, and as a rhetorical device, I would like to set up a straw target as a caricature of what a closed system could look like. Central to the idea of a closed system is the concept of intellectual property as the equivalent of physical property, understood as owned in terms of some sort of title, either by an individual or corporate group, and available for sale or rent in order to achieve a material return on the investment. This, of course, is the classic rent seeking activity of economic theory.

This idea of intellectual property as the equivalent of physical property is best represented by the traditional business approaches of large pharmaceutical companies that depend on closely controlled innovation funnels. Large numbers of early ideas are protected by patents and are fiercely defended by rights in law. Many of these ideas fall by the wayside as concepts are tested for viability, costed, and aligned with marketing strategies. The end result is a small set of highly valuable intellectual products that are taken to market, and further defended through patent protection and licensing.

This concept of intellectual property has also come to dominate the cultural industries, whether these be in the areas of conventional book publishing, specialist journal publishing, online and electronic databases, film, music, or the by products of contemporary popular culture, whether baseball caps, T-shirts, coffee mugs, or the reproduction of protected images and ideas from almost any sphere of cultural activity.

This is the image of the eternal Mickey Mouse, whose representational lifespan is preserved by means of the periodic extension of patent protection laws that prevent the image of the Mouse becoming a free and available resource. Large cultural corporations base their revenues in the licensing of these forms of intellectual property, gamely swimming against the tide of the revolution in digital access, the availability of bandwidth in millions of homes, and the widely available technology that allows forms of peer sharing and the reproduction and distribution of an infinite number of perfect copies, whether these be favourite songs, videos, or popular cultural icons such as the ageless Mickey Mouse himself.

In this - closed system - approach to intellectual property, every intellectual construct that takes an external form can be ascribed ownership that is equivalent to the ownership of a table, chair, car or house. Such intellectual constructs include musical phrases, lines of poetry, strings of digital code or photographs. The relentless logic of closed systems and their associated constructs of legal protection, licensing regulations and rent-seeking is that every idea that we express can have the potential to be sold or rented. The politics of this approach are well known and have resulted in high profile and well-publicized cases, whether these relate to video piracy, reproduction of books, peer-to-peer file sharing, or similar situations.

Every academic is likely to have experienced, directly or indirectly, the consequences of this regime. For my part, having worked hard on a paper for several months, and pleased to have had it accepted by a leading academic journal, I was invited by the journal's publisher to pay \$3000 for the privilege of being able to distribute my own work to my colleagues without being charged a fee every time I did so. In another instance, I wanted to use as an epigraph to a book chapter a phrase from a Paul Simon song. Eventually, the combination of anxiety by the university press publishing the book and potential cost of licensing these fifteen words led me rather to change the title of the chapter and drop the epigraph.

This copyrighted world of Mickey Mouse is, as I've already said, a straw target, a rhetorical device to help conceptualize an alternative to such closed systems. How much is this a caricature of university life today?

Universities: from public good to private benefit

It is often claimed that universities have become managerial and have succumbed to the pressures of the commercial marketplace. This is an intellectually lazy critique that fails to recognize the considerable degrees of freedom in intellectual life that are nurtured and protected today. We do not yet have the sort of controls that characterize the pharmaceutical industry, or the obsession for achieving financial returns for every shred of intellectual property that has become typical of some of the cultural industries.

At the same time, though, the last thirty or so years have seen gathering momentum towards complementing funding for teaching and research with so-called third stream income that is based on gaining a commercial return for our activities. In the United States, this tendency was signalled by the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 and the attempts by many universities to gain significant revenue from patents and licensing. In Britain, the devastation caused by dramatic reductions in state support for universities in the early 1980s forced many to seek third stream income in order to survive. This was particularly the case here at the University of Salford, where the cuts imposed by the Thatcher government were particularly severe. It is now often taken as a given that universities must seek a direct financial return on their intellectual property in order to survive.

There has been a parallel tendency in teaching provision. It is now commonplace to calibrate the cost of education in terms of the return on the investment in future earnings. It now seems generally accepted that students should pay fees for education and should take loans in order to cover these costs as a matter of course. The main thrust of current debates is how large these loans should be allowed to become, rather than the principle of whether they should exist at all. Another way of looking at this is to think in terms of a shift from understanding education as a public good, to seeing it as a private benefit. If education is viewed overwhelmingly as a private benefit, it is logical to expect it to be paid for in the same way as any other service.

When the current pressures to preserve or increase revenues from student fees, attracting overseas students to study here, or licensing intellectual property in order to get a return are lined up, we seem to be a long way away from the principles of education as a public benefit. There is a certain poignancy to this at a conference on the historic Crescent in the heart of Salford, a street which was one of the earliest to be lit by gas lights, where Marx and Engels are claimed to have met, the site of one of the earliest public libraries, the location of Britain's first public park, and the home of the Working Class Movement Library.

It is particularly appropriate to revisit these issues now, when the prevalent gloom about the country's public finances anticipates significant reductions in public funding for higher education in the future. While it is not yet known what form these cuts could take, it seems quite probable that there will be a reduction in direct and indirect grants from government, and some form of increase in the obligations placed on students and their families, leading to a rise in indebtedness as the price for obtaining a higher education qualification.

It is also probable that there will be renewed enthusiasm for the concept of private universities. While there is nothing wrong with private provision, and while of course this already exists in many parts of the overall education system, a significant increase in privatization would further shift the overall ethic of education provision towards the concept of private benefit. It is worth pausing to consider the implications that this might have before accepting such changes as inevitable.

The market illusion

But enough of straw targets. The danger of too much dialectic is that one ends up with such gloomy scenarios that there seems little point in carrying on. For, despite the rhetoric of the last twenty years and many of the

assumptions still held today, there is no true market in higher education. Provision in the United States is characterized by its diversity. Private universities with large endowments use these to craft undergraduate cohorts independent of the sticker price of study. For their part, US public higher education institutions have complex tariffs that depend on whether a student is or is not a resident in the state.

In Britain, some have naively assumed that the introduction of fees will create a market. All that has happened is that almost all universities have moved rapidly to charge the same maximum permitted fee. No one really knows what would happen if the cap on fees were to be removed completely. It is not at all clear that students would pay more for quality. Quite the opposite could happen; those universities that were able to offer a qualification in the shortest time possible and with the least effort could well command the highest fees. This, after all, would be the logical of retailing a service. Of course, this could be prevented by putting in place a statutory quality regulator, as the parliamentary select committee has recently proposed. But a statutory quality regulator would, of course, destroy any possibility of a genuine market.

A further point to note is that few universities have made significant income from third stream activities despite trying to do so for the best part of three decades. There are far more failed science and business park initiatives than there are success stories. Even the most successfully entrepreneurial universities do not cover more than 10% of their annual turnover from third stream income. Without doubt, licensing and patenting can be important, and spin off companies can bring considerable benefits. But these benefits rarely include genuine, unentailed, third stream income.

Perhaps most significantly, the rhetoric of the market has done little to increase participation in higher education. Over the past thirty years Britain has become steadily more unequal, to the point where Britain and the United States are now the most unequal of the economically developed countries. Not surprisingly, participation in higher education by young adults is strongly correlated with socioeconomic status. Young adults from middle to upper socioeconomic groups are many times more likely to attend university than those from poorer households. While the consumer market in a range of services and products has spread across a wider socioeconomic range, access to university remains predominantly a middle-class privilege.

The nature of knowledge

Why has the vision of the early 1980s - the concept of a more entrepreneurial higher education sector capable of generating significant revenues independent of state support - not been realised?

It seems often to be assumed that this is due to inefficiency, perhaps wilfulness, of academics who are not prepared to be part of the real world, or to a persistent tendency to appoint academics as vice-chancellors rather than having universities run by skilled corporate chief executive officers. Maybe some of these assumptions are justified. But there again, maybe not.

An alternative point of view - a starting point for a different interpretation - is to see universities as organizations that are the opposite of pharmaceutical companies and for-profit cultural corporations. Why? Because the essence of academic life is to give intellectual property away rather than to set up secretive and legally-defended systems in order to extract maximum financial returns.

Disciplines, and fields of study, are and always have been sophisticated global networks in which ideas and information circulate and are formalized. Systems of circulation include flexible and open networks of collaboration, shared databases, conferences, workshops and a wide variety of mechanisms for bringing people together to share their insights and information about commonly prioritized problems. Systems are formalization include peer-reviewed academic journals, books by publishers with recognized academic credentials, edited collections of papers and conference proceedings.

Taken together, this is a massive, open knowledge system that has been established over several centuries and which joins together some 10,000 institutions which are recognizable as universities, as well as hundreds of thousands of libraries and other forms of knowledge repository.

What drives this network? The fundamental imperative is maintaining and advancing the reputation of individual academics and research groups. We do this through well tried systems of recognition and authentication. At the heart of the system of recognition is citation, and citation is a sophisticated form of distributing intellectual capital. A major point of our work is to have its outcomes cited with approval and respect by as many other academics as possible across the widest geographical span. Such a system of imperatives is the antithesis of the way in which a major pharmaceutical company, or indeed the Disney Corporation, is organized. Given this, it is not surprising that the majority of academics are uninspired by the call to generate third stream income, or that vice chancellors generally depend on dire institutional crises to persuade their colleagues that generating third stream revenues is fundamental to survival.

This system, of course, long predates the digital revolution of the early to mid-1990s although, as I will argue a little later, this digital revolution gives us immense opportunities to expand long established, open networked forms of academic knowledge distribution. And the university, too, is a resilient form of institution in its own right, despite the fact that every ten years or so its demise is predicted.

Why is this open academic network so resilient? Because of the nature of knowledge itself. One of the beneficial consequences of the digital revolution of the mid-1990s has been the stimulation of research into the nature of knowledge. Work in the field of the knowledge economy has shown how knowledge is best understood as a spectrum from tacit to highly codified forms. Tacit knowledge is often shared by individuals on a face-to-face basis, circulating informally within groups. Codified knowledge is expressed in ways that can be easily summarized, communicated and distributed.

The work of a typical university science laboratory illustrates the spectrum. Ideas originate in informal discussions and seminars and are tossed around until they have some valency and coherence. As this tacit knowledge takes shape, it begins to be codified, firstly as working papers and then as a formal publication. In its most advanced form, codified knowledge is expressed in the binary code that enables our digital world. The more knowledge is codified, the more it can be shared. In its codified forms, knowledge can be reproduced, potentially infinitely, without exhausting the original. The more knowledge is shared and reproduced, the more futile our attempts to contain it, or limit or own its distribution. And the more knowledge is distributed, the more likely it will be to enable and promote new combinations with their own potential.

It is clear that these particular and peculiar qualities of knowledge make it different from other categories of phenomena. The history of knowledge, and its exponential tendencies in explaining the world, can be mapped against the great inventions that facilitated communication of codified information; the printed book, the telegraph and the Internet. While we tend to think of the explosion of knowledge as a recent phenomenon, these essential qualities of knowledge have always been at the heart of the university, and have been known for a long time. It was, often all, Thomas Jefferson who appropriated the eloquent metaphor of a candle, observing that in many could light their candles from his without exhausting his flame and condemning him to darkness.

Triumph of the Commons

My argument, then, is that closed system approaches, that follow in the tradition of the large for-profit knowledge-traders of the later twentieth century, are not likely to succeed in yielding viable alternatives to forms of public funding. This is because closed system approaches are contrary to the inherent nature of knowledge itself. Indeed, some of the older for-profit knowledge models are not doing so well either – witness the tribulations of the pharmaceuticals and the failing battles of the culture industries with the easy distribution of video and music files via peer-to-peer systems. In face of these challenges, not-invented-here strategies are gaining ground.

But now the positive case: how can open system approaches do better in advancing new knowledge and therefore in taking the university forward as an institution? A useful metaphor here is that of the village commons; the communal grazing grounds that were characteristic of the British countryside before enclosure.

In a now-classic paper, this metaphor was used to argue for the inherent self-interestedness of individual groups in making choices.

Imagine a common village grazing ground surrounded by households of equal stature and political authority. Each household has the right to graze its livestock on the commons. But it is evident to everybody that if this right continues to be exercised the grazing will soon be destroyed, to the detriment of all. An individual household could recognize this and reduce the amount of time its livestock use the common land. But, so the argument goes, to do so would be to advantage one's neighbours, since they would simply take up the extra capacity to make their own animals fatter for market. Because of such prevalent self-interest, the common grazing would be destroyed in any case. The outcome - the Tragedy of the Commons - is that although every household knows what is going to happen, all continue to overgraze the common land until it is destroyed, and all lose equally.

There has been a formidable body of work stemming from the original formulation of this dilemma, leading into game theory and with renewed interest in approaching major contemporary problems such as the difficulty of developing effective strategies for reducing carbon emissions. In simplified terms, though, the metaphor suggests the alternatives of regulation or shared common interest.

Most solutions to the Tragedy of the Commons tend towards regulation. Were the households to be governed effectively, use of the common grazing could be regulated and policed. Individuals may chafe against the statutes of the village, but in the end it would be for their own good. This, as we have seen, has also been the tendency when the commons comprises not grass, but rather that vast cloud of ideas, publications, papers, images, sound files and code that comprises knowledge. Rather than allowing the intellectual villages that depend on knowledge for their sustenance to graze at will, the inclination has been to restrict and control through regulation and licensing.

Of course, the knowledge cloud does not have the same properties as a field of grass. As Thomas Jefferson noted, the knowledge commons is not destroyed in its consumption and has properties of perpetual renewal that would have been regarded as miraculous by a shepherd concerned with fattening sheep for market. But the metaphor challenges easy assumptions in another way. For the particular miracle of the open source and open access movements has been the demonstration of the power and potential of shared interests rather than individual gain. Despite early scepticism and the assumptions of large closed systems corporations such as Microsoft, the open source movement has seen tens of thousands of programmers collaborate to offer robust and reliable operating systems and applications that have rivalled closed systems competitors for quality and versatility. Increasingly, closed systems software producers have to rely on legal protection to maintain their market position; an irony, since the need for such protection hardly demonstrates the supremacy of the free market in driving forward innovation and the improvement of quality. Similarly, open access knowledge systems have shown how a vast contributor community can develop and function. Taken together, the infinite renewability of the knowledge commons, combined with the pervasive respect for shared interests that has driven forward both the open source and the open access movements, turn this old metaphor on its head. Where there was tragedy there is now triumph.

New possibilities

Full explication of the triumph of the knowledge commons awaits its ethnographers, sociologists and philosophers. But there is a line of continuity between the vast cloud of digitized knowledge that we work with today and the scholarship centred on printed books and journals that defined all academic work until the last decade of the last century. Then, as perhaps now, practitioners sought and gained respect from their peers, whether other specialists in Medieval poetry or fellow hackers demonstrating their prowess by discovering a new hole in the Windows operating system. As with traditional academic networks, mutual respect is a form of reputational capital that has various forms of value for those who hold it.

This Triumph of the Commons offers immense possibilities for universities. If we think of the immense cloud of digital information that is our contemporary shared resource not as something new, an invention of the past decade, but rather as a continuation of the open systems that have been at the heart of academic life in the universities of the world's major intellectual traditions, then we can see new ways of taking the strengths of traditional disciplinary networks and knowledge systems forward.

The digital revolution is essentially an advance in technology and technique, rather than in conceptualization. Contemporary methods of coding complex knowledge structures in binary form take us further along the exponential track that is characteristic of the longer history of knowledge. Just as the invention of the printing press freed knowledge resources from the constraints of handwritten copies, so the Internet allows infinite and perfect copies of the original that can be distributed almost instantaneously. While twenty years ago a group of scholars working on a common problem would have the expense and inconvenience of intercontinental air travel to enable their collaboration, so virtual environments allow online, real-time collaboration. While until recently we were dependent on commercial publishers to print and distribute the fruits of our labour, today we have all the technology we need to set up shared electronic databases of peer-reviewed publications without the need for profit-seeking intermediaries.

Beyond these instrumental advantages in the digital commons lie intellectual possibilities that are on the cusp of being fully realized. As Bruno Latour and others have argued, modernist concepts of science and truth may prove to be limited in their ability to respond to the extremely complex problems that characterize the contemporary world. This is central to knowledge work because today's big problems are too complex to solve within the boundaries of conventional disciplines. Issues such as climate change, understanding global financial systems, effective and inclusive public health systems and, closer to home, designing and implementing urban regeneration plans that do not have perverse consequences have proved to be resilient to established, conventional and discipline-based approaches. This is probably because both analysis and problem solving fall across disciplinary boundaries and require new combinations of knowledge. In the same way that distributed computing has used the capacity of thousands of linked processors to solve complex problems in astrophysics, so connecting the vast array of intelligence that makes up the knowledge cloud has the potential of addressing extremely complex problems that are not amenable to solutions from conventional research teams working within the boundaries of disciplines and individual institutions.

Whether or not some of these complex problems can be solved by means of these knowledge networks, what is clear is that reversion to old, closed system thinking will deny any real possibility of advancing understanding. For example, tackling climate change must involve a full array of natural and physical scientists, economists, sociologists and political theorists. Imagine a situation in which physicists would not make available the latest research on carbon reduction to policy analysts lobbying for political positions without the payment of licensing fees. Multiply this a hundredfold, add a clutch of regulators and a squad of highly priced patent lawyers, and take into account that, if an increase in global warming of less than 2° is to be achieved, this has to be within the next five years. I would not give closed system, rent seeking approaches to managing the creation of new knowledge much chance of success. Looked at another way, if global warming does go much over 2°, Botswana will probably disappear beneath the sands of the Kalahari Desert. With the stakes this high, I believe that we need to look very carefully at the approaches that we take to organizing the use of the knowledge that we have, and the approaches that we take in seeking new knowledge.

Open systems approaches to knowledge have to be funded; and my presentation today began with the challenge of financing research and teaching in the face of a crisis in public finances. I've argued that the promise of third stream income generated through copyrights, patents and licenses may be an illusion. But is there any better prospect for developing ways of funding open systems?

A first step in developing viable funding models is to regard knowledge networks as tangible assets with capital and renewal requirements and running costs, that can be subjected to the discipline of full economic costing. Most universities continue to restrict their concept of assets to buildings, equipment and conventional paper-based libraries. In this resourcing approach, the costs of maintaining networks tend to be regarded as expenses, or even as perks of the job. Increasingly, though, the viability of universities will come to depend on

their effective role as nodes in multiple knowledge networks. Unless these networks are fully incorporated into our financial systems, we will not establish a proper basis for funding open system knowledge work.

Once appropriate financial models are in place we will be able to see how costs and benefits can be properly matched. We already know a good deal about this. Remember that, only ten or so years ago, the Internet was regarded as "free". Teaching that made use of e-mail or early webpages was assumed to require no additional resource. We now know that online learning solutions, whether asynchronous or blended, have high or very high upfront costs and low or negligible marginal costs. Remember also that it is still often assumed that research collaboration using shared databases or online collaboration can be sustainable through mutual goodwill and by squeezing a little extra time out of already busy days. But emerging models of good practice show that these forms of open system management require active intermediaries in order to maintain and advance the daily operation of the network, its documentation and validation, and its interfaces. It does not seem to me that this is inherently more difficult than costing the operations of a traditional research laboratory. Once we have conceptualized the network as a core asset, all else follows.

Once the costs of networked knowledge systems are known and accepted, protocols for fair use and an appropriate currency to cover costs will be required. Again, much of what is required here is already known. Protocols for acknowledging the authorship of sources that are used and cited in open systems are well-established and have been in use for several years. Because open systems depend on reputational capital, all participants have an interest in correct acknowledgment and citation. This, after all, is why plagiarism is one of the most heinous sins in academic life. Because reputational capital can be taken away as well as granted, it is not difficult to imagine a broadly accepted system of peer management for covering fair costs of usage. Anyone who has become addicted to buying and selling on eBay will know the consequences of not honouring an online deal. Such approaches seem ready-made for the self-regulation of peer-to-peer transactions to cover the costs of sharing knowledge.

My argument, then, is that we already know how to fund open system approaches to knowledge. Once we have made the conceptual shift, we will be able to redirect the considerable wasted resources that go to unnecessary duplication, legal protections, and to all the unnecessary involvement of the profit-seeking publishers to whom we currently cede our intellectual work for nothing, only to buy it back for our libraries at considerable cost. Taken together, this reconceptualisation of knowledge, combined with a new approach to funding, will extend the Triumph of the Commons and will open further the potential of universities to contribute to some of the most complex challenges of our times.

Theme 1

Giving Voice to the Student Experience: methods, approaches and evidence

Paper 1

University-School Connections: Giving Voice to the Student Experience

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Abstract

University-school connections (partnerships) have had an historical place in Australia, England and the United States of America since Dewey in 1904; however, there is increasing acknowledgement of the value of connections that vary from the traditional versions of professional experiences (practicum and internship). In this paper, I draw on two sources of data, a literature review and focus group interviews both of which were collected for a larger research project titled University-School Connections (USCs): Complex Connections. Plentiful evidence, over time, of the research effort spent on USCs is available, with the bulk of studies indicating the high value of USCs to stakeholders, (individually and collectively: pre-service teacher education students, teachers, schools, and by extension school students, academics, higher education institutions and systems operating within the profession and beyond). Alongside of this evidence of 'value' sits, at times, an urgent call for adaptations to the style and an increase in the frequency of university-school connections. The focus is on four areas in this paper. Firstly, the terminology used by researchers to describe USCs is explored and it is argued that the use of the word partnership isn't the most appropriate choice. Partnerships, according to research, happen via collaboration, are mutually beneficial, with partners having some autonomy, thus resulting in the creation of a common culture. These ingredients however do not necessarily constitute a recipe for a successful or enduring partnership. Wenger (1998:168) claims that collaboration and the forming of a common culture can involve challenges such as 'conflict and cordiality, competitiveness and co-operation. Sachs (2003) tackles the difficult problem of defining partnerships based on either collaboration or co-operation. I argue that the use of the term partnership for co-operative/ collaborative and /or third culture arrangements between schools and universities is a misnomer and in some way contributes to the cause of disharmony, dissatisfaction and lack of endurance of some partnerships. Secondly, there is a brief historical perspective of the journey of USCs and thirdly an outline of more recent developments in USCs touching on both a national and international perspective where there has been a systematic push for universities, students, graduates, government and community to make meaningful connections is presented. Indeed many Australian university strategic plans encourage the development of collaborative partnerships and internationally a push for increased connections between schools and their communities is evident in the research literature. Lastly, to give student voice to USCs data from focus group interviews of pre-service teachers involved in a university-school connection, the LiNKs Program is drawn on. This paper is a contribution to the theme of student voice at the ECE conference.

Introduction

The term partnership in the literature is based upon the understanding and expectation that a partnership will have an air of permanence and stability, that stakeholders will be equal, that outcomes will benefit all parties equally and that no one stakeholder will hold an hierarchical position over another. Given this understanding there is no paucity of research on university teacher education and school partnerships (hereafter referred to as university-school connections [USC]); the opposite is the case. A vast array of literature on university-school connections is available with a variety of foci. This variety can be clustered into the following broad themes: problems in pre-service teacher education partnerships, power relationships invested in partnerships, ownership of partnerships, teacher professional development partnerships, partnerships designed for revitalization of the teaching profession and improvements to school based practice via school based enquiry and action research partnerships. This paper is focused on USCs that are non-assessed components of pre-service teacher education (not practicum and internship which are assessed) and the associated complexities.

One, I examine the terminology used by researchers to describe such USCs where I argue that the use of the word partnership is not the most appropriate choice. Two, I provide a brief historical perspective, from the beginning of the 20th century, of USCs illustrating that complexities were evident throughout. Three, I look at

more recent developments in USCs touching on a national and international perspective where there has been a push for universities, students, graduates, government and community to make meaningful connections. Four, to give student voice to USCs I draw on data from focus group interviews of pre-service teachers involved in a university-school connection. This USC, the LiNKS Program, was formed with the explicit purpose of enabling pre-service teachers to connect with local schools to augment their current exposure to professional experience (ie. assessed practicum and internship) by providing opportunities for non-assessed professional experiences. This provision enabled the immersion of the pre-service teachers in opportunities to engage with and reflect on real schools in real contexts where the theoretical and practical aspects of university courses can be connected to genuine realities. Student J found that indeed the opportunities for reflection were real ‘LiNKS makes you question, it makes you think, it makes you reflect on what you are learning.’

The LiNKS Program is an Australian Higher Education Institution (NSW University of Newcastle, Central Coast Campus) initiative designed for augmenting pre-service teacher education assessed professional experiences. 798 (Semester 2, 2008) undergraduate pre-service teacher education students (PST) are linked to a school, rather than an individual mentoring teacher within the school, (in addition to mandated professional experience days,) for six out of eight semesters of their 4 year degree program. The PSTs are required to visit their LiNKS school at mutually convenient times to provide negotiated assistance to school students and teachers. This connection with schools allows the PSTs increased participation in school “community” life. In return, as a gesture of reciprocity, the school provides a place for non-assessed field experiences where the PST is able to complete course related assignment tasks, engage in observations, teach small and large groups and reflect on their own and teachers’ practice. PSTs are able to give voice to this experience through data gathered during a study for a larger research project, the title of which is University-School Connections (USCs): Complex Connections. Data was gathered during a review of the literature on university-school connections and also from analysed transcripts from five pre-service teacher LiNKS Program focus groups.

Partnership- not the most appropriate term.

Use of the word partnership that presumes permanence, stability, equality amongst stakeholders and is seen as a panacea of myriad partnership problems is not the most appropriate choice to describe many connections between universities and schools that are engaged in pre-service teacher education. Using the term partnership to describe co-operative and/or collaborative arrangements between schools and universities may be ‘familiar to everyone’ (Stephens & Boldt, 2004) as it is such a commonly used descriptive term however I contend that it is a misnomer and in some way contributes to the cause of disharmony, dissatisfaction and lack of endurance of some partnerships. Much is expected of this word and therefore I offer an alternative approach to understanding these relations.

Partnerships Constructed as Collaboratives and or Co-operatives

The term ‘partnership’ is often described in the literature as ‘collaboration’ and is based upon notions of equality. Clark (cited in Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988) defined partnerships as ‘deliberately designed, collaborative arrangements between different institutions working together to advance self interest and solve common problems.’ Goodlad, (1988) wrote of the benefits of ‘symbiotic partnerships’ where partners with differing expertise collaborate for the common good. Digby, Gartin, & Murdick (1993) write of collaborations between university and schools as explicit agreements between people who engage in meetings to set and achieve goals. They then call these ongoing meetings ‘university-school partnerships’. Having such a simplistic view of partnerships by calling them meetings does little more than constitute such partnerships as mere gatherings, yet, the meeting is but one element amongst the many complexities involved in a true partnership.

A more useful definition of connections between universities and school is proposed by Sachs, (1997) when she writes of partnerships as the forming of ‘a two way model of reciprocity with each party having something significant to contribute’. Such partnerships are based upon notions of equality where all stakeholders have equal rights, are treated similarly and all are valued equally. Dallmer (2004) supports the notion of partnerships as collaborative relationships where no hierarchy exists among participants with decision making

as a democratic process. However, the reality experienced in such collaborative partnerships can be quite different with hierarchical structures emerging, unequal power relationships and a lack of reciprocity developing, explicit agreements breaking down and the surfacing of unbalanced advancement of self-interest by one party over the other. (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006; Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009; Shinnars, 2006)

Sachs (1997) has acknowledged these problems by suggesting that where the basic premise of a partnership is the provision of skills through expertise, the term cooperative partnerships rather than collaborative partnerships may be a more apt description. In Sach's definition of co-operative partnerships it is expected that the 'power relationship between the parties' is likely to be unequal. Despite an acknowledgment that unequal power relations may exist from the commencement of some partnerships, inequality does not augur well for stakeholders who believe in the egalitarian principles of engagement, which the term partnership implies. Any focus on power relations veils the key purpose of collaborative or co-operative partnerships which is the establishment of ways of working together and defining key purposes for doing so. Duffy, (cited in Million & Vare, 1997) suggests collaborative partnerships should allow for problem solving that encourages partners to 'grow into their roles as egalitarian participants' yet many partnerships lack endurance due specifically to the lack of ongoing egalitarian principles, outcomes and an acknowledgment that these are difficult to uphold. When the spirit of reciprocity breaks down, often because one party considers the other party's contributions are lacking and when explicit agreements are changed and set goals moved some stakeholders become passive compliant, others become resisters, yet others engage in vigorous non-egalitarian leadership (Goodlad, 1993). These well documented problems (Allsopp, et al., 2006; Bartholomew & Sandholtz, 2009; Ledoux & McHenry, 2008; Peters, 2002) arise for collaborative and/or cooperative partnerships, even when they are constructed on symbiotic principles requiring stakeholders to work together to advance self-interest and solve common problems for the common good. Many risk faltering, changing or ceasing altogether.

Dallmar (2004) proposes that partnerships based upon hierarchical structures could lead to alternative conceptions of partnerships. This proposition for alternative constructions and conceptualization of partnerships is worthy of serious consideration. Dallmar (2004) suggest that it is time that the common understanding of stakeholders that 'equity and collaboration across the board are necessary for school-university partnerships' is challenged. This view supports my contention that the word partnership is not apposite and could indeed be a constraining factor in the design, establishment and endurance of university-school partnerships and in some way contributes to the cause of disharmony, dissatisfaction and lack of endurance of many of these so called partnerships.

Partnerships as Third or Common Cultures

Liaison between the two distinctive cultures of university teacher education institutions and schools, to the point where a third or common culture emerges can be a possible solution to the partnership complexities. This is what Prater and Sileo (2002) are referring to when they state that 'the two bodies need to blend and create a third culture'. I contend that once a liaison has morphed into a third or common culture it becomes an entity in and of itself and so no longer constitutes a partnership based upon notions of equality and reciprocity. Others, on the contrary, suggest that a partnership is maintained even though a third or common culture has emerged. Schlechty and Whitford (cited in Goodlad, 1988) suggest partnerships can be mutually owned yet sufficiently autonomous and designed to create a common culture with unique norms and values.

When stakeholders deem that their collaborative/cooperative has merged into a third or common culture, and according to my contention that as a result a partnership no longer exists, then one might therefore expect to find that typical partnership problems don't exist in a third culture. This is not what Bullough, Birrell, Young, Clark, Erikson, Earle (1999) found. While agreeing that the literature is 'replete with calls to blend university and school culture into a third culture...' they add the cautionary phrase 'the problem [of university pre-service teacher education-school partnerships] is widely recognized and its complexity underappreciated; few institutions appear to have succeeded in resolving it'(p. 387). In examples such as this, where the merged cultures remain operating under the premises of a partnership, I argue that a third culture, essentially, has not

been formed. This argument subsequently provides an explanation for why the perceived third cultures often fail as they are constructed similarly to collaborative /cooperative partnerships and fail for the same reasons such as lack of collaboration, development of hierarchical structures, unequal benefits, lack of autonomy, non-egalitarian principles and outcomes, declining reciprocity, changing of explicit agreements and moving and changing goals (Goodlad, 1993). These issues lead to disharmony, dissatisfaction and the lack of endurance.

Connections an Appropriate Term

Just as the term partnership implies an air of permanence and stability, with equal outcomes for and amongst stakeholders and with no one stakeholder holding an hierarchical position over another, the term connection provides an alternative, less constrained label for such liaisons. This alternative label allows for liaisons that are distinct to partnerships in subtle ways. Connection allows for more capricious liaisons based upon particular understandings such as: unpredictable endurance, variable outcomes, inconsistency, and flexible hierarchical structures. At the fundamental level it is understood that involvement by stakeholders will fluctuate over time according to the purposes and engagement with particular tasks. The following student voices exhibit how inconsistency of engagement is possible and deemed acceptable in the LiNKS Program.

Student M Voice: First year was a lot of observation, and that was fine for me, then I actually had a bit of a decent relationship with the teacher, I had a baby in second year and lots of stuff on so I'd go and do five hours and then go and do five hours and then I've done my ten. If I there was something that I could help out with then I'd do that, but otherwise I stop at ten, because of the time constraints. Third year was good I actually went a few more times and started developing a relationship with a class and I really enjoyed that and found it good cause I'd be out in the community and students would recognise me that was something that was interesting to learn that you are always a role model not just when you are at school.

Student J Voice: The first year was observation, second year a got a bit more stuck into it and third year was really good that was when I hooked up with a Support Teacher Learning Assistance (STLA) and I learned an awful lot, she was really good at reading groups, had had a lot of experience and she also taught gifted and talented for a long time, now we don't really touch much on that in uni, so that was quite interesting to hear her views on that.

As exemplified by student voices, some stakeholders will connect fully, some intermittently and other sporadically while some will choose not to connect at all. Some will choose to initially connect then fade out and others will connect over time, yet others will connect, disconnect and reconnect. The LiNKS program is based upon such theoretical assumptions and as Lieberman (2000) argues the value of networks, or less formal partnerships such as connections, is that the stakeholders commit to an idea and have a sense of shared purpose devoted to information sharing and reciprocal support. The purpose then of the connection, for example as in the LiNKS Program, is the augmentation of the typical assessed professional experiences with non- assessed, less formal opportunities to engage with and reflect on genuine schooling practices. A connection therefore implies a less formal arrangement between parties. With USC based on such premises I contend that pre-service teacher education university courses that are connected to schools are better positioned to effectively prepare pre-service teachers to be both, equipped with the opportunity to build pre-graduation cultural capital that carries credence within schools before graduation (Bourdieu, 1985). In addition I suggest that they will be better prepared to be responsive to rapidly changing societal and educational contexts experienced in the schools in which they are likely to commence their professional careers (Million & Vare, 1997; Ramsey, 2000; Sachs, 1997). Evidence of this is provided by student voice M when she states that:

'without the LiNKS program they [pre-service teachers] don't get out into schools until their third year and just drop out because they have no idea what it is like to be in a primary school setting from a teaching perspective so I found that as soon as I started Links and saw what it was like, like seeing all the behind the scenes teaching things, it gives you a greater understanding of all the things that you need to do when you are a teacher, so I see that the Links program is creating awareness for beginning teachers and teaching them about what we need to do.'

Stephens and Boldt (2004) begin to move the focus away from equality in partnerships when they write of the rhetoric of partnerships as being ‘familiar to everyone’(p.1) and as such it is the goal of the partnership that is important, not the definition, or the ‘what is or isn’t ’ [this partnership?]. Stephens and Boldt argue that the goal of university-school partnerships is ‘the simultaneous renewal of colleges (universities) of education and of K-12 schools’ (p.1). They claim it is the detail of how such partnerships are formed and maintained rather than ‘what is the definition of partnerships’ that is important. Despite the importance of considering, ‘how has/should the connection been/be formed?’ I contend that it is the ‘why has/should the connection been/be formed?’ that is the unstated and unconsidered element in Stephens and Boldt’s work that is of crucial importance. Investigating the ‘why has/should the connection been/be formed?’ may possibly be the first crucial step in the instigation of such connections and I contend that it is the ‘why’ that constitutes whether a partnership is the apposite model or if indeed a connection is a more appropriate style of association. Dallmer’s work (2004) supports my thinking by suggesting that stakeholders currently held belief that not only equality but ‘equity and collaboration are essential for schools and universities to work together(p. 687)’ should be tested.

As a USC, the LiNKS Program has helped to test stakeholder beliefs that equality, equity and collaboration are essential components in a successful liaison. Equality and equity were not tabled or discussed when the program was first conceptualized nor have these terms surfaced in five years. Consequently the LiNKS program connection enabled a move away from the typical partnership foci of equality and equity enabling a focus on the how to and why when schools and universities connect to better prepare pre-service teachers. Sachs’ (1997) explanation of co-operative partnerships is useful as a guiding principle for establishing connections, where she claims that the provision of skills through expertise is the basic premise with often unequal power relationships being expected. There is consistent evidence that the use of the term partnership based upon the notion of equality for co-operative / collaborative arrangements between schools and universities is a misnomer and in some way contributes to the cause of disharmony, dissatisfaction and lack of endurance of some partnerships. I prefer to term university-school partnerships as university-school connections (USCs); connections where stakeholders [people], places and things are sometimes physically, mentally and logically joined for particular reasons. Connections furthermore implies a less formal arrangement while acknowledging that all stakeholders have differing and fluctuating capacities in the realms of expertise, motivation and commitment levels. Consequently, equality is rarely possible or expected as a guiding principle in a connection.

Historical Journey of USCs: Complexities Evident

Internationally USCs are not recent phenomena. In Australia, England and the United States of America (US) for example, an interest in partnerships hasn’t waned over the past century and so they appear as dynamic entities in a constant state of flux, undergoing review, renewal and therefore evolving. They tend to be topical and contentious, with quite diverse contextual factors contributing to their formation, maintenance and endurance or lack thereof and are often very complex. The research indicates that the same complexities evident in the early 20th century have been present over the years and continue in many of today’s partnerships. Consequently it is timely that the notion of a partnership as the most appropriate form of liaison in pre-service teacher education be challenged.

Complexities Evident in USC 1900-1990s

From the early 1900s in the US, Dewey cited in Goodlad (1993) encouraged university-school partnerships that involved emergence in ‘matured experience’ where student teachers were immersed in classrooms alongside practising teachers of ‘matured experience’ and not isolated in training institutions. His claim was that student teachers would then emerge as better prepared teachers as they had been engaged in both theoretical and practical studies. The theory - practice link was also being explored in England with an innovative programme at the University of Leicester Training Department. Their original teacher education program, traditionally dominated by college (university) lectures, was restructured so that students spent four days a week in supervised classroom practice (Board of Education, 1934, cited in Vick, 2006). In this case the school became the main site of both the ‘practical’ work of learning to teach and for identifying theoretical issues that might inform classroom practice. During the period from 1948-1964 both school and college (university) staff in Adelaide, Australia, collaborated in giving demonstration lessons to teacher education

students (Adelaide Teachers' College, 1948-1964 cited in Vick, 2006). Over this period of time Vick (2006) points to plentiful evidence 'that partnerships, whether at an institutional or an individual level, were not easy to maintain, and that in practice the supervision of the practicum very commonly fell well short of anything that could reasonably be described as genuine partnership.'(p.9). Logistical difficulties, large numbers of students, increasing workloads for college(university) staff and reduced time lecturers could spend in schools collaborating with teachers, all proved to be complexities not anticipated at the commencement of these partnerships. Today complexities remain in USCs such as the LiNKS Program but interestingly they are of a different nature and tend to focus on teacher reluctance or resistance as exemplified by the following student voices.

Student C Voice: Some teachers that I have talked to have really appreciated my sort of newer knowledge however, I've come up against quite a bit of resistance because teachers are just feeling, you don't know anything, you don't have anything to teach us.

Student D Voice: Yeah to be honest with you I think that some teachers purely don't want other people to come into their classrooms and observe their teaching practice because they probably know that it is not the best but I think they just feel quite a bit of judgment like just as if they're being watched and sometimes when I've come in to teach lessons a couple of the classes have been really receptive and welcoming but other classes have just sort of seen it as a disruption to their regular activities.

Connecting The Expertise From The Universities To That In The Schools

Harold Rugg in 1952 (cited in Goodlad, 1988) in the US furthered the connection of theory to practice via collaboration beginning with a focus on university faculties when he suggested that liberal arts and teacher education be linked in order to improve teacher education student outcomes. The Russian launch of Sputnik 1 on October 4th, 1957 aided Rugg's push for university collaboration with schools by creating a crisis of confidence in US education programs. This perceived crisis resulted in government centred initiatives designed to foster a new generation of scientists and mathematicians. This partnership initiative was promoted as the panacea and encouraged professors to leave their offices and labs to form teaching partnerships with schools. The US success in being the first to have human beings walk on the moon could be used as evidence indicating success of these partnerships; however the university-school partnership model was but one of many interacting players in this achievement. In 1958 (Patterson, Michelli & Pacheco, 1999), a US conference provided a forum for representatives from all areas of education (kindergarten to graduate school) to discuss two issues: firstly the absence of co-operation between scholars in the disciplines and their colleagues in teacher education, supporting Rugg's push, and secondly, the failure of both of the above groups to become involved in schools. Barnes (cited in Patterson, Michelli & Pacheco, 1999) found evidence that the two key issues under discussion in 1958 were not resolved and were still present into the 1970s with "appallingly few instances of substantial school-university co-operation". Recurrent problems increased the complexities involved in partnerships.

From A Focus On Pre-Service Teacher Education Partnerships To A Focus On The Professional Development Of Teachers.

Goodlad (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988), the seminal author and researcher in the field in the 1970s, commenced ethnographic research on university-school partnerships which was followed by the work of the US Holmes Group and National Network for Educational Renewal (Holmes Group, 1990). Both groups were concerned with making attempts to move away from demonstration or laboratory schools to more community centred university-school connections (Patterson, Michelli, & Pacheco, 1999). From the late 1970s through to the 1990s, Goodlad (1993) focused his research efforts on methods to change and improve the liaison process between universities and schools acknowledging that teacher education reform was connected to social and economic reform and could be driven by school renewal and well educated teachers. As a result his work didn't focus on pre-service teacher education but on USCs as opportunities for professional development and then by extension, pre-service teacher education. Throughout this period of professional development partnerships Patterson et al. (1999) along with Bullough and Gitlin (2001) found that university-school

partnerships rarely blended successfully and Prater & Sileo (2002) observed that ‘both parties must have a shared vision and a clear understanding of their individual and collective roles and responsibilities’ in order for successful partnerships to emerge. Interestingly, the altered partnership focus from pre-service teacher education to professional development of teachers did not alter or alleviate the recurring problems and complexities that plagued the partnerships. This implies that the focus or intention of the partnership was not the cause of the complexities and problems. The complexities that partnerships experienced therefore can be attributed to the one unchanging variable, the actual partnership. Connections, providing less formal arrangements for stakeholders, may provide a step towards alleviating some of the complexities.

More Recent Developments in USC

The literature indicates that contemporary developments in USC such as systemic support, endurance or lack thereof and sense of urgency are in fact not recent. These developments have been highlighted in the USC literature over the years however a more recent perspective is offered here.

Support for USCs

Systemically there is a push for universities, students, graduates, government and community to make meaningful USCs. As an illustration Ramsey (2000) in *Quality matters: Revitalising Teaching: Critical times, Critical Choices: Report of the review of teacher education, Australia* made key recommendations for initial teacher training, which were that:

- initial teacher training should be reconnected with schools;
- professional experience should be at the centre of initial teacher education;
- the academic disciplines should be reconnected with teacher education;
- there should be an improvement in the quality and effectiveness of school-based induction;
- Universities should be effectively preparing, present and future educational leaders, to be highly responsive to rapidly changing societal and educational contexts.

These recommendations could not be implemented without USCs. Another recent systemic push from the (Australian) NSW accrediting body, the Institute of Teachers (2004) required that ‘from 1 October 2004 all people wishing to start teaching in a primary or secondary school in New South Wales are required to be accredited’. Aspects of this accreditation process require connections between universities and schools so that pre-service teachers’ capacity for professional practice can be assessed. Additionally the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training Ministerial Discussion Paper, *Higher Education at the Crossroads* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002) further supports the formation of USCs for pre-service teachers when it asserts that one of the purposes of higher education is to enable individuals to adapt and learn at local, regional and national levels. These examples of systemic and governmental push for connections are supported by many university strategic plans which encourage the development of connections with the wider community including schools. For instance the importance of connections to the University of Newcastle, Australia is made clear in their Strategic Plan Priority 4 “We will foster partnerships that enrich and develop our communities in mutually beneficial ways”.(2007, pp. 7-12). Student B found that not only she but the school benefited enormously from her participation in this connection which was validated by an offer of employment

Student B Voice: Well basically all of us that have been approached by our LINKS school asking for our casual numbers for 4th term, that is just awesome.

One major purpose of the University of Wisconsin- Madison program is to prepare teachers who can be successful in culturally diverse urban schools (2009), the University of Nottingham emphasises ‘practical school-based training supported by a thorough introduction to current educational theory’(2009) and the Manchester Metropolitan University undertakes to provide employment-focused and work-based learning

opportunities' (2009). In relation to pre-service teacher education these examples indicate serious undertakings to engage in connections between universities and schools. Student A has highlighted how from his/her perspective the LiNKS program is successfully engaging universities and schools in worthwhile connections.

Student A Voice: LiNKS is to put into practice what we are learning at university and in our degree. I think in our course based tasks we can actually do that by putting theory into practice and I think the LINKS programme too is also getting us out into the wider community and out into schools and connecting with teachers and making contacts and being able to draw upon those contacts when we need them.

Endurance or Lack Thereof

Convincing evidence of endurance in more recently formed non-assessed USCs is not found. Myriad researchers (Russell & Chapman, 2000; Sachs, 2003a; Seddon, Clemans, & Billett, 2005; Smith & Edelen-Smith, 2002; Yinger & Nolen, 2003) have cited similar issues hindering the endurance of non-assessed USCs such as disharmony and dissatisfaction that continue to present as ongoing challenges. Pat Thomson's research (cited in Sachs, 1997) indicates that the work conducted on USCs by universities and schools, is diminished by the theory/practice binary. This binary is perceived by many to mean that students learn about teaching in the university and they learn how to do teaching in the school. Thomson (cited in Sachs, 1997) argues that this binary, where the university and the school are each responsible for differing parts of the whole, doesn't allow for acknowledgement that any practice is 'saturated' with theory, and any theory is based upon practice. Thompson then, (cited in Sachs, 1997) with support from Johnson, Peters & Williams (1999) suggests that the gap between the two are and will continue to be very difficult to bridge, but gives hope by indicating that there are continued efforts to try to make USCs work. This continued effort is evidenced by research conducted by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, University of Richmond, Virginia, US which documented more than 1,200 partnerships between schools and universities (Dugery & Knowles, 2003). These 1,200 partnerships indicate that liaisons between universities and schools are a given part of the university-school culture. Vick (2006) suggests that the deep seated problems in teacher education-school partnerships require that universities and schools 'forge genuinely new ways to address some of the endemic problems in teacher education' such as high recent graduate teacher attrition rates and for this to occur the 'nature of professional-practical learning' will need to be reconceptualised. (p. 2) Student M indicated that the LiNKS Program may indeed be a new way to forge a genuinely attempt at addressing high recent graduate teacher attrition rates.

Student M Voice: I've got quite a few friends that are at different universities and they don't have the LINKS program and they don't get out into schools until like their third year, and they just drop out because they have no idea what it is like to be in a primary school setting like from a teaching perspective so I found that as soon as I started LINKS and as soon as I saw what it was like, like seeing all the behind the scenes teaching things, it gives you a greater understanding of the things that you need to do when you are a teacher, I see that the LINKS program is creating awareness for beginning teachers and teaching them about what we need to do.

Moving away from the concept of a partnership to a connection such as the LiNKS program may help to reconceptualise theoretical-practical learning in ways that are mutually beneficial to all stakeholders.

A Sense of Urgency

Barnes (cited in Goodlad, 1999) in the 1960s and 1970s stressed a sense of urgency as he undertook studies of USCs that revealed 'appallingly few instances of substantial school-university co-operation' in teacher education. In 1986 the USA Carnegie Commission (cited in Patterson, et al., 1999), reported on the urgent need to make schools centres of 'progress, productivity and prosperity' (p.83). As early as 1987, reformers were asserting that as difficult as partnerships are to create and sustain, quality teaching and learning require collaboration for optimum effectiveness. (Comer, 1987) in connecting the theory and practice binary. Darling Hammond's work offered meaningful contributions here when she identified the elements of 'extraordinary

teacher education programs' as involving extended on-school experiences coupled with common knowledge and shared beliefs between schools and universities (Darling-Hammond, 1989, 1996, 1997, 1999). Darling-Hammond asserts that if there is not a USC based on shared belief and common purpose then the program must be less than extraordinary- ordinary in fact. Patterson et al. (1999) refers to the paper titled 'What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future' written by a National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, to highlight the once again urgent need for improved teaching [and by extension teacher training] in the nation's schools. His point is emphasized by his use of highly emotive language 'there has been no previous time in history when success, indeed the survival, of nations and people has been so tightly tied to their ability to learn' (p. 86). Throughout the 1990s the literature on USCs is continuing the urgent request for transformation in USCs as exemplified by Maheady, Mallette & Harper (1996), and Munby and Hutchison (1998), where they request teacher education programs to be grounded in school practices. Field (1993) reports on the increasing calls, in the United Kingdom, for closer collaboration between universities and schools while in Australia similar calls were being made (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989; Wiltshire, McMeniman, & Tolhurst, 1994).

Quality of the Teacher is Important

Hatwood-Futrell, (cited in Patterson, et al., 1999) contributes her point of view to the sense of urgency cautioning that the nation will not be prepared for 'cataclysmic challenges... and teacher educators...' needing to 'find more effective ways to prepare teachers to teach future generations' (p. 95). Rowe (2003) argues that a student's ability to learn is significantly affected by the 'quality of teaching and learning provision'. Student J found that it is USCs where pre-service teachers are provided the opportunities for immersion in the culture of schools; schools that provide real contexts for theory and practice to operate simultaneously, essential for the development of a quality teacher.

Student J Voice: I then I hooked up in my third year with the STL/A because I thought I'm doing special needs and I really wanted to get to grips with it, running records so I really got in with this girl and she was very good and she spent a lot of time with me, a year I had with her and she was fantastic, but that was because she was an educator and felt that it was her role to then teach me, whereas some teachers still don't feel like that.

Can Quality Of Teacher Be Assured In A USC?

Jenkins, Pateman, & Black's (2002) research has supported the view that pre-service teachers active involvement in school classrooms early in their preparation programs is accepted practice and contributes to the development of teacher quality. However in the LiNKS USC the quality of the teachers that the PST engages with is not assessed or measured yet valuable learning can, and does, occur. Student E has used an example of non-exemplary practice to reflect on further developing her teaching philosophy.

Student E Voice: I've just seen what I really don't want to be. I've seen the type of teaching practices that I don't want to implement in my classroom, the children aren't engaged and they sort of put down the children in front of other students, I haven't really seen a supportive environment.

The use of emotive terms from researchers in the field, such as urgency, appalling, cataclysmic and extraordinary heralds a concern amongst stakeholders about the lack of worthy and enduring pre-service teacher connections between universities and schools. It is time to problematise university-school partnerships and use the ideas this creates to embark on establishing connections to improve learning outcomes for pre-service teachers and ultimately the students they teach.

Problematizing Partnership

Internationally the call for urgent improvements to USC is supported by the work of Ulichny and Schoener (1996), Butin (2003) Groundwater-Smith and Dadds (2004), Stephens & Boldt (2004) and Ledoux & McHenry (2008) who while providing strong support for USC, suggest that the skills of a teacher must be more encompassing than simply learning tried and true approaches to classroom tasks at the feet of an academic mentor. Garner (2000) calls for focused educational research to inform USCs and Kahne and McLaughlin (2001) suggest the need to develop a broader conception of what learning is and where it takes

place, to focus on what enables school community connections as opportunities to learn. Therefore, a focus on identifying the enabling factors for learning in partnerships and a move away from a trouble shooting focus on challenges may help to problematise current views of pre-service teacher partnerships between universities and schools.

Dallmer (2004) suggests that the challenges faced by partnerships such as emergence of hierarchical structures, development of unequal power relationships, a lack of reciprocity, break down of explicit agreements and unbalanced advancement of self-interest by one party over the other, be constituted as drivers of change for USC. For these drivers to succeed the current belief amongst stakeholders, as unearthed by Dallmar (2004), that ‘equity and collaboration... are necessary for school-university partnership change’ (p. 687) must be challenged. Her research has prompted a rethink about what she terms ‘contrived collaboration’(p. 687) in partnerships which moves forward the argument that the current concept of partnerships need to be problematised and therefore challenged.

Vick (2006) suggests that reconceptualisation of the nature of professional-practical learning has to occur in a way ‘that troubles the theory-practice binary’. (p. 2) The theory–practice binary is further complicated by imperatives imposed by systems. Imperatives, in the guise of policies, according to Bartholomew & Sandholtz (2009, p. 165) ‘by their nature must be uniform, operational through bureaucratic command, and implemented in a standardized fashion to produce easily measurable results’. System enforced uniformity, accountability and a requirement to adhere to standardized policies can add significant layers of complexity to partnerships as there is no one size that fits all. Systemic push prompted Bartholomew & Sandholtz (2009) to challenge the current version of partnerships by suggesting that ‘partners who see accountability measures as problematic to their work must find ways to recast institutional common ground...’ (p. 165). This is yet another call to problematise those partnerships where stakeholders have expectations that: partnerships will have an air of permanence and stability, that stakeholders will be equal, that outcomes will benefit all parties equally and that no one stakeholder will hold an hierarchical position over another.

Once again the term connection is offered as an alternative, less constrained label for such liaisons. This alternative label allows for the formation of more capricious relationships based upon particular understandings such as: unpredictable endurance, variable outcomes, instability, flexible hierarchical structures, all of which fluctuate over time dependent upon the incumbent stakeholders, the purposes and engagement with particular tasks and allows the two crucial questions ‘why should this connection be formed’ and ‘how should this connection be formed’ to take place of prominence.

Conclusion

It is time in the current education calendar to truly problematise university-school partnerships that are based on notions of permanence and stability, equality amongst stakeholders, outcomes benefiting all parties equally and with no stakeholder holding an hierarchical position over another. Once problematised, it will be possible to reconceptualise partnerships as connections which are liberated from the confines that often bind partnerships. This will allow the utilization, evaluation and amendment of the myriad ideas stakeholders propose so that university-school connections can be established and maintained with learning outcomes for PST and ultimately the students they teach that are highly valuable and valued. Pragmatically, this can be achieved by the asking of two crucial questions of the connection: 1. Purpose ‘why should this connection be formed and maintained?’ and 2. Conceptually ‘how should this connection be formed?’

A connection as a concept will not be the panacea for all the problems and complexities occurring when universities and schools combine. What it does have to capacity to offer, due to its guiding principles of unpredictable endurance, variable outcomes, instability, flexible hierarchical structures and stakeholder commitment, is a less constrained model promoting positive movement forward in university-school liaisons than that currently provided by partnerships.

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Paper 2

Valuable Voices; Invaluable Teaching/Learning Experiences

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Abstract

Providing excellent learning experiences for university students often depends on the ability of educators to understand students' learning needs. Formal and informal data collection tools are used to capture the students' voice which must be heard, understood and responded to appropriately by academic staff. At Curtin University in Western Australia the methods of enabling student experience to be voiced have developed over the last decade. Previously, manual data collection methods such as the Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) and the Unit Evaluation Questionnaire (UEQ) were used. However, since 2006 an online tool, eVALUate, has been used each semester to collect this data across the university. Despite the eVALUate tool being developed through consultative processes within the university, some academics have criticised its use because of low return rates, issues of interpretation about some questions and the diversity of contexts to which the same questions are applied. Although staff members are provided with reports quickly because of the electronic system, the data is collected at the end of semester and reports to academics are provided after students have left the units. Thus, as a summative report, academics are not able to respond directly to the students providing the feedback.

Moreover, each of the seven sub-schools at Curtin Business School (CBS) determines its own methods for obtaining interim feedback from students in order to improve teaching/learning processes and individual academics react differently to available formative feedback. In 2009, a faculty-wide, CBS survey was conducted to identify methods that were used to encourage students to give voice to their experience and describe the associated costs/benefits of the usage of the devices. Data were collected by approaching the teaching & learning representatives of the seven sub-schools and asking them to respond to the questions in collaboration with their School colleagues. Their responses were collated and analysed by the Coordinator of Teaching & Learning and the results of the survey were reported back to Schools through the CBS Teaching & Learning Committee representatives. The current paper is used to review some of the literature in relation to giving voice to the student experience, particularly related to the way in which it has been achieved at Curtin University. A description of the research methodology and the results of the CBS staff survey are discussed. It was apparent that a multiplicity of methods was used to give voice to the student experience. This multi-method approach is appropriate given the diverse nature of the student population at universities and is offered as a contribution to the critical approach to the theme of student voice in this conference.

Introduction

In March 2008 the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, Australia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, initiated a review of the Australian higher education sector. The review incorporated national consultation with a range of stakeholders and the receipt of 450 formal submissions. The final report, known as the *Bradley Review*, was released in December 2008. The *Bradley Review* highlighted the changes that have occurred in the higher education sector in Australia over recent decades and the current need for improvement in the resourcing and performance of the sector. Significantly, the *Bradley Review* noted "a high-quality student experience is central to the future of higher education ... students are more likely to complete their studies if they are satisfied ... [and] return to study if they have had a positive experience previously" (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008: 69).

The provision of a high-quality student experience is important to the staff of Curtin University and, more specifically, to academics in the Curtin Business School - the largest of the university's five faculties. Curtin Business School (CBS) is a comprehensive teaching and research facility, with an extensive multi-national reach and over 15,000 students from 70 countries. CBS has an international reputation as a practical, innovative institution that has consistently educated and developed industry-ready graduates for the global business community. To maintain this reputation and meet the current and future needs of its students, it is imperative for academic staff in CBS to provide and develop opportunities for student voice that staff can respond to.

In this paper a range of methods of giving voice to the student experience are explored. Literature is reviewed in relation to mechanisms used to evaluate the student experience on a national level, and international comparisons are made. Also, literature is reviewed to provide background information about how Curtin University has developed and used various instruments to evaluate the student experience over the decade from 1999 to 2009. Specifically, research was conducted within CBS to investigate the opportunities business school students have to voice their opinions about their university learning experiences and how the faculty academics respond to student feedback. As a result of reviewing the literature and conducting the research it is apparent that there is a range of alternative approaches to giving voice to the student experience, some of which have been intensively and extensively researched. Even so, the quest to respond to student feedback in such a way that it improves the student experience in a demonstrable way remains complex and challenging.

The Student Experience in Australia

The primary national instrument used to collect summative data about the student experience is the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) which is comprised of two components – the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) and the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) or, alternatively, the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). In Australia, the AGS is administered approximately four months after students complete their university courses; it is used to collect data in relation to students' work, study, salaries and course satisfaction. The preliminary results of the 2008 AGS indicated that of the graduates from bachelor degrees who were available for full-time work 85.2% were employed full-time; these results were the strongest employment figures for new graduates since 1990. In 2008, the majority of students were broadly satisfied with their courses (they answered '3', '4' or '5' on a 5 point scale); dissatisfaction was minimal (they answered '1' or '2' on a 5 point scale). Since 2000, the percentage of students who stated they were satisfied (they answered '4' or '5' on a 5 point scale) has remained stable between 68-71% (Graduate Careers Australia, 2008).

The CEQ has been used in Australia since 1993 but in 2005 the United Kingdom (UK) began using it to evaluate the experiences of final year university students (Bradley et al., 2008; Graduate Careers Australia, 2008). Seven items were compared; *overall satisfaction, communication skills, tackling unfamiliar problems, I received helpful feedback, teaching staff made the subject interesting, staff are good at explaining things, and staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work*. A comparison of similar items from the 2006 CEQ results in Australia and the UK indicated that in all but one category universities in the UK outperformed their Australian counterparts. For example, British students were 35% more satisfied than Australian students in relation to the item - *staff are good at explaining things*. Australian students were slightly more satisfied than British students with the receipt of *helpful feedback* (Bradley et al., 2008). Some consideration could be given to the difference in the timing of the data collection, because better results from the CEQ could have been obtained by surveying final year students. Even so, Australian students were generally less satisfied than British students (Bradley et al., 2008; Oliver, Tucker, Gupta, & Yeo, 2008).

In 2007 the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) piloted the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) which was derived from the College Student Report – a component of the United States National Survey of Student Engagement. Twenty of the 39 Australian universities and five universities in New Zealand participated in the AUSSE pilot (Bradley et al., 2008; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). The data derived from the AUSSE made it possible to compare the experiences of Australian and New Zealand university students with those of students in North American universities. Five categories of student experience were compared; *academic challenge, active learning, student and staff interactions, enriching educational experience, and supportive learning environment*.

The comparative results showed that “Australian results were below those of the United States and Canada for every scale, although slightly above those of New Zealand in most categories” (Bradley et al., 2008:76). Consequently, the *Bradley Review* panel proposed strategies to enhance the experience of Australian university students. Some of the strategies included changed funding arrangements, the development of a broader accountability system and tools to measure and monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, they recommended that Australian accredited higher education providers continue to administer and provide annual reports on the Graduate Destination Survey, the Course Experience Questionnaire and, from 2009, also utilise the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (Bradley et al., 2008).

Curtin's Quest to Give Voice to the Student Experience

At a national level, the CEQ was used by the Australian Government to gather data about students' reflections on their university learning experiences. Data were collected after students had completed their courses and entered the workforce and results were analysed and reported back to the universities. Until recently it was difficult to analyse the qualitative component of the CEQ. However, the development of CEQuery, a qualitative analysis tool, has greatly assisted in the analysis of students' open-ended comments about their university experiences. Over a two year period, 2004-2005, funding was provided for *Accessing the Student Voice: Using CEQuery to identify what retains and promotes engagement in productive learning in higher education*. Curtin, along with participants from thirteen other universities in Australia, participated in this extensive collaborative research project that systematically investigated students' open-ended comments in the CEQ (Scott, 2005). The outcomes of this research were disseminated through a series of workshops, forums and reports.

At a local level, academics at Curtin, like their counterparts in other universities, sought to gather formative data about students' learning experiences as they progressed through their courses. One of the earlier monitoring tools, the Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) survey, was designed and validated in 1982 (Marsh, in Oliver et al., 2008). SEEQ was used on a voluntary basis by lecturers and the results were given only to the participating lecturer.

From 1999-2002, both within the faculties and at the university level, research and development of monitoring tools based on the CEQ occurred. In the Curtin Business School, the Unit Experience Questionnaire (UEQ) was developed and administered at the end of semesters or trimesters. In the School of Physiotherapy, the Course Experience on the Web (CEW) was developed. Evidence from the use of the CEW showed the benefits of including an instrument that could predict the likely outcomes of the CEQ and provide academics with enough warning to make adjustments to their teaching and learning programmes to enhance the student experience before their course of units was completed. The Curtin Annual Student Satisfaction (CASS) Survey has been used across the university each year since 2002 to measure students' satisfaction with their overall experiences at Curtin (Curtin University of Technology, 2009; Dixon & Scott, 2003; Dixon, Scott, & Dixon, 2007; Oliver et al., 2008; Straker & Smith, 2000; Tucker, Jones, Straker, & Cole, 2003).

These instruments did not provide sufficient information to inform improvement of teaching and learning at the unit level across the university. Hence, the need to provide an instrument that targeted "students' perceptions of what helps them to learn ... what students bring to the teaching-learning experience ... and students' overall satisfaction with the unit" was recognised across the university (Oliver et al., 2008: 622). In 2003 broad consultation with stakeholders, development and trial of a student experience survey, known as *eVALUate*, began. Development occurred in four phases and included three pilot studies, unstructured interviews, paper-based and online questionnaires. The final version was piloted in November 2005 and, subsequently, implemented in Semester 1 2006 at Curtin's campuses in Western Australia, Sydney and Malaysia (Oliver et al., 2008). Since 2006 the implementation of *eVALUate* has broadened and been subject to ongoing analysis and reporting. In 2009 *eVALUate* was available for use in Summer School, Semester 1, Semester 2, Trimester 1, Trimester 2 and Trimester 3. It was available in all of Curtin's Australian campuses and nine offshore campuses located in Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore and Hong Kong (Tucker & Pegden, 2009). Within the Curtin Business School, in alignment with the rest of Curtin University, *eVALUate* has been implemented for seven successive semesters and cumulative data have been collected. Because the focus of this research is on the different ways that CBS academics give voice to the student experience only *eVALUate* data in relation to CBS is reported in this paper.

Research Methodology

In this research, mixed methods were used to collect the data. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through the administration of a survey. Participants were purposively selected because of their pivotal role as Directors of Teaching and Learning within the seven CBS Schools. Ethical issues concerning research with humans were considered. All participants were informed about the purposes of the research and given the opportunity to volunteer their participation. No participants were coerced and all participants had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. At the conclusion of the research the findings were presented to the CBS Teaching and Learning Committee of which the participants

were members. Also, the results were disseminated to the wider academic community through conference presentations and scholarly publications.

Participants had the option of completing the survey using their own knowledge as School Directors of Teaching and Learning or to consult with their staff. By selecting these key people, the researcher aimed to minimise the workload for a majority of academic staff. Consequently, the survey was sent to the CBS Schools' Directors of Teaching and Learning. There were responses from six of the seven CBS sub-Schools; thus, the return rate was 86%. Four Directors of Teaching and Learning completed the survey on behalf of their School peers, the fifth completed it individually as a coordinator of a very large unit and the sixth delegated the task to an associate who, subsequently, interviewed and recorded the responses of the unit coordinators within their School. The survey responses were tallied by the researcher and the results synthesized. Thus, the research results are presented in this paper as descriptive paragraphs.

In addition to the data collected through the survey, the researcher also collected data from the *eVALUate* University Aggregated Reports (Tucker & Pegden, 2008, 2009) which were published on Curtin's website and available to staff and students. The data in these reports were collected over time as a result of the university-wide *eVALUate* student surveys and, subsequently, analysed by a team of experts within Curtin's Office of Teaching and Learning and published to report back to the University community. Also, previously, the researcher had assisted two of the CBS Schools to collect their own formative data about the student experience through student interviews and the Stop, Start, Continue student survey.

As part of her role as CBS Coordinator of Teaching and Learning, the researcher had communicated with faculty academics about ways in which they responded to feedback they received from students. Consequently, the researcher had a sound knowledge of the various ways in which the student voice was expressed and responded to within the faculty. The co-author of this paper, an expert in the fields of education and research, scrutinised and informed the interpretation of the results. Thus, triangulation occurred and the conclusions presented in this paper were verified. In the following sections the different methods of giving voice to the student experience used within CBS are identified, together with the results from the *eVALUate* University Aggregated Reports (Tucker & Pegden, 2009) and the faculty survey.

Giving Voice to the Student Experience in Curtin Business School

The results of the faculty survey and information on the Curtin website indicated a variety of mechanisms were used to collect data about the student experience. Three distinct levels of data collection were reported to be used to identify the students' voice, with strong support by staff for the different techniques. The first set of techniques involved four well-established, statistically-based surveys that provided summative data regarding the students' experiences. The CEQ and CASS provided information about students' experiences at the course level. The two *eVALUate* surveys provided information about students' experiences within their units of study and with their lecturers and were formal institutional data collection tools.

The second set of techniques comprised of six activities which were less formal collections of data and formative in nature; i.e., staff were able to respond to the voice of the students and make on-going changes or corrections in the presentation of their unit. They were the Stop Start Continue student survey, interviewing student representatives, focus groups, obtaining class-level feedback, during semester assessments and the writing of learning journals. The third set of techniques used to recognize students' voices can be described as incidental occasions which provide formative data to enable staff to respond directly to students' needs. The two major incidental types identified were feedback through personal staff/student contacts and online discussion boards. In the following section, the discussion of the twelve various techniques is informed by the responses of CBS research participants.

Summative Methods

Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)

The CEQ is an externally managed national process that targets all students on completion of their courses and investigates their course experience. Results are later released to the university and its faculties. One of the School Directors of Teaching and Learning stated:

I'm not sure that this one has been that useful. The data tends to be from experiences some years before and there are often small numbers sometimes from less representative places like small offshore partners. I've not seen it used in a relevant, systematic way that really impacts down to the unit level (DTL 1).

Curtin Annual Student Satisfaction (CASS) survey

CASS is a centrally managed university-wide annual survey for all students. The questions in the survey extend beyond the scope of students' experience in relation to specific units. The surveys are conducted online and lecturers do not participate in the process. Aggregated results are published on the Curtin website. Specific reports are provided internally for key stakeholders. Participants were not asked to comment on the CASS survey.

eVALUate (unit focus)

In 2009 eVALUate was available for use in Summer School, Semester 1, Semester 2, Trimester 1, Trimester 2 and Trimester 3. It was available in all of Curtin's Australian campuses and its nine offshore campuses. Access to results is limited to the Dean of Teaching and Learning, Head of School and Unit Coordinator who may share the results with lecturers but must ensure that no data identifying individuals are made known. The majority of respondents in the faculty survey indicated that little effort was required by them to use eVALUate because it is an automated online instrument managed centrally by the Office of Teaching and Learning. They also noted that response rates were either low (below 35%) or medium (36-59%). The data from the eVALUate University Reports shown in Table 1 below confirm participants' perceptions of the response rates for eVALUate. The shaded scores are below the target response rate of 35%: though, response rates have improved over time.

Table 1 CBS eVALUate response rates 2006-2009

Teaching Period	Number of Units	Response Rate
Semester 1 2006	316	23.7%
Semester 2 2006	326	24.9%
Semester 1 2007	310	36.2%
Semester 2 2007	315	31.3%
Semester 1 2008	314	39.9%
Semester 2 2008	312	38%
Semester 1 2009	287	38.6%

Source: Adapted from Tucker & Pedgen, 2008, 2009.
Adapted from

Participants' responses varied when asked to comment on the impact of eVALUate. Some noted it had low impact and provided minimal gains, others stated it had medium impact and provided moderate gains, and others claimed it had high impact and provided high gains. Similarly the perceptions varied about the types of gains it offered. Participants noted that the use of eVALUate:

1. Demonstrated compliance with University requirements;
2. Provided evidence that could be used for academic promotion;
3. Identified targets for improvement;
4. Was a cathartic experience; and
5. Explained the situation.

Comments from Schools' Directors of Teaching and Learning who spoke on behalf of the lecturers in their Schools noted that eVALUate was institutionally supported and administered centrally. Specifically, a Director of Teaching and Learning noted;

at the start students were not able to be discriminating about the content and context of their unit; or to identify what they or the lecturer had control over (DTL 2).

Responses from lecturers in one School were somewhat negative about the use of eVALUate. They noted that:

This as a stand alone method of evaluating unit or teacher performance is ridiculous (L1).

It is a rough general indicator as to whether a course is what students expected, but what do they expect (L2)? Targeted, relatively easy – instant feedback on performance of unit (L3).

eVALUate (teacher focus)

This is voluntary and confidential and results can only be accessed by the teacher who requested the survey. Respondents indicated that 'all', 'most' and '50%' of lecturers request the teacher survey. DTL participants comments about the level of difficulty in collecting the data and the impact of eVALUate (teacher focus) were consistent with the comments they made about the impact of eVALUate (unit focus). Lecturers' comments about the usefulness of this method of data collection ranged from:

independent unbiased in terms of voluntary responses (L3) to ... not valid feedback on teaching performance (L4) to ... what alternatives do we have (L5)?

Formative Methods

Stop Start Continue Survey (SSC)

This is a survey in which students note, in writing, what lecturers or tutors should stop, start or continue doing in a particular unit. It is usually administered mid-semester so that lecturers can respond to student feedback promptly. The SSC survey was used in a majority of Schools and respondents stated that they used it either once per year or once per teaching period.

In one School individual lecturers had mixed feelings about the effort required to administer the SSC. Almost half of the respondents noted the effort required was excessive but the remainder felt that it was reasonable. Interestingly, in two of the Schools where the SSC is used there are specialised teaching and learning personnel who provide support to academic staff through the collation and analysis of the SSC data. Typically, lecturers noted that student response rates for the SSC were high and usually high gains were achieved. The most frequently identified gains were the identification of targets for improvement and the explanation of the situation. Lecturers noted:

the SSC was relatively easy and quick to administer ... provided feedback early in the unit – time to respond (L3); valid and practical (L6) and; great feedback and students feel good about it (L7).

Interviewing student representatives

In specific units, students nominate to represent the voices and experiences of their peers to provide feedback to lecturers. Respondents stated they interviewed student representatives either once per year, once per teaching period or on an ad hoc basis. Even so, in most Schools student representatives were rarely interviewed. The Director of Teaching and Learning in one School explained why they decided to discontinue the practice;

We stopped doing this because there was concern about the identification of the student representative. Also there were issues about representation and what exactly was the role of the student rep. Whilst we could have persisted it was a good deal of work, not institutionally supported, and open to some problems and risks (DLT 1).

Focus groups

These are groups of students who volunteer to participate in a collaborative discussion about particular items of interest within specific units. Respondents stated they used focus groups to provide feedback on individual

units or courses in general, usually no more than once per annum. However, some lecturers used them more regularly at the unit level with their students:

for the specific purpose teaching due to the composition of students (L10).

The Director of Teaching and Learning in one School noted:

whilst useful on an ad-hoc basis, they are quite time consuming to set up – so unless they are institutionally supported and integrated it is always extra work for the Schools (DTL 1).

During semester students' assessment

Formal student outcomes achieved as a result of students' participation with specific assessment items enabled the majority of respondents to reflect on student performance at least on a monthly basis. Assessment points enabled individual and group voices to be heard when assessments were returned to students. Some individual respondents thought it was reasonable to respond to feedback from students' assessment and others thought it was difficult. Participants who spoke for their Schools noted that reflecting on student results was a reasonable expectation. Reflection on student assessment brought high gains in terms of identification of targets for improvement and explanation of the situation; some respondents noted that it demonstrated compliance. Lecturers commented that student assessment results:

give you a feel for where they are going wrong (L4) and that we have an obligation to give timely and meaningful feedback (L9).

Class-level feedback

In one School a questionnaire was administered during weeks 4/5 of every teaching period in 50% of the units. The perception was that the questionnaires could be administered within the current workload structure and resulted in moderate return rates (36-59%) and medium level gains. In another School they used a questionnaire once to evaluate a project. Other Schools stated they used other mechanisms but did not specify further.

Student reflection and journal writing

A number of staff noted the 'teaching' of strategies for giving and receiving feedback encouraged students to interact more with staff and fellow students; the consequence being that students were more confident about their ability to interact, more direct in addressing relevant issues and more able to receive feedback and react positively to it.

Several respondents identified the task of having students keep a weekly journal of their learning as being particularly useful. By recording their progress regularly, using a basic technique such as E.R.G.A. (Experience, Reflection, Generalisation, and Application) or P.M.I. (Pluses, Minuses, and Ideas), students were able to express their voice about positive or negative aspects of their development. The writing process encouraged students to be quite specific in identifying pros and cons of their progress, which enabled them to voice their opinions more readily in learning team and class situations. A Director of Teaching and Learning noted:

the use of the learning journal has been a fillip for students and staff. Staff realized students did not understand, and battled to learn and practice the use of feedback techniques, let alone learn techniques to help them respond to feedback; whether it be positive or negative. Students' capacity to analyse and be self-critical about their study improved dramatically (DTL 2).

In several units student reflections of their learning were included as part of the assessment.

Incidental Formative Feedback

Feedback through staff/student contact

This is informal anecdotal evidence that occurs as a result of interaction and communication between lecturers and students. Respondents stated lecturers were informed by students' comments within the class as they interacted with them on a weekly basis. The majority of respondents noted students' personally commented to them on a daily basis at each lecture/seminar session; it was easy to receive comments from students and respond to the whole student group. Typically, respondents perceived the impact of interaction with students to be highly beneficial and most frequently identified areas of improvement and explained the situation. Lecturers commented that interacting through communication with students was:

necessary for maintaining a relationship with students (L1); spontaneous and trends can be relayed back to class (L8); honest and non-threatening (L7) and; you get to feel what they are struggling with and what is easy (L4).

Also, the Director of Teaching and Learning in one School noted:

Staff always have an ear open for personal comments. Sometimes it's a link to a generic issue/problem; sometimes it's idiosyncratic, so one has to be open to the possibilities. If it's backed up by other forms of feedback then that strengthens the validity (DTL 1).

A university-wide requirement is that academics allocate two 2-hour sessions per week for student consultation and notify students of their availability for personal contact. It is a rare occasion when there are not at least one or two students that take advantage of these times to visit the lecturer in the privacy of the academic office to discuss personal or learning issues.

Online discussion boards

The typical forum for online discussion at CBS is through the Blackboard learning management system. Respondents stated they received feedback about the student experience via discussion board either daily, weekly, or monthly. Some stated they only used it for online units, others did not specify what type of units they used it in. Lecturers' opinions about the level of difficulty in using discussion boards varied. Distance education lecturers stated:

It's easy. Students communicate this way these days (L9) and they need to talk to each other (L11).

Face-to-face lecturers stated:

It's too time consuming (L5), have tried – not successful (L7) and timely, effective and valid information for teaching staff (L6).

As a method of unit evaluation, a Director of Teaching and Learning commented:

I can't see students committing to this over and above the existing eVALUate (DTL 1).

Responding to the Student Voice at Curtin Business School

Regardless of how many mechanisms are in place for giving voice to the student experience, unless there are appropriate responses from academics and students are aware of the responses, the effort is in vain. To demonstrate their responsiveness lecturers provide students with *feedback*. Students' perception of this *feedback* is measured through formal mechanisms like eVALUate. Traditionally, eVALUate scores across the University and within the major faculties for the item related to feedback have been the lowest of all items. The eVALUate results for the feedback item for CBS and Curtin are compared and shown in Table 2. Although the results have improved progressively over time, the results are still below the target of 80% agreement.

Table 2 .CBS/Curtin Comparison of eVALUate Results 2006-2009:

(Percentage of students who agree with the item "Feedback on my work in this unit helps me to achieve the learning outcomes")

Teaching Period	Feedback CBS	Feedback Curtin
Semester 1 2006	71.5%	70.5%
Semester 2 2006	70.9%	70.8%
Semester 1 2007	74.4%	72.9%
Semester 2 2007	76.2%	74.0%
Semester 1 2008	77.9%	75.7%

Source: Adapted from Tucker & Pedgen (2008, 2009)

Academics have sought to improve their *feedback* to students. One of the contentions has been that students do not always recognise when they are being given *feedback*, so lecturers have increased their use of this term when they give students *feedback*. Also, lecturers have implemented interim measures to collect data about students' experiences within the teaching period so they can respond to students' concerns in a timely manner and make it known to students that they have responded to their voice. Many of the informal mechanisms, such as Stop Start Continue, have been used for this purpose. Additionally, the improvements based on *eVALUate* are reported in the unit outline (DTL 1). Results from the CBS research show that Schools have responded by increasing resources devoted to teaching and learning and providing professional development for staff. Audience response systems have been purchased and used to increase interaction between lecturers and students in large lectures. Heads of School and Unit Coordinators have discussed *eVALUate* scores with lecturers and developed strategies for improvement. Teaching and Learning consultants have conducted teaching observations and lecturers have reflected on their teaching so they can continually improve their performance. In spite of this there are still some lecturers who are unaware of any of these initiatives.

Conclusion

The student voice has informed the direction of teaching and learning from a national perspective, at the University level and within the Curtin Business School. The *Bradley Review* (2008) provided the Australian Government with recommendations to enhance the experiences of students in Australian universities. Over the last decade Curtin University has developed, refined and implemented several mechanisms to facilitate the expression of students' experiences with their courses and the units within them. Within the Curtin Business School lecturers respond to the student voice expressed through summative, formative and incidental mechanisms. Such responses have led to a continual improvement in teaching and learning. Although gains have been made over time, there is still room for improvement. The provision of effective feedback for students is one of the most challenging teaching endeavours yet pivotal to enhancing the student experience. Not only has expression of the student voice been a valuable experience for students, it has proven to be an invaluable asset for staff in developing excellent teaching/learning experiences.

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Paper 3

What Values do Students in Hong Kong Attach to Experiential-learning Opportunities?

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of experiential learning at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) from an alumni perspective. The aim of this project was to identify the value of these learning experiences when viewed a year or two following graduation, and learning outcomes for selected participant experiences. This research adopted a qualitative approach to analyzing the identified outcomes for selected alumni experiences. Thirty-five phone interviews, two focus- group interviews and four individual interviews were conducted with recent graduates across different disciplines. The findings indicated the positive impact of experiential-learning activities in terms of:

1) personal growth, 2) social networking, 3) cross-cultural exposure, 4) career development, and 5) academic development. The study also identified five facilitating factors that influence student participation in the CUHK context – curriculum flexibility, students' personal interests, peer support, belonging to related communities/ organizations, and the overall University culture. Implications for optimizing experiential-learning offerings in university settings are provided and the methods and data are key aspects of researching student voices a key theme of the ECE conference.

Introduction

Experiential learning is concerned with the discovery and application of intellectual knowledge through direct experiences and guided reflections (Kolb, 1984; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2002). It is a general term used to describe a wide range of educational activities. Although the term is more typically used in referring to specific out-of-class activities such as internships, exchange programmes and community service programmes, it also broadly indicates an educational approach that focuses on learning from authentic or naturalistic experiences. Following Proudman (1995), this research defines experiential learning as any meaningful interaction between individual learners and a unique community/ environment which allows the learner to construct knowledge, skills and values. This research emphasizes the interaction between learners and the unique community/ environment facilitated by different experiential-learning opportunities outside formal lecture- room learning contexts. The paper summarises literature on experiential learning and outlines the research methodology used. It then examines the gains of different types of experiential-learning programmes. The paper concludes by discussing factors that should be taken into account when analyzing student participation in experiential learning.

Literature Review

Since the 1990s, Hong Kong's higher education has become increasingly aware of the importance of providing experiential-learning opportunities to undergraduate students. Different types of experiential learning may enhance different aspects of student development. However, there is a dearth of empirical evidence to demonstrate the values of experiential learning. Most of the studies in the field of experiential learning focus on the evaluation of individual programme implementations. There are few studies examining the overall impact of different experiential-learning programmes on students' development during their undergraduate education, especially in the Hong Kong context. Much of the published research into experiential learning was conducted in Western contexts.

Exchange programmes are the most widely studied experiential-learning activities in the existing literature. Wilson (1993) discussed the impact of cross-cultural experiences in a United States (US) context. She argued that students generally could gain substantive knowledge and perceptual understanding of the global world through cross-cultural exposure. Such experiences may also facilitate their personal growth and interpersonal relationships. Kitsantas (2004) conducted a quantitative study in assessing the impact of studying abroad on graduate students. Her study showed that students had a significantly increased global understanding and cross-cultural skills after being abroad. Students who participated in studying abroad appeared to be better prepared to function in a multicultural world and promote international understanding than students without such

experiential-learning opportunity. Sowa (2002) asserted the value of exchange programmes and summarised that the gains from exchange programmes can include cross-cultural interactions, increase in knowledge and language skills and changes in attitudes and career goals. The intercultural experience enhanced their awareness and appreciation of other countries and cultures. Messer and Wolter (2007) examined the gains of Swiss graduate students after participating in exchange programmes. Their findings corresponded to the previous studies; however, they argued that students with exchange programme experiences were associated with higher starting salaries and a higher likelihood of opting for postgraduate degrees. This indicates the positive impact of exchange programmes on participants' career development.

Community-service programmes are another popular type of experiential-learning activity in facilitating students' personal development. Markus et al. (1993) discussed the benefits of community-service projects, which can enrich undergraduate students' education in the classroom. Their studies showed that students not only took the lessons they learnt in class out into the community, but also brought the lessons they learnt in the community back into the classroom. They fulfilled their civic responsibilities to one's community and gained insight into values and prejudices. Teranishi (2007) also highlighted the positive impact of community-service-abroad programmes on Latino college students' identity, relationships, and connectedness to the community. Her survey results indicated an increased self-efficacy, civic participation, career preparedness, and understanding of diversity. In addition, McClam et al. (2008) pointed out that the value of community-service programmes not only can develop students' personal growth throughout the participation process, but also provide career confirmation to the participants. In fact, self-reflection is a main focus in community-service programmes. Participants usually gain insights on the social issues and develop their professionalism through the reflection process.

On the other hand, programmes such as mentorships, internships and leadership-training programmes are relatively understudied. Riordan (2006) studied the internship impact of experiential learning on high school students in the US. His findings revealed that school students learnt through internships and indicated a significant development in intellectual and personal aspects. Chan (2000) examined the impact of leadership-training programmes on secondary student participants in Hong Kong. His study indicated that the participants generally rated themselves to have more qualities, characteristics, or abilities related to leadership after the training. Lee (2007) highlighted the value of mentorship programmes in learning from experiences. She argued that mentees can benefit from the relationship with their mentor when it is at its most productive. Murray and Owen (1991) also studied the value of mentoring programmes in the US. They pointed out that students can learn time management in an effective mentoring programme. They know how to cope with organizations more productively and get more job satisfaction through the mentoring process (ibid). Although the above studies demonstrated some specific values of experiential learning in secondary school and undergraduate educational settings, it is important to note that within the Hong Kong context, evidence of experiential learning in an undergraduate setting is relatively scarce.

Methodology

Within a qualitative paradigm, this study adopts an interpretive approach that is not concerned with objective facts but with the subjective values alumni have about their learning experiences within the University context. Guba and Lincoln, (2005) argued that human experiences can only be properly understood through a process of empathetic communication. A qualitative approach for this study was chosen because it allows the collection of valid data about the experiences of recent graduates and their understanding of the experiential learning provided by the University. It provides an opportunity for the researchers to further discuss the related topics with the interviewees. An interpretivist approach supports descriptive explanatory quality and it fits with the social constructivist notion of learning and experience. Interview is used as the major data collection method in this qualitative research. It allows the researcher to construct a better understanding of the perception of alumni from different colleges and departments. In addition, it provides access for researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration.

Thirty-five alumni who graduated between 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 participated in this study. All participants completed a full-time undergraduate degree at CUHK. Twenty participants (57%) were female and 15 (43%) were male. Their ages ranged from 23 to 28. Three types of interviews (phone interviews, group interviews and individual face-to-face interviews) were used to collect data for different purposes. Data collected from the

phone interviews was regarded as the first stage of our data collection to understand the general perception of alumni towards their University experiences, and to fine-tune our main research questions. Two group interviews were conducted to trigger deeper insights and four individual interviews were carried out to explore the different learning experiences of key informants. Table 1 below summaries the data collected in this study. All data were mainly collected and transcribed in Cantonese for content analysis. Selected quotations were translated into English for data reporting. All the translated transcripts were checked by the main researcher. Data triangulation was used to test the validity and reliability of the findings.

Table 1: Summary of Data Collection

Research method	Purpose	Research questions	Constituted data
Phone interview with individual alumni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To gain background information of a group of alumni •To explore the general perception of the experiential-learning opportunities the University provided to a group of alumni •To inquire about the alumni's willingness to participate in further exploration of this study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What, overall, memory do you have when talking about your undergraduate studies at CUHK? •What, overall, have you gained in your undergraduate learning experience? •What, overall, do you see as the drawbacks or impediments of your undergraduate experience? •If you could redo your undergraduate experience with any changes made, would you and how? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •35 completed phone-interview forms and handwritten notes. Phone interviews lasted between 11 to 28 minutes.
Focus-group interview with alumni from different disciplines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To further explore and clarify analysis derived from phone interviews •To elaborate on the alumni's view of particular broadening activities •To identify key informants for individual case studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What have you gained in your undergraduate studies at CUHK? •What are the factors that influence your motivation for participating in an activity? •According to the educational goal of CUHK, what attributes and skills have you developed during the undergraduate studies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •2 focus-group interviews audio-recordings lasting from 77 to 93 minutes with handwritten notes
Individual indepth case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To examine the impact of different broadening activities on the development of individual alumni •To collect specific evidences and learning outcomes for selected alumni experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What were your expectations of University education? •What do you value the most in your University life? •Why are those experiences particularly valuable to you? •How do those experiences different from the other you experienced during the undergraduate studies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •4 individual-interviews audio-recordings lasting from 98 to 106 minutes with handwritten notes

This project adopted a grounded approach as a guide for analysis. All data was analysed holistically from the initial phases of phone interviews to individual in-depth interviews. This method offers us tools for analysing data as well as for obtaining additional focused data that inform, extend and refine emerging analytic themes (Charmaz, 2003). Interesting or frequently appeared nodes were coded into themes as the initial set of nodes. The initial list of grounded themes, such as values and impediments of particular broadening programmes, were sorted and reviewed to reduce overlapping themes. Related themes which share similar meanings were merged or rephrased into a category and subcategory relationship. For instance, past experience, personal motivation, reputation and curiosity were merged with the theme of student's personal interest after review. Arguments and comments then emerged from the revised list of themes. The emerging arguments and comments were used to compare and verify the previous analysis to ensure its consistency and validity. A simplified version of the coding structure is shown in Table 2. The first row indicates the grounded themes, which subsequently became the analysis in the second and the third column.

Table 2: The Coding Structure of the Analysis

Planning										
<i>Which modes of experiences</i>	<i>What kinds of values</i>					<i>What facilitating factors</i>				
Modes of experiential learning	Values/ advantages					Facilitating factors				
	Personal growth	Social network	Cross-cultural exposure	Career development	Academic development	Personal interest	Flexibility	University culture	Community belongings	Peer support
Exchange	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		
Internship	√	√		√	√		√			
Mentorship		√		√		√		√		
Student clubs	√	√		√			√		√	√
Leadership	√		√							

Findings

Qualitative analyses were conducted to examine the impact of experiential-learning activities offered at CUHK. Using grounded theory, five overarching values emerged from the findings: a) personal growth, b) social networking, c) cross-cultural exposure, d) academic development, and e) career skills. Table 3 summarises the values of experiential learning identified in five modes of experiences at CUHK. The analysis highlights the importance of experiential learning to facilitate students' personal growth. Factors facilitating the values of experiential learning among different experiences are also discussed. These factors emerged as alumni reflected on how *much* value they gained from the experiential learning they were involved in; these factors are curriculum flexibility, students' personal interests, peer support, belonging to related communities/ organizations, and the overall University culture.

Table 3: The Value of Experiential Learning

Modes of experiential learning	Values/ advantages				
	Personal growth	Social network	Cross-cultural exposure	Career development	Academic development
Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem-solving skills • Reflection from past experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to establish friendships in the host country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection with international community • Increase cross-cultural knowledge and international awareness 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to study courses that are not available in CUHK
Internship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insights into career aspiration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to establish social network in a work setting 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain career skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidated academic knowledge
Mentorship		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting different people 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge about work life • Job-hunting skills 	
Student clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speeded up personal development • Acquire generic skills • Leadership experiences • Active learning attitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to establish long-lasting friendships • Expand social network 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to acquire technical and specialist skills 	
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social awareness • Sense of responsibility • Thinking skills and leadership knowledge 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of different cultures via interacting with overseas participants 		

The following paragraphs elaborate each value identified in particular experiential-learning activities from our alumni respondents. Facilitating factors which enhance and restrain their participation in those activities are also mentioned. For easy reference, the five facilitating factors are marked in bold throughout the section.

a) Personal growth

Most of the respondents described a strengthened sense of personal growth through experiential learning. Sam, a 25-year-old Engineering alumnus, reflected on his enhanced personal development over the experience of being on a student club committee. He said,

'I believe if you think it is right and comply with your values, you can make breakthroughs. Someone poses a question: "What is success?" You have to show respect to others' beliefs. Business students may have a framework or model of what success is. I reckon everyone can be successful no matter which fields they are in. These kinds of values are established gradually. When you are in the final year, you can realise having such values will give you a distinctive edge over others and you can adapt to the environment much faster apparently.'

These respondents demonstrate how the process of experiential learning offers an environment for them to reflect on their own experience. The ambience participants enjoyed and exercised through experiential learning has facilitated their personal development. Many respondents said they became more responsible and confident after participating in some experiential-learning activities, such as exchange programmes and student activities.

They developed a greater sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy after undergoing those experiences. One respondent, Margaret, a 24-year-old Science alumnus, originally considered herself to be dependent and weak. After she had been through several types of experiential-learning programmes (e.g. cultural exchange programmes, internship and student clubs), she felt an increased sense of self-efficacy, realizing that she could achieve far more than she had thought through adopting an active attitude with willingness to try. She said:

'After participating in exchange tour and student club in Year 1, I realised that my learning attitude has changed gradually. I lowered my expectation on study and started to spend more time on engaging in other activities on campus. I realised that I should acquire not only academic knowledge, but also other skills in my undergraduate studies. I become more active and I want to acquire more (different types of learning experiences). My family also becomes more supportive of my involvement in these non-disciplinary activities, when they see the positive impact (of these activities) on me.'

Many participants highlighted the importance of **flexibility** in facilitating their personal growth in experiential learning. The more flexibility the participant can enjoy, the more reflections they obtain from the activity. One participant, Charis, a 24-year-old Science alumnus, commented that the limited **flexibility** on certain types of student clubs can restrain the personal development of participants through such experiences. She argued that:

'The student club I joined was restrained by many ordinary activities, which was so much alike to the club culture in secondary schools (i.e. mainly focused on organising internal social gathering). So, I did not obtain any profound impact on my personal development in student clubs.'

b) Social networking

Through engaging in a variety of social interactions with other experiential-learning participants, twenty five respondents expressed that the experiences strengthened and widened their social network. They were able to meet a range of people from different social sectors by participating in different experiential-learning programmes. The interactions with mentors, internship colleagues and peers allowed them to develop their social network beyond a course-based community. These established social networks with mentors and internship colleagues enhanced participants' understanding of working life. Interactions with mentors and internship colleagues also provided participants with support and guidance in their career development.

Jeff, a 24-year-old Arts alumnus, pointed out that his broadened social network had enhanced his pleasant memories of the University and facilitated him to enhance his self-understanding through interacting with a range of people during the undergraduate studies. He said:

'...interacting with different people allowed me to understand my limitations and strengths ... the broadened social network increased not only my pleasant memories of the University, but also my skills. I am good at imitating others. My interaction with professors (through participating in different experiential-learning activities) allowed me to learn their presentation skills and apply it to my current job ...'

However, the sense of **belonging to the community** and the extent of **peer support** students received in the community may determine the values of social networking in experiential learning. Some respondents explained that their active participation in student clubs was cultivated by their strong **sense of belonging to their associations**. In addition, students seemed to be more eager to participate in the activities when they agree with the value and culture of that particular community. Charles, a 26-year-old Business alumnus, pointed out that a supportive environment and his **belonging to the community** were essential for sustaining his engagement in student activities. He stated:

'I wasn't sure the values of participating in student clubs at the beginning. The main reason of my engagement in student clubs was due to the encouragement from my peers and senior students ... while the continued participation in student clubs during my second and third year was due to my devotion to the college and the good feeling when interacting with other working parties in the environment.'

c) Cross-cultural exposure

Some respondents also received certain exposure to cross-cultural issues in particular types of experiential-learning programmes. The exchange programme is one of the typical programmes that provide a cross-cultural and a global perspective to participants during the learning process. Twelve participants reflected that they especially cherished such cross-cultural experiences. Bryan, a 24-year-old Science alumnus, shared his reflection on the cross-cultural exposure he experienced during the exchange period. He commented:

'This may probably due to my host family as it was really an intensive experience. Yet, I reckon my attachment to Japan is because learning Japanese and its culture enables me to have more understanding of Chinese culture as a great deal of Japanese culture stems from China as early as in the Tong dynasty. This is something I cannot learn in Hong Kong and China. As a result, I would like to discover more in this area (Chinese and Japanese cultures) afterwards.'

Due to the important learning value of cross-cultural exposure, some experiential-learning programmes have become more diversified and integrated (i.e. internship-abroad programme, across-cultures leadership programme). However, the impact of cross-cultural exposure could be hindered by the type of culture and the familiarity of the participant towards that culture. Sam explained the limited impact he had on an across-cultures leadership programme with Singaporeans and mainland Chinese. He said:

'... I have been to Singapore and Peking. So, even though the programme (leadership-training programme) provided cultural exchange opportunity, the benefit and impact weren't very impressive and obvious to me.'

Thus, the factors of **personal interests** may hinder students' cross-cultural exposure. For instance, some participants tended to show a stronger initiative to learn new knowledge and create new experiences than the others. This may explain why Sam seemed to show less appreciation for the interaction with those familiar cultural groups in the programmes. **University culture** is another significant element in cultivating students' cross-cultural exposures. Yanis, a 24-year-old Science alumnus, pointed out the growing trend in obtaining cross-cultural exposures at the University. He said:

'A few years ago, there was only a few students who participated in exchange programmes ... People were doubtful of the value (of cross-cultural exposure) with the cost of deferring their degrees for an additional year ... Now, it's weird if you do not have any exchange experience.'

d) Career development

Nine participants also indicated the positive impact of their career development through participating in experiential-learning programmes. Eight out of the twelve internship participants argued that the experience was essential to their professional development. They were able to understand more about their professions through interacting with professionals in the field. In fact, it contributed to their career development positively. For the

participants who are working in a job related to their placement nature, they found the experience exceptionally useful, as it provided them an opportunity to experience the working culture of the field and enhanced their competitiveness in the job-hunting process.

In addition, mentorship programmes cultivated the interaction between students and working alumni. Such interactions allowed students to further understand the working environment. The network between students and working alumni also enhanced their career development. Two participants pointed out that their mentors were keen to provide support on their job hunting. They offered reference letters and provided interview skills training to them in order to boost their competitiveness in the job market. Alan, a 24-year-old Social Science alumnus, shared the gain of career development he obtained through participating in mentorship programmes. He said,

'...these (mentorship) programmes allowed me to meet different people and learn more about work life in various setting. Like [the name of one mentor], I have been trained under his thinking mode for a year ... His thinking mode benefits me a lot ... Another mentor gave me mock job interviews and offered me reference letters for my job hunt preparation.'

However, student's career development in experiential learning can be enhanced and restrained by **the culture of the University** and the **flexibility** of departments. Many internship programmes in supporting students' career development are bounded by curriculum designs. In addition, there are very few career-related experiential-learning programmes offered on campus. Bryan criticized the lack of career support in the University. He complained that:

'I didn't know there were internship opportunities provided by the University. Even though there was some internship opportunities offered by my department, it was mainly related to laboratory work, which is not in my interest.'

e) Academic development

Experiential learning not only can facilitate participants' personal growth and widen their horizons as well as social network, but also can enhance students' academic development. For instance, exchange programmes offer an opportunity to students to study courses that may not be available in their home University. This enhanced the flexibility in their studies. Yuki, a 24-year-old Social Science alumnus, claimed that her current career development was inspired by a random course she studied during the exchange period. She explained:

'I think that exchange is of great importance. I studied in the School of Journalism and Communication and it was deemed that the University offered a range of courses to choose from. Yet, when I was an exchange student, I realised that other universities provided some courses which cannot be found in CUHK. During the exchange period, we tend not to enrol in courses that are available in CUHK, as we prefer to try something new. For example, I took a course called "Magazine Editing", which cannot be found in CUHK. I've gained interest in magazine editing through that particular course and I am now working in this field.'

In addition, the experience of being an intern in a field related to their discipline allowed students to apply the knowledge they learnt in the lectures during the internship period. The experience consolidated their theoretical knowledge and allowed them to further explore their interest in particular academic areas. Margaret felt that the depth and breadth of her academic knowledge was both enhanced after the internship experience. She said:

'...this process (being an intern) deepens my understanding. I do not gain much knowledge from attending lectures in the University, whereas I obtain some practical knowledge from these experiences. For instance, if someone asks me what kind of food is suited for kindergarten students, I may not be able to answer even though I have completed the course. Yet, my knowledge increased after completing the internship and thus makes me become more professional ... We reckon this is quite useful as we can apply what we have learnt.'

Although students' academic development can be enhanced through experiential learning, their **personal interests** and the **flexibility** of their curriculum designs may vary the extent of their development in such experiences. Some participants argued that some departments have particular high demand on students' academic performance. They created very intensive curriculum for students, which limited their opportunities to

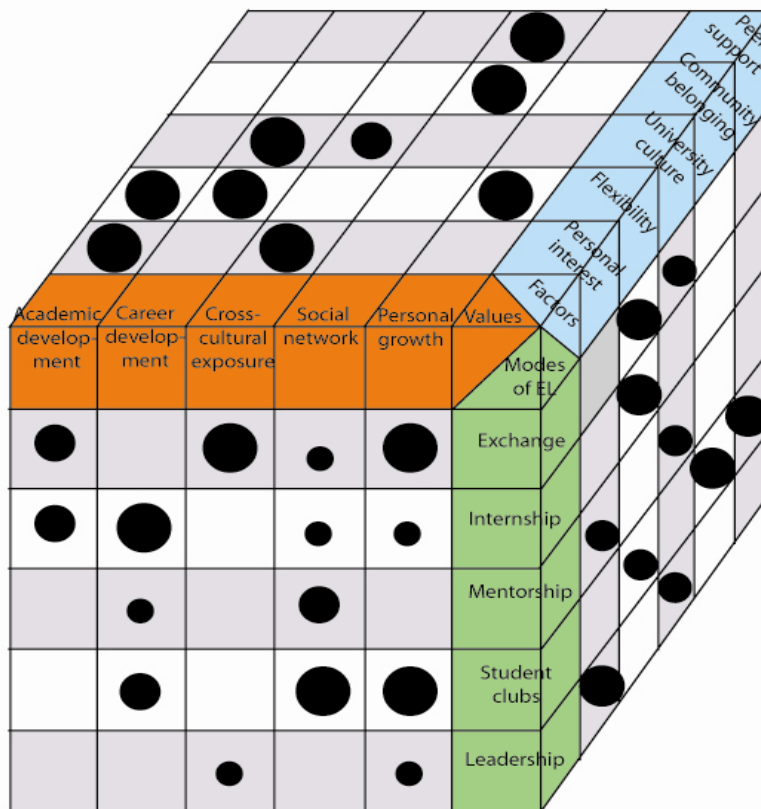
explore their academic interests and restricted their study options. Andrea, a 25-year-old Arts alumnus, explained how the **flexibility** in exchange programmes supported students' academic development. She said:

'...the most important element (in exchange) is the right to choose. I won't insist to fit study abroad credits into my programme ... If it is compulsory to fit a certain amount of study abroad credits into the home programme, we will turn back to a "Hong Kong learning style", which relies too heavily on textbook and focuses only on findings notes and references. As a result, we won't able to learn much.'

Implications and Conclusion

Our findings outlined above indicate that the success of experiential learning depends on student's participation and reflection (AEE, 2002; Seaman, 2006). The understandings and learning outcomes alumni constructed through reflection on concrete experiences are hindered and facilitated by five main factors including flexibility, personal interest, peer support, belonging to related communities/ organizations, and University culture. Figure 1 indicates the interrelationship between modes of experiences, their values and facilitating factors revealed in this study. The size of the circles is indicative of the strength of the relationships.

Figure 1: A matrix model of the impact of experiential learning (EL) in CUHK



Experiential learning has value for students in deep personal growth and self-discovery. This study into the outcomes of experiential learning supports a rationale for the learning gains on undergraduate students in CUHK. Our analysis indicates that a range of experiences through experiential learning are acquired, the extent of positive impacts depends on the quality of student participation. The quality of student participation can be influenced by a number of factors (i.e. curriculum flexibility, students' personal interests, peer support, belonging to related communities/ organizations, and the overall University culture). Our analysis leads us to conclude that it is highly desirable to ensure a provision of equal access to all students in experiential-learning programmes. In addition, facilitation and reflection contribute immensely to the success of experiential learning. Therefore, it is important to provide opportunities and supports for all students to create diversified learning

experiences. As students, it is necessary for them to become active learners to engage in reflection and constructing meaning through experiences.

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Paper 4

Contexts and narratives of attrition for child branch students in nursing: an ethnographic performance

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'A staff nurse from another ward said to my mentor: 'Can I borrow your student?' It was from that point I knew I was just a nameless body in a shameful profession.'

(A Girl Called Student Cohort 208)

'I knew it was going to be hard, but I never anticipated the guilt you feel when ignoring the kids and the other half. He calls himself a University Widower...'

(University Widower's Wife Cohort 107)

'The Child Branch can't even do practical skills because there's no simulation babies.'

(Baby-less Student in Burton Cohort 206)

Abstract

This paper is a report of a study conducted at the University of Wolverhampton to explore and describe in detail the experiences of child branch students when undertaking their Registered Nurse training. The recruitment and retention of nursing students is a major cause of concern both nationally and globally. The implications of high attrition rates are wide ranging for higher education institutions in terms of meeting targets, and incurring financial penalties. One of the aims of Project 2000 was to increase student satisfaction and reduce attrition rates, however, little research has been conducted on the implications of increasing group sizes, and the impact of a common foundation program on students studying smaller branches. Using an ethnographic approach child branch students from six cohorts were invited to attend a focus group interview towards the end of their Common Foundation Program during 2008/09. The findings suggest that student attrition is influenced by: experiences concerning power, surveillance, hierarchy, subject positioning, symbols of identity, maintaining status and the ugly nature of social-hood. That these experiences are variable for each and every student and that the personal characteristics of the student; the ability of each student to conform to the social norms of the profession; the levels of support provided to students both from an educational and clinical perspective are influential in the students' perceptions of these experiences and ultimately influence their behaviour. A number of strategies have been implemented to improve the overall student experience within the School of Health and Wellbeing including: pre-course taster days; appointment of a student advisor and protected learning time during clinical placements.

Introduction

The recruitment and retention of students on nursing programs is a major cause of concern both nationally and globally (Prymachuk, 2009; Gilchrist, 2007; Grainger and Bolan, 2006). The implications of high attrition rates are wide ranging not only for higher education establishments in terms of meeting targets and economic use of resources, but also the impact on staff morale (Council of Deans and Heads, 1998 cited in Glossop, 2002). National Health Service Trusts also have a responsibility to provide a supportive learning environment for students, whilst on placement, and maintain an adequate nursing workforce in order to provide patients with the highest standard of skilled nursing care (Moseley and Mead, 2007). There is also the obvious emotional, social and financial implications for those students who have withdrawn or been discontinued from the programme (Glossop, 2002).

One of the aims of Project 2000 was to increase student satisfaction and reduce attrition rates (Glossop, 2001). At the same time the entry gate for nursing programmes was widened, with a greater proportion of mature students entering nursing. There has also been a steady increase in the number of student nurse recruits (McCarey et al. 2006) leading to ever increasing group sizes. Little research has been undertaken on the implications for smaller branches, of the introduction of a Common Foundation Programme and whether the experiences of (child branch) students during this time has a negative effect on their willingness to complete their nursing programmes.

Aims of this article

The aims of this article are to:

1. Review the literature on student nurse recruitment and retention.
2. Discuss performative ethnography and the limits of its application as a research methodology.
3. Consider some of the emergent ethnographic themes as a way of substantiating the effectiveness of the overall study.

Literature review

A literature review was conducted using an electronic online search using the following databases: British Education Index; British Nursing Index; Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINHAL); Educational Research Abstracts and Netlibrary. Key terms included: nurse recruitment, retention, attrition, ethnography.

Obsessed by Predicting

The growing demand, by the NHS for more qualified nurses has resulted in a year on year increase in the number of student nurse recruits (McCarey, 2007). Finding suitable recruits has been challenging, partly because of the demographic changes to the population but also due to the number of alternative career opportunities available to school leavers. Not surprisingly therefore, much of the literature concerned with student nurse retention is concerned with predicting which students are likely to succeed (Prymachuk, 2009; McCarey, 2007; Moseley & Mead, 2007; McCallum, 2006) in an attempt to develop tools to minimize the selection of high risk students (Wharrad, 2003, Glossop, 2002).

This obsession with predicting who will stay and who will not has tended to focus on demographic variables such as age, academic abilities of students and their personal trait characteristics, e.g. their strength of character; at the expense of the contextual experience of nurse education as a conveyor of complex and multiple learning experiences. The bulk of the studies carried out in North America and Canada have established that the only true predictors of success are previous academic qualifications (Byrd et al 1999; Wong and Wong 1999). However, it is a false belief that academic entry qualifications are the only significant predictors of future academic success. Studies carried out in the UK have identified previous education and age as the most significant predictors of academic success for students studying the Diploma in Nursing (Kevern et al. 1999). Mature students, (aged over 22 years), often with non conventional qualifications, appear to do better academically (White et al. 1999) despite having greater demands placed on them in terms of managing personal relationships, child care and financial commitments.

Evaluating levels of satisfaction

Several studies have focused on the perceptions and levels of student satisfaction with their nursing programmes (Grainger and Bolan, 2006; Karaoz, 2004; Watson, et al. 1999). A number of factors have been identified as contributing to dissatisfaction: lack of clinical preparation, poor course organisation, an unnecessarily high academic level and bias towards the adult branch (Steele, et al. 2005; Ansari, 2004; Kinsella et al. 1999; White et al. 1999). In addition Braithwaite et al. 1994 (cited in Kinsella et al. 1999) identified personal difficulties; family problems and disillusionment as major reasons for withdrawing from the Common Foundation Programme (CFP). Other themes focus on the economic difficulties faced by students and the social and psychological factors contributing to attrition (Stott, 2006, McSherry and Marland, 1999).

Multi-factorial approaches

Prymachuk et al. (2008) suggest that the reasons why students leave are complicated and probably interlinked and that when looking at attrition the factors associated with non-completion (risk factors) and completion (protective factors) should be taken into consideration. The Department of Health (2006) has identified the following factors as contributing to attrition: age on entry (younger students are more likely to drop out); academic attainment on entry (those with minimum entry requirements more likely to drop out); student commitment (those not accepted by their first choice institution and subsequently obtaining a place through

clearing are more likely to drop out); the speciality being undertaken (the child branch speciality in particular has high drop-out rates, particularly during CFP); cultural and ethnic issues (black/minority ethnic students more likely to complete than white students); the widening participation agenda (those with non standard entry qualifications often fare better than those with standard qualifications).

The majority of the literature and research on student nurse retention attempts to pigeon hole retention research in this way, but this does not provide a holistic view of the individual experiences of the students. It is easier to focus on the individual and forget the impact culture, systems and organisations have on the experiences we have and the choices we make.

Methodological Philosophy: Performative Ethnography

Ethnography is one of the oldest qualitative approaches used in nursing research (Oliffe, 2005). As a methodology it provides an effective means of learning *about* people by learning *from* people, and is therefore well suited to describing differing cultures (Roper and Shapira, 2000). An ethnographic research approach is primarily concerned with interpreting the chosen culture under study, however, it is also particularly useful in developing understandings about organizations. As researchers we were interested in developing an understanding of the cultural rules, norms and values of students within the School of Health and Wellbeing and how these informed and influenced the students' behaviours in relation to withdrawing or not from the CFP.

Denzin (2003:3) invites ethnographers and social scientists to re-think the ways that performing cultures can be written. He cites the work of Conquergood (1998) and the sequential developments that ethnographic research has travelled from performance as imitation, or dramaturgical staging (Rock, 2007; Goffman, 1959) to 'an emphasis on performance as liminality and construction' (Cortazzi, 2007; Spencer, 2007). In short, that the performance constituted by culture is a construction which itself creates, generates and constitutes new meaning rather than just merely representing it. For example, a simple representation or drama may instill in the actor a sense that they are imitating responses and behaviours typical to all other students or as typical to how they as individuals always seem to respond, 'I know I will fail this course because I've never been any good doing exams', and at a more analytic depth the belief that, 'in every group there are dynamics which mean I can't get on with everyone'. However, at what Denzin (1997) describes as the seventh moment ethnographers are now at a point of 'performing culture as they write it', and this is something wholly different.

The 'performance' of the student is a new way of thinking about retention research. It focuses on the social and systemic nature of university life as a contextual and collective way of overlapping and merging experiences. The problem with past retention research is that it has tended to hope that the issue is singular e.g. just about a personal trait and about something tangible such as a specified clinical standard that the student cannot meet. However, by viewing retention as a process, as a reflexive performing of culture which is dynamic it is feasible to ask different types of questions in different types of ways and thus, reconsider the purpose of the research.

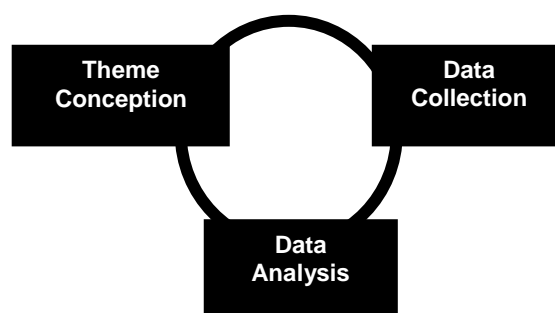


Figure 1: the 3 spectacles of performance happen continuously.

Performance ethnography is the latest development in a long line of anthropological research methodologies and methods. It has the distinct driver that the process and action of all participants, including the researchers, creates meaning. All meaning is constructed and arbitrary to the culture under study. The recent work of Gobo (2008) and Smith & Gallo (2008) supports the idea that we are now in the age of the post-modern ethnographer. This can be described as an approach which ‘disputes the authority of the objective participant’. It criticises classic ethnography for being what Denzin (1997) describes as ‘realist, impersonal and falsely neutral’. In short, this means that ‘truths’ about retention could not be located by the authors just because they were, ‘simply there’. The performative ethnographer is a dynamic contributor to the data collection process, the tool by which meaning is made and interpreted in the process of performance. The post-structural factors that play havoc with the usual accounts of retention (e.g. Ethnicity, age, maturity, finances) are recognised as existing even if they are not within the dynamics of the performance, and then, interpreted as fictions, as stories, as narratives, and provide a different way of looking at the politics of retention (Also see Crang & Cook, 2007, Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Holyoake, 2002, 2001, Travers, 2001).

The study

The aim of the study was to explore and describe in detail the experiences of child branch students when undertaking their Registered Nurse training at the University of Wolverhampton, in order to identify those factors that may contribute to student attrition.

Research Design

The study was concerned with the students’ stories and cultural experience of ‘doing’ the child branch. Ethnography lends and shares much of the constructionist philosophical foundation, which allows for an intimate exploration of these phenomena. Ethnography is a form of social research concerned with exploring the mundane, dismissible and even ugly truths of how people interact with each other and the objects within their culture. According to Spradley (1979), the aim of an ethnographic study is to understand another way of life from the native’s point of view, in the hope of learning from them. This approach enabled the researchers to explore the experiences of students within the wider context of their families; their social networks, the environment of the School of Health and Wellbeing and their placements. It was envisaged that these factors would have some influence on the difficulties the students experienced, the ways in which they were able to cope and ultimately on their decision whether or not to withdraw (Glossop, 2001).

Population and sample

Sampling in ethnography initially requires a broad approach to enable ethnographers to meet and have conversations with as many members of the culture under study as possible (Polit and Beck, 2006). Later ethnographers may focus on gathering data from a small number of key informants. It is important to recruit as diverse a group of informants as possible in order to ensure information richness. The study sample for the project was purposeful and aimed to include all child branch students undertaking the RN Dip HE. In practice this meant a complete sample of 140 student nurses who made up 6 cohorts (20 to 30 per cohort).

Data Collection

The principle method of data collection was in keeping with the anthropological tradition as noted in all ethnographic literature (Smith & Gallo, 2007; Madison, 2005; Spradley, 1979). Data were collected via focus group interviews conducted by the researchers at the end of CFP. Students were asked to describe their experiences on the course, the researchers then explored particular areas of concern as identified by the participants. The questions asked of the participants were deliberately broad and open in order to encourage the students to talk about what was important to them, as a result of their experiences, rather than direct them along a specific line of questioning.

The promotion of a relaxed and conversational style of data collection helped to break down the potential barriers between the two authors (who are senior lecturers) and the students who sometimes perceive themselves to be powerless and need to be ‘careful about what they say’. This of course is just the type of

cultural meaning that performative ethnography aims to explore. In practice, it meant that data was collected in stages with one cohort being asked to join both authors in conversations about retention and life at the university. The data collected from one group would then be used to help structure the next focus group with a different cohort (See figure 1 for a simple diagram).

Due to the guiding principles of performance ethnography (interpret data as fictions, stories, and narratives), there is a consistent feedback loop and collaboration between the researcher and the researched. The actual data collection process never ended. As with most ethnographic studies there are no easily definable sections or phases to the data collection and subsequent analysis. The two occurred hand in hand, with the one part informing the other. One of the strengths of the methodology was the allowances it made for multi layering and organising data for analysis into contextual domains and ethnographic themes which represented meaningful cultural utterances.

Ethical considerations

There is inevitably a difference in perceived power between the nurse lecturers conducting the research and the students who were asked to participate, to the extent that the students may not have felt they had the freedom to refuse. In order to overcome any feelings of coercion, students were invited to participate by letter. Their consent was sought prior to participation and they were reassured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

The researchers were mindful that during discussions with students they may become aware of circumstances or situations which posed a hazard for either staff, students or patients. Students were therefore asked to ensure that they protected the anonymity of staff and patients when discussing their experiences, and to raise any concerns with their personal teachers, subject coordinator or student advisor. Ethical approval was sought and granted by the School of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee.

Data analysis

Ethnographic data analysis is a search for patterns in the behaviour and thoughts of the participants (Polit and Beck, 2006) as these patterns make up the culture. Ethnographers use particular structural models of analysis to acquire a deeper understanding of the culture being studied. Data was analysed using Spradley's (1979) Developmental Research Sequence (Fig 3). Spradley's structural approach to analysis in ethnography works on the principle of exploring the multiple possibilities of semantic relationships between what he calls folk terms and collective cover terms (the names people give things in their culture e.g. 'doing the bed pans'). This initial approach to analysing the data allowed for a structuring and 'making sense' of the retention issues the students considered important as opposed to what the authors might consider of value. The structural Developmental Research Sequence (Spradley, 1979, cited in Polit and Beck, 2006) has 12 steps, which include both data collection and data analysis (see figure 3). The primary task was to organise the data with the help of the students into 100's of domains.

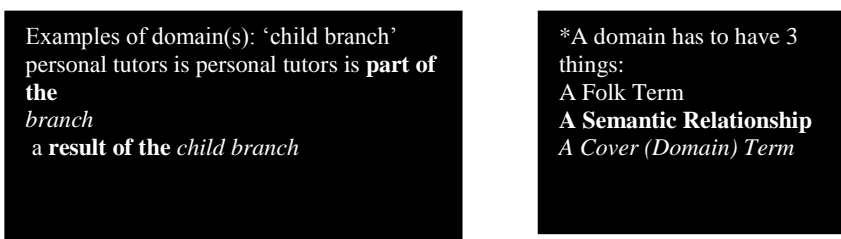


Figure 2: Examples of a domain

- Locating an informant
- *Interviewing an informant*
- *Making an ethnographic record*
- Asking descriptive questions
- Analysing ethnographic interviews
- Making a domain analysis*
- Asking structural questions
- Making a taxonomic analysis
- Asking contrast questions
- Making a componential analysis
- Discovering cultural themes
- Writing the ethnography

Figure 3: Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence (1979).

Once the authors had developed their primary domains (to list a few out of hundreds: Child Branch Nursing, Support, Peers, Money, Tearful Phone calls, Course Expectations, Personal Tutors, Favouritism, Being Ignored), it was possible to start building taxonomies (lists) of all the related folk terms students might suggest belong to each domain. As can be seen this is a long and tiresome process, but it helped to build up a complete and structured appreciation of related cultural markers related to retention in nurse education. To date, the authors have decided upon 3 core ethnographic themes (see figure 4). The following cultural utterances are examples of those which were used to build the structured Domains and Taxonomies during the months of data collection:

- my husband is a 'university widower'
- 'the placements kept me going'
- The personal tutor role is poorly assigned
- 'I was told to stop whinging and to get on with it'
- the university centred course
- 'can I borrow your student?'
- £1.50 an hour
- 'they tagged us on to the end'
- Little faith in the lecturers knowledge
- Lack of personal touch

Findings

Over the initial period of collecting data from three of the cohorts the authors were overwhelmed with the types of data given above. The raw utterances were scrambled into loosely fitting domains and then fed back to following cohorts in an attempt to verify their authenticity. But in addition to building domains and taxonomic ethnographies the authors were also concerned to avoid what Spradley (1979) termed 'translating' the data so that a type of post structural analysis could be applied. The work of McKee (2003) allowed the authors to add a

textual analysis to the already formed domains. Thus the theme: 'University Widower' is taken from a comment made by a student that her husband makes her feel guilty for being at university. This sentiment was echoed by many mature nursing students, especially those with children who had to perform on at least two stages. First, there was the home life system and second, the demands of the university. But instead of focusing on the way these demands are individual and the responsibility of the student, the authors were able to think more about the mundane, up close, personal meanings associated with the conflict in performance and a new language for thinking about retention narratives.

The realisation that the domains as seen in figure 4 lend themselves to a visual analysis and a new language shows the possibilities of utilizing new models of analysis as highlighted by Rose (2007, p79) who in the semiotic tradition of Spradley points out that it is possible to focus analysis on the nature of the semantic relationship between the signifier (e.g. The need to be on the one hand a diligent student and on the other a dutiful mother) and the multiple signification (non caring mother, over burdened student, competent and organized person, vulnerable incapable learner). Rose (2007) notes Roland Barthes (1977 :78) and the importance of anchorage and how Semiology offers a detailed vocabulary for specifying what particular signs are doing and being in a social performance (Rose, 2007:87). In particular, the notion of voyeurism and the compositional organization of meaning between actors are significant aspects. (Mulvey, 1989). Therefore, the three themes shown in figure 4 offer an exploration and at best an interpretation of cultural iconography which is a variance of social experience for the students.



Figure 4: 3 Performative Ethnographies.

All of the concepts above are about the culture, the collective and the performance expected of students. Each of the utterances is recognizable to anyone who has attended a university education. As flamboyant as some may appear, there is no doubt that they all harbour within them a 'realness' which is different to the usual stunted and predictive concepts of previous retention research. This performative approach to exploring is ripe for criticism, but early feedback from students and colleagues has shown an appreciation for the way this methodology has not succumbed to the temptation of trying to 'make things easy and simple'. The performance of retention is anything but simple. It is personal. It is culture.

To date the research has structured over a 1000 ethnographic folk terms which have cultural meaning for most students. Some of these include issues related to: 'neglecting family', 'having no money' and 'feeling the pressure of handing in assignments'. But the study has also highlighted how students have stories about 'being tagged onto the end' by lecturers who 'often appear to be bored'. Or as one student said 'being known as a girl called 'student''. These are the untold stories unique to this study, which are often conveniently forgotten in other articles about retention. This study has allowed for taxonomies and domains to develop which contextualize many of the concepts actors in the world of retention encounter in their everyday mundane work. This study

has been about accepting the mundane as being meaningful and co-constructed at any given time. Therefore the average experience of the disgruntled student nurse is something universal, whilst feeling so personal, because it circulates in the grids, bustle and webs of meaning being constantly generated and constituted. Therefore, the performance ethnography is about the audience being involved in the play. This may take the form of perhaps directing it, influencing the mood, 'doing' decisions about the next script, doing the scenery and the sting in the tail.

Conclusion

By using a 'different methodology' to explore the nature of retention it has been possible to ask different types of research question: 'What is it like here at the university?' 'When thinking about student retention, what would be useful for us to know about?' Other ethnographic structural questions asked included: What are all the things your peers say about that assignment? These types of questions are geared towards not asking about the individual, but about the impact of the university and the way university structures, systems, expectations and ways of socialising large groups (up-to 200 students in a single cohort of mixed branches) influence student experiences and the choices they make (Madison, 2005). There is a recognition every individual student comes into contact with the university discourse (which is made up of people, metaphor, fantasies, histories, the physical environment and working structures). This discourse then forces each student to participate in a personal performance which generates anxiety and specific meaning which ultimately influences their behaviour: do I stay or do I go? This project was not a replication of previous research, instead it wanted to explore the 'up-close' nature of failure, the dirty linen of nursing politics, the possibility that there can never be an all defining model from which to base substantive conclusions about student nurse retention.

A number of strategies have already been implemented to improve the overall student experience within the School of Health and Wellbeing at the University of Wolverhampton including: pre-course taster days; the appointment of a student advisor and protected learning time during clinical placements. It is hoped that these will help to provide students with a more realistic view of the demands of the nursing programme as well as the realities of clinical practice, and simultaneously studying at a higher academic level.

*Part I: *No Babies in Burton*TM (Presented January 2009 - University of Wolverhampton, UK.)

** Part II: *A Girl Called Student*TM (Presented May 2009 - University of Groningen , NL)

***Part III: *University Widower*TM (Presented in September, 2009 - University of Salford)

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Paper 5

Knocking on the door: how do students enter the disciplinary community of practice?

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Abstract

This paper explores how students on a professional course (prosthetics and orthotics) become members of that community. It uses Lave & Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice to explore whether they were able to legitimately participate within the university setting before they went on placement. Students participated in focus groups and a postal focus group. A thematic analysis of the data was undertaken. Five themes were identified: speaking as a prosthetist/orthotist, doing rather than being told, negotiating what a prosthetist/orthotist is, and beliefs, attitudes, and values. It appears that there are tacit knowledge and skills that could be made explicit in educational programmes. The findings showed that in this case students were becoming members of the community of practice before going on placement suggesting that legitimate peripheral participation does not only occur in work based learning. The data collection and the data analysis are also a contribution to the theme of student voices at the ECE conference.

Introduction

Health care education involves a process of socialisation into a profession (Clouder, 2003; Dorman & Bundy, 2004; Howkins & Ewens, 1999; Lindquist et al. 2006) as well as understanding and using esoteric knowledge (Benoit, 1989). Whilst the best way to achieve this has been debated over the years (Benoit, 1989), in the UK health care courses have moved or are moving into higher education. As well as university based formal learning, health care education also includes work based learning. This type of learning has been explored using social practice theory, especially Lave & Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation within communities of practice. But can situated learning theory also be applied to formal learning?

Prosthetists and orthotists are an allied health professions regulated by the Health Professions Council. Prosthetists assess, diagnose functional need, prescribe and fit artificial limbs (prostheses) to people who have lost a limb through trauma or disease and to those who are born without limbs. Orthotists assess, diagnose functional need, prescribe and provide splints and braces (orthoses) for people with a variety of different conditions such as cerebral palsy and rheumatoid arthritis in order to correct, stabilise or protect parts of their body. Entry to the profession is through a degree in Prosthetics and Orthotics. These courses have consisted of three years of class room based education together with simulated clinical practice. The final fourth year is then spent entirely on clinical placement. This differs from other allied health courses where placements are spread throughout the duration of the course.

Communities of Practice and Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Lave & Wenger (1991:8) state that a community of practice is "...a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice." Wenger (1998:73) states that communities of practice share three aspects: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and have a shared repertoire. Lave & Wenger used the concept to explore how student midwives, butchers, tailors and quartermasters learn the knowledge and skills necessary for their role. There have also been studies using communities of practice to analyse professions involving health care including anaesthetics (Goodwin et al. 2005), midwives (Blåka, 2006), general practice (Cornford & Carrington, 2006) and nursing (Spouse, 1998) and in other professional areas such as further education lecturers (Bathmaker & Avis, 2005), and teachers (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004, Sim, 2005). All these professions involve both classroom based and workplace based education before qualification.

Lave & Wenger (1991) state that newcomers to the community achieve membership through what they identify as "legitimate peripheral participation". Newcomers have permission to be part of that community but are acting on the edge of it moving inwards towards full participation. They used it to explore how workplace or situated learning occurs for people new to that area of work. Goodwin et al. (2005) consider legitimacy to be

akin to a “security clearance” in that participants are given access to restricted areas, opportunities and experiences.

But can the concept be used to explore professional learning outside the workplace? Lave & Wenger (1991:63) use it to explore apprenticeships but in their definition of apprenticeships they include professions such as medicine and law. They also include in their analysis an area of work (butchers) that includes attendance at a “trade school” although in their analysis the non-situated learning is not seen in a positive light. However, Lave (1996) does move this forward and does include formal education within the concept of a community of practice. In this paper the concepts will be applied to an existing course as a tool to explore how students are integrated into a community of practice.

Language

Within any community there are ways of communicating that are essential to becoming part of that community: “language is the medium of culture” (Blåka, 2006). It is necessary to enable the shared meaning, joint enterprise and mutual engagement of the community. Lave’s (1988) analysis of language as an evidence of a “way of thinking and practicing” has not been fully developed (Edwards, 2005) and it has been stated that within the concept of communities of practice that no theory of communication has been developed (Dysthe et al. 2006; Tusting 2005). Tusting (2005) explores this in relation to Wenger’s (1998) concept of negotiation of meaning and states that any negotiation of meaning must involve language and that language forms a part of many of the shared repertoires within communities of practice.

Identity and Professional Socialisation

Wenger (1998) explores identity and argues that it cannot be separated from learning and the communities of which we are part. He states that identity is developed through meeting of engagement, imagination and alignment. Alignment is used to describe how people become connected to the bigger picture through coordination of practices, actions and energies. Engagement involves the meeting of negotiation of meaning, forming pathways within the community, and an understanding of the history of the practice. As the three aspects of engagement occur and link together a sense of belonging is formed and becomes a source of identity. Imagination Wenger uses to explain the differences in what we perceive our role to be and how it can develop within the world. Adapting Wenger’s story of stonemasons, one prosthetist may view what they are doing as fitting legs; another may view what they do as empowering people to achieve their potential.

Clouder (2003) states that student professionals are moulded into a professional identity both consciously and unconsciously but this fails to account for the differences between individuals within the same profession, nor for the impact of how individuals shape their professional identity. In developing a professional identity through professional socialisation both structure and identity need to be considered. Lindquist et al. (2006) found that among physiotherapy students there were three distinctly different professional identities: empowerer, educator and treater. These different identities may affect professional development for these students and therefore raises the question: do the different identities need to be considered in the development of professional courses both at pre- and post-qualification levels? Howkins & Ewens (1999) found that with nursing students the constructs that formed their identity changed over the course, particularly for those with no prior relevant experience again linking with the omission of the effect of prior experience within community of practice theory.

A Community of Practice?

Is prosthetics and orthotics a community of practice? Prosthetics and orthotics involves prosthetists/orthotists, technicians, assistants, other health care professionals, administration staff and prosthetic and orthotic patients, so it could be considered to be a constellation of practices (Wenger, 1998:126) with individual workplaces as communities of practice. But prosthetists and orthotists across the UK share the three aspects Wenger identified. The practices are similar across the UK. They are engaged in identifying and discussing their practice with the other prosthetists and orthotists that they work with every day, with their colleagues and friends who work elsewhere through informal conversations, courses, conferences and web forums. They work to provide appropriate prosthetic and orthotic management for the service user – their joint enterprise. And they share

language, use standardised procedures and tools. Therefore I consider that prosthetists and orthotists are a community of practice.

So as a prosthetist/orthotist, a member of the community of practice into which students are aiming to enter, with a strong professional identity, I became interested in how and when the students “became” participants of and developed their identity within this community. Despite the students of prosthetics and orthotics not undertaking any

placement learning until the end of their course, were they able to legitimately participate and develop their identities towards becoming a prosthetist/orthotist during their three university based years as well as the fourth placement year? Undertaking the degree is accepted by the community of practice of prosthetists and orthotists as a legitimate activity in peripheral participation (Fuller et al. 2005), as the only way into the profession. Hodkinson & Hodkinson (2003) also state that formal learning can be very influential for learning in professional work. It was my view that during the course students identity developed from being a student of prosthetics and orthotics to being a prosthetist/orthotist, but how did this happen? The aim of the study was to use the concept of legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice to explore how students became part of that community through answering the following questions. What aspects do students identify as developments in their progression towards becoming a member of the community of practice of prosthetists/orthotists? Does this happen during formal learning at the university as well as work based learning? What impact does this information have for curriculum development? As Blåka (2006) explains for the midwifery profession:

“becoming a midwife is about joining the community of practice represented by qualified midwives, as much as it is about learning the technicalities of midwifery”.

Method

The researcher’s role

Before becoming a lecturer, I was a prosthetist/orthotist working within an inter-disciplinary team setting in a hospital in the UK. The participants knew me as a lecturer in prosthetics and orthotics. My experience made me familiar with the settings, activities, and language experienced by the participants. This prior knowledge had advantages in that I was able to gather data without asking the participants to explain in detail what they meant with regard to certain terms, activities etc. However, I may have been over familiar with the information being given to me, leading to assumptions being made without seeking clarification (Blåka, 2006).

Sampling

Once ethical approval had been given by the university, students were invited to participate through speaking to years 1 – 3 and by putting up posters on their notice boards. Students in year 4 on placement received a letter containing the same information provided to years 1-3 together with a consent form.

Data collection

Three semi-structured focus groups were conducted with students in their year groups (a total of 9 students; 2 male and 7 female; 3 1st years, 2 2nd years and 4 3rd years). An introduction to the purpose of the focus group (based on a format by Litosseliti, (2003)) was read to the group and consent forms were signed prior to commencing the questions and recording. The focus groups were transcribed verbatim and students were given a copy of the transcript. The students in year 4 of the programme were on placement and unable to attend a focus group. On-line discussion boards have been used as computer mediated focus groups (Walston and Lissitz, 2000) and these can occur both synchronously and asynchronously. However, an on-line discussion board style focus group was not an option as confirmation of internet access was not possible. A questionnaire sent by post or email did not provide the discursive nature of a focus group. However, consensus research using the Delphi technique (Parahoo, 1997:168-170 and Robson, 2002:57) utilises the concept of asking for participants views via a questionnaire, collating and returning them for comment. Due to logistical issues email was excluded as an option. Therefore students in year four participated in a paper based postal focus group with responses being collated and returned for further comment.

Analysis

All transcripts were read and a thematic analysis was undertaken. This analysis involved reading through the transcripts to enable familiarisation with the data. Substantive statements within the data were identified (Gillham, 2005). Themes informed by the concepts of legitimate peripheral participation, community of practice, identity and professional socialisation emerged through further reading of the transcripts. Similarities and differences in these themes both within and across the different focus groups were sought.

Findings

From the analysis several themes emerged. These were seeing as a prosthetist/orthotist, negotiating what a prosthetist/orthotist is, doing rather than being told, speaking as a prosthetist/orthotist, and understanding and developing the beliefs, attitudes and values of the profession. The examples provided are evocative of the overall findings. Within the excerpts given all names are pseudonyms, data editing is indicated by “(…)” and insertions and explanations are in square brackets.

Seeing as a prosthetist/orthotists

Visual analysis is an important aspect of the role of the prosthetist/orthotist, clinicians and lecturers talk about students needing the “prosthetic/orthotic eye”. Prosthetist/orthotists watch people’s movement and need to ensure that the patient is walking the best that can be achieved. Initially this may be simply seeing what effect in a change in position of the prosthesis has on the persons walking.

“I think, um, during our practical, um, trans-tibial, erm, the concept of er, abduction and adduction [moving the limb away from and towards the midline of the body] and stuff, where you can, er, actually change things (mumbles) to say make the limb more abducted or something and then you actually see the outcome, to help the patient walk and that’s kind of, actually makes you feel like a professional, you can actually do the job, kind of thing”

Craig, year 1

The prosthetist/orthotist recognises movement problems and corrects them using knowledge and skills that have become tacit. Students progress to automatically spotting problems and being able to correct them, whilst feeling less able when they are not able to automatically identify them

“The “prosthetist/orthotists eye” is definitely something I think I’ve developed over the past year although before coming on placement I was very blind! There are still things I miss and feel annoyed when this happens but when I do notice things and know how to rectify them (like gait deviations) [differences from a normal walking pattern] I feel great like I’m really progressing.”

Linda, year 4

As well as using this aspect within the clinic it also penetrates into non-clinical life and becomes part of a prosthetist/orthotists normal behaviour.

“...[there are] people in front of you in the street and you can see how their trainers are, sort of, really caved in on one side and you think I know what’s wrong with you”

Amanda, year 1

This understanding and gaining of the “eye” is important in identity development and in enabling students to feel that they are progressing into the community. As they move inwards, seeing as a prosthetist/orthotist becomes tacit and “normal” behaviour. It separates them from non-prosthetists/orthotists.

Negotiating what is a prosthetist/orthotist

Understanding within themselves what a prosthetist/orthotist is, how it differs from and what the similarities are with other health care professions is important in progression as this first year describes after a module where they learned about other professions and their relationship to prosthetics and orthotics

“The lectures looking at other professions, makes you feel a bit more like a group when you pick up those sort of concepts of what other people are doing...”

Craig, year 1

This realisation and understanding of the role of a prosthetist/orthotist progresses into placements, when as part of the clinical team the students are working with an interdisciplinary team to provide the appropriate management for the patient.

“...through talking to other p/o’s [prosthetist/orthotists] and other members of the MDT [Multi-Disciplinary Team] you gather a more clear understanding of your role and the impact you can have not only on the patient but also on other members of the MDT who dominate the patients treatment following your intervention ...”

Alex, year 4

Prosthetists and orthotists work with technicians to provide prosthetic/orthotic management for patients. Understanding these different roles appears to help the students in understanding what their future role is. The following student had spent time before starting the course on work experience and went to visit a different clinic half way through year 1.

“When I was there [work experience] I learnt the practical side of everything, I was with the technicians a lot and like, I’d go and see patients but it was more like, just watching and talking to the patients and just like, erm, building up my communication skills. Erm, but when I went to XXXX I was, you know, I was with the prosthetist, and I was you know, I was doing the prosthetist thing [laughs], I liked it.”

Karen, year 1

Realising what could appear to be minor changes in behaviour for the student maybe more difficult for others outside prosthetics and orthotics to understand. This realisation can also have an impact in identity development. This third year student refers to an internalisation of the role

“... my mum said the other day “I’ve just washed your whites [uniform] and they’re full of plaster”, and I just went “yeah, that’s what I do” and she said “well I’ve just had to pick it off” and [I] said “don’t if you don’t want to, I’ll do it” and she was like, “well, you can’t go to a patient with plaster on you” and I said “well obviously I can’t go covered in plaster” and she was “can you not put any overalls on?” and I was like “that’s kind of what they are”. ... we have all got used to putting your whites on, tying your hair back, you know, not having your jewellery on, just your normal professional things.”

Julia, year 3

Whilst prosthetics and orthotics is a small profession, students sometimes do not realise this until they go on placement in year four. Opportunities to see the prosthetics and orthotics world outside university do exist prior to the placement year. Feeling that you are part of something bigger than just a student on one course and being accepted by the wider community impacted on one student who attend two conferences in her first year.

“...”I went to a big BAPO [British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists] conference in Blackpool and that were, [it] just blew my mind, it was all these erm, machines going on and all this new technology, and it was just like, it was like a toy, I was like a child in a toy shop. It was just like oh come on lets just get my hands on everything. I was trying everything out and that made me feel part of something, part of a huge big, load of people and I met people at BAPO who’d obviously had stands in the exhibition at ISPO [International Society of Prosthetics and Orthotics] and it was “oh weren’t you at ..” and that made you feel part of something.”

Amanda, year 1

But sometimes students have bad experiences of the wider community and this can provide a potential reversing of the movement into the community of practice. This first year explains the negative experience of one of her colleagues

“...there’s two people on our course [who] went to a bad limb centre and they had a horrible time and there was a girl who was considering dropping out because it was such a negative experience for her. But we were trying to explain that there not all like that and it’s only from going to, it’s only from experience that you can say that.”

Karen, year 1

The ability to understand what their role as prosthetist/orthotist is and its similarities and differences with other members of the interdisciplinary team clearly assists with the students' progression into the community. They may have to explain to others what to them has become normal and implicit. Through meeting the community of practice out with the university they may feel more welcomed into the community or excluded from it. These experiences have potential implications that need to be considered by both lecturers and clinicians. The students here have shown progress in their understanding of the joint enterprise of the community and in engaging and aligning with the identity of prosthetists/orthotists.

Doing rather than being told

All year groups commented that they needed to be told what to do less and less as they progressed. Being given more responsibility and processes becoming automatic appears to help them with identity development and learning. Often this was to do with practical aspects of the role as explained by this second year

"I think everyone's more comfortable in the workshop. People just, the first year in the workshop it was like a bunch of mannequins stood round and everyone just looking at their toolboxes and looking at the machines and sort of scared. And now people are fighting over the oven, because they want to whack their bit of plastic in and grab it and drape it [vacuum mould hot plastic over a solid plaster cast]."

Greg, year 2

The third year students also realised in later years that they will soon be responsible for a person's prosthetic/orthotic management. Some times this was an apparently simple thing as explained in the extract below.

"I think even going and just getting your patient from the waiting area and bringing them in. I know that sounds really silly but it's like...they're actually your patient and not just someone that you're practicing on"

Ellen, 3rd year

Some progress in processes and procedures becoming automatic can occur early and quickly, assisted by repetition of tasks

"...in the beginning your doing it step by step and your following all the rules and the next time you miss out some rules and you just do it automatically, and the next time you just do it. I love that feeling, you know, and you're like, and you think back to like, three weeks ago and I must do this and I go to step two but now I've just done it, just automatically."

Karen, year 1

Normally feedback is given by the lecturers on student's practical work. Once in clinic they will be expected to make their own decisions on whether their work is acceptable and of an appropriate standard. This third year student commented on how it felt to have to self assess her own work

"...normally we'd come and check with you [the lecturer], but assessing it ourselves makes you feel like you've got a bit more responsibility I suppose"

Alice, year 3

Praise from lecturers also assists with students feeling that they are progressing in their practical abilities. This is seen as positive and supportive reassurance from "oldtimers"

"And you hand it over and he [the lecturer] goes "that's good that", you know, and I'm like "I did that all by myself". It's only a cast, but I did it all by myself. It's a good feeling"

Karen, year 1

Overall, students move from being told when and how to do every activity to knowing what is expected of them for certain areas of work. These processes and procedures also become automatic and part of the tacit behaviour of prosthetist/orthotists. There are ways to enable the student to see that they are progressing such as praise and self-assessment.

Speaking as a Prosthetist/Orthotist

Language is an important factor in being part of a community. The language prosthetists and orthotists use is initially incomprehensible but eventually it becomes part of their normal speech.

“... it was really hard at first ... [I’m thinking] why don’t you [the lecturer] just say forwards and backwards and up and down? It’d be so much easier and then you understand why once you start using them yourself. But again you do only start using them properly in 2nd year really, at the end of 2nd year”

Julia, year 3

Like seeing as a prosthetist/orthotist students find that they begin to use prosthetic/orthotic language in everyday, non-clinical/non-university life as Greg explains in relation to a climbing trip.

“I was following Henry [another Pe&O student] on a climb the other day, and he had his foot trapped and I said “you need to move your leg, sort of laterally” [away from the body’s midline] and he just laughed at me going “you’re not in the gait [walking] lab now”“

Greg, year 2

But it also involves being able to communicate more freely with patients, moving from asking a list of questions to additionally being able to communicate with the patients on a more personal level. This is an important aspect of being a prosthetist/orthotist as the majority of the patients we see will be coming back to us for life.

“... like in first year you have like: name, date of birth, side of amputation and you just literally used to sit with your head down until you’re let out kind of thing. Whereas now you can just have a joke “

Stacy, year 3

It also means that you are speaking a common language with other health care professionals and can feel part of a bigger constellation of practice or individual workplace communities of practice

“... language is very important and helps with integration into the MDT [multi-disciplinary team] and improves understanding of what everyone’s talking about”

Linda, year 4

Beliefs, attitudes and values

Prosthetists and orthotists must ensure that they are equitable towards all patients. Being able to treat people with the same attitude no matter what the situation is important even when you may inside feel otherwise.

“...that guy the other day, and he had like all his toes amputated and he was really nice man. And it was so nice of him to come in and show us his feet and everything. But I was with the foot that [had] all the toes amputated and they were really infected and really, really smelt bad and I think you have to kind of learn to get a face not to show that anything smells or anything”

Ellen, year 3

Due to the nature of prosthetics and orthotics it requires invasion of personal space and palpation of body parts. Therefore it is important for students to understand what patients may be feeling when we have to undertake the necessary practices to enable the making of a prosthesis or orthosis. Some of this understanding of how a patient might be feeling, the students develop through their own individual experiences and others they develop through listening and watching how the “oldtimers”, the lecturers behave, act and explain.

“I do remember you [the lecturer] saying though in a lecture erm, “right everyone stand up and feel your IT [ischial tuberosity – the bone you sit on], feel your own and then feel your neighbours” and then we did it and thought “what have we just done that for?” and we sat down and you said, like, “now remember how you feel” and that’s, that’s what’s always stuck in my mind, ‘cause I thought, you know, it’s not very nice, ‘cause you just do it”

Julia, year 3

Developing how prosthetists think and act in relation to patients is part of their progression into the community. They learn that they must treat patients with dignity and have some understanding of what it is like to have the necessary procedures practiced on them. Overall in all of the themes there was progression into the community and development of their identity as a prosthetist/orthotist through a variety of different aspects. Many students felt that whilst they were becoming prosthetists/orthotists they were not there yet. However this student in year 3 did feel like they were a prosthetist/orthotist

“I felt like that [a prosthetist/orthotist] when we did, was it trans-humeral [above-elbow level of amputation], um, Adam [her son] came and I was showing him my arm and he said “what’s that?” and I said “it’s an arm I made today” and he just sat looking at it and he went “you’re clever you, Mum” and I went “I know I am” and I thought I can do it. I felt like one then”
Alice, year 3

Discussion

From the data it seems that students were legitimately peripherally participating in the community of practice from year 1 and they could feel progression into the community as they progressed through the course. This progression of participation occurred through language, use of knowledge through sight and understanding of roles and developing the views of prosthetists and orthotists in relation to others especially the patient.

The development of language clearly is important to the students learning and their development as a prosthetist/orthotist. Understanding the terminology used by experienced prosthetists and orthotists is part participating as a member in the community allowing mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a sharing of repertoires through the negotiation of meaning. Language development should be encouraged and explained to the students. Should the acquisition of disciplinary language be an explicit outcome of a programme of study?

Within all professions practical skills are essential whether these are physical skills or cognitive skills. Being able to utilise these skills automatically is part of everyday work. Students are able to develop and attain these not just through placement learning but also through simulated and relevant learning experiences at university. Developing your own professional identity also includes understanding the similarities and differences of other roles you may encounter in relation to your own (Howkins & Ewens, 1999). In health care education, inter-professional education is part of government policy but the understanding of professions other than your own is not covered in the expectations of what inter-professional education should cover (DH, 2000).

Conclusion

This study was developed due to my professional identity as a prosthetist/orthotist and an interest in when and how students achieved this professional identity. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice provided a useful framework to analyse this. The findings from this study do not attempt to be generalisable but do provide insights on the progression of particular prosthetic and orthotic students, into the community of practice of prosthetists and orthotists. Different students may have had different experiences in becoming a prosthetist/orthotist. The students who participated in this study had different prior experiences and this had not been considered in their progression. This is an area for further study.

The findings show that there is progression through legitimate peripheral participation during the course and not just on placement. For these students the factors that assisted their progression were seeing and speaking as a prosthetist/orthotist, undertaking the processes and procedures with increasing automation, developing their own understandings of what a prosthetist/orthotist is, and realising what and how prosthetist/orthotists believe and act. Some of these themes may be implicit within the curriculum and its learning outcomes. Making these aspects of the “ways of thinking and practising” (Entwistle, 2005) and “the underlying game” (Perkins, 2006) explicit may make students, lecturers and clinical supervisors understand how and what students need to progress in addition to the esoteric knowledge (Benoit, 1989) of the profession.

Many health care professional courses have placements interspersed throughout the course and entry into the community of practice and the development of a professional identity may occur more quickly in these circumstances. Some of these aspects are not always made explicit to the students. The findings here support the suggestion that the idea of legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice is not limited to work based learning, but can begin through appropriate learning opportunities in a university setting.

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Paper 6

The Foundation degree experience: Expressions of transformation and multiple identities.

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Abstract

Economic and democratic agendas underlie the introduction of the Foundation degree (Fd); an economic drive to up - skill the workforce amidst global market place competition, whilst simultaneously widening participation in Higher Education and stimulating lifelong learning. Critically positioned within and spanning these two competing agendas is the Fd. This research aims to capture the views and experiences of a cohort of students undertaking the Fd in Health and Social Care at the University of Southampton. The study comprises a flexible design, using face to face interviews to generate qualitative, primary data, collated in conjunction with secondary data in the form of government papers and official reports. Thematic and documental analysis is applied in order to draw out key findings for discussion. Initial observations suggest that many students undergo a transformational experience during their journey into, through and beyond the Fd programme, developing as confident and critical thinkers. In addition, striving to balance two learning environments (work-based and academic), in addition to maintaining a home/family environment, the employee/learner's changing sense of self can reflect conflicting elements of multiple identities, whilst highlighting the value of communication and partnership equality in effective, collaborative working. For future Higher Education programmes to fully capitalise on integrating academic, work-based learning and employer engagement, the key voice of the Fd student experience needs to be heard.

Introduction

Fds were introduced in 2001 by David Blunkett whilst Secretary of State for Education (DfES, 2000) with the objective of addressing skills shortages at the associate practitioner and higher technician level, to contribute to the widening participation agenda and to promote collaboration between employers, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and Higher Education (HE) providers. Global economic competitiveness and the need for increased skills were cited as key drivers (HEFCE, 2000; HEFCE, 2001). Fds were expected to meet these needs by blending academic knowledge with technical and transferable skills required by employers, whilst facilitating lifelong learning for the workforce. According to the Quality Assurance Agency, the distinctiveness of Fds depends upon the integration of the following characteristics: employer involvement; accessibility; articulation and progression; flexibility; and partnership (QAA, 2004).

Existing literature

As a relatively recent HE qualification, a limited number of evidence- based research or evaluations have been fully developed in relation to its success either in meeting the skills shortages or in widening access (Rowley, 2005). In its 2005 review, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2005), the body responsible for introducing the first benchmarks against which Fd programmes were to be measured, concluded that Fds were generally succeeding in recruiting, developing and educating students very successfully (over 4,500 students on the 68 programmes reviewed). However, the review (QAA, 2005) also indicated that a significant minority of providers struggled with issues such as engagement with employers, providing suitable work placements and making explicit progression opportunities and constraints. A study focusing on engaging with employers in work-based learning (Benefer, 2007) revealed that making partnerships work is dependent on a number of critical success factors, including programme delivery in part on the employer's premises, mentoring as a key factor and a firm partnership between employer, FE College and the University. Illustrating a model of good practice in employer engagement, case studies of this nature can be extremely informative in terms of sharing key success factors, yet there remains a need to cross reference such findings with the experience of the learners themselves.

Other research examines issues from a more institutional viewpoint, focusing on feedback from Fd programme developers and providers. The study of curriculum innovation in the context of cross-sector partnerships in post-compulsory education (Foskett, 2003) revealed that successful needs-led curriculum development with

employers relies on complementary aims, good personal relationships, and strong interpersonal skills of partnership members. Similarly, a discussion of the risks and challenges associated with the 'lived experience' of delivering a Fd in Health and Social Care (Thurgate, MacGregor & Brett, 2007) concluded that the workplace facilitator is a vital link in the success of the Fd programme. Such studies provide important evidence of both barriers and innovations pertaining to effective curriculum change within partnership contexts, implementing a variety of methodologies to include interviews, participant observation, focus groups and documental evidence. Their findings offer valuable insight into the complexities of employer and needs-led curriculum planning in HE with specific emphasis on Fd development. In this instance, the main focus is on those elements crucial to the development of successful collaborative partnerships, essentially between two major stakeholders i.e. the University and the employer organisation, yet it is equally vital that the views and experiences of the third member of the partnership are not overlooked, i.e. those of the employee/learner.

Having said that, a number of qualitative studies do indeed focus on specific aspects of the Fd student experience, such as the progression of learners from a FE College to the final year of a University honours programme (Winter & Dismore, 2008); likewise, students' perspectives of the nature and extent of employer involvement in Fds (CHERI, 2008). Studies of this nature offer rich insight into the implications for students, and in doing so contribute significantly to the growing volume of experiential research supporting the notion that collective influences - including socio-economic, academic and cultural - have a significant impact on the student experience. Building on existing qualitative research, this particular paper will focus on the educational and professional development of Fd students, specifically in terms of transformation and identity, thus offering an original contribution to knowledge in this field.

Methodology

The research comprised a flexible, qualitative design providing a framework within which to conduct a series of face to face, semi-structured interviews. This approach was considered to be the most appropriate means of collecting primary data, as it would allow participants the freedom to talk as naturally as possible, to express views and opinions in their own time, whilst also affording the opportunity to explore in more depth the most poignant themes as they arose (Robson, 2002). In addition, secondary data in the form of official documents, government initiatives and relevant papers were consulted and analysed. With the student's informed written consent, all interviews were digitally recorded, allowing the researcher to remain consistently engaged with and actively listening to a participant throughout the entire interview and creating an ambience in which the participant's views were valued. Recordings were then transcribed verbatim, affording interviewees the opportunity to read through individual transcripts should they wish to verify, retract or alter comments. The CAQDAS software package NVivo was used to assist with organising, coding and retrieving data in preparation for ensuing thematic analysis.

This paper draws on two research studies, which, whilst sharing a number of similar thematic links, are distinguished by their individual aims, objectives and life spans. The initial study comprised of qualitative interviews with twenty two alumni participants who had graduated with a Fd in Health Care/Health and Social Care between 2002 (inception year) and 2008. Graduates participated in a single, face to face interview which aimed to capture their reflections on the value of the Fd experience in terms of their working lives/career pathways, and more specifically how they regarded their subsequent employability.

The second, ongoing study is longitudinal in design and consists of a series of up to three interviews over a 3-4 year period with students who are currently undertaking the Fd in Health & Social Care. This first part of the study aims to capture the student's educational and professional journey in terms of exploring initial hopes and perceptions of what the Fd experience would be like, the value students place on the Fd programme, together with their thoughts and feelings with regard to the work-based learning element of the programme. It is anticipated that the final interview will take place once the student has graduated, whether employed in an original post, in new employment or not in employment. The second strand of this study involves collecting and collating individual entry qualifications of students, again with informed consent, together with their subsequent assignment/project achievements throughout the Fd programme. An examination of these quantitative data alongside qualitative interview feedback will afford unique insight into the extent to which students' personal perceptions of their individual progress are fair reflections of their actual achievements.

It is anticipated that the sample will reflect the voices of approximately fifty Fd students, who will volunteer to participate in the study on a self-selecting basis.

Background

The Fd in Health Care at the University of Southampton was validated in 2002 and recruited its initial cohort of full-time and part-time students in September of that year. The degree was developed in conjunction with partners in the NHS, partners in the Social Care and independent sectors, who were involved in curriculum design and the provision of practice-based placements for students. This new qualification signified commitment to the government's widening participation and lifelong learning agenda (DfES, 2003), whilst providing an ideal vehicle for developing closer working relationships with employers, public services and other educational establishments. To help realise this overall vision, regional Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) received funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Locally, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Lifelong Learning Network (HI-LLN) supported a number of initiatives to order to 'maximise progression opportunities for work-based, non-traditional vocational learners by offering enhanced, flexible, work-related educational opportunities, with benefits for learners, employers and the regional and national economy' (HI-LLN, 2006). One of these initiatives took the form of a project to capture the Fd student experience whilst informing future curriculum development.

Findings

Findings from the initial, graduate-focused study indicated that participants used personal change as their reference point and gateway to future employment (unlikely now to revolve around one employer or skill set). Although confident in the workplace, many participants experienced initial self-doubt in relation to their perceived academic ability. However, determination to succeed began to nurture a thirst for knowledge which led in turn to academic achievement, positive feedback and further progress. As a result, levels of confidence and self-belief rose at crucial stages throughout the duration of the programme. This symbiotic increase in knowledge, confidence and self-worth was described by participants as transformative.

The notion of transformation also appears as a significant theme in the early findings emerging from the ongoing longitudinal study. During interviews, many participants recalled a negative compulsory school experience which had left them with low levels of academic confidence and limited expectations. A notable number of participants still harboured some of the self-doubts implanted from school days yet were determined to overcome them and succeed within a learning environment, despite often being the first family member to ever study at HE level. Rowley (2005) paints a similar profile when he suggested that the majority of Fd students had not previously considered HE nor had they come from families or communities where HE was an expectation.

Re-entry into a formal educational environment, therefore, often engendered feelings of anxiety, fear of failure and a sense of 'trespassing' in a territory perceived to be out of bounds. Overcoming these fears through determination and a desire to succeed on the part of the student, coupled with growing insight and understanding of the particular needs of work-based learners on the part of HE staff and employers, led to a gradual transformation into a more confident, critical- and independent-thinking learner. As students developed their personal and professional autonomy as learners, embracing and being nourished by knowledge, a transition from a didactic to a more self-directed, inquiry-based approach to learning became apparent. This sense of 'taking responsibility' has encouraged the questioning of established practices, leading to reciprocal learning through work relationships indicative of 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Participants referred to a growing awareness of the bigger picture; the historical evolution of Health and Social Care organisational cultures, structures and roles which allowed them to formulate more informed and individual viewpoints in a broader socio-economic and political context. In turn, an increasingly confident and critical thinking employee may initially appear as threatening to an employer organisation, but it could be argued that by opening up and maintaining good communication routes between employee and employer, and indeed

the HEI, then a more balanced and trusting relationship can evolve within this collaborative partnership. The critical voice of the employee/learner needs to be listened to.

Moreover, findings suggested that the student voice carries an important message not only into the working and learning environments but also within the personal/home environment. Many participants had made the decision to begin an Fd programme in Health and Social Care because it was 'the right time' for them. Further questioning with regard to this notion revealed that the decision often reflected a crucial moment in time when a participant's circumstances changed, sometimes subtly, often drastically, but always poignantly. This could be, for example, when children had reached an age when they were less dependent on parental time and physical presence; when there was a relationship breakdown with a spouse/partner or when there had been a change in management at work resulting in a new focus and direction for employees concerned. However, within all these scenarios, where there were children in the household, the decision made by a mother or father to embark on a programme of study at HE level sent out an extremely powerful message to those children/teenagers in terms of providing an influential role model and raising the aspirations of the next generation of learners. Transformation can have a knock on effect beyond the individual student.

Findings to date also highlighted, as a significant emerging theme, a need to balance the dual-identities experienced by participants. Given the nature of the Fd programme, which requires the employee/learner to spend a significant portion of their time in a work-based learning environment, participants frequently voiced feelings of tension and conflict in relation to the 'dual-identity' experienced when moving between different organisational cultures and environments (work and academic). This was found to be particularly true for employer-sponsored participants, who had generally already developed a distinct and confident work identity over a considerable period of time. These employees were not only familiar with the particular organisational culture, language and established norms/values in which they operated on a daily basis often over many years, but employers were also accustomed to a relationship with employees which was clearly defined and mutually understood. This notion of how learning, identity and practice both connect and conflict is supported by Holland *et al* (1998: 4) in the suggestion that identity is not fixed, but rather a response to cultural circumstances.

The potential for tension and conflict can be intensified further by a potential lack of clarity of role and expectation when an employee presents as a student fulfilling their work-based learning placement, both on the part of the employee/learner and the employer. Some participants reported frustration at the perceived lack of understanding and respect for their learner identity in the workplace, often describing a feeling of being seen as regular staff members, especially when short staffed. On the other hand, employers may not be fully informed of the specific role and focus of their sponsored employees whilst they are on Fd work placements, reflecting the need for employers to develop a deeper understanding of and insight into the purpose of the work-based learning element. It could be argued that the role of the work-based mentor is ideally positioned to assist in bringing about greater clarity and a shared understanding of this element of the programme. Developing good practice with regard to the mentoring process would not only enhance the quality and effectiveness of the Fd programme but would also allow the employee/learner to fully embrace the role of work-based learner.

Finding a voice that speaks for and represents the different roles and identities experienced by employees/learners is a crucial aspect of attaining the partnership equity necessary for effective collaborative working between employers, HEIs and learners (Foskett, 2003). Partnership equity is achieved through the build up of trust, communication and shared aims of all members of a consortium. Researching employer and needs-led curriculum planning in HE, Foskett (2003) goes on to emphasise the need for recognition from all partners that collaborative working of this nature presents a learning situation that subsequently has a meaningful impact on curriculum development. The potential benefits of creating a close and transparent working partnership between students, HEI staff and employers can be manifold in terms of developing shared trust and values, building up respect for the unique expertise of all concerned, gaining insight into the world of work and feeding all these valuable benefits back into the curriculum development process. The student's own perception and lived experience offers a highly valuable contribution to the development of a mutual understanding within a partnership.

Feelings of dual identity are extended further to encompass 'multiple- identities' for many of the participants interviewed. By the very nature of Health and Social Care related employment, the majority of individuals engaged in this programme are female (although the number of males is increasing year on year), many of whom are also juggling home/family commitments (partners, spouses, children) alongside the demands associated with work and study. For those students working long hours in a physically challenging job, their family time at the end of the working day/weekends is equally important and demanding of their time, energy and attention, often leaving only late evenings to dedicate to studies and assignments. Some participants reflected on the concerns expressed by those partners/spouses who experienced study time as encroaching on shared time together, which only goes to further highlight the complex and conflicting demands incurred by multiple identity roles.

Conclusion

The transformative experience illuminated by the findings of this study to date, based on a symbiotic increase in knowledge, confidence and self-worth, suggest emerging links between lifelong learning and social and organisational change. Participants in this study expressed a growing feeling of empowerment resulting from their experience on the Fd programme, enabling them to develop and voice opinions as well as question established practices within the workplace. Where a workforce is increasingly empowered and intellectually engaged in the very structure of their organisation, there exists the potential to bring about meaningful organisational change and innovation. Specific to those students for whom work-based learning plays a significant role in their HE experience, it is vital that issues pertaining to dual learner/employee identity are appreciated and further explored. For effective work-based learning collaborations to be successfully established and sustained between employers and education, the employee/learner voice is of crucial value.

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Paper 7

Changing Identities: Working Class Adults' Voices in Higher Education

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on working class adults' voices in higher education in a University that has a tradition of widening access. It is, therefore, a specific and distinctive case study of voices underpinned by a concern for social justice and higher education. The concept of student voice itself has become more widespread throughout the education system and has a variety of meanings and practices associated with it, Fielding and Rudduck (2002). This paper draws on data from a research conducted with adults who had enrolled on Access to higher education courses in Greater Manchester. Research was carried out using a database held at the University of Salford which has been active in the area of widening participation for a number of years. The database contained the names of 6000 adults who had enrolled on Access courses in the sub-region of Greater Manchester and had registered for enrichment courses at the University of Salford prior to their application to higher education. The database contained names and contacts for the years 2000-2006. Funding for the project came from Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance and the Aimhigher Research Network North West. One of the main purposes of the research project was to explore key aspects of agency in the lives of working class adults who engaged with further and higher education for the first time. The data presented here indicates that engagement in formal education such as Access courses involves changing identity for the individuals and the changes are presented through narratives of success. Lifelong learning is a critical aspect of the lives of these working class adults but this lifelong learning is a far cry from the discourse of government policy, (Tedder and Biesta 2008). For many of those who successfully negotiated the transition to higher education by this route there was a keen sense of 'making something of themselves or becoming someone'. In nearly all cases this was because of a sense of a missed opportunity earlier in their lives. These narratives indicated the ways in which support from family, friends, adult peers, FEC and HEI support systems were critical to success. However, engagement entailed a changing emphasis of support in conjunction with a changing identity of studentship. This becoming had effects in relation to the significance of the influence of immediate family at the beginning of the engagement but often moved to a greater dependence on aspects of peer support in higher education. How peer support was negotiated was different for each but there was a sense of class belonging involved that was related to cultural understanding. Support systems in FECs and HEIs were also perceived as critical for some individuals at specific moments of their studentship.

Introduction

As Tedder and Biesta (2008) indicate there is a struggle over the very concept of lifelong learning as the discourse of education has become more economic under New Labour. Ashwin (2006) detailed the changing context of higher education over a longer period and explored the move from an elite to a mass higher education system. He acknowledged changes in student diversity and pointed to the changes in gender composition and the increase in students from specific ethnic minorities who have entered higher education as key aspects of this change. Modood (2006) pointed to the achievements and the differences that we need to be aware of in relation to ethnic minorities and entry to higher education. Similarly, in relation to social class Blanden and Machin (2004) indicated that change and expansion in higher education had not affected all social classes to the same degree. While higher education has experienced an expansion changes in intergenerational mobility have actually declined. This inequality in access has been identified by recent government policies as the result of lack of attainment and lack of ambition on the part of students from working class backgrounds. Blanden and Machin (ibid) indicated that differences in household income were central to understanding the differential outcomes of this expansion.

Widening participation policy has seen the establishment of Foundation Degrees and the e-university by Blunkett (2000), the creation of a national network Aimhigher and the creation of Lifelong Learning Networks. In schools there was a reinvigorated curriculum with the Literacy and Numeracy initiatives and between secondary schooling and further education the Education Maintenance Allowance, a means tested monetary allowance for staying on in education post -16. Teaching, learning and assessment in higher education has been subject to both increased regulation and increased funding, Ashwin (2006:8).

An example of changing context and the role of Hefce is the Bell Memorial Lecture (Newby, 2004) with the announcement of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs). LLNs were to provide coherence for the progression of vocational learners to higher education with a remit to build partnerships and develop progression agreements. This initiative focused specifically on progression from vocational subjects at colleges, as evidence on progression from A Levels indicated that the vast majority who studied A Levels progressed to higher education. HEFCE targets and policy initiatives were aimed at the system's failure to enable transition into higher education. The constraints to transition to higher education were perceived as barriers within the system itself. Questions of identity and of engagement in learning were not perceived to be systemic but individual and thus less open to policy initiatives. However, existing partnerships within the system itself were initially used to develop LLNs in a locality or sub region. The policy initiative of Aimhigher was aimed at stimulating demand in schools and FECs and the LLNs were aimed at changing the supply side of courses and programmes and securing progression agreements between Colleges and Schools and HEIs.

The policy of widening participation to higher education and the target of fifty percent of 18-30 year olds attending higher education were key aspects of New Labour's vision of a competitive knowledge economy in a global age, Ainley (2008). Foundation Degrees were established as providing a different route to higher education, one that involved partnership, employer involvement and work-based forms of learning. (Doyle and O'Doherty, 2006). It is recognised in this paper that learning takes place in many different sites and over the course of an individual's life but the focus in this paper is on engagement with formal learning through a site of engagement by adult learners. In this paper the concept of site of engagement is developed from the work of Scollon (2001). There are three critical aspects to the site of engagement: the origin of the policy initiative, the design and development of the curriculum intervention (Fds, Access courses and APL) and the experiences of the students in engaging with the curriculum or intervention.

Researching Structure and Agency

Given the shifting nature of the policy interventions both within the system and from funding and other agencies outside the education system indicated above, it will be argued that the concept of site of engagement gives a focus for understanding key aspects of structure and agency in educational contexts. In this paper there is a focus on one site namely Access courses and specifically with the experiences of working class adults who engaged in the site. The context of Access courses to higher education is a sub-regional context that developed from local initiatives in the 1970s before becoming accepted as a route into higher education. Access courses have had a significantly different impact in the South West, North West of England and London than for example in the Midlands. However, the number of certified centres which are usually Further Education Colleges (FECs) has not altered significantly over time and the expansion of Access courses does not appear to have been seen as central to widening participation policy.

In the adoption of the concept of a site of engagement I wish to rely on some of the aspects of mediated action that Scollon (1998, 2001) uses. However, the concept is used by Scollon at the micro level of interaction and language use. I wish to adapt this to the meso level of analysis. At this level analysis of actions can be detailed in relation such aspects as course design and course development in response to policy initiatives as well as at the reasons for the engagement of adult learners. In FECs and HEIs there are policy procedures for the development of such courses that constrain, evaluate, monitor and exclude and such procedures are put into practice both prior to and during the courses offered. While this is a legitimate concern of the research and some data has already been gathered from course leaders, employers involved in Foundation Degrees and APL Co-ordinators, the major part of the research has been conducted with adult students in higher education in three of the four sites of engagement. Ainley (2008:616-617) argues that:

Cognitive and structural barriers addressed in widening participation are pathologised with little reference to sociocultural processes of learning among those already in higher education. Instead an emphasis on what is learnt rather than what is taught, can reveal effort, identities and trajectories involved in getting and staying on course that the recent preoccupation with widening participation has largely ignored. As the age, class, gender and ethnic components of higher education participation change, including 'broken' transitions that disrupt prevailing concepts of cognitive linearity, insight into how learning is constructed can be afforded through the contrasted narratives of learners....

This critical concern frames the concept of student voices within this paper and is reflected in the methodology and the theorising of agency within educational contexts. Biesta, Field, Goodson, Hodkinson and MacLeod (2008) carried out a biographical approach to researching lifelong learning as most of the existing research base in this area focused on institutional practices or how education polices function in practice. Central findings of their research was that learning of some sort was ubiquitous in most people's lives and that:

For a minority the sense of being a learner is an important part of their identity. In some cases this learner identity is focussed around formal education but always with substantial informal learning related to it. Learning is sometimes valued for the outcomes it brings, but people often value the process of engagement in learning for its own sake... (Biesta et al.: 18).

The changing relationship between engagement in formal learning and the way in which this is experienced is the focus of this paper. How do working class adults understand this engagement? Is there risk involved and what occurred earlier in their lives that involves a degree of risk taking in their mid thirties or forties in relation to engagement with higher education? Archer (2007) refers to such matters as projects or the ways in which we deliberate or mull things over and decide to focus on acting in particular ways at specific times in our lives. Social practices are the ways in which we get by as knowledgeable agents in human activity but such practices are related to the ways in which agents perceive opportunities or constraints.

Matters are no different in the social order where many of the projects we pursue necessarily involve us with constraints and enablements. As with the other two orders of natural reality, life in society is impossible without projects; each one of its members has myriads of them every day. Although we do not usually think of such things as catching buses, going to the pub or taking the dog for a walk in these terms. Nevertheless, a change of circumstances can make us realise that this is precisely what they are, precisely successful social practices which have become taken for granted as embodied knowledge. (Archer, 2007: 9).

Archer indicates that when human beings pursue their social projects they encounter structural properties that are activated as powers. In any attempt to develop a successful social practice there are two sets of causal powers interacting. Such causal powers are those of the individuals (subjects) and those of the relevant structural or cultural properties. Structures' causal powers are experienced as constraints or enablements but human causal powers operate reflexively. (ibid:9) In other words our knowlegability of the context in which we act or reflect on how we should act is fallible but nevertheless informs our actions. Acting in the world as human beings therefore depends on what Archer (2003, 2007) refers to as this inner conversation or reflexivity. In her 2007 study Archer identifies a typology of three types of reflexivity that humans possess and the three types have implications for acting in the world. These are Communicative Reflexives, Autonomous Reflexives and Meta-Reflexives. Archer (2007) argues that there are profound implications for social mobility, given that the internal conversation is a lifelong process and that within it there is a sequence related to:

<Concerns → Projects → Practices>

How we understand the ways in which constraints are experienced is related to identity and how we experience and reflect on such constraints. In terms of many people from the working class higher education, structurally is not a part of their lives. Culturally, there is a remoteness or an absence in the day to day concerns of working class people in relation to higher education. So the actions of mainly working class women who decide to return to study and the ways in which they experience constraints to their engagement in higher education is a central focus of this paper. For example, practices related to teaching, learning and assessment may appear to be perceived as distinct and outside their control. Such practices may be experienced as individual inadequateness related to earlier experiences of schooling. Practices in coping with everyday aspects of caring or family may also act as constraints structurally but be experienced as individualised problems associated with roles and positions within family. The limits of acting on projects can therefore be located within the ways in which learning, transitions between periods of people's lives and socially between spaces FE to HE are experienced and understood. Stones (2001) suggests that we need to understand this as placing limits on actions.

Constraint stems from the 'objective' existence of structural properties that the individual agent is unable to change. As with the constraining qualities of sanctions, it is best described as placing limits upon the range of options open to an actor, or a plurality of actors, in a given circumstance or type of circumstance. [original emphasis] (Stones, 2001:182).

Individuals prioritise and decide by mulling over their concerns and arriving at their projects or ways in which to act in the social context that lead to their social practices in relation to their life course. Human beings cannot act in any way they wish, given their understanding of their contextual constraints such as role, but act in relation to their knowledgability of such contexts (Giddens, 1984).

In carrying out the research with adults who enrolled on Access courses these theoretical concerns were influential. The decision to study on an Access course was seen as a critical moment of engagement in formal education and a significantly risky one at that. Both what occurred before with early education and the decision to engage at this later stage of life were related. This engagement with formal learning later in life was explored through biography. In biographical terms we were interested in how the decision was arrived at and what it related to in the individual's understanding of their career or life. Early schooling and engagement in education was a key moment in decisions about employment and relationships with family and was related to this later engagement. The individual's understanding of the Access course itself and their experience of learning was also of interest as was the experience of transition to higher education.

The social practices of teaching and learning were explored from the individual's concerns and understanding of this. Finally, we were interested in the ways in which individuals approached the telling of their life stories. How they positioned themselves within their narratives and the ways in which they ordered their concerns through this experience of engagement. This then is a contribution to student voice but quite specifically the voices of the students as adult learners who are mainly women who identified themselves in response to questions about their early lives as working class. Such voices are not often positioned within the context of higher education and are more likely to be visible in research on lifelong learning. However, such voices offer valuable insight into the taken for granted aspects of social practices around teaching, learning and assessment.

Methodology

The project was carried out from September 2008 until June 2009 and was designed to gather data from students who had enrolled on Access courses during the years 2003-2006. A dataset of names and personal information was held at the university and ethical approval and data protection issues were applied for using university procedures. Procedures relating to anonymity were followed as were the holding of data in a secure place. Three data gathering tools were used to contact the adults. Firstly, we used a mail shot that contained a one page survey and a consent form and a stamped return envelop. We posted 3000 of these to individuals at their last known address. This was followed by a telephone contact two weeks after the mail shot and an appointment booking for a face to face or a telephone interview.

Telephone interviews were written up immediately after the conversation finished and filed and face to face interviews were transcribed and filed separately. The returned surveys were analysed and written up as a report for the external agencies and qualitative data was analysed using a thematic approach related to the key questions. We decided, given our theoretical influences, to conduct semi-structured interviews related to six key areas of concern and added a final seventh for the adult learner to contribute. These areas were:

- early education and schooling; the decision to enrol on an Access course;
- the experience of learning on an Access course;
- the transition to first year in a university; teaching and learning in a university;
- present location as a student or in employment, changing identity.

The data presented here concerns a number of the Access adults who identified themselves as working class.

Voices of Working Class Adults: Missed Opportunities

In this section data from the interviews is presented and analysis is provided in relation to key concerns that arose related to engagement.

Karen is in her mid forties and she pointed to the ways in which engagement with education and qualifications have changed over time. Work and marriage were her first concerns when schooling was over and she left with few qualifications. However in the late 1970s there were unskilled and semi-skilled employment opportunities in Mills in Rochdale, Bury and Oldham. When these jobs started to disappear she, like many working class women, moved into caring something she had learned as a mother in her own family. The growth in retail employment and part-time employment is another feature that Karen points to as the changing labour market in certain areas allowed women to work and care. However, there was always the increasing need in employment for qualifications.

My name is Karen and I left school with nothing apart from like needlework and cookery, practical skills because when we were brought up you had nothing and if you wanted anything you had to go out and work. So you were so keen to leave school as soon as possible to get the things that your mum couldn't afford. So I left with nothing and I went into mills when I was younger and things like that to get the things I wanted because it wasn't as hard then as it is now to get jobs. You didn't need all the qualifications you need now so I worked in mills and care assistants and things like that. I got married. I had my family....So I did move on and I worked part time at Boots when my son was growing up and because I could work part-time. Jobs were getting that way where you had to have qualifications where if you wanted to improve your professional working. But I did go to Bury College then and I did my GCSEs in English and Maths.

Karen continued studying and eventually enrolled on an Access course as she had always wanted to be a nurse from early in her childhood. However, the need to contribute to the household and the way to a form of independence from contributing to the family wage as a working class young woman was through the wage. It offered the opportunity to have a portion of the wage for oneself and made more practical sense to work than to study as a young person. Eventually, she moved into employment in social care in a National Health Trust(NHT) and although the Trust funded her training for NVQs eventually the funding was withdrawn.

Well the reason was that after I'd done the courses I was a home help and nursing assistant I got a job working with learning disabilities in X Primary Care Trust. I loved... absolutely loved that job. It was only twenty hours and I could do twenty hours so really I was full time but I was only contracted for twenty hours. I did like your mandatory courses in that and an introduction and foundation in ALDAF. Because I'd took those courses it gave me the incentive to want to learn more and more.

Karen went on to study an Access to Nursing course at her local college and then progressed to university. She found studying at university more difficult than college as the systems for support are different and the numbers on the courses mean that the relationships are different.

I think coming from a college to university you've got to be dedicated because I found in my first year that "what have I got here?" We all communicated as students and we all had similar opinions that university is.....they help you they steer you in the right direction and tell you what you need to be achieving but at the end of the day it is down to you. I think you've got to be motivated to do that and if you're not motivated ...

The requirement of a more independent learning approach meant that reliance on peer support became a necessity. This aspect of the transition was identified by different adults. On Access courses the number of students is not a constraint on teacher support and feedback and there are both more of a tradition of pastoral tutoring and of the likelihood of feedback on assignments for rewriting. Jane, for example, found the move between the two locations difficult as she hadn't been motivated by school and returned to study to improve her employment opportunities.

University is different and much more relaxed but there is no support in university and students fail modules. I don't think you get taught properly and you're expected to go away and do it yourself. I need a lot of support because I struggle academically and need one to one support. The university offers a workshop on how to do the work but there are too many students in that. I need help at a one to one level....I'm not enjoying it. I'm finding it very difficult. I've failed a module

and can't go on to the third year until I pass it. I still intend to be a social worker and finish it. If there was one thing that is needed at university it is more support for Access students like me.

Jane's understanding of teaching at university is that it doesn't support different types of learners such as herself. As an Access student she wants what she calls more explanation or more one to one support. This is what was available in a FEC Access course where the course tutor would have given time for support on essay writing skills and time for drafting and submitting work. However, at university level students are seen as independent learners and the ways and means of learning are available within the university. The support workshop on academic writing or on referencing is usually well attended with close to one hundred students and for Jane this makes it difficult to understand what is required in such a setting. However, despite failing one module she still intends to continue and is still optimistic about completing her course and becoming a social worker.

Bernadette's story is different although her initial engagement with formal education was related to her caring responsibilities. This initial engagement in a sense was the hook for wanting to learn for her as the course was flexible and fitted with her caring responsibilities.

I completed my education with very few qualifications and went to work. Seven years ago I was made redundant and around about that time my mum became ill and I cared for her. While I was caring for my mum I did small courses at college just to improve my education. I did courses such as counselling before I registered on an Access to higher education course. I struggled at first because during the introduction they did physics and chemistry and I wasn't very good at that. But soon I really loved the work we were doing as the course was flexible and I could do it and still care for my mum. There was a lot of support on the college course.

Bernadette found the transition to university and the initial requirements of higher education difficult but was sufficiently committed and engaged to overcome her fears about higher level study. She qualified but her mother passed away and so she took some time out before applying for employment. In her case the support she received from her personal tutor was what Jane had referred to. So the differences in support may be a result of individual subjects differences such as differences in the numbers on the course and the differences in the numbers allocated to teaching staff. Such differences could easily be related to an individual's own conception of what a university student should be capable of. Personal tutoring in both further education and higher education are dependent on the interest of the individual tutor rather than being systematic such as used at the Open University. Bernadette offered the following:

It was a lot different. The assignments were harder, the marking was harder and it took a bit of getting used to. Once you reach the half way stage of the first year it gets easier as you understand what they want from you. In the university there was a lot of support from my personal tutor who I could go to and she would explain some of the things I didn't understand. The subject tutors they weren't really very helpful in that sense. I'm a single parent and my mum died last year but I got through. I passed and qualified last year but I've taken some time out. I'm looking for an Occupational Therapy job but because of the cuts it's not as easy as it was to get employment.

John left school when he was fourteen or rather as he puts it he did a newspaper round to get money and didn't attend much in the last two years. He didn't see the point of school and eventually became a bricklayer.

I went to a comprehensive school in Manchester. I didn't enjoy school at all. I think it was the second year. When I was in the second year my father died so I more or less pleased myself whether I went to school or not because me mam needed a breadwinner in the house so in the third year I'd go to school a bit but I had a paper round but I also had a job working for the ice cream man. That fetched a few quid in so I could pay my mam and in fourth year I never went to school and I left school with no qualifications. I wanted to go for big money but I did listen to my mother and she told me to get a trade which is something my dad always wished he had done. So I got a trade as a bricklayer and went to college and enjoyed college but I failed it the first time round but in my last year I passed everything. I've been a bricklayer for years. I've worked abroad and earned a good booty at it.

John is the classic lad in Willis's (1997, 2001) study of working class lads getting working class jobs. Although his attainment of a skilled trade rather than a semi- skilled or unskilled job goes slight against the eventual jobs

the lads ended up in, the rejection of school as a solution to earning a wage is similar. However, his inversion of the mental manual divide and the role of breadwinner when his father died meant that John was destined for labouring earlier than most young people his age. John, after twenty five years 'working on the tools', came back to England from Dubai. He had a problem with his back and took up taxi driving because he couldn't lift heavy weights. He moved from that to caring for his mother when she became ill and following a suggestion from his sister that he should take up nursing he applied for an Access to Nursing course.

My sister worked as an auxiliary nurse in X hospital and she encouraged me to go into nursing. I made some enquiries and I found out it would take about four years as I'd have to go to college to get my GCSEs and university I didn't really fancy it and as I'm a single parent I had most of the year off because I knew I didn't want to go driving again or do anything too heavy. I finally decided and went to college. The only thing I was good at was Maths I was excellent at Maths but my English lets me down a lot. I'd never been on a computer. When they started teaching me these things I really enjoyed it. I took to it and it was one of these things. It was like a drug to me I just wanted to learn and learn more.

John's engagement can be seen against his lack of engagement in his secondary schooling as another example of a missed opportunity. His view of support was different as he benefited significantly from the systems that were in place at the university in his area of study.

I wouldn't say I was bottom of the class but I struggled. I was holding on to everyone's shirt tails more or less. (asked about support) Absolutely fantastic. I went on nearly every academic study session there was for my English and I improved year by year. Eventually, my first assignment I got forty percent and by the time I was in my third year I got a seventy six percent pass. So it's a fantastic improvement really. At the minute I can write good English but I don't speak it very well I find it really hard to ...communicate what I want to say.

Another aspect of support for adult learners is the network they establish within the college or university and there is a sense of who you are and where you belong when John talks about how peer groups are formed.

I've a proper Manchester accent and right from the start ..I'm from X a proper working class area and a girl in our class was from Salford and she spoke exactly like I spoke and had the same sense of humour whereas the others were all a little bit snooty. So we hit it off day one really and we stuck it through all the way through. If she was doing ok and I was down she'd help me and vice versa and it was so ..it was towards the end of the second year and then we started trusting the others if you know what I mean not all there was only one or two we didn't get on with. We've met one another's families. I've changed my friends and social group by the way because my house used to be full of people but most of my old mates are into dodgy things and I just have one or two friends from here now.

John has changed in terms of his identity. He is a Paediatric Nurse and he mixes with fewer people and mainly with people he works with or he met while he was studying. His life outside work has also altered as he states and his lifestyle has changed but some aspects of his class 'habitus' remain. He has moved on in both identity terms and social terms and his achievement although it began with support within his family has drawn on support systems for study skills within the university and peer group.

Stella wanted to make something of herself for her children. She wanted to gain qualifications rather than do dead end jobs and she had a good idea what she wanted to do. She left school with no qualifications and went straight into work.

No I just went straight into a job and I was in a job then till I started having my children and in 1998 I went back into education. I went to X College in Manchester. I went to do English..... Well no, because my children were still too young I was wanting to get my education so that when my children were old enough then I could go out and go to work because I 'm a single parent and obviously there are child care problems but also because I was brought up, because my mum worked, I was brought up in a single parent home. My mum she was never around so we were latchkey kids as they used to call them and so I always said I would never have my kids as latchkey kids so I waited till they were like.. the youngest was fourteen before I would go out. I did part-time jobs you know school dinners a dinner lady and cleaning. I did all those but it was qualification wise that's why I came back.

Stella didn't want to treat her children, as a single parent, the way she was treated so she waited until her youngest child was settled in secondary school before she started doing part time jobs in schools and cleaning. The influence of her early life of wanting to be a nurse, the failure to achieve any qualifications and the influence of her sister all played a part in the motivation to engage in learning.

What it was, I just went in and I said I want to be a nurse a mental health nurse because it always interested me anyway and my sister qualified about six years ago and after chatting with my sister I thought I could do that you know the way I am. I just went in and said I want to go into nursing. They just said we've got an Access course in health and science which will get you into university. I didn't have any A Levels or anything so I wouldn't have got in otherwise.

Returning to study can be quite daunting when there is a period of years between engagement in a formal learning setting. Stella admitted that she struggled with parts of the Access course because of its alignment with the requirements of the Nursing degree.

Yeah it can be quite scary. Well to be honest I didn't think I'd get in. Initially I just thought, I don't know I never have any confidence in myself. I didn't think I had enough in me to get in so. A few of us got interviews. We had to do a personal statement for university and we worked on that for about four months and everyone sent them in and there were a few there that were really I want to go to uni. I wasn't really I was well if I get in I get in because I'm not confident I just thought if I get in great but if I don't I don't. Anyway I got an interview and I was like oh god, I haven't been to an interview for years. I was really petrified but after speaking to the tutors in the interview they just sort of eased your mind.

Stella only applied to one university, the University of Salford, because of her caring responsibilities and her family life there was only one choice. She had studied locally and she intended to continue that. She wasn't confident as she didn't think 'she had enough in me' wasn't capable of studying at that level. This is the perception of constraint as functioning part of reflexivity and it is a key element in understanding how constraint works as people consider their projects in terms of their biographies. However, success in examinations and in the submission of projects and essays has an effect on working class identities when engaged in higher education. The fear of failure is always present but self esteem and the exercising of more control over ones life result from such engagement.

Yeah, especially when you pass. We just got our results today on passing the exams because you are always thinking I might fail. Most of us have passed. It does improve your self esteem if you can do it because I always I'm always negative about myself. I don't think I can do this and I can do that. I always think oh I don't think I can do that. Will I be able to do that?...I went back initially in 1998. The Access course helped me get here and I've got more confidence now. I think my abilities... I've got more knowledge than I had and my abilities I think I can do it. I'm still not really dead confident but ...I've met a lot more people and we do go out for drinks. So yeah the social circle is wider. I've still got the same friends that I've always had like at home but at uni you meet a lot more people even on placement I've got a few people like nurses and mentors that I socialise with.

Support from family in many of the cases was the initial spur to get engaged with learning or as a key change that an individual planned but this for Stella became difficult as she was a single parent.

That was one thing I didn't get and I think it was because I'm a single mother and because all my attention went on to the kids that when I started working well doing work I wasn't spending as much time with them even though I was still doing the usual the tea and everything else but I wasn't spending the time with them I was like saying oh I've got to get this essay finished and I've got to do this and I've got to do that. It was difficult to manage because they would say what are you doing this for? Why are you doing this I don't understand why you're doing this. And I'd say to better myself because I want to get a good job and have a career and look forward to the future. They would say you're getting stressed out all the time. I mean I think now that I'm at the end of the second year they say you know she is doing it and they're that bit older now so. They understand it better that I want to be someone with a career.

Conclusion

Stella struggled because of the commitment to the children and her studies and the initial emotional tension around giving time to the kids was a stressful and difficult time. However, she continued to try to explain that she wanted to be someone who had a career as well as being mum. In her case as well her changing identity meant changing the people she mixed with even though she is still a local and has local friends. Her admission of increased knowledge, more confidence and self esteem mean that her engagement with learning like those cited here has been a worthwhile experience but it has not been easy. Constraints to engagement and constraints while engaged whether real or perceived work as Archer claims reflexively for individuals. Each of the cases here suggests that the transition between Access courses and higher education are individual journeys that are constructed differently by those involved and that their projects are mulled over and evaluated in terms of their ongoing changing identities through the engagement. Those cited are evocative of a larger range of narratives in the research that indicate both change through engagement and increasing control over a sense of what they are becoming.

At different times in these journeys each individual encountered a range of constraints and each had differential access to a range of support mechanisms. Some of these support mechanisms were cultural or familial in the form of a brother or sister but these were drawn on at an early stage of engagement. As the individual progressed the range of material and cultural supports were situated within the organisation of the FEC or the HEL. These were the tutorial system or academic support system which, in some cases and in some areas were very useful, and students drew on these resources to enable their engagement. In other cases they were peer support systems which the students established themselves in order to aid their engagement. Who they mixed with and how these groups were formed as John indicates resulted from a mixture of cultural understanding of who you were if you were working class who you could trust. Things such as accent, humour became important in deciding who to trust at an early stage of engagement although eventually these moved into the background. Socialising through the course aided self esteem altered during the process of engagement for these working class adults.

Early experiences of education were not very good and almost all left secondary education with little or no formal qualifications. Schooling was rejected by many not in a rebellious manner but more in a passing manner. It passed them by without much passion or engagement in learning and this acted later in life as a constraint reflexively as indicated by Archer (2007) as many of those in the research although engaged in formal learning doubted their ability to achieve. So it is a surprise that later in life their project was to attain qualifications in order to improve their career situation. However, for many of those interviewed the engagement with formal education again later in life was an opportunity not to be missed. Access courses are provided in FECs and are likely to remain an alternative route to higher education. In this paper the voices of working class students who had had little or no formal education qualifications were explored through their experience of their transitions to and engagement with higher education. Their projects (return to learning to gain qualifications) and their understandings of constraints that impinge on such projects remind us of the different journeys that occur through higher education.

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Paper 8

Coming to America: Sixth Form Students' Reasons for Considering Undergraduate Study in the United States

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Abstract

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to understand the increased number of secondary school age British students considering undergraduate study in the United States. The study included events and experiences that influenced participants' interest and decisions concerning pursuing undergraduate study in the United States. It further explored the role played by various people in the students' lives: parents, friends, careers advisors, media, etc. The study included a purposeful sample of 12 self-identified British students completing their A-levels education. Additionally, interviews with nine international students completing their A-levels education at a school in the United Kingdom were included. The study also included interviews with three careers advisors and the former head of the U.S./U.K. Fulbright Commission. The interviews took place at three boarding schools in England over a one-week period.

The following conclusions were drawn after an in-depth analysis of the transcripts of the individual interviews and biographical questionnaires. The students in the United Kingdom who are considering undergraduate study in the United States are interested in universities in the United States based upon their perception of the quality of education, the ability to delay choosing a major, the opportunity for a liberal arts education and their perception of the availability of scholarships and other financial assistance. In this study we explored the events and experiences that influenced participants' interest and decisions concerning pursuing undergraduate study in the United States. We further explored the role that the various people in the students' lives played in the process: parents, friends, careers advisors, media etc. Four major research questions were explored and are explained further below. The study included a purposeful sample of 12 self-identified British students and nine international students completing their A-levels education at schools in England. The study also included interviews with three careers advisors and the former head of the U.S./U.K. Fulbright Commission. Of the self-identified British students, three participants were female and nine were male among the international students five participants were female and four were male. The interviews took place at three boarding schools in England over a one-week period. In addition, the interviews with the nine international students were included separately.

Through an in-depth analysis of the transcripts of the individual interviews at Christ's Hospital, Eton College and CATS Cambridge and biographical questionnaires, three overarching themes emerged from the data. These included: (a) characteristics about universities in the U.S.; (b) people and experiences that have influenced their decisions; and (c) considerations that will influence their ultimate decision. Under these three themes, sub themes emerged. Information about all three schools will be discussed below.

Research Question 1

1. *What processes and experiences relate to British students' interest in undergraduate study in the United States?*

Various themes emerged when exploring this research question. The overarching themes of the characteristics of education in the United States and people and experiences that have influenced their decisions informed this question.

“You can get more knowledge straight away instead of focusing on just one area”

Under the first theme of characteristics of education the students consistently looked to their experience with the educational system in the United Kingdom. This experience oftentimes pointed to some dissatisfaction with higher education policies and practices in the United Kingdom. Students were specifically dissatisfied with having to declare their major immediately, taking only courses within their major. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the overall student life experience and the lack of opportunities to participate in activities outside of their major.

This led students to identify characteristics about the higher education system in the United States that influenced their interest in considering undergraduate study in the United States. Specifically, students identified the flexibility in the degree programs in the United States. They liked the idea of liberal arts electives. The idea that they could take a diverse array of courses, and not just courses in their major area appealed to them.

In addition to the desire for a liberal arts degree program, students also identified student life as being a reason that they are considering undergraduate study in the United States. In the United Kingdom, student life is much different. The students' perceive that in the United Kingdom they generally focus only on their courses and possibly a few clubs. The wide array of options found in the United States include sororities and fraternities, varsity athletics and living learning communities in campus housing.

Students in this study also identified the quality of education as being a reason that they are considering undergraduate study in the United States. The students in this study believe that their education in their A-levels has been first rate. They believe that many of the universities in the United Kingdom do not offer the same high-class educational experience. They perceive that universities in the United States can offer them a similar level of education to what they currently have. There is a perception that the higher education system in the United Kingdom is inferior to the higher education system in the United States.

The next major theme that informed the answer to this research question relates to the experiences and influences that motivated these students to consider undergraduate study in the United States. Some of these influences include specific common characteristics observed in each student. The students in this study have an adventurous spirit. The students that participated in this study were observed to be extraordinarily outgoing. Many of the students felt that going to a university in a different culture would enhance their educational experience.

Media also played into some students' experiences. Although this was not a major contributing factor, it was prevalent many times in the conversation when I was no longer recording. Students referred to movies, television shows and celebrities to illustrate their vision of undergraduate study in the United States. The media did not seem to be the major factor; however the media helps shape what these students' conceptions and expectations concerning undergraduate study in the United States. Many of the students pointed to their experience of visiting the United States as a major influence. Specifically, the students who have already visited universities in the United States seem even more enthusiastic about studying in the United States than the students who have not yet visited. CATS Cambridge

In the findings from the interview transcripts, the CATS Cambridge students identified experiences with the educational system in the United Kingdom and their experience in their home country and how these experiences relate to their interest in applying to school in the United States. These experiences with the educational systems at home and in the United Kingdom make the liberal arts system found in the United States appealing to many of the students. Most of the students felt that the educational system in the United Kingdom made them feel that they were being pushed into a box. For most of these CATS Cambridge students, it is not a matter of them applying to U.S. schools over schools in the United Kingdom. They are simply applying to schools in the United States in addition to schools in the United Kingdom.

Since the education system in the United Kingdom requires students to choose a major early on, indecision about their particular professional and life goals was also a major reason cited for considering the U.S. higher education system in addition to the U.K. higher education system. The students who are interested in studying in the United States have a wide cross-section of interests. They are not yet ready to commit to a specific major.

The student-participants at CATS Cambridge were not originally from the United Kingdom. Thus had generally more extensive cross-cultural experience than did the other interview participants. The chance to experience another culture was important for some of the students. Many of the students felt that going to a university in a different culture would enhance their educational experience. Some of the students' motivations were specifically to experience American culture. Their experience in England has influenced them to explore yet another culture. Additionally, for some of the students, their experience in their home country has pushed

them to want to come to the United States. Some communicated a hope to experience the “wealth” of the United States and others sought to experience the political climate of a democracy.

The students at CATS Cambridge have been influenced by a number of different people in their lives. They stated that various friends and family played roles in their decision to consider undergraduate study in the United States. There are also a number of external forces influencing their decisions such as finances, affordability of universities, scholarship opportunities and prior travel in the United States. If these students stay in the United Kingdom for undergraduate study, they will have to pay a higher tuition rate because they are deemed international. As a result, many of these students view undergraduate study in the United States as a more affordable option. There is a perception that schools in the United States give more scholarships than schools in the United Kingdom. Some were influenced by their visits to the United States and their desire to return.

Research Question 2

2. *How do particular students' characteristics (e.g., socio-economic class, race, gender, etc) relate to their interest in studying in the United States?*

Socio-economic class was a major determinant concerning which universities students applied to and how they viewed where they were applying. The students at Eton College come from mainly upper class backgrounds. For the most part, they apply to universities based on their interests; financing their education is a secondary thought. They seemed more interested in the prestige that a university education at an Ivy League institution could offer than in exploring the wide variety of upper tier universities available. In fact, if a university does not have an internationally recognized name by the general population in the U.K., they did not believe it would be of value to attend there.

The students at Christ's Hospital chose target universities based upon affordability. Specifically, when the interviews concluded, one student explained that she was only applying to institutions with needs blind admission policies. The only university she was applying to that did not have a needs blind admission policy was the University of North Carolina (UNC). She was applying to UNC in hopes of receiving a full-ride scholarship (Moorehead Cain) and having all of her education subsidized by the university. Three out of the four students interviewed at Christ's Hospital were applying to UNC to the Moorehead Cain Scholar's program.

In essence, participants' socio-economic backgrounds related primarily to how they would make their final decision. Further, it also relates to their consideration of possible colleges and universities. The students' socio-economic status played a major influence on colleges and universities they are willing to consider and how they are going to go about making their final decision. Those students from upper class homes were interested in Ivy League schools without concern for cost. Those from lower income families considered schools based on the ability to received financial aid and scholarships.

CATS Cambridge

The students at CATS Cambridge come from privileged backgrounds with the exception of one student. Their parents are willing to pay large amounts of money for their education. However, the students in this study come from a variety of different cultures. These cultural backgrounds play a role in their interest in studying in the United States and the types of colleges and universities they are considering.

Two of the students in this study are from China. When asked where they are considering undergraduate study, they both identified only Ivy League institutions. Adam explained that his parents sent him to CATS Cambridge because of its proximity to Cambridge University. In spite of being told by the personnel at CATS Cambridge that attending there does not have an impact on being accepted at Cambridge, his parents felt that a school this close to Cambridge must have close ties to the university, thus helping his chances for admission to Cambridge University upon completion of his A-levels. The status that the university can add to his resume is important to his family.

The students from Europe were less flexible about location. They explained that they were primarily considering Ivy League institutions located in the United States. All of the students from Europe want to return home after they finish undergraduate study. As such, they believe that an education at any school outside of the Ivy League will not help them find employment at home.

The two students from Africa were much more open to investigating a variety of institutions. When I spoke with the each of them, they were more interested in studying in the United States for the experience of being in the United States. They were less concerned about the prestige of the school and more concerned about gaining the experience of living in a democracy and a developed nation. They both explained that going home for university was not really an option. They were adamantly opposed to studying in England for their undergraduate degree

Research Question 3

1. Who and what influence students to consider undergraduate study in the United States?

All of the students stated that they always knew they were going to university; however, the idea of going to university in the United States was a fairly recent notion. Many of the students identified the information being presented at their school as being a reason they were considering undergraduate study in the United States. The presentation of information occurred in the form of university representatives visiting and presenting information on their university.

“I don’t want to be sceptical but I’m pretty sure that the universities in Great Britain might be degrading”

Students in this study identified many different characteristics of undergraduate education in the United States that influenced their decision to consider looking at universities in the United States. Many of the students started to consider undergraduate study in the United States after learning and hearing about the prestige that follows an education from a university in the United States. Additionally, some participants began to consider undergraduate study in the United States because they felt that their major would be better taught at an American university.

The prestige of universities in the United States seems particularly important for the students attending Eton College. Attending a prestigious boarding school, they have come to expect a certain level of prestige to be attached to their education. The students at Eton perceive their education as elite and prestigious and they are unwilling to exchange that prestige for matters such as economical issues in choosing a post-secondary institution. Because they perceive that the universities in the United Kingdom are not as good as they once were, they are interested in looking elsewhere to get the educational experience they have come to expect.

“I want to experience more of the world.”

The adventurous spirit described in question one can also be applied here. The students cited a desire to see more of the world. Without this spirit of wanting to see more and willingness to leave their home country to see and learn, they would never consider going outside of England for undergraduate study. Friends and family oftentimes influenced students. Many of the students have extended family living in the United States. Some of the students’ families want for them to experience a different culture. As result, some family members are encouraging them to look at schools outside of the United Kingdom and more specifically in the United States.

The students were questioned about what kind of information they have received thus far in the process. The information varied between the two schools. The students at Eton College had the benefit of admissions professionals visiting their school. Additionally, the students at Eton had many fellow classmates who have already matriculated to universities in the United States. The students that attend Christ’s Hospital went about looking for information in a different way because they did not have the benefit of foreign admissions officers coming to their campus. Their careers advisor was the first point of contact in obtaining information about studying in the United States. Additionally, students looked at websites and then would make contact with the schools in which they were interested.

Many of the themes found in the interviews helped to inform the answer to this question. Simply put, family members, careers advisors and other outside influences helped manifest students' interest in considering undergraduate study in the United States. From there, the information received and the schools they consider vary based upon their educational background and the resources available.

CATS Cambridge

Outside influences play an important part in student's decision to consider undergraduate study in the United States. The influences cited in this study include friends, family and overall cost of study. For some, friends are a major influence in encouraging student's interest in undergraduate study in the United States. Some of the students started to consider undergraduate study in the United States when a friend suggested it. International students in this study have to pay international student fees at the universities in the United Kingdom. If they come to the United States, they have pay tuition and fees. The students in this study are under the impression that United States institutions offer more scholarships and financial aid than are offered in the United Kingdom. As a result, when they started considering paying for university, they examined an array of options, including undergraduate study in the United States.

Another influence cited is the influence of family. Many of the students were encouraged by family members to consider different universities in the United States. Some have extended family living in the United States and one student has a sibling attending university in America.

Research Question 4

3. *How do British students anticipate coming to a decision whether or not to pursue undergraduate study in the United States?*

The students at the two different colleges where the interviews took place come from different and diverse backgrounds. The students at Eton College mainly come from privileged backgrounds while the students at Christ's Hospital come from lower income backgrounds. All of the students interviewed at Christ's Hospital were on scholarship and extremely thankful for the opportunity they were given. Students were questioned about how they would make their ultimate decision when faced with whether or not to go to university in the United States. For the students attending Christ's Hospital the ultimate decision came down to finances. For the students at Eton, the final decision comes down to prestige and where they are accepted. Although some of the students at Eton were only applying to universities in the United States, the sentiment seemed to be universal. If they were unable to gain admission into a top school in the United States, then they were willing to stay in the United Kingdom for university. For the most part, they plan to attend Cambridge or Oxford if they stay in England.

CATS Cambridge

The participants were directly questioned about how they were going to make the ultimate decision. The students said they would first examine where they have been accepted and then weigh the options. The factors they will consider include quality of education, cost and feasibility.

Conclusions

Throughout the research literature there was a consistent pattern. Extant scholarship suggested that when selecting a university important factors affecting student choice include location, academic reputation, programme of study, and future employment opportunities (Moogan & Baron, 2003). Veloutsou (2004) explained that potential students consider other attributes such as reputation, location, infrastructure, costs, and quality of life. Previous scholarship on student decision-making focused on decisions students make within their own countries. This study expands the literature, by extending this to the increasing phenomenon of international enrolment in particular, British students interested in studying in the United States.

Patton (2000) conducted an exploratory study examining “What characteristics of degree programme do overseas students particularly consider when deciding whether or not to enrol?” Participants frequently cited “recognition of the degree in their home country, the courses offered, fees, the duration of course programmes, course flexibility, the availability of part time coursework, and the prestige and reputation of the university” (Patton, 2000, p. 347). Additional factors included, “concerns about government, business, and industry recognition of the course ,as well as relevancy, time factors, and reputation” (Patton, 2000, p.347).

The findings of this study support the existing research literature as follows:

1. The students in the United Kingdom who are considering undergraduate study in the United States are interested in universities in the United States based upon their perceived prestige and quality.
2. For some students, the final decision will come down to scholarships and affordability. Some of the students are basing their university selection on the prevalence of need blind admissions policies.
3. Students believe that the quality of life in United States higher education is superior to that offered in the U.K.
4. Students are looking at schools in the United States because they believe the schools infrastructure is better than the schools found in the United Kingdom. Specifically, they believe that more money is invested in schools in the United States allowing the schools to offer more opportunities and provide better facilities.
5. Students are primarily looking at schools with international reputations because they believe schools that do not have an international reputation will hinder their future employment opportunities.
6. International students are interested in studying in a developed nation with a democratic government.

In addition to supporting the existing research literature, additional themes emerged.

1. All of the students in the study identified the ability to delay choosing their major as being a contributing factor in their decision to consider undergraduate study in the United States. The idea of liberal arts degree programs offered in the United States is very appealing to these students.
2. Another difference is in the area of student life. The students in this study were intrigued and persuaded to consider undergraduate study in the United States based upon the university life culture found in the United States.
3. International students are interested in studying in a different culture.

Discussion and Implications

The students in this study described many different influences and experiences that have encouraged and moved them to consider undergraduate study in the United States. The students were dissatisfied with the requirement to choose their major and career path at such a young age. The wish to delay this major life decision led them to consider universities in the United States. They cited this reason under the guise of wanting a liberal arts education. It is interesting that they cited the idea of a liberal education, because, their reason behind wanting a liberal arts education is to be well rounded and not about buying into a sophisticated understanding of what being well educated means.

It was also surprising that students felt they could obtain a higher quality education attending a university in the United States. Many of the students felt that they could go to Oxford or Cambridge in the United Kingdom and receive a high quality education. Beyond those two universities, one would be unable to receive the quality of education at a U.K. University that will equal the quality of their current educational experience. The media has influenced many of these perceptions. There has been much speculation about why students are considering undergraduate study in the United States in the media. Additionally, there has been negative publicity surrounding the amount of funding allotted to universities in the United Kingdom. There has been media coverage surrounding the university lecturers threatening to strike if they do not receive additional compensation. One student explained, “I don’t want to be sceptical but I’m pretty sure that the universities in Great Britain might be degrading in a way as the funding is going down.” He felt that only a few universities were worth considering in the United Kingdom. He said that, “Trinity Cambridge is still up there and a few others, but apart from that the other colleges are losing. As a result, I won’t have the level of teaching that I’ve come to expect at Eton.”

In addition to experiences influencing student's decisions to consider undergraduate study in the United States, the influences of friends, family and careers advisors also played a role in student's decisions to consider undergraduate study in the United States. Some student's parents encouraged them to consider going to the United States for undergraduate study. For others, the interest started when their careers advisor shared information on undergraduate study in the United States. These people have played a large role in students' consideration of undergraduate study in the United States. Without these influences, many of the students would probably stay in the United Kingdom possibly dissatisfied with their educational experience. Once they received encouragement from their friends, family members or careers advisor, they were more willing to consider undergraduate study in the United States. The idea of leaving their home country seems less foreign and scary and more like a real possibility.

The historical class differences became apparent when interviewing students at the different schools. As discussed earlier, students attending Christ's Hospital are primarily scholarship students from low-income families whereas students attending Eton College and CATS Cambridge come from wealthy upper class families. Although the government has worked hard to eliminate the class differentiation in the United Kingdom, the perception of social class is still prevalent. The Guardian conducted a study in 2007 to determine the perception of social class and social mobility and whether the perception of class differences still exist. The Guardian study found that 89% of people in the United Kingdom believe that their social standing determines how they are judged. Almost half of those feel that it still counts for "a lot" (Glover, 2007). This study shows that social standing still influences people in the United Kingdom.

This social class system is apparent in multiple areas of their lives and can specifically be seen in educational opportunity. Amanda Root (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2007) explains, "About half of all Oxbridge students still come from public (ie private, fee-charging) schools, yet such schools educate only about 7 per cent of the school-age population." The Sutton Trust (2008) conducted a study to determine university admissions by individual schools. The study determined that 100 elite schools accounted for a third of admissions to Oxbridge during the prior five years. These 100 schools make up less than 3% of 3,700 schools offering sixth form education in the United Kingdom. Of these 100 schools both Eton College and Christ's Hospital make the list. It should be noted that Eton is in the top ten while Christ's Hospital is in the bottom ten. The schools with the highest admissions rates to Oxbridge are highly socially selective. The Sutton Trust study also found that the top 200 schools and colleges make up 48% of admissions to Oxbridge. The other 3,500 schools and colleges account for the remaining 52% of admissions, with one per cent of their university entrants going to Oxbridge (Sutton Trust, 2008).

When conducting the interviews at Christ's Hospital and the interviews at Eton College, the primary researcher observed a difference in the ways the students viewed their chances at gaining admission to highly selective institutions. The Eton College students expected to gain admission to highly selective institution whether at Oxbridge or an Ivy League school. The students at Christ's Hospital were thankful for the opportunity to attend a good sixth form college. They explained that they worked extremely hard to gain admission to Christ's Hospital and did not want to let their parents or themselves down by not gaining admission to a highly selective university.

The social class difference also became apparent with the students' adventurous spirit. The students at Christ's Hospital had not visited the United States. They had not had the travel opportunities the Eton College students had been afforded. As a result, the adventurous spirit of the Christ's Hospital students is a driving influence in their decision to consider undergraduate study in the United States. Because the Eton College students have had the opportunity to travel and visit the United States, their desire to study in the United States is driven more by the perceived opportunity for success. While the Christ's Hospital students desire success and are considering undergraduate study in the United States because of this desire, this desire is influenced primarily by their adventurous spirit. The Eton College students are partially influenced by their adventurous spirit, but primary influence is the perceived success a degree from a highly selective university in the United States will afford them.

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Theme 2

New Technologies and Student Engagement

Paper 9

A SiMERRing Story: New approaches to professional learning for teachers in rural and regional areas of Australia.

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Abstract

The research project outlined in this paper aligns with the priorities of the National Centre for Science, ICT and Mathematics Education for rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR). A key aim of the Centre is to support the achievement of students and to promote teacher growth by working collaboratively with communities, educational authorities, professional associations and industry groups in the conduct of research and other professional activities. The Centre especially seeks to address problems faced by teachers in rural and regional areas who otherwise might be professionally isolated. The research project was conducted by members of the local SiMERR Hub located at the Australian Catholic University in Canberra. This SiMERR project brought together a university, teachers, learning technology officers and selected schools in rural, regional and urban settings to establish a dynamic professional learning community that facilitated the development of quality pedagogy and teachers improved sense of self efficacy, in the use of interactive whiteboards in their classrooms. All participating teachers had interactive whiteboards (IWBs) in their classrooms and had demonstrated some competency and enthusiasm for the use of ICT to enhance their teaching and their students' learning. The paper provides an overview of the research design adopted for the project, its underlying rationale and the methodologies used during the research development. A predominantly qualitative approach is utilised for the analysis of data gathered through questionnaires, semi-focused interviews with students and teachers, and lesson observations, including videotaped lessons of teachers' use of interactive whiteboards. The relationship between the project and the development of self-efficacy beliefs is also discussed.

Introduction

The introduction of information technologies (ICT) has been integral to education within the last decade (Lee & Gaffney, 2008). Instructors with high teacher self-efficacy are more likely to embrace new teaching strategies including the integration of technology into their pedagogical practice (Albion, 1999, 2001; Bruce & Ross, 2008). The appearance of interactive whiteboards within the classroom has been termed a 'revolution' (Betcher & Lee, 2009), and one that has the capacity to highlight the strong correlation between technology use and teacher self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy with respect to computers has been found to be an important factor in decisions about using them (Hill, Smith & Mann, 1987) and increased performance with computer related tasks was found to be significantly related to higher levels of computer self-efficacy (Harrison, Rainer, Hochwarter & Thompson, 1997).

Literature Review

Educational researchers have attempted to measure teacher efficacy and teachers' self-efficacy beliefs for the past 25 years (Bandura, 1997; Dellinger, et al. 2008), and the recent TALIS report highlights the links between self-efficacy and productivity and people's actions in the workplace (OECD 2009, p.5). Bandura (1977) argued it is through a person's sense of self-efficacy that behaviour is acquired. Personal self-efficacy is defined as 'judgments about how well one can organise and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations that contain ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements' (Bandura, 1977, p.201). When related to education, self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs or judgments about their abilities to teach effectively. Teachers with a stronger sense of self-efficacy are believed to be more open to new approaches and strategies for teaching and are more willing to implement innovative instructional practices that meet the needs of their students. When studying the relationship between teachers' workplace factors and teaching quality, Rosenholtz (1989) found that teachers were more committed, effective and more inclined to adopt new classroom behaviours when their own learning and classroom practices were supported.

The link between self-efficacy and learning strategies has been examined for sometime (Pittard, Bannister, & Dunn, 2003; Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Higgins, et al. 2005; Schuck & Kearney, M., 2007). The TALIS report (OECD, 2009, p.5) states that ‘when teachers envisage effective teaching as a skill that can be acquired, this feeling of self-efficacy can help them better analyse and solve problems’. These teachers also persist in the face of student failure, are more resilient when facing setbacks, and are more likely to provide special assistance to students who are struggling (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The inter-relationships between teacher-efficacy, empowerment of positive teacher-student learning interactions, and beneficial outcomes for students who are recipients of this process have been consistently recognised in research (Bandura, 1997; Wertheim & Leyser, 2002; Marat, 2007).

Early research of the impact of interactive whiteboards (IWBs), as they were introduced, focused on the management of change; teachers had to first become fluent in the use of the new technology and then develop an awareness of related classroom management issues. An extensive review of the literature regarding the introduction of interactive whiteboards in educational settings is provided by Smith, Higgins, Wall and Miller (2005). Their review notes that while teachers and students demonstrate a clear preference for the use of IWBs, it is unclear if this enthusiasm is ‘translated into effective and purposeful practice’ (p.99). They argue that the uniqueness and value of IWB technology ‘lies in the possibility for an intersection between technological and pedagogic interactivity’ (p.99) and that further research of practitioners’ use of IWB technology as transformational devices is required if it is to be more fully understood and more coherently conceptualized (p.99). Betcher and Lee (2009, p.6) suggest the research indicates that IWBs are acting as ‘an effective ‘gateway’ for many teachers to start exploring the further use of digital technologies in their classrooms’.

Teachers’ beliefs have been shown to be a significant factor in the success at integrating technology (Albion, 1999; 2001; Albion & Ertmer, 2002; Becta, 2006, 2007). Lumpe and Chambers (2001) identify fourteen contextual factors impacting on teachers’ beliefs about technology, and professional development was also found to be significant. The higher amount of technology use by teachers correlated both with the amount of professional development received and also with the time spent outside the classroom in preparation for instruction. Dean’s (2001) study of the impact of a teacher-focused technology integration program, found computer attitudes and computer self-efficacy to be significantly higher following professional development. Further, it was found that the teachers’ self-perception of their role changes dramatically from the ‘sage on the stage’ approach to one where the teacher operates more as a ‘guide on the side’. The study also acknowledged the benefits for students from technology infusion efforts. Openness to change regardless of teaching philosophy or beliefs about one’s teaching ability has also been noted as important (Vannatta & Fordham, 2004).

Saleh (2008) argues that from the viewpoint of self-efficacy theory, the ideal method for developing teachers’ self-efficacy towards computer use is to provide teachers with training and support to work successfully with computers. Overbaugh and Lu (2008) determined that without a sufficient level of self-efficacy for performing computer tasks, technology integration may not even be attempted. Their research on the impact of professional development related to technology, combining online and face-to-face immersion courses, confirmed that these courses changed how participants taught and this resulted in an increase in students’ learning outcomes. Furthermore, the elevation in efficacy scores was maintained over time (Overbaugh & Lu, 2008, p.56).

Although training programs may appear to focus on increasing technical proficiency, they can result in an increase in computer self-efficacy, changes in attitudes and belief systems, and heightened awareness of the potential of technology to enhance classroom teaching. The Saleh (2008) study involving tertiary lecturers, determined that ‘focused training on specific software, applications to learning in their disciplines, developing confidence, and learning communities directed by faculty peers’ (p.237) were more effective than extrinsic rewards.

Peery (2002) highlights the effectiveness of peer-led, open-ended and active classroom-based professional development for teachers and the importance of sharing this new learning. In an earlier study, Borchers, et al. (1992) demonstrated that professional development over an extended period with on-site support for participants could be effective for increasing both self-efficacy and computer use. The use of peer trainers with

high computer self-efficacy as mentors provides an excellent application of the vicarious experience component of self-efficacy theory. The trainers, who hold positive beliefs about the integration of technology and pedagogy, benefit by having their views reinforced and level of mastery increased as they share their expertise with others. Saleh (2008) argues that although some barriers may deter the implementation of technology in teaching, it is imperative that strategies and techniques for increasing computer self-efficacy be incorporated into quality instructional practices as part of the 'paradigm shift into the information age' (p. 238).

Context

This research project aligns with the priorities of the National Centre for Science, ICT and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR), which, in 2006, was established to improve educational outcomes in Science, ICT and Mathematics for students in rural and regional schools. The Centre also aimed to ensure that teachers working in rural and regional environments would feel professionally connected and supported.

The increasing use of interactive whiteboards, especially in primary classrooms (Smith, et al. 2005; Kennewell, 2006; Betcher & Lee, 2009) and a desire to learn more about the potential of interactive whiteboards to strengthen pedagogical practice provided the impetus for the research project reported in this paper. Teachers in Canberra, in rural NSW, University academic staff and learning technologies officers (LTOs) from the Catholic Education Office (CEO) Canberra and Goulburn Diocese were involved in the project. Generally, LTOs work collaboratively with teachers in Catholic schools to provide professional learning focused on enhancing learning and teaching and to support the development of new technologies and resources. In this project, the role of the LTOs was to liaise with members of the research team and teachers in the field.

Participants in Phase One and Phase Two of the Project

- Three academic staff members from the Australian Catholic University in Canberra.
- Three Catholic Education Office staff members (Canberra/Goulburn).
- Fifty teachers from eight schools in rural and regional NSW and Canberra, ACT.

The project was conducted in two linked phases:

Phase One

Phase One of the SiMERR Project (2006-07) was titled: *Utilising the information and communication technologies to build a professional learning community to enhance the learning outcomes of teachers and students in rural and regional schools in NSW and the ACT.*

This phase of the project linked St Francis Xavier School, Lake Cargelligo, in western New South Wales, with five primary schools in the Canberra region. Collaboration between the teachers in these schools aimed to support peer mentoring in the use of ICT technologies in classrooms, and to facilitate the development of an effective and sustainable professional learning community. The participating schools already had a number of interactive whiteboards (IWBs) in their classrooms, and some teachers had demonstrated a degree of competency in, and enthusiasm for, the use of the boards to improve the quality of their classroom practice and strengthen the students' learning.

The identified outcomes from Phase One were:

- Development of a sense of ownership for the project by the participants;
- Establishment of effective professional relationships and sense of community between teachers in the various schools;
- Development of ICT skills through full-day forums, professional engagement and sharing of ideas and resources;
- Emergence of spontaneous mentoring between early career teachers and established practitioners, especially those with expertise in the use of IWBs;
- High levels of teacher motivation to broaden the scope of the project; and
- Development of strong University-school partnerships.

As Phase One neared completion it became evident that the skills developed by the teachers in the local Canberra schools, and who had more pre-project experience in the use of IWBs than their rural colleagues, were now at a level where peer mentoring was possible. This process was introduced during Phase Two of the project in 2008, which saw three more rural schools located at Cootamundra, Young and Temora, NSW, join the emerging 'professional learning community' with the Phase One teachers from the local schools assuming a leadership role in mentoring their rural colleagues. All three new rural schools had recently installed IWBs but little technological or pedagogical support had been provided.

Phase Two

During this stage of the project links were created between the three rural schools and staff from the research team, the CEO and local teachers in Canberra. Two Twilight Sessions were held in the rural town of Cootamundra in May and June 2008. These were well attended and required considerable commitment by the teachers from Temora and Young who travelled long distances after school and at the weekend to participate in this IWB professional learning experience in Cootamundra. At each Twilight Session, teachers who had participated in Phase One of the project presented a series of workshops in classroom locations at Cootamundra. The workshops were designed to build teachers' knowledge and skills relevant to their specific needs and those of their students within a supportive professional learning community. Written evaluative comments by participants show that this aspect was regarded as highly significant in contributing to the overall success of the sessions.

Members of the University research team and staff from the CEO in Canberra also travelled to Cootamundra to facilitate the sessions and work collaboratively with teachers. To further support the teachers, an interactive online professional network was set up to enhance the teachers' learning and communication with one another. Building on the Twilight Sessions, a weekend Professional Development Day was convened at the local school in Cootamundra to extend the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the way in which IWBs might be used to develop higher order thinking and enhance the teachers' pedagogical approaches in their classrooms.

Phase One and Phase Two Project activities consisted of:

- Three full day ICT forums held in Cootamundra and Canberra for a total of 40 teachers;
- Two Twilight professional development IWB sessions held in Cootamundra for 30 rural teachers, facilitated by 5 teachers from the ACT;
- A full day professional development intensive IWB training program in Cootamundra, on the pedagogy of higher-order thinking in classroom practice, for 30 teachers from Canberra, Young, Temora and the Cootamundra regions;
- The development of shared digital materials, IWB flip charts and teaching resources; and
- Set-up of a Western Region IWB information technology online internet sharing site.

Research Design Methodology

The methodological approach adopted for this research project was predominantly qualitative with some quantitative strategies used for the collection of data. These included semi-focused in-depth interviews with teachers and students, questionnaires, lesson observations, and videotaped lessons of teachers using IWBs in their classrooms. These were used during workshops for sharing and reflection. All interviews with teachers and students were audio taped and conducted in schools. The teachers were released from classroom responsibilities to be able to participate in the interviews during school time.

The research addressed the following questions:

- What benefits and costs have resulted from the establishment of a professional learning community for teachers and students in the participating schools?
- How has the use of the information and communication technologies assisted in building community and enhancing the learning outcomes for all participants?
- What implications are there from this study for the development of effective models of professional

learning experiences for teachers in rural, regional and urban schools?

Interview Procedures

Eighteen teachers were interviewed to ascertain the development of their personal and professional use of IWBs in classroom practice. Questions were also asked regarding the concept of 'on-site' rural professional development and the creation of a supportive learning community. Each interview, which was tape recorded and transcribed, was on average 35-40 minutes in length and used to explore the impact of the two phases of the project. Using a semi-structured interview protocol constructed by the authors to guide the discussions, questions focused on the participants' attitudes toward the impact of the professional learning program on their technology competencies, their willingness to integrate IWB use into their teaching and the effect on their students' learning. They clearly acknowledged that initially there was little support after the installation of the IWBs from the suppliers, and that they were very much 'on their own' in many respects in learning how to use the boards. Focus groups were also conducted with approximately 180 students who had been taught by these teachers.

Analysis and Discussion of Teacher Interviews

The following analysis of data obtained during the 18 teacher interviews provides an insight into the views and thoughts of these teachers on their learning journey.

Value of IWBs to teachers

The teachers' comments highlighted their growing perception of the value of the interactive whiteboards in their classrooms. As one teacher commented, she 'could not imagine being without it' and the use of the interactive whiteboard had given her 'a new lease of life trying out other things and manipulating objects'. Another teacher felt she now had 'a new focus'. Whereas previously, this teacher had spent a significant amount of time making and laminating resources, the ready access to resources through the interactive whiteboard had allowed her to use her time more productively.

The impact on teaching style was evident from comments such as:

My teaching style has changed because I can use a lesson now where I can plan for more student involvement. Before, when I used a blackboard and a whiteboard there was minimal involvement. Now I can plan so much more involvement. With the IWB my creativity, efficiency and time management have increased also. (Yr 5 teacher)

Versatility in teaching and proficiency in technology resulted in teachers claiming, 'I think I was a very good teacher before. It has made me a 'deeper' teacher because I've been able to access all technologies e.g., the net, film, video and print within a lesson rather than separate from the lesson'. (Kindergarten teacher)

The qualitative data gathered from the discussion and interview groups suggests that using an IWB facilitates curriculum integration and the development of information and communication technology skills. A beginning teacher found the integration relatively natural,

I'm proficient in using the internet and all that sort of thing. It's been fairly easy for me to integrate it into my teaching. (Yr 5/6 teacher)

The increased levels of IWB integration were consistent across the group to the extent where one teacher acknowledged 'the amount you can do on the board day to day is only limited by your imagination'. (Year 5/6 teacher) Increased satisfaction with their work was mentioned in most of the interviews. While a number stated that their prior ICT skills were almost non-existent and that the learning curve in the first few months was considerable, all teachers were adamant that they would not want to return to using a static whiteboard.

I've been teaching for a considerable amount of time and using an IWB is probably the most revolutionary thing I've done. (Yr 4 teacher)

For a beginning teacher the experience was different, and the following comment is consistent with Hall and Martin (2008) that newer teachers report higher levels of self-efficacy in regards to technology.

... it's just a change of technology, the change in the way we are teaching. I'm learning in my first year out so I'm quite

happy to learn anything, do anything. I'm not scared of technology, I love technology so for me it's just great training....., another PD opportunity for me that I'm going to have that I can take further and continue to learn. (Yr 5/6 teacher)

Teachers commented that they were now more creative in the ways they use the technology. They tended to use a clear visual representation of concepts and ideas to consolidate learning, and often engaged every child in the class on a systematic basis in student use of the board. Teachers either obtained a wide range of ready-made resources to make mathematics, science and literacy activities interesting or developed these IWB resources themselves as their expertise increased. There was significant sharing of resources in local groups and through the online community.

Most negative comments were related to the technical reliability of the boards and the associated equipment. Some initial complaints also concerned the amount of time required to develop flip charts and other resources. These complaints, however, were often moderated by the positive comment that longer term use would result in more time efficiency as teachers developed higher level skills, a wider range of curriculum materials and shared resources with their colleagues.

Student Outcomes

Teachers interviewed during the project believed their students were more on task and more motivated.

I think that the behaviour issues are just non-existent with the [interactive] whiteboard because the kids are so interested in it. The inter-activeness is there in what they can see, and there is so much more available which is getting them to be more interested in their learning and keener to learn. (Yr 5/6 teacher)

They also believed that the students covered curriculum content at a faster pace with much more capacity to extend and explore a subject in depth.

Definitely, if they're more engaged they're...getting more work done. You can certainly see that their interest level has increased, therefore their work is better. (Year 5/6 teacher)

They are more attentive now and they're more interested and they enjoy learning more when it's done with the board. (Year 1/2 teacher)

Special emphasis was placed on the ease of scaffolding lessons and return to prior learning at the touch of a screen. Teachers stated that they were able to cater more effectively to a variety of multiple intelligences and that there was generally higher engagement of students with special needs, as indicated by Blanton et al. (2002) and Wall et al. (2005).

Being able to make your own flip charts just gives that extra visual, ...with students who are visual learners, it's really good for getting them up to work on the board and building their confidence. (Yr 5/6 teacher)

The opportunities for curriculum differentiation were more easily facilitated.

If you are doing a topic on optical illusions it is one thing to show them a picture and pass it around, but to have it on the IWB so they can see it and go up to see it more closely and manipulate the models they don't want to go home because they get so involved in it!! (Yr 5/6 teacher)

Significance of the Learning Community and Peer Trainers

The online learning community was seen by a significant percentage of respondents to provide ongoing professional support and development of best practice for isolated teachers. The fact that much of the project was facilitated in the rural location was particularly appreciated and the peer trainers were certainly valued.

[Peer trainer name] showing me what she had done with it and just having people around that knew what they were doing, that was really, really good, and they were very, very organised and it was run very well. (Yr 1/2 teacher)

The credibility of the peer teacher was much appreciated:

It was good to be able to go up to some of those teachers and say 'What do you do with this?' Probably the best thing too about that was that they were willing to share any resource that they had and it didn't matter. (Yr 5/6

Teacher)

The concept of focused technology training identified by Saleh (2008) was confirmed in this study.

They had experience and we started in the low, low levels, we knew nothing and then it didn't really take that long to think 'OK, I am comfortable with doing this and this' and it's just you practicing. (Yr 5 teacher)

Teachers spoke of the value of programs being made available in a folder or clip chart so that everyone could access resources through the network and acknowledged the reciprocity of the online community.

Now it's more you wanting to go and tell them rather than them coming and saying 'How do I teach this'? You go and say 'You know, I just had a fantastic lesson. I did this with the board, you should try it.' You are keener to volunteer ideas. (Year 5/6 teacher)

Increase in Teacher Efficacy

Increasingly research confirms that there is a distinct need to implement new forms of continuous professional development in a workplace environment as part of a culture of lifelong and peer learning. (Balanskat et al 2006). Current research literature supports the contention that increased self-efficacy may have a beneficial impact upon motivation for teachers as they pursue improvement in pedagogical skills and professional knowledge. Teachers' poor ICT competence, low motivation and lack of confidence in using new technologies in teaching are significant determinants of their levels of engagement in ICT. These are directly related to the quality and quantity of teacher training programs.

A Year Six teacher's reflection highlights the importance of personal self-efficacy as a very influential construct in supporting the belief that the teacher has the skills to influence student learning and behaviour. (Bandura 1997)

I'm not an ICT person. When they first talked about computers in schools I prayed that they would not come. I would not say I'm computer literate now, but I am interactive whiteboard literate because that is a tool for my teaching. We've got to give the best to our kids and this is really helping me to do this. There is no saying 'No, I'm not going to do it!!'

To be confident, teachers must be able to upgrade their ICT skills and gain more pedagogical knowledge in a much more active way than previously. Teachers have to become active shapers of their own learning process which requires a professional environment and culture that allows teachers to do this. The approach in this project using peer tutoring, and everyday practice was an important factor in increasing teachers' self-efficacy and pedagogical competence. Training programs were school-based and adapted to the particular needs of teachers in order to address their personal and subject specific needs, or project related needs. The locally based Twilight Programs, forums and full day professional development sessions were spaced at intervals over several months and provided practice oriented projects in day to day classroom pedagogy. This approach raised the confidence level of teachers as they developed a stronger sense of self-efficacy, were more open to new approaches and strategies for teaching and became more willing to implement new innovative instruction practices using IWBs.

I think the style of training used allowed us to do things for ourselves. Just like the children, that is the best way to learn and learn from your mistakes. The training model was so crucial to the success of this course. (Yr 5 teacher)

Focus group analysis also identified greater teacher self-efficacy and further student learning enhancement for the participants in this study. This affirms Saleh's (2008) contention that when low self-efficacy is not addressed, technology usage will suffer, but usage alone does not increase self-efficacy. Issues of effective technological support need to be addressed to overcome fears, particularly those that may be experienced by older teachers. In contrast to the younger teachers, older teachers confirmed that fear was initially a barrier for them. They stated that they were concerned or scared of the new technology and using it 'what if it doesn't work, or what if I have a problem?' (Year 5/6 teacher) This was true for both rural and regional teachers.

The development of focused training courses led to elevation in teacher self-efficacy and correspondingly increased IWB use. Bruce and Ross (2008) comment that receiving positive and constructive feedback from a respected peer increases goal setting, motivation to take risks and implementation of challenging teaching strategies (p.347)

At the start we probably weren't using them to their full potential but now the more we have them in the room and the more you do and the more the months go by you learn more things, you talk to other teachers, you collaborate and from that you tend to start to use them more. (Year 1/2 teacher)

Conclusion

This project shows what can be achieved when schools capitalise on positive attitudes and teachers are supported to explore new technology. The outcomes from this project also show clearly the benefits that accrue when teachers in regional and rural communities receive specifically tailored professional on-site learning opportunities that address identified needs. These experiences allowed the teachers to move from the 'novelty factor' in using new technology in their classrooms to a clearer pedagogic understanding of the impact that ICT can have on their day-to-day work in the classroom. The often-perceived mismatch between the potential of ICT for learning and the actual teaching approach used by teachers was narrowed. As the various groups involved in the project worked together, these collaborative partnerships significantly improved attitudinal factors, basic proficiency, and awareness of instructional potential leading to more equitable and sustainable learning outcomes for all. Increased self-efficacy resulted from practical training, providing easy to use ICT based materials and resources, peer learning and peer sharing of experiences (Watson, 2006). In doing this ICT was more clearly integrated into the schools resulting in an enhanced potential for it to act as a catalyst for even greater change.

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Paper 10

The Use of Discussion Boards by First Year Business Information Systems 100 Students

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Abstract

Business Information Systems 100 (BIS100) is a common core business unit at Curtin Business School in Western Australia. The unit is offered to first year Bachelor of Commerce students in face-to-face, distance or online modes; over 1166 students were enrolled in BIS100 in Semester 1 2009. In all modes of learning students were given access to a learning management system (LMS) and encouraged to communicate through the discussion board. The use of such technology is expected to enhance access, quality, interaction and flexibility (Eastman & Owens Swift, 2002; Eaton, 2003; Freedman, 2008). Moreover, Krentler and Willis-Flurry (2005) found in their research with university business school students that the use of technologies such as discussion boards and the Internet enhanced student learning. Similarly, learning management systems are used at Curtin Business School to enhance access, quality, interaction, engagement and learning. Curtin Business School students are introduced to the FLECS-Blackboard learning management system and encouraged to use the discussion board functionality through first year common core units such as Business Information Systems 100. Local Western Australian students attend lectures and tutorials and also have access to the FLECS-Blackboard learning management system; access to the BIS 100 unit is online for all distance education students. The same weekly content is delivered for both groups. Quantitative data were collected; students' use of discussion boards was monitored and comparisons made between usage at the beginning and end of a semester. Also, the numbers of students who contributed and posted to individual threads was monitored. Additionally, qualitative data were collected; key informants were asked for their opinion on how best to enhance students' learning experiences through the use of learning management systems. In this paper, the researchers present their findings about the relationship between students' different levels of engagement with discussion boards and their learning outcomes. Also, consideration is given concerning how best to enhance students' learning through the use of discussion boards. In the future, this research could be extended to consider the quality of student interactions on discussion boards and usage by different age groups. In addition to this consideration could be given to the differences in student interactions on FLECS-Blackboard in voluntary participation, as in this research, and compulsory participation in discussion boards for assessment purposes.

Introduction

As new technologies have emerged they have been adopted by educators to engage students more effectively in their learning and increase the effectiveness of their own teaching. Even so, this adoption of new technologies has created challenges for traditional pedagogical approaches to learning and teaching. The advent of the Internet has facilitated the development of learning management systems and changed the way distance education is delivered, but what kind of impact has it had on face-to-face instructional methodologies?

In 2009, the authors sought to deepen their understanding of the pedagogical impact of the use of learning management systems in higher education; in particular, they investigated the use of discussion boards within a first year business education unit, Business Information Systems (BIS) 100, at Curtin Business School (CBS) in Perth, Western Australia. Quantitative data were collected by interrogating the learning management system used at Curtin University, FLECS-Blackboard. Qualitative data were collected by interviewing key stakeholders in relation to the use of discussion boards. In this paper, background information is provided which contextualises BIS100 within the Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) offered by Curtin Business School. Also, the different ways academics use FLECS-Blackboard to enhance students learning within Curtin University and its largest faculty, CBS, is discussed. Additionally, a review of the literature was conducted; hence, an overview of current thinking about blended learning is included in this paper. It was evident from the review of the literature that until recently minimal research had been done in relation to blended learning and the relationship between students' learning and the use of technology; there is scope for further research into the pedagogical implications of the use of learning technologies, particularly the use of discussion boards (Krentler & Willis-Flurry, 2005; Vaughan & Garrison, 2005).

What is Blended Learning?

Blended learning is the combination of multiple approaches to learning; it is used both in higher education and in workplace professional learning contexts. According to Driscoll (1998, in Baldwin-Evans, 2006) blended learning is a combination of different technology based learning opportunities and pedagogical approaches, as well as different instructional technology integrated into workplace activities. Instructional technology can be face-to-face, via the Internet or CD-ROM. Blended learning combines and maximizes the benefits of face-to-face and virtual educational and workplace learning environments (Mackay & Stockport, 2006; Mitchell & Honore, 2007). Even so, getting the blend of learning opportunities just right is important (Hoffman & Miner, 2008; Mitchell & Honore, 2007).

According to Vaughan and Garrison (2005, p.2) *blended learning is on the cusp of transforming higher education*. However, the transformation of higher education via blended learning is dependent upon a clear understanding about the quality and nature of blended learning. In the earlier days, e-learning in higher education referred to web-based learning and teaching materials and online activities. More recently, effective blended learning is understood to be the integration of quality online learning experiences with the best of face-to-face instruction in a planned, pedagogically valuable manner which also reduces traditional class contact time (Vaughan & Garrison, 2005). It is cautioned that mere substitution and enrichment of face-to-face for electronic learning is unlikely to be successful in higher education.

Importantly, Vaughan and Garrison (2005) asserted that this thoughtful integration is neither an add-on to a classroom lecture nor an online course. It is the fundamental redesign and an optimal (re)design approach to enhance and extend learning by rethinking and restructuring teaching and learning. The interpretation of Vaughan and Garrison (2005) is notable simply because it addresses and expands Laurillard's (2002) idea on refining the learning and teaching in higher education by embedding educational technology. Curtin University has adopted an approach consistent with refining the learning and teaching process by embedding technology and is investigating strategies for the provision of quality blended learning across the institution. The need for continuing investigation into how best to thoughtfully integrate technology to enhance students' learning in higher education is reiterated in the literature.

What Type of Pedagogy Facilitates Blended Learning?

The advent of emerging technologies has generated a need for new pedagogies to enhance students' learning (Eaton, 2003). A survey conducted at the end of a three year action research study into the blended learning delivery of an MBA program at Ashridge Business School in Hertfordshire in the United Kingdom showed the majority of participants agreed that implementation of e-learning strategies demanded new attitudes and skills from lecturers and students alike (Mitchell & Honore, 2007). Lecturers' ability to actively engage students in the learning process was an important pedagogical factor in the facilitation of effective blended learning environments (Arbaugh et. al., 2009; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996; Paetzold & Melby, 2008).

Active learning did not just happen and was not synonymous with online learning even though it could be enhanced through the use of technology. Hence, it was necessary for lecturers to plan for active learning to occur (Arbaugh et. al., 2009; Paetzold & Melby, 2008). Additionally, Wan, Fang and Neufeld (2007, in Arbaugh et. al., 2009) noted that blended learning was influenced by the interaction of students' and lecturers' personal traits, technology and instructional design. The use of communication technologies could enhance contact between lecturers and students (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996).

In this paper the impact of the use discussion boards in blended learning environments is considered. One of the problems associated with blended learning is that lecturers could be unsure about how to use emerging technologies in their classrooms if they are unaware of the associated advantages and disadvantages or if they have insufficient knowledge of appropriate pedagogies. In recent research Bolt and Dickie (2009) found the use of discussion boards was perceived to be advantageous in distance education but lecturers doubted its usefulness for face-to-face learning situations. In many cases lecturers were familiar with managing in-class discussions, but less familiar with facilitating asynchronous online discussions made up of a series of posts and

responses linked together as a threaded discussion. To determine the respective advantages and disadvantages of the two modes of discussion, Meyer (2003) compared the benefits of face-to-face versus threaded discussions by investigating the roles of time and thinking. Not surprisingly, Meyer (2003) found that face-to-face discussions produced energy because of the speed at which the discussion occurred; whereas, threaded discussions took more time.

Moreover, an energetic discussion commenced in a face-to-face learning situation could be extended and deepened outside of class time through the use of discussion board forums. Although higher-order thinking was evident in both forms of discussion, brainstorming activities were better suited to face-to-face discussions and thinking that required time for students to reflect was better suited to threaded discussions (Meyer, 2003). Additionally, Salmon (2000, in Arbaugh et. al., 2009), noted that compared with face-to-face learning opportunities online courses were more likely to promote reflective learning.

Sometimes it was difficult for academics to spark ‘an energetic discussion’ amongst some groups of students, particularly in undergraduate units. Nunn (1996, in Sloffer, Dueber, & Duffy, 1999, p.11) found that “student discussion averaged only about 2% of class time”. Students, also, noted that face-to-face discussions could be superficial compared to the more reflective types of comments generated by threaded discussions. In class, lecturers could employ cooperative learning strategies to spark discussion (Bennett, Rolheiser, & Stevahn, 1991; Kagan, 1994). Even so, perhaps, because of language difficulties or lack of experience students, still, may be reluctant to participate. Hence, the provision of opportunities for students to engage in threaded discussion as well as face-to-face discussion could broaden the opportunities for students with different learning styles and abilities to engage more effectively in discussions.

Does Participation in Discussion Boards Enhance Student Learning?

In early studies that compared student learning outcomes as a result of either online or face-to-face delivery, there appeared to be no difference in students’ final exam results (Arbaugh et. al., 2009). Sankaran and Bui (2001, in Arbaugh et. al., 2009) attributed differences in students’ performance to their learning strategies and motivation levels rather than the course delivery method. In their study, Clouse and Evans (2003, in Arbaugh et. al., 2009, p.75) found that “the combination of asynchronous content delivery and synchronous chat sessions produced the poorest results on exam questions, but that the combination of face-to-face content delivery and asynchronous discussion produced significant improvement on open-ended exam questions”. Krentler and Willis-Flurry (2005) found that when business school students did not choose to use discussion boards, students majoring in Marketing or Information Systems outperformed their peers. However, when students chose to use discussion boards the performances of students from across all business majors were comparable. Thus, the use of discussion boards *appeared to equalize student performance* (Krentler & Willis-Flurry, 2005, p.320). As a result of this research, Krentler and Willis-Flurry (2005) suggested that students who were less intrinsically motivated by their field of study or less experienced with the use of technology could enhance their learning through utilising technology such as discussion boards.

In this paper, the outcomes of preliminary research into the use of discussion boards by business education lecturers and students are presented. The methodology is discussed in the following section and the results of the study are presented later in the paper.

Methodology

The authors conducted the case study research presented in this paper in 2009 in a Western Australian Business School. The case in question was the Business Information Systems 100 unit which was located in the context of Curtin University’s Bachelor of Commerce degree as one of the seven first year common core units. The focus of the research was on the use of discussion boards by students enrolled in BIS100 in various locations and modes of study. BIS100 was an interesting case because it provided access to three different learning contexts; that is, a large first year unit, a small Year 12 experience unit and distance classes. The purpose of the study was to determine the frequency of students’ discussion forum usage in a range of situations, consider its impact on student learning outcomes and provide advice about pedagogical considerations for enhancing students’ learning through the use of discussion boards.

Mark Graber coordinated and taught BIS100 in face-to-face and online learning situations for 10 years. As the Unit Coordinator of BIS100 and a lecturer within the School of Information Systems, Mark had extensive knowledge and understanding of the unit and how to effectively engage students through the use of discussion board forums. Notably, the authors conducted related research into the flexible delivery of BIS100 through a partnership agreement between Curtin University and the African Virtual University (Grabber & Bolt, 2009). Susan Bolt, as CBS Coordinator of Teaching and Learning, also, had extensive knowledge in relation to this case and pedagogical approaches that enhanced student learning. In relation to her professional duties and associated research activities, Susan observed the delivery of BIS100 to students enrolled at the Curtin Bentley Campus in both the large unit and the Year 12 experience unit on several occasions throughout Semester 1, 2009 and, subsequently, provided feedback to lecturers in relation to her observations.

To overcome any bias that may have existed because of their close association with BIS100, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with three key informants about the use of discussion boards. The number of key informants was low because only a few key people had access to the type of information required in this research. Moreover, investigations of this nature were not typically conducted and data were only available for a brief period of time. Initially, the authors explained the purpose of this research to the key informants and discussed how the data could be obtained through an interrogation of Curtin FLEC-Blackboard databases. After an interrogation of the databases the findings were reported back to the authors. The key informants, also, provided advice on the effective use of discussion boards to enhance students' learning. Numerical data from databases were analysed quantitatively and reported in this paper as percentages, graphs and tables. Qualitative data were reflected upon by the researchers and reported descriptively in the paper. Further to this, the authors investigated relevant Curtin University websites and reviewed literature pertaining to blended learning.

Although most data were collected through the interrogation of Curtin University databases ethical issues concerning research with humans were considered. Participants were informed about the purposes of the research and given the opportunity to volunteer their participation. No participants were coerced and all participants had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured and participants' names have not been used. At the conclusion of the research the findings were shared with key informants and disseminated more widely to the academic community through conference presentations and scholarly publications.

Context in which BIS100 is Situated

At Curtin University lecturers are encouraged to provide flexible learning opportunities that enhance students' access to information, each other, and learning spaces. The FLECS-Blackboard learning management system has been adopted by Curtin University to provide learning spaces, manage classes, provide information and engage learners. Even so there are different levels of usage of the FLECS-Blackboard learning management system (LMS). Some units have no online component. If there is an online component it may be informational, supplemental, essential, or fully online. At the informational level, an online unit site would contain information such as a unit outline and details about the unit assessment items. The LMS is recognised as an optional source of information for students. At the supplemental level, the online unit site is used to enhance face-to-face instruction and may contain lecture notes and additional resources. At the essential level, the unit is designed so that students engage with a significant proportion of the learning activities via the website. If a unit is fully online there is no face-to-face component; all learning activities are delivered online (Office of Teaching and Learning, 2009).

Curtin Business School (CBS) has an international reputation as an innovative business school that has consistently produced industry-ready graduates for the global business community. With over 15,000 students from 70 countries, CBS is a comprehensive teaching and research facility with a multi-national reach. Its online MBA is ranked in the top 100 internationally. The CBS undergraduate Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) course is comprised of 8 common core units and 16 specialist units that constitute studies in single or double major discipline areas. The Business Information Systems (BIS) 100 unit is one of the seven common core first year units; the eighth common core unit is the Business Capstone unit which students take in their third year of study. The first year B.Com units are delivered across 10 campuses in local, national and international locations. The majority of CBS students study internally through a face-to-face study mode. Western Australian rural and

remote students study through a partially online study mode; this is a form of blended learning whereby students have some face-to-face interaction with lecturers but, also, download pre-packaged material via the internet. Similarly, 'offshore' students participate in partially online blended learning as a result of partnership agreements between the Curtin Business School and its international partner institutions. The Bentley-based Distance Education Area offers online learning options for external students (Curtin Business School, 2009). The various locations and study modes are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Locations and Study Modes for BIS100 Semester 1 2009

Location	Study Mode	Online Component
Curtin Bentley Campus	Face-to-face	Essential
Bentley-based Distance Education Area	External	Fully online
Esperance Community College	Partially online	Essential
Kalgoorlie Campus	Partially online	Essential
Pilbara TAFE Karratha	Partially online	Essential
Pilbara TAFE South Hedland	Partially online	Essential
Curtin Sydney Campus	Face-to-face	Essential
INTI International College Penang	Face-to-face	Essential
Metropolitan College Malaysia	Face-to-face	Essential
Curtin Miri Sarawak Campus	Face-to-face	Essential
University Economics Ho Chi Minh Vietnam	Face-to-face	Not essential
Curtin Singapore Campus	Partially online	Essential
Charles Telfer Institute Mauritius	Partially online	Essential

Frequency of CBS Students' Discussion Forum Usage

Curtin Business School lecturers are encouraged to provide flexible learning opportunities that enhance students' access to information, each other, and learning spaces. As a result of this research it was found that across CBS, in Semester 1 2009, 807 units had a presence on the FLECS-Blackboard learning management system, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of unique unit instances on FLECS-Blackboard in CBS in Semester 1 2009

Areas within the Curtin Business School	Number of unique units on FLECS-Blackboard
Accounting	152
Business Law	126
Economics and Finance	118
Graduate School of Business	94
Information Systems	124
Marketing	98
Management	87
CBS (Divisional unit)	8
Total across all CBS areas	807

Of these 807 units there were 522 units that used the discussion board function within the LMS; thus, across CBS discussion boards were used in 65% of the units with a presence on FLECS-Blackboard. One of the limitations of this research was that the number of discussion boards in use within each of the CBS areas was not identified. However, the research did identify that in the largest School, Accounting, there were a total of 416 discussion forums in 96 of its 152 units with a FLECS-Blackboard presence; that is, 63% of the Accounting units on FLECS-Blackboard had a discussion board component. Thus the percentage of Accounting units on FLECS-Blackboard that had a discussion board component (63%) was consistent with the overall percentage of CBS units on FLECS-Blackboard that had a discussion board component (65%). Further analysis of the Accounting units showed a trend towards providing one or two discussion forums for each unit; 65% of

Accounting units with a discussion board component had either one or two discussion forums. This trend is shown in Figure 1.

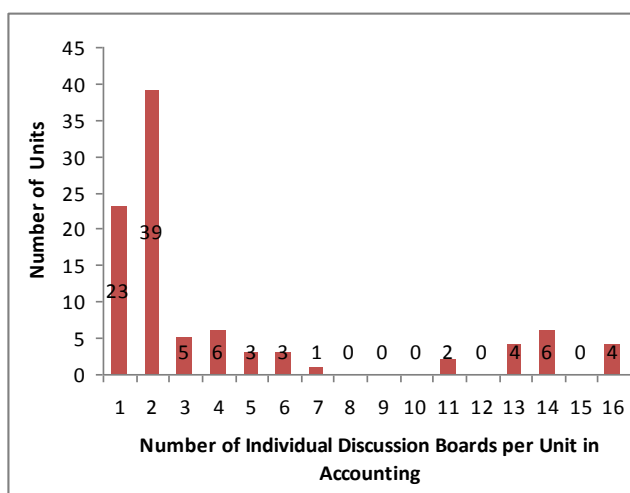


Figure 1: Frequency of Discussion Forums in Accounting Units in Semester 1 2009

The School of Accounting offers Accounting 100 for first year Bachelor of Commerce students as one of the common core units. This research identified there were three discussion forums, in Accounting 100 - *unit feedback*, *welcome to Accounting 100*, and *help us to help you*. As well as the use of discussion boards, the Accounting 100 unit coordinator delivered the content through mass face-to-face lectures with the assistance of sessional mentors. This structure created a highly interactive learning environment whereby there was significantly more interaction between the lecturer and students even though there were large classes.

Typically, lectures in higher education are less interactive and the dilemma of engaging students to enhance their learning persists. In Business Information Systems 100 (BIS100), the lecturers sought to increase the interaction between the teaching staff and students by team teaching and increasing students' opportunities to engage in course related online discussion forums. Students without experience of online learning and the use of discussion forums could be disadvantaged in distance learning or web enhanced courses. Anecdotal reports taken from the University's unit evaluation tool indicated students found using FLECS-Blackboard to be initially intimidating. Many students felt frustrated and some gave up because of expectations of completing online assessment using a time constraint, posting discussion responses by set dates and the weekly review of online course content. So, some of the web functionality of BIS100 was designed to decrease student anxiety, for example, by providing immediate feedback and results via online assessment and build students' capacity to enhance their learning through the use of designated topical BIS100 discussion board forums.

The same discussion board topics were used in five of the six BIS100 locations. The discussion board usage for Bentley Campus BIS100 students is shown in Figure 2 and the number of responses per individual thread for Bentley Campus BIS100 students for the Assignment 1 discussion board forum is shown in Figure 3. The implications of these results are discussed in the following paragraph.

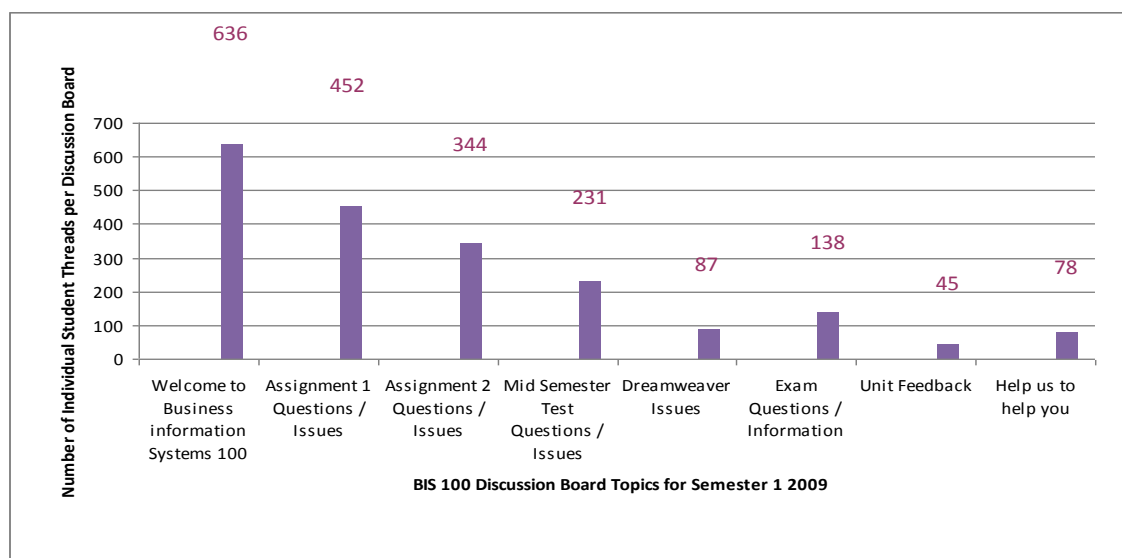


Figure 2: Discussion Board Usage by Bentley Campus BIS100 Students in Semester 1, 2009

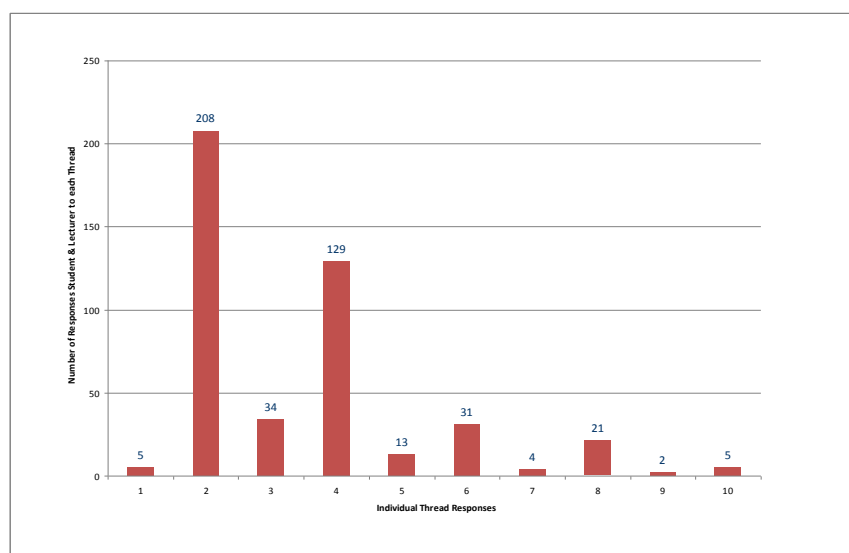


Figure 3: Number of Responses per Individual Thread for Bentley Campus BIS100 Assignment 1 Discussion Board Forum

In Figure 2 it is evident that 87% (636 of the 733 enrolled students) participated in the initial discussion board forum to introduce themselves to each other and the lecturers. It is important to note that students' participation in the BIS100 discussion board forums was entirely voluntary; there was no assessment attached to their participation in the discussion board forum nor were there any stimulus questions posted to elicit required responses from students. Students were welcomed to the unit and asked to introduce themselves to the class in the first discussion board forum. In subsequent forums students could post any queries or comments they had in regard to the four assessment items, the software, the unit or any general concerns they had.

The unit coordinator's observations and reflections on the decreasing frequency of students' discussion board usage indicated students' increasing confidence with the work associated with the unit. The unit coordinator held this opinion because he read the student posts and interacted with the students in class. Predictably, students were more concerned about completing their first assignment than subsequent assessment items. In Figure 3 the number of responses per student thread in relation to the first assignment is shown. Thus it shows that 46% of threads (208 of the 452 responses) had two responses given for that thread; that is, the student posted a question and their question was answered. The next highest category showed that 29% of threads had four responses associated with them (129 of the 452 responses).

In these cases the students asked an initial question that was answered and then they asked a second question that was also answered. In cases where there were an odd number of responses it indicated that students asked a question which was answered and then they made a further comment, for example, they thanked the lecturer for the assistance. Over time, it was evident to the unit coordinator that students' confidence increased and that their participation in the discussion forums had contributed to their increased confidence. However, the impact of discussion board usage extended beyond the affective domain and was also evident in student results.

Impact of Use of Discussion Board Forums on Student Learning Outcomes

In this research the usage of discussion boards in the BIS100 unit, internationally, was investigated. In Semester 1, 2009, there were 733 students enrolled internally in BIS100 at the Bentley Campus; 686 independent student identification numbers were recorded in the discussion board data. This was the largest group of BIS100 students, as shown in Table 3 below. An overview of BIS100 students' participation in the discussion board forums and the students' average final grades are shown in Table 3. Data relating to the BIS100 Year 12 Experience BIS100 students is not included in either Table 3 or Figure 2. There were 26 students in the Year 12 Experience BIS100 group and two discussion boards were established for this program; most students participated in both discussion board forums. There was no need for a large number of discussion boards because it was a smaller cohort of students and team teaching was used to deliver the lectures and computer labs; hence, students had a lot of opportunity to interact with the lecturers face-to-face.

Table 3: Overview of BIS100 students of Participation on Discussion Boards and Final Grades

Location	Number of students using discussion board	Number of discussion boards	Total number of student contributions to discussions	Average number of contributions per student (ranking)	The average final grade of students (ranking)
Metropolitan College Malaysia	119	8	374	3.1 (1)	66% (1)
Charles Telfer Institute Mauritius	118	8	256	2.17 (4)	57% (4)
<i>Curtin Miri Sarawak Campus</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>0.67</i>	<i>63%</i>
INTI International College Penang	24	8	65	2.7 (3)	65% (2)
Curtin Sydney Campus	65	8	48	0.74 (5)	46% (5)
Curtin Bentley Campus	686	8	2011	2.9 (2)	59% (3)
Overall number of students using discussion board across all locations and their average final grade score	1166				59%

In Table 3 the results for the Curtin Miri Sarawak Campus are shown in italics because there were a different number of discussion board forums in this location and there were issues in relation to moderation of assessment items. Therefore, in the comparative ranking, shown in brackets in the final two columns in Table 3, the results for Miri were not compared with those of the remaining five BIS100 locations. Interestingly, there seemed to be a correlation between the number of student contributions to discussion board forums and students results. In locations where the total number of contributions per student to discussion board forums was higher the students' average final grade scores were also higher. Further scrutiny of the average final scores of Bentley Campus students supported this claim. A random sample of students was taken from across five categories of the number of contributions the students had made to the discussion board forums and their final

scores were considered. In this research, five students from each category were selected so the total sample size was 25 students. In future research the sample size could be increased. The number of Bentley Campus BIS100 student contributions to discussion board forums compared with their average final scores is shown in Table 4. These results clearly show that students who participated more in the discussion board forums also achieved higher scores. At this stage it is not known what other factors contributed to students' participation in the discussion board forums or their learning outcomes.

Table 4: Number of Bentley Campus BIS100 Student Contributions to Discussion Board Forums Compared with Students Average Final Scores

Category Number of Independent Contributions	Average Final Score
50 +	73.4%
30-49	71.4%
15-29	61.8%
5-14	54.2%
0	38.8%

Pedagogical Considerations for Using Discussion Board Forums

The use of online learning technologies such as the discussion board feature of some learning management systems has been beneficial in the context of open and distance education but there has been doubt about its usefulness in face-to-face teaching and learning situations. Clouse and Evans (2003, in Arbaugh et. al., 2009) found that the use of face-to-face content delivery combined with asynchronous discussion improved student learning outcomes. In the BIS100 research, evidence has been provided in relation to the use of discussion board forums in distance (partially online) and local face-to-face learning situations. The results of this research indicated that higher frequencies of students' usage of asynchronous discussion board forums correlated with higher average final scores in both distance and face-to-face learning situations. So, the provision of blended learning through the combination of face-to-face and asynchronous discussion is an important pedagogical consideration.

In the context of BIS100, students' participation in the asynchronous discussion was voluntary, not linked to assessment and decreased throughout the semester. In all of the BIS100 locations students also had the opportunity to speak with lecturers and fellow-students face-to-face; asynchronous discussion provided timely and flexible support for student learning. A key feature of the BIS100 use of the learning management system was the provision of multiple asynchronous discussion forums about critical assessment and learning issues that students could engage with at their point of need. Thus, unit coordinators need to consider the nature of students' participation - will it be voluntary or assessable? Also, unit coordinators should determine the frequency and number of forums, and the type of topics to include for discussion. Needless to say, all forums require monitoring and input from the lecturers/unit coordinator. So, the level and nature of input from academics will also need to be decided and communicated with participants. In any situation where there is public discussion there are rules of engagement, so the etiquette for communications will also need to be decided and communicated to students.

Another important pedagogical consideration identified by Vaughan and Garrison (2005) was the possibility of reducing the amount of time spent in class as a result of using a blended learning approach. In the BIS100 case there was no reduction of class time because of the use of discussion board in terms of how many contact hours lecturers and students had for the unit. However, many of the students' questions were being answered outside of this contact time; hence, it was likely that more of the contact time could be devoted to other aspects of learning and teaching. In future research, for example, the impact of reducing class time to facilitate the use of discussion board forums to enhance student engagement with required readings could be explored.

Conclusion

In this paper the results of the BIS100 case study have been presented along with a review of the literature in relation to blended learning. Consequently, the conclusion is drawn that the provision of blended learning in higher education, distance and face-to-face learning situations through the use of discussion board forums is worthwhile and enhances student learning outcomes. To use this technology effectively pedagogical consideration must be given to the nature of student participation and instructional design issues. Although the

outcomes of the BIS100 are indicative of enhanced student learning further research is necessary. Further consideration should be given to the impact of students' and lecturers personal traits, technology and instructional design (Wan, Fang, & Neufeld, 2007, in Arbaugh et. al., 2009). Also, future research could investigate the use of blended learning, particularly, in relation to how discussion board forums could be used to enhance student learning in face-to-face classes.

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Paper 11

Making Research Count via an Online Environment – An Action Research Study to Explore Effective Strategies to Develop Research Skills in Students Undertaking a Masters in Public Health

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Abstract

Much has been written about the need for teaching to be research informed. To all intents and purposes the current teaching and learning strategy for the masters in Public Health incorporates the three aspects of the framework developed by Griffiths (2004) as it is research-led (by active researchers), research-oriented (students learn about the research process through taught sessions) and research-based (inquiry based activities are incorporated). However, despite having a curriculum that links teaching and research a number of challenges have been identified. Our student population is diverse and includes a large number of international students who have not previously studied in the UK. As a result many face difficult challenges in their studies. Their academic skills are variable and many struggle with basic concepts such as literature searching, evaluating the quality and content of the literature and referencing. Having successfully delivered a traditional face-to-face taught course for 2 years it was identified by a large number of potential applicants that a solely online mode of delivery was needed. To meet this need the online taught course was launched. This led us to question how we could deliver the research elements of the course so that both traditional and online students are afforded the opportunity to develop their research knowledge and skills. This paper explores some pedagogical challenges faced and identifies the need for the teaching team to constantly reflect on their teaching and learning strategies and evaluate feedback from students to enable them to gain the necessary research and evaluation skills required for 'real world' research.

Methodology: Action Research (AR) was the methodology of choice as it is a practical way of evaluating our own work to ensure that it is as we would like it to be. Participants (n=104) were all students undertaking a taught or online Masters in Public Health. Questionnaires were developed to gather data on highest entry level qualification, mode of learning, international or home student status, prior research experience, and student perception of research knowledge on commencing and completion of the course. Teaching and learning strategies were evaluated by the students. Assessment grades were used as outcome measures.

Findings

There was no difference in attainment between international and home students or by mode of delivery. Entry qualification does not seem to indicate outcome. Students perceived themselves to be relatively confident with their referencing, citing and ethical issues. They were less confident with their critical appraisal skills, data analysis and interpretation, and knowledge of research methodologies.

Discussion

Student feedback on effective and less effective teaching and learning strategies were evaluated and changes implemented are identified. Future challenges are discussed.

Background

Contemporary education seeks to engage students as active, self-directed learners, and foster the development and maturation of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. An emphasis on team learning is critical because deeper learning occurs when groups, not individuals, work together (Santanello & Gupchup, 2007). Elam & Duckenfield (2000) provide useful insights into defining a community of learners where the "teacher as a facilitator" is used as a model and where people continually learn from one another. The Public Health Masters teaching team face specific challenges in developing a community of learners as the course is not only delivered via a face-to-face mode but also via a solely online environment. The major challenge identified is enabling the distance-learning students to engage with the attending students and the teaching team to enhance their learning experience.

Evaluation is necessary as a function in good teaching practice. The American Physiological Society (2002) suggests that evaluation is valuable as it provides both formative and summative feedback. The formative feedback helps guide future changes to teaching practice whilst the summative feedback can identify if stated goals and objectives have been accomplished. The Public Health Masters is coming to the beginning of its fifth year as a taught course, and its third year as an e-learning course. The course content was already deemed to be successful, however the course needs to be in a 'language that the e-learner understands'. This is not easy when the community of e-learners is mixed internationally and by educational background. There are three recognised steps to take:

1. Determine how we will prepare the material so that the e-learner can make sense of it (encoding).
2. Determine what obstacles exist that might prevent proper understanding (decoding)
3. Determine the best ways to engage the learner (transmission)

Encoding and decoding required us to formally consider our methods of communication and how they have already changed over the short life of the course. Communicating with students taught in traditional ways does not present a problem whereas the introduction of the e-learning approach has identified many challenges for the teaching team; especially where the team was not totally conversant with the emerging e-technologies. Hence, it continues to be a steep learning curve. E-learning, as defined by Dongsong Zhang (2004), is learning and teaching via a solely online environment through network technologies. He believes that this use of technology is arguably one of the most powerful responses to the growing need for education'. Dongsong Zhang (2004) reminds us that higher education needs to meet the needs of today's workforce who, he describes as being highly educated with the need to continually improve on, and learn new skills, many whom will achieve lifelong judiciousness only through e-learning.

Evaluating what we are doing to ensure that we develop approaches that facilitate effective communication with our 'virtual' students enabling their progression will offer insight into the e-learners requirements. To achieve these aims we have had to review our pedagogy. Beetham and Sharpe (2007, p3.) ask *'as educators and higher educational establishments are we prepared and ready to re-think our pedagogies and re-do our practices?'* They further propose that contemporary pedagogy needs to encompass *'ways of knowing'* as well as *'ways of doing'*. Mayes and de Freitas (2007, p23.) observed that we are witnessing *'a new model of education, rather than a new model of learning'* as *'our understanding deepens...we see how learning can be socially situated in a way never previously possible'*. So as e-learning breaks new grounds, we are forced to consider pedagogical changes. Hughes (2008, p438) states that elements to this pedagogy must include an understanding that: *'technology, without the pedagogy can be a fetishised and empty learning, and teaching experience – stylized, but without substance, simply an electronic information push'*. Hughes (2008) also suggests that by emphasising the technology *per se* the UK has lost it way and as a result pedagogical debate has been held back. However, Laurillard (2007.p.xvi) suggests that *'a synergy knowing and doing, pedagogy and technology arrived at through ongoing conversations with our learners and peers, is a starting point for tackling the bridge building policy, strategy, research, and practice'*. Therefore when gathered together they will form an appropriate new pedagogy.

Recently K2 Academy for Higher Education Institutes (K2. 2009) has considered what structure a new pedagogy should take. In the deliberation they have said that frequently the e-learning approaches focus on dialogue, interaction, collaborative activities and course content and secondary to this the importance of what is generated by the students. They suggested that student activities go unrecognised. They described this missing element as 'Social-Constructivism', a pedagogical perspective whereby learners construct their knowledge through discussions, thereby enhancing their own thinking skills without acknowledgement. Constructivism goes beyond the study of how the brain stores and retrieves information to examine the ways in which learners make meaning from experience. Rather than the transmission of knowledge, learning is an internal process of interpretation. K2 proposes that this interpretation does not occur in social isolation but within the students own social systems. This perspective is closely associated with many contemporary theories, most notably the developmental theories of Vygotsky and Bruner, and Bandura's social cognitive theory (Shunk, 2000).

The pedagogy of ‘*Social-Constructivism*’ would appear to be in line with this master’s course as these students should be self-motivated and independent learners. However a blend of four main pedagogical perspectives would we feel, underpin the present programme more accurately. These are:

- **Cognitive perspective** - which focuses on the cognitive processes involved in learning as well as how the brain works. It considers the student as not being passive receivers but actively involved in their learning process. In fact, Shunk (2000) proposes that they can control their own learning.
- **Emotional perspective** - This focuses on the emotional aspects of learning, like motivation, and engagement. The emotional perspective involves enabling students to be self-aware, socially cognisant, able to make responsible decisions, and competent in self-management and relationship-management skills to foster their academic success (Teachers College, 2004).
- **Behavioural perspective** - This focuses on the skills and behavioural outcomes of the learning. The process of learning can then be defined as the relatively permanent change in behaviour resulting from experience or practice (Cunia, 2005; Hummel, & Hummel, 2006).
- **Social perspective** - This focuses on the social aspects, which can stimulate learning. Interaction with other people, collaborative discovery and the importance of peer support as well as pressure. This perspective considers the debate of nature and nurture (Rogers, 2003).

The pedagogy, which underpins the course, uses a combination of perspectives so that we might take into consideration the learning styles of the students. This need is re-enforced by the work of Rogers (2003) who reminds us that people learn differently at different times so age has to be taken into consideration. This is an important aspect with a postgraduate course where the age range is frequently 26-52. We had learnt over the last two years that the modern student has a different way of learning from the traditional learners. The computer learners want delivery within three clicks of a mouse, they need to read it on screen, listen to it or see it, using a book and reading is not part of their normal practice. The course content had already proved to be successful, but changing delivery for somebody sitting in front of a computer calls for different techniques. Sharpe and Oliver (2007) conceptualize e-learning as a *Trojan Mouse*; it is simple yet at the same time startling in its effect. They further argue that we must not just think in terms of which particular hardware and software we use but ensure that new technologies being used are effectively incorporated within the course.

One lesson we have already learnt is that our students are not a homogenous group and come with a variety of educational experiences and backgrounds. Whereas Brew (2006, p44) states that “*By the time students reach university, they have already had considerable experience in investigation, in project research, and in inquiry based learning at school*” Schroeder (2004) disagrees. He suggests that contemporary students entering HE have changed dramatically which has resulted in many experienced lecturers feeling both ‘*bewildered and frustrated*’. Schroeder (2004) proposes that many HE students display a lack of confidence in their intellectual abilities and are uncomfortable with abstract ideas. He further suggests they have difficulty with complex concepts, a low tolerance for ambiguity, are often less independent in thought and judgment and more dependent on the ideas of those in authority. They are also more dependent on immediate gratification and exhibit more difficulty with some basic academic skills.

Schroeder (2004) suggests that these students require a practice-to-theory approach rather than the more traditional theory-to-practice approach. As a result, the need for effective communication became apparent early on. Our experiences indicate that if the learners do not fully engage with the methods we use to communicate and do not view themselves as belonging to a ‘*community of learners*’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) they become disillusioned and drop out. This notion is further supported by Smith *et al* (2001) who argue that students who do not share a physical environment and work together only in an online environment face significant challenges in establishing a community of learners. They suggest that “*In the opening weeks of distance courses, there is an anonymity and lack of identity which comes with the loss of various channels of communication*” (Smith *et al*. 2001, p9). It is apparent that if we are to succeed meaningful communication needs to be established from the very beginning of the course. Although this looks a very simple task it has proved to be a challenge.

Kock (2005) estimates that an exchange of 600 words requires about 6 minutes for complex group tasks in face-to-face settings, while exchanging the same number of words over e-mail would take approximately one hour of effort. Therefore, a taught system enables immediacy in giving and receiving whereas the e-learners have a closed loop unless it is managed well. Another challenge is that what is being communicated to the e-learner is interpreted in the same way by all the learners as there are a number of reasons why the learner may perceive the information in different ways. For example, how they come to the course in terms of educational background, expertise, experience, knowledge and background in Public Health can be factors that affect how effective the information being relayed is interpreted. Equally, there may be cultural and environmental differences, which have an impact on commitment and the ability to sustain long-term commitment. When reflecting we often become aware of how we frequently live our day-to-day lives by assessing what we will skip (Varis, 2004). Therefore, we question how accurate communication can be achieved within our e-learning population. Can we really control confused perception issues and develop strategies to safeguard against confusion?

Hrastinski (2008) maintains that for e-learning initiatives to succeed organisations, and in particular Higher Educational Institutions, must understand the benefits and limitations of different e-learning techniques and methods. He continues by saying that research over the last decade has enabled recognition of the impact of different factors in relation to the effectiveness of e-learning. Hrastinski (2008) describes the concepts of *personal participation* and *cognitive participation* and how these can be supported by asynchronous and synchronous communication. Personal participation describes a more arousing type of participation appropriate for less complex information exchanges, including the planning of tasks and social support. Cognitive participation describes a more reflective type of participation appropriate for discussions of complex issues.

All things being equal, synchronous e-learning better supports personal participation and asynchronous e-learning better supports cognitive participation. The initial decision faced was to determine which of the two basic types of e-learning communication would be more effective in enabling the learner? Romiszowski & Mason (2004) suggest that e-learning initiatives mainly rely on asynchronous means for teaching and learning which we could support. Haythornthwaite (2002) argues that three types of communication need to be considered in order to sustain e-learning communities - content-related communication, planning of tasks, and social support. She further states that communication related to the course content is essential for learning. Hence, it would appear that achieving this is vital to success.

An key area that the teaching team decided to explore was how did the student group develop their research skills so that they could complete successful dissertation and meet the requirements of the Key Area 8 'Public Health Intelligence; collect, generate, synthesise, appraise, analyse, interpret and communicate intelligence that measures the health status, risks, needs and health outcomes of defined populations' (Faculty of Public Health). Having set a first degree as a minimum entry requirement our expectation was that the students would come with a basic understanding of the research process. This proved not to be the case and our early perceptions immediately indicated that among the total student group there was a lack of academic skills. For example, basic referencing, quality of literature used, critical analysis skills were identified as being particularly problematic.

We identified our key challenge as 'how do we ensure that **all** our students gain the research skills required for 'real world' practice'. Once we discovered for certainty that the attending students were have difficulty with developing research skills we began to ask what strategies were needed that will be equally effective for our online students? To all intense and purposes our current teaching and learning strategy incorporates the three aspects of the framework developed by Griffiths (2004) as it is research-led (by active researchers), research-oriented (students learn about the research process through taught sessions) and research-based (inquiry based activities are incorporated). How should we take forward our investigation?

Methodology

An action research (AR) approach was adopted. Action research is a form of research that focuses on the effects of the researcher's direct actions on practice within a participatory community with the goal of improving the performance quality of the community or an area of concern (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; McNiff, 2002). One definition offered by Carr and Kemmis [1986, p162] is: "Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry

undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out". Dick (2002) describes action research as a flexible, spiral process that is well suited to situations where change (the "action") and understanding (the "research") need to be achieved at the same time. In other words this spiral process allows informed change that is informed by that change. However, Smith (1996, 2001, 2007) suggest that we should be cautious about accepting the concept of an AR spiral purely in terms of it being a 'one-fit-all' template for all phases of the study as there may be the tendency to forget that this method is interpretive and, therefore needs to be thought of in terms of making refinements as the study progresses over time. Hence, for the purpose of this study AR will be referred to as being a cyclical, rather than a spiral, process. This research method allows experience to facilitate learning, and therefore, an action research study does not begin with a fixed hypothesis but can begin with quite imprecise research questions. It allows enough flexibility to allow "*imprecise beginnings while progressing towards appropriate endings*" (Dick, 2002, p5). As AR is interpretive it is only after the research cycle has been repeated and study refinements made, can teaching practice be reviewed holistically (Norton, 2009). This aspect of AR is key with this study as it is looking at different groups of students over time, making changes to practice and then re-evaluating these changes in line with the findings. At its core, AR allows the researcher to test new ideas and implement action for change.

Figure 1. Action Research Cycle



Source: Higher Education Academy LLAS Subject Centre

The First Action Research Cycle

Identifying and Defining the Problems:

Our students come from a diverse range of backgrounds and as many as 50% begin the course with limited understanding of many of the concepts of research methodology. Assessments suggest that many students are unfamiliar with a number of key graduate skills that, arguably, should have been developed during undergraduate studies. Elements that prove particularly difficult are referencing, critical analysis of literature and literature searching. As a result of our observations we asked:

- are some students displaying more problems than others? For example do international students have similar levels of academic skills as home students who have already experienced the UK HE system? Are there differences in ability and expectations within the students who enroll for the online method of course delivery? Does qualification level at point of entry impact on the outcome?
- if attending students have difficulty with developing research skills is this the same for the online students and, if so, what strategies can we use that will be equally effective for the all students?
- how do we ensure that all our students gain the research skills required for ‘*real world*’ practice?

Carrying out the Research

It became apparent that there was a need to formally explore the background of the students, listen to their voices in terms of which specific research skills they needed to develop further, and investigate which teaching approaches are effective in enabling them to do this. Only by doing this would it be possible to ascertain if our perceptions of student ability are in line with Brew’s (2006) perception of HE students’ or whether they mirror those of Schroeder (2004). In other words we needed to evaluate our teaching and learning and ensure that the ‘student voice’ is being listened to. Possible methods of doing this were explored and it was agreed that employing action research was the best method to facilitate this. A research protocol was drawn up and local research ethical approval gained. Funding was acquired from the Centre of Teaching and Learning (CETL) within the University of Bedfordshire.

Data Collection Methods:

Data was gathered using a variety of approaches and incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods:

Quantitative data:

- Questionnaire based tools;
 - Student demographics – academic level on entry, research experience, mode of delivery being undertaken, international or home student, full or part time
- Student perception of research skills on entering the course and again on completion. Students were asked:
 - to rate on a scale of 0-10 their confidence of key research skills.

- to identify which skills they specifically wanted to develop (on entry) and whether this has been achieved (on exit)
- to state which teaching and learning strategies they found effective and what we could do differently.
- Outcome measures – research methods assessment grades (completed early in the course) and dissertation grades (final assessment before completion) were used as indicators as to whether their perceptions of their skills were evidenced in their academic assessments and whether their knowledge and understanding had developed over time.

Qualitative data:

- Semi structured interviews of a sub section of students at the start of the course and those who have completed. These have not yet been undertaken and will be conducted by an independent researcher in the near future.

All students enrolled on the Masters course since 2006 have been asked to participate in this study. To date the sample size is 104.

Results

Table 1 illustrates that the majority of students (71%) undertook the course via the traditional taught approach and studied full time (72%). Two students opted to continue their studies during late pregnancy and post birth via the online mode of delivery.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Mode of delivery n=104	Traditional taught 74 (71%)	Online 28 (27%)	Combined¹ 2 (2%)
Course duration n=103	Full Time (1 year) 74 (72%)	Part Time (2years) 29 (28%)	
Origin of student n=104	International 46 (44%)	EU 3 (2%)	Home² 51 (54%)

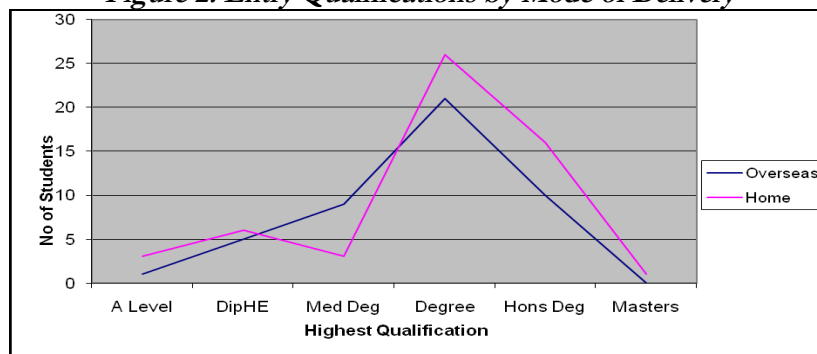
¹ undertook some elements of the course online due to pregnancy

² not necessarily educated in the UK

Figure 2 shows entry qualification by international or home status (n=104). Analysis indicates that there is no significant difference in entry qualification between groups. When groups are combined 73% (n=76) of student's entered with the course minimum entry requirement of a degree. It is worth mentioning that of these the majority (n=49, 64%) had gained an unclassified degree, and therefore, may not have completed a final research project / dissertation during their studies. A further 11% (n=12) entered with a medical degree. One student had already completed a Masters degree. Perhaps surprisingly 14% (n=15) of students did not meet the minimum entry requirement and were enrolled with just A levels or a Diploma in Higher Education (Dip HE). However, although the numbers are small, there is no indication that these students performed any differently to those

with higher level entry qualifications and all completed the course with no referral work. Interestingly of the 7 students who failed their dissertation on first attempt 4 have an honours degree, 2 a medical degree and 1 an unclassified degree. Failures were evenly spread across the international and home students (n=4 & 3 respectively).

Figure 2: Entry Qualifications by Mode of Delivery



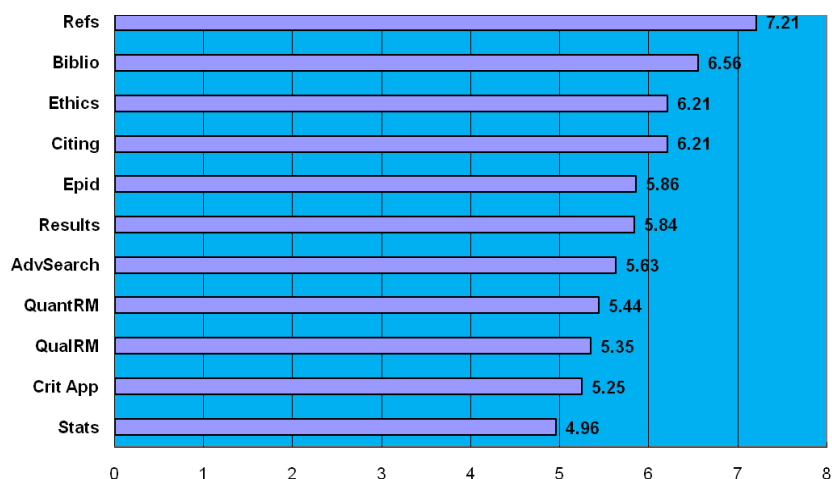
Research Methodology Unit Content

Students were asked about their satisfaction with the content of the research methodologies unit. Of the 57 respondents only 9 (15%) were totally satisfied with the teaching material and did not feel any change was needed. One key issue identified by 20 students (35%) was time and the need to have additional timetabled sessions. 10 (17.5%) identified a need for more coverage of statistical analysis. When exploring the research skills students felt they needed to develop on entry to the course just under half of the respondents indicated that they wanted to develop all skills (n=104). Interpreting data was identified by 22%. When the participants who have completed the course were asked which skills they did not feel they had been able to develop sufficiently all identified that they had not developed data analysis skills (n=47,100%).

Skills Development

Student perceptions of their research skills on entry to the course were gained. Students were asked to rate on a scale of 0-10 how confident they felt with each of the research skills listed; a score of 0 indicates no confidence and a score of 10 indicates the respondent is fully confident. This questionnaire was introduced as a data collecting tool with the 2008-9 cohorts (n=57). Mean scores were calculated and the ratings can be seen in Figure 3. The factor students rated themselves as most confident at is referencing (M=7.21) and producing a bibliography (M=7.21). Statistics was perceived to be the aspect of research that they felt least confident with (M=4.96). The analysis also indicates that they feel relatively unconfident with their critical appraisal skills (M=5.25) and knowledge of quantitative (M= 5.44) and qualitative (M=5.35) research methods.

Figure 3: Student Perception of Research Skills: Mean Ratings on Entry



Outcome Measures – Assessment Grades

Assessment grades were used as outcome measures to ascertain whether there was a difference in performance by international students versus home students. Table 2 illustrates the grades for the Research Methodologies assessment which is completed in the first term of the course. There is no significant difference in grades between international and home students. Table 3 illustrates the grades for dissertations by origin of student and again there is no significant difference between groups. However, it is worth noting that although all failures were found in international students overall the sample size is very small so presumptions cannot be made. When grades and mode of delivery were explored, once again, there was no significant difference between groups.

Table 2: Research Methods by Grades Origin of Student

	A	B	C	D	Fail	Total
International Students	1	12	11	17	3	44
Home Students	1	30	10	14	0	55
Total	2	42	21	31	3	99

Table 3: Dissertation Grades by Origin of Student

	A	B	C	D	Re-Sit	Diploma*	Total
International Students	1	8	3	7	4	0	23
Home Students	3	8	2	4	3	1	21
Total	4	16	5	11	7	1	44

*Did not complete dissertation and awarded a diploma

Reflection and Evaluation

Lecturing staff on the Public Health Masters perceived that a significant number of international students were entering the course without the underpinning knowledge base or experience of research methods. Hence, quality of their work was judged to be low. Likewise, it was perceived that as developing research skills within the taught cohort was challenging the students studying via the online mode of delivery would be disadvantaged as they are

limited by the amount of opportunities available to gain the face-to-face support from lecturers and/or peers. As research underpins the whole curriculum it is important that students are facilitated to develop key skills that will enable them to successfully complete the course and evidence a high level of employability skills (Public Health Faculty, 2009; Yorke, 2006). If, as suggested by Beetham and Sharpe (2007), contemporary pedagogy needs to include '*ways of doing*' as well as '*ways of knowing*' it was important that these perceptions were fully explored. In order to ensure that teaching and learning strategies are effective for both taught and online students it was necessary to appraise what actions needed to be taken to. This study has enabled us to start this process, to rethink our pedagogies and evaluate our practice.

By using a combination of pedagogical perspective we are accommodating the range of learning styles and learning experiences that our students present with. Although four main pedagogical perspectives underpin the current programme there is still a lot of work to do in relation to the social perspective. This pedagogical approach focuses on the social aspects of learning and in particular interaction with others, collaborative discovery and peer support. It is vital facilitate effective communication strategies so that the students feel that they belong to a '*community of learners*' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and are not learning in isolation. Romiszowski & Mason (2004) suggest that e-learning initiatives mainly rely on asynchronous means for teaching and learning, however, recent improvements in technology and increasing bandwidth capabilities have led to the growing popularity of synchronous e-learning (Kinshuk, 2006). We aim to develop not only synchronous communication (to develop and support social participation) but also asynchronous as this supports cognitive participation which assists the students to control their own learning (Shunk, 2000).

Analysis to date suggests that both international and home students achieve at the same level, which is in opposition to the perceptions of the lecturing team. However, what the study has not determined is why this may be. In other words it is not possible to identify whether the students who achieve the lower grades do so for the same reason. International students are limited to the number of hours they can work and therefore may, potentially, have more time to concentrate on their studies yet find this difficult because of the lack of the required skills. Conversely, perhaps the home students are attempting to study whilst working full time and time management, not lack of skill, is the key reason they do not achieve their full potential. In order to try and identify any underlying factors that may impact on learning further exploration is necessary. There may be cultural and environmental differences, which have an impact on the ability to sustain long-term commitment and motivation. Interestingly Varis (2004) observes that we frequently live our day-to-day lives by assessing what tasks we will skip. Potentially, contemporary students, who are often juggling busy working and family lives with their study commitments, may well decide to 'skip' the study. By incorporating additional questions about work/life balance into future questionnaire, and providing students with the opportunity to express their views on external factors that may have the potential to impact negatively on their study, a deeper understanding may be gained. Similarly student engagement and motivation will be evaluated by accessing course statistics to determine how frequently individual students access online teaching and learning material and explore if those who engage more achieve higher grades. At present there is no evidence to suggest that the online students are achieving any differently from the attending students. However, the numbers of online learners is relatively small and as we re-visit the AR cycle with future cohorts, and sample size increases, this may change

Although the Public Health Masters students identify a relatively high confidence level in terms of referencing, ethics and citing authors it is clear from assessments that this confidence is somewhat misplaced. Students are displaying less confidence with research skills such as qualitative and quantitative research methods, critical appraisal skills and statistics. When questioned about skills they felt they had not achieved at the end of the course, unfortunately, all still identified a lack of understanding and confidence with data analysis. This highlights the need for the teaching team to explore how this can be addressed. If, as Schroeder (2004) suggests, contemporary students need a more practice to theory rather than a theory to practice approach this is something that that needs to be considered within the teaching strategy.

Students identified that additional taught research sessions are needed. However, this is not always possible and would not benefit the online students. In order to facilitate more autonomous and critical thinking learners perhaps the best way to approach this is to utilise the online technology available and increase the range and number of online tasks that students can do to enhance their learning. Students have already evaluated video and podcast material well and as a result more of this type of material has been incorporated into online teaching material. Additionally more 'workshop' type of activities has been introduced in the classroom setting whereby students are given relevant published material and work in groups to critically analyse and discuss in terms of research and its implications for public health. The challenge now is to explore how this can be adapted for the online students. One solution may be to re-evaluate how the Wiki is utilised and make this much more prescriptive so that specific research related tasks guide student learning activity. This year new online activities are being introduced in light of student feedback. These include such things as more online discussion forums, and the inclusion of games (such as crosswords and hangman) as educational tools.

This study is beginning to address the research questions posed. Findings suggest that knowledge and understanding of the research process is a challenge for a large number of students regardless of where they were previously educated. However, it is worth noting that many students, who have migrated to the UK and are now classified as home students, may well have completed their education in another country. There is now the need to now explore in greater depth where higher level education was achieved to clarify if, in fact, those educated overseas do face more challenges in relation to prior skills and knowledge. Likewise, the mode of learning does not seem to impact on outcome. Interestingly data suggests that qualification level at point of entry is not necessarily an indicator of outcome. In light of this finding this may be something that needs to be explored at an institutional level as it may have implications for policy in terms of entry criteria for Masters level study.

In line with the AR process the research cycle will now be repeated and data gathering tools refined to allow for new ideas to be implemented and evaluated and for research questions to be developed further. One key priority is to develop more online material in order to facilitate the development of research skills, particularly in areas such as data interpretation, data analysis and critical thinking, as these have been identified by students as being particularly challenging. These have also been identified as challenging skills that are not being developed sufficiently throughout the course. Only by constantly reflecting on, and evaluating our teaching practice will the student experience be enhanced and our pedagogical knowledge improved.

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Paper 12

The Use of Classification Techniques to Enrich e-Learning Environments.

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Abstract

In recent years many data mining applications have been developed to mine and classify the learner's records and characteristics in an E-learning environment, in order to help the learners to predict their studying results. In this article we examined and compared the predictions' results of four classification methods which were used to classify and analyze the learner's information and found out that those methods which had used the Simple Bayesian or Decision Tree Algorithms had more accurate results and can be used as useful agents for leading the learners to have better improvements in an E-learning environment.

Introduction

These days, thousands of web based e-courses are offered to the e-learning candidates, regardless of their natural ability, skill or powers. If we pay attention to the learner's abilities and based on these abilities find some ways to predict the results of their learning studies, we would be able to help them to choose more related courses in order to have better results (Beck and Woolf , 2000). Data mining or "knowledge of automatic deciphering of useful patterns from large data collections" can be used to classify the learners' information and to find out the more useful courses for that learners which could be more beneficial to them. In the following sections of this article we have some brief description about: data mining, classification, prediction of learners' studying result and our experiments of using different classification techniques for the learners' studying prediction and finally our conclusion of these experiments, which shows that if we use simple Bayesian or Decision Tree as our classification technique, we would have more precision in the learners' studying prediction.

Data mining

The amount of saved data in data warehouses has been rapidly increased. So one needs a useful method for automatic and intelligent organization of large data collection. This point has been led to data mining or Knowledge Discovery in Database (KDD). Data mining is a process to mine and organize data in useful and coherent collections (Han and Kamber ,2006). Data mining is sometimes used to discover and show some knowledge in an understandable form. The aim of data mining is description and prediction. There are many strategies in data mining which can be led to the prediction. One of them is *classification*.

Classification

One of the data mining strategies is data classification. The aim of classification is to separate different data into different Pre-defined classes. Classification is based on available features that leads to new data description and causes a better understanding of each class in a Database or in a Data Warehouse, so classification can prepare a model to describe the proper class for any given data. In other words by using classification, we can predict that which given data would belong to which predefined class. Different statistical techniques are used for classification functions like; Bayesian, Neural Network, Decision Tree and Support Vector Machine.

Prediction of learner studying result using classification

The servers which give service to a Learning Management System (LMS) in an E-learning environment can log most of the learners learning behaviours and can also make a large amount of profiles, which can be classified in meaningful and useful classes. It is necessary to predict the learner's studying result in future according to their given abilities. If a teacher can predict learners studying result, he or she will be able to give a suitable learning plan for the learner and will control weak learners studying progress and also will help more talented learners. Romero et al (2003) suggested a methodology for mining data in the system log files to discover proper patterns,

for example this pattern can be regarded as a relationship between learners' learning level and his or her grades. Muehlenbrock (2005), showed a system for automatic analysis of learners actions in a web based learning environment by which the learners' future usages will be predicted. In Dutton et al (2001), the final grades of learners are predicted by neural network .Neural networks have also been used in Bernardete and Alberto (2007) for making models to discover user's behaviour patterns. The outcome of this research showed that if we use user's behaviour reactions, we will predict learners studying result successfully.

Moodle is popular open source software for Learning Management System. This system has some modules for logging user behaviours and characteristics such as user ID, IP, time of user connection to the system, user actions and also user scores. Delgado et al (2006) showed how they could use the Moodle log files of 240 learners to discover knowledge for better management of learning sources.

Our Experiments

The information of 352 learner of an electronic learning system has been used in our experiments as a collection. The minimum, maximum and average age of the learner in this collection is 24, 46 and 31.2 respectively. Learners of this collection had to do three of four homework during the term. If they could do it; they would be able to take their final exam, otherwise they missed their final exam. Characteristics of these learners are shown in table 1. At the final exam of these learners, 155 students were absent or had been rejected. Table 1 shows learners' characteristics chosen for this experience and their related values:

Table1: Learners 'Characteristics and their related Values

Learner Characteristics	Related Values
Sex	Male , Female
Age	24-49
No of Children	0,1,2,3,4
Marriage Status	Single , Married
Computer Knowledge	Yes, No
Working with Computer	Yes, No
First Homework done?	Yes, No
First Exam Result	Excellent, Good , Absent, Rejected
Second Homework done?	Yes, No
Second Exam Result	Excellent, Good , Absent, Rejected
Third Homework done?	Yes, No
Third Exam Result?	Excellent, Good , Absent, Rejected
Fourth Homework done?	Yes, No
Fourth exam Result	Excellent, Good , Absent, Rejected
Final Exam Result	Accepted, Absent or Rejected

Selection of the effective factors for evaluation of learning machine methods, was one of the important part of this experiment .We used the Cross Validation method for 10 learner groups to evaluate the classifier's quality. Ninety percent of the total collected data were used as the training set for learning machine and the other ten percent of the total learning data were used as the test data. The amount of samples that were classified correctly, were attended as a basis for determining its accuracy. This process was done by Weka software for ten

times and each time, 10 percent of the learning data were used. When this process was done completely, the average amount of accuracy in each part was considered as the final accuracy of the related method.

Comparison of the prediction precisions using different statistical techniques

We have used different statistical techniques of classification to predict the learners studying results, based on their final exam results. These techniques were consisting of Decision Tree, Neural Networks, Simple Bayesian, and Support Vector Machine. When we used the Decision Tree as our classification technique, the result of our experiment showed that 282 cases from 352 are correctly classified and the result precision of our prediction is 80.113%.

Table 2. Results of the prediction using the Decision Tree technique

Description of related class	Precision(Percent)
Precision of accepted class	0.759
Precision of rejected or absent class	0.843
Recall of rejected or absent class	0.792
Recall of accepted class	0.813
F-Measure of accepted class	0.783
F- Measure of rejected or absent class	0.817
Final prediction accuracy of this method	80.113

When we used the Simple Bayesian technique for classification, the result shows that again 282 cases are correctly classified and the result precision of our prediction is as before (80.113 %).

Table 3. Results of the prediction using the Simple Bayesian technique

Description of related class	Precision(Percent)
Precision of Accepted Class	0.746
Precision of rejected or absent class	0.855
Recall of rejected or absent class	0.832
Recall of accepted class	0.777
F-Measure of accepted class	0.787
F- Measure of rejected or absent class	0.814
Final prediction accuracy of this method	80.113

When we used the Support Vector Machine technique for classification, the result shows that 276 cases from 352 are correctly classified and the result precision of our prediction is 78.409%.

Table 4. Results of the prediction using the Support Vector Machine technique

Description of related class	Precision(Percent)
Precision of Accepted Class	0.739
Precision of rejected or absent class	0.824
Recall of rejected or absent class	0.787
Recall of accepted class	0.82
F-Measure of accepted class	0.763
F- Measure of rejected or absent class	0.782
Final prediction accuracy of this method	78.409

And finally when we used the K Nearest Neighbour technique for classification, the result shows that 255 cases from 352 are correctly classified and the result precision of our prediction is 72.443%.

Table 5. Results of the prediction using the K Nearest Neighbour technique

Description of related class	Precision(Percent)
Precision of Accepted Class	0.679
Precision of rejected or absent class	0.763
Recall of rejected or absent class	0.71
Recall of accepted class	0.736
F-Measure of accepted class	0.694
F- Measure of rejected or absent class	0.749
Final prediction accuracy of this method	72.443

By comparing the final prediction accuracy of the above mentioned tables ,we can see that when we use the Decision Tree or Simple Bayesian techniques for our classifications, we would acquire more precision in our learners' studying result predictions.

Table 6. Comparison of results

Statistical technique of the Classification	Prediction Precision
Decision Tree	80.113%
Simple Bayesian	80.113%
Support Vector Machine	78.409%
K Nearest Neighbor	72.443%

Conclusion

Using the classification method for predicting the learner studying results in an E-learning environment causes the E-learning system to be potentially enriched and to be more beneficial to the users. An intelligent E-learning system tries to analyze the logged information of the learners, and then based on this information, tries to make, a model to predict learner studying results and according to this prediction it helps the learner to choose more related courses for their improvement. In this article we described a prediction model based on the classification method for predicting the learners studying results in an E-learning system and we showed the prediction result precisions of this model with four different statistical techniques which were used in our classification model . As the outcome of this experiment we found that if we use the Decision Tree or Simple Bayesian techniques as our classification statistical methods we would have more precise prediction results.

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Theme 3

Student Diversity and Critical Pedagogy

Paper 13

Preparing Future Faculty for Multicultural Teaching and Learning as Everyday Philosophy and Practice

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Abstract

By necessity I began stretching my practical theories regarding multicultural teaching and learning (MCTL) and adult learning when I became director of Minnesota's Preparing Future Faculty Program (PFF) in 2003. Originally scheduled to begin teaching in the program in 2004, I was charged with expanding the program and guiding the experienced PFF teaching staff in redeveloping a Teaching in Higher Education course and a Practicum. Reviewing teaching evaluations and student confidence survey raw data from previous years I noticed that, in sharing ideas about what could be dropped from the course, a majority of student comments addressed the diversity-focused class session, suggesting the session be improved or dropped entirely; also, the gains scores were consistently small for the survey item tracing pre-/post course confidence to address/support diversity. The student-identified deficit had to be addressed – given the deep and broad diversity of participants, the wide range of academic institutions in which they would teach, and a state course objective to provoke understanding of student diversity. The course revitalization charge, therefore, required not only support for staff in creating a rich common syllabus that could be adapted by experienced and new members of the teaching staff, according to each teacher's practical theory but also (1) deeper understandings of our own theorizing, of MCTL and of adult learning in order to shape our common syllabi; and (2) development of individual research plans to investigate how and why changes had an impact as we personalized the common syllabi to specific teaching contexts. This article reports on how one teacher moved from the "teaching problem" of inadequately incorporation of MCTL in the Preparing Future Faculty course "Teaching in Higher Education" into the "teaching possibilities" that come with attending to practical theory, multicultural teaching and learning theory, adult learning theories, and student voices in a research-driven course redesign.

Practical theory can be described as the array of ideas serving as a personal construct guiding teachers as we learn and continue to teach, with ideas being developed through personal experience/attitudes, academic training/knowledge, and core values/commitments discussions, observation of others, and formative peer, student or supervisor feedback. A practical theory may serve to guide – tacitly or explicitly – the following aspects of a teacher's daily work: situational view of curriculum, level of goals set for students, expectations for student performance, understanding of teacher-student roles in the classroom, development of classroom climate, perceptions of students' social needs/cultural contexts, ideas about connections between life and learning, and pedagogical hopes (Handal & Lauvas, 1987; Kettle & Sellars, 1996; Stevenson, 2008).

A practical theory situated in multicultural teaching and learning (MCTL) in higher education requires teachers make explicit their understandings of *multicultural* and of *multicultural learning*. After collaborating with a faculty colleague to develop a grant project involving 35 multidisciplinary, multicultural university teachers in four cohort years meeting six times per year to discuss and develop projects specifically focused on MCTL, we closed our work with the project by composing a 300 word response to "What is multicultural learning?" for a Driven to Discover public image campaign. Embedded in our answer is a definition of *multicultural*, which is and involves "reach[ing] across boundaries of ability, age, class, gender, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation and other personal, social and cultural identities so that learners will more thoroughly understand the multifaceted dimensions of knowledge" (Alexander & Chomsky, 2008). *Multicultural learning*, we learned from the collective projects, must be cultivated:

Learners need practice and guidance to become active listeners, readers and writers striving to understand what others are saying *and* meaning. Sustaining Multicultural Learning involves

creating classroom climates in which students and teachers can acknowledge and address the discomfort of working across boundaries, learn how to respond to difference, and grow intellectually and personally as a consequence. To make multicultural learning both possible and effective, instructors must structure classroom interactions to be respectful and challenging, creative and meaningful, engaged and transformative. In such an environment, inaccuracies, mistakes, hasty generalizations and intolerance are addressed with honesty and care. (Alexander & Chomsky, 2008)

Teachers engaging MCTL, therefore, need to see anew the students in their classrooms and to understand anew the dimensions of lifelong adult learning. Stephen Brookfield offers helpful lenses in both of these areas. Speaking about the “college classrooms in my own twin cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul,” where I also teach and which is typical of the places where Preparing Future Faculty students will build academic careers, Brookfield puts the classroom demographics together in this way:

Among students sit next to Somalis, who sit next to Ukrainian students, who sit next to the children of Mexican migrant workers, who sit next to African American learners, who intermingle with Tribal and Indigenous people, who learn alongside working-class White Minnesotans – and all these students are the first in the families to go to college. Sometimes tribal and ethnic conflicts present in the homelands of learners re emerge in college classrooms. And, of course, class differences also become apparent among all students, including those of colour. (2006)

Given the richness of experience, breadth of learning preferences, deep well of beliefs, complex motivations and unbounded assumptions that these students carry into classrooms where they expect teachers to prepare them for future work in an ever-quickening, ever-complex, knowledge-based world. We – and they – need to develop keen understandings of adult learning. Brookfield (2000) sets out four distinct adult learning faculties:

- to think dialectically (move between objective/subjective, universal/specific in decision-making, recognizing the importance of contextuality over general rules/theory);
- to employ practical logic (attend to internal features of a given situation to reason contextually “in a deep and critical way” allowing for inferential reasoning);
- to know how we know what we know (becoming conscious of own/others’ learning, ability to adjust styles situationally; as teachers, articulate “inferential chains of reasoning,” cues seen/unseen/ignored/unknown, and know grounds for decision-making); and
- to engage in critical reflection. (assessing the match between earlier rules/practices/practical theories and emerging understandings in “interpersonal, work and political lives”) (Brookfield, 2000).

Adult multicultural learning additionally requires “an understanding of group processes that allow students to regularly gain experience in planning group activities, in sharing responsibilities for carrying out plans, in evaluating accomplishments, in putting group welfare in the foreground, in abiding by majority decisions, and in cooperating with other members of the group” (Courts, 1958). Within an “enriched” reading group environment Courts’ created students supplemented assigned reading with charts, library books, magazines, newspapers, and pictures related to current issues/contemporary life.

Courts (Ibid) found that enrichment activities focused on meaning making and promotion of higher thought processes increased students’ “feeling of the need to read” and reading comprehension, especially with group work establishing a purpose and context in which to use learning. As Miss Courts’ former student reading her masters thesis in 2002 I would recognize the roots of my own pedagogy – working *in* the group, not on it; making meaning from interaction among students, between teachers and students or linking classroom and world; and pursuing uneasy curious questions in a world rich with multiple resources and perspectives that needed sorting in the company of others.

Finally, adult multicultural teaching will need to engage students and teachers “in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change” (Shrewsbury, 1987). Written while I was an undergraduate student and masters candidate working with Shrewsbury, I began my teaching career having experienced pedagogy and pedagogues as embodying concepts of power – but with the understanding of *power* “as energy, capacity, and potential rather than as domination,” as engaging student and teacher direction rather than directives (Shrewsbury, 1987). Engaging *power to* requires coming to understand the otherwise intangibles we carry with us when we use that power: assumptions and biases, experiences and alliances, presumptions and oppressions, blocking behaviours and budding possibilities.

“Teaching in Higher Education” Course Design: Incorporating Practical Theory, Multicultural Teaching and Adult Learning Frameworks

Phase 1: Where We Started, 2003-2004

Preparing Future Faculty began in 1993 as part of a national initiative to improve undergraduate education by bringing together a multidisciplinary mix of aspiring college and university faculty to comprehensively study, discuss and practice teaching, and examine the three-faceted faculty role common across colleges and universities in the United States: research, service and teaching. The graduate students and postdoctoral fellows enrolled in PFF courses come to the program enmeshed in the research focus of the doctoral-granting institution context and keen to deepen their skills for and understandings of classroom teaching, with the majority of students targeting careers at academic institutions where teaching expectations for faculty are equal to or prioritized over expectations for conducting discovery-based research. Staffed by the Center for Teaching and Learning and co-sponsored by the Graduate School, the two PFF courses are co-taught to create a synergy from the collaboration of a teaching-learning specialist and a disciplinary specialist, each holding a doctoral degree and balancing careers requiring – in differing proportions – achievement in teaching, research and service.

Students in “Teaching in Higher Education” study and practice, dialogue and write about teaching that promotes objectives rich, assignment-cantered, active learning for diverse student populations across a variety of academic, disciplinary, classroom (and beyond) settings. Course participants come from multiple disciplinary backgrounds, professional, national and ethnic cultures and each has elected to enrol in this course to pursue professional development as effective, responsive and reflective teachers. By the end of the program participants will have considered how teaching is informed by these different contexts and how participants can make choices as teachers that are effective for their students, adapted to their fields and appropriate to them personally. The co-teachers model a variety of deep learning strategies as we would use them in undergraduate courses (interactive lectures, peer instruction, writing/speaking to learn, discussion & group structuring, problem-posing, case study, role-playing and uses of technology), expecting students to come class prepared to create a respectful class climate, to share homework, to engage in dialogue that seeks consensus and dissent and to explore assumptions about teaching and learning, teachers and students by thinking in new ways about teaching and learning in their disciplines.

Representative of those eliciting student dissatisfaction, the Spring 2003 common syllabus included one MCTL-focused class session, “Diversity of Learners” during week six of the semester. Three learning outcomes are stated: “comprehend[ing] the richness that student diversity can bring to the classroom” via “analys[ing] and understand[ing] a range of learning styles that foster student learning” with attention to “gain[ing] an awareness of ways in which societal biases and individual biases can shape teaching.” The combination of objectives, readings and class structure produced a class session focused on (1) understanding ways in which a teacher’s preferred learning mode combined with disciplinary hierarchies establishing “best” ways to learn within a field created barriers to student learning and achievement and (2) gaining fluency with learning style theories in order to develop courses that incorporated multiple ways

of engaging learners and demonstrating learning. No writing assignment due for this class session, with the curriculum vitae draft due the week before and the teaching philosophy due the week following this class session. Typically the session included a formative mid-course evaluation of co-teaching and of course content/practices.

Moving into the redesign endeavour with specific awareness on broadening MCTL elements that could be more fully incorporated into discussions, the Spring 2004 syllabus divided the “Diversity of Learners” class session into two parts: Learning Styles, week four, and Cultural Diversity, week nine. The combined class goals remained the same, but the “managing diversity” tone was replaced with a “possibilities emanating from diversity” discussion framework. The Learning Style readings remained consistent with participants now completing a learning styles inventory and a brief writing assignment that aimed to provoke participants into practical theory building. The prompt offered three questions: What had participants discovered about themselves as learners? What links might exist between their learning preferences, teaching practices and expectations of students – especially those with learning preferences in contrast to their own? In what ways might they construct a syllabus to stretch themselves and their students in terms of learning preferences, assumptions and practices?

In focusing on Cultural Diversity,” during week nine, a new selection of readings asked student to consider why MCTL theory was important for higher education, to understand engagement with diverse peers as significant to student development, and to learn strategies for incorporating divergent thinking and reflective analysis into interactive lecture and discussion. For tracking their practical theorizing, the readings were linked to two class assignments – design a class session on a topic in your discipline related to diversity, which would be adapted to an in-class micro-teaching session, and draw on the Diversity of Learners class session to revise a teaching philosophy statement due in class. A primary goal for Phase 1 of the redesign process was to start in a small way that would allow co-teachers to gain confidence with the new assignments and fluency with new readings as a common starting place for redesign each teacher would undertake.

Phase 2: Stretching to What Is Possible, 2005-2006

Between Spring 2005 and Spring 2006, I revised the my sections of the course in two ways: (1) deepening course readings by introducing a small number of just published articles and book chapters addressing universal course design, cross-cultural student development, structured academic discussion formats, and active learning strategies to assist students in becoming aware of how they had come to know and in considering how to guide students in coming to know; (2) introducing weekly writing prompts to overtly engage participants in dialectical thinking by casting prompts that would call students to test, link, evaluate and synthesize personal and social constructions of teaching and learning throughout the course with self, peers, teachers and future self as audience. The informal writing, additionally, made it possible for me to take in each student’s response to readings and activities throughout the course; in this, I was able to be *in* the group discussions and to shape questions for future discussions. Overall, students welcomed the interplay between readings, informal writing and discussion.

By integrating these three elements starting with the first class period – and by having teachers share pieces of their own writing in response to readings - students overcame an initial worry that their writing would be evaluated by all in the classroom for political correctness rather than for striving to engage the other PC elements necessary for building an understanding teaching and learning: practical connections, potential coalitions, purposeful communities and perceptive collaborations. (The reading selections and writing assignments for this phase are reported in Alexander, 2007). As reflected in Table 1, the confidence survey data gathered from students during Phase 1, show an alignment of strongest gains score (1.0 or better) and smallest standard deviation (.09 – 1.07, each on the 7-point scale used for this survey) in GRAD 8101 class for Spring 2005a and Spring 2006, each section featuring co-teaching *and* student co-led presentations into the “Cultural Diversity” class session.

Four voices became more powerful than one for a single reason according to participants: hearing multiple voices unravel multicultural teaching and learning practices allowed participants to more carefully and fully consider their own experiences by the multiple examples of shifting perspectives, sifting assumptions from facts and differentiating between personal discomfort and intellectual disagreement – all aspects of adult learning and a benefit of intentionally diverse teaching teams in a multiracial classroom (Fried 1993; Brookfield 2000; Brookfield 2006).

Table 1. – “Address/Support Student Diversity” Confidence Survey Item Scores

	N	Mean (pre/post)	Standard Deviation (pre / post)	Gains Score	Co-Teaching
Spring 2005a	21	4.0 / 5.63	1.58 / 0.90	1.63	Yes: by teachers & students
Spring 2005b	12	4.67 / 5.5	0.72 / 1.00	0.83	No: only one teacher present that session
Spring 2006	24	4.0 / 6.0	1.01 / 0.73	2.00	Yes: by teachers & students
Summer 2006	13	5.3 / 5.9	1.48 / 0.95	0.60	No: only one teacher present that session
Spring 2008	20	4 / 5	1.54 / 1.07	1.0	Yes: by teachers & students; work with “ill defined” scenarios
Summer 2008	12	4.4 / 5.4	1.68 / 1.43	1.0	Yes: by teachers; work with “ill defined” scenarios

Phase 3: Extending the Stretch, 2008-2009

In designing the Spring and Summer 2008 sections, I asked my co-teachers – long-time colleagues, both middle class, married, white men new to MCTL – if I might make two additional changes to the course: first, fully integrate MCTL across the course; second, introduce an open discussion of conflict strategies at the end of the course by asking students how they would resolve two difficult scenarios. With those agreements in place, the course came to include the following components each week:

- practical experience (perspective shifting reflection, analysis of class-generated scenarios, microteaching with feedback, co-leading a 50 minute class segment, transfer and apply to specific disciplines/courses)
- diverse readings (research by/about students, teachers, co-curricular staff, administrators; classroom analysis; analysis of cultural and identity contexts at personal, disciplinary and institutional levels; international scholarship of teaching/learning)
- discussion-based learning (active listening; multiple formats/grouping strategies; meta-theoretical feedback sessions to examine placement/structure of discussions)
- forward looking feedback (debrief co-teaching activities; peer observation; meta-theory discussions between activities – how does this apply to my situation; comments on papers in response to carefully-composed student-generated questions)
- writing across the curriculum (weekly ARAs synthesizing readings; transfer and apply across disciplines; portfolio-based grading with closing self-assessment rubric).

The infusion also more easily accommodated a rich mixing of learning modalities: blend visual/oral, listening/talking, self reflection/group processing, student practice/teacher demonstration, abstract conceptualization/practical illustrations (Brookfield, 2006). Following a Highlander Folk School learning circle discussion model the overall structure engaged students in thinking how they might "build a program [teaching practice] that will deal with things as they are now and as they ought to be at the same time," a two-eyed approach to education (Horton, 1990). Through process I began to conceive of the readings-informal writing-small group discussions-peer feedback component as an instructional entity, a third member of the formal teaching team contributing to the classroom community and conversations. In this, we increased the potential that "at some point in the class most students will be taught by someone whose learning style, personality, cultural background and communicative preferences match their own" (Brookfield, 2006)

Table 2. – A Learning Circle Approach to GRAD 8101

	What? Knowledge	So What? Analysis	Now What? Synthesis	Tasks Action Steps
About Learning	understand learning theories; cognitive & identity development; students as inter-subjective subjects	analysis of learning: in your field, experience, related disciplines, family, cultural & affinity groups	scaffold learning for class session: situational context, objectives, measures of learning & of teaching	complete reflective writing, learning styles inventory, plan a 50-minute session of 8101 to co-teach
About Teaching	investigate integrated course design principles based on active, multicultural, assignment-centred, writing/speaking to learn strategies	examine personal, local, disciplinary learning assumptions to understand implications for own teaching, theorizing, & decision-making	discuss teaching cases/scenarios; observe teaching & examine syllabi built from active, integrated, multicultural course design principles	draft teaching philosophy, write course proposal with objectives & calendar setting out assignment-centred course organization
About Class-rooms	increase awareness & ways of engaging specific situational context to develop interactions to enhance classroom climate & students multiple strengths	plan/co-teach 50-minute session to enact 8101 topic; use teaching & assessment strategies new to class & appropriate to own context	post-teaching meta-analysis of co-taught segments: based on goals, experience, theory address what worked could work better	develop a major course assignment with assessment plan (from objectives to homework to evaluation tools) to accompany syllabus
As Students	prepare through targeted readings and ARA for lecture linking active learning, education practices of US civil rights movements to multicultural teaching as an every day practice across disciplines	respond to readings on universal design concepts, understanding student life contexts, identity development theories to generate ARA on MCTL in own teaching practice	extend from readings, ARA, lecture, discussion of cases, student co-teaching & questions at the end of MCTL-specific class to address what you could do tomorrow	compose, share, problem-solve in cross-disciplinary groups scenarios (from US, international & students' classrooms); incorporate new understandings in revised teaching philosophy

As Peers	engage with peers in a writing intensive, discussion-based, MCTL course with forward looking objectives & assessments	practice observation & feedback processes (initiating, offering, responding to & assessing possible next steps) with peers & teachers	establish practice of gathering peer feedback through exchange of assignment drafts, observation of teaching & analysis of responses	employ self- & peer assessment practices (peer revision memos, writing group discussions, portfolio review with self assessment rubric
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The session focusing on “Teaching for Learning” – class two – provides an example of changes in early weeks of the semester. This session included a presentation in which I analyzed practices teachers can use to bridge emotion and intellect to help students from the first day of class learn to shift perspectives across cultural contexts whether in making sense of content materials or cross-cultural interactions. By asking students to make use of their informal writing, which focused on readings addressing the shift from lecture-based/teaching-centred educational approaches to interaction-based/learning-centred paradigms, pairs – then disciplinary groups –talked about their own processes of emotional-cognitive bridging provoked by the course so far.

During the “Class Session Design” and “Learning Styles” weeks that followed new readings on student identity development and on student of colour perceptions of faculty behaviour invited the class to see their own disparate personal identity development to understand factors in perceptions of student learning, to assess teaching strategies that situate developmental phases, and to gain additional frameworks for considering tensions that emerge within student-student communication and teaching-learning/teacher-learner interactions when people are at different places along development continuums.

The middle section – now with six session leading up to the carry-over “Cultural Diversity” week – emphasized course design and syllabus development as dependent on understanding the deep structures of student learning, whatever one’s discipline or course-level assignment. group of students. To end the “Cultural Diversity” class session – and to employ, stretch, re-make practical logic and reflection – students role-played scenarios featuring “diversity flashpoints”– those interpersonal moments in a faculty–student, student-student, or faculty-faculty interaction that “originates from an area of identity difference (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability/disability, language or linguistic ability, religion, age, size, family structure, geographic origin)” (Garcia, Hoelscher & Farmer, 2005:).

One scenario linked to a social science classroom featured a student-student interaction that inflamed class and race tensions while also silencing the teacher. Following the discussion of each scenario from character roles/perspectives and in the context of shifting each scenario to another discipline, students completed the “post-course” confidence survey, this time including two open-ended questions asking students to describe “two ways in which you’ve developed confidence as a future faculty member” and “two areas where you’ve seen your confidence with regard to teaching and learning plateau.” The moderate gains scores and broader spread of Likert responses reflected in Table 1 for Spring and Summer 2008 indicate that the flashpoint scenarios had tempered their “addressing/supporting student diversity” confidence. Yet, as one student noted in a comment reflecting the responses overall, “I am sure I will encounter issues that I [am] not prepared for” but for which she indicated she had skills from which to begin the “in the minute” thinking necessary to develop an appropriate response.

Phase 4: Student Voices, 2009-2011

GRAD 8101 students initially and openly bring biases, hierarchies, tenderness and yearning – tangible and intangible – into the classroom (O’Brien, 1990). They not so secretly begin semesters wishing I would

just let them keep company with one of the “teaching tips” books as they develop a syllabus and assignments for a class they will teach someday, and let them assemble in disciplinary-expert discussion groups throughout the process because what happens in science certainly cannot be transferred to humanities, and vice versa. Yet, they have enrolled in a course known for – whatever the section and co-teachers – drawing on the tenderness and yearning of new teachers to unravel the biases and hierarchies.

In designing a MCTL infused GRAD 8101, I invite the course-opening resistance by making it ordinary for students to “speak out loud their emerging understandings, or raise questions that represent where they are in their struggles as learners,” believing that the more they speak the biases and tenderness, “the more they are engaged”(Brookfield, 2006).

In this, I sought to make “pushing back” a regular part of classroom interactions, asking students questions and asking students to question one another in order to dig beneath the resistance for its complex motivations: Really, do *all* chemistry teachers in the US use the same approach as the teachers in your department? Does everyone learn chemistry in that way? How would your lab mates describe themselves as learners? How would it affect your research team if everyone processed information in the same ways? If this one way works, why do so many students drop out or fail introductory chemistry classes? Would your dad learn chemistry in the same way you have? No, well then, your dad is a smart guy, so how would you make it possible for him to learn chemistry as a student in your class? What about a writing assignment that made him explain an element in haiku, or that asked him to explain just why the ingredients for that family favourite high rising layer cake need to be added in exactly the order and proportion set out in the recipe, or that asked him to explain which of the three formulas you just discussed would help a chemist make a particular recommendation to a client or policy maker?

I want students to understand – at every phase of course design and in every discussion about classroom interactions – how biases and hierarchies work *and* how tenderness and yearning compel us to push back to unravel what isn’t working for enough students – all in order to create something that will work for more learning for more students. Again, the two-eyed approach to teaching and learning, with a slight twist: What is in front of me right now? What questions do I need to ask in order to understand what I could make possible in the future?

With the need for course redesign established (Phase 1), then framed across sections (Phase 2) and finally tailored to particular co-teachers (Phase 3), it is time to focus on what students have said in their ARA writings from Spring 2005 through Spring 2008 and on what GRAD 8101 alums have carried with them into academic careers.

Do they understand MCTL as an everyday philosophy and practice, one that they carry on to some degree? Do they make meaning as teachers through practical theorizing, weighing personal experience, local attitudes, core beliefs, classroom observation, situational diversity context, and information from feedback loops they establish? To close this long-term research project during Spring 2010, I will: (1) Reflect on the course redesign through a critical analysis of students’ ARA writings for the Cultural Diversity class sessions to identify patterns in their descriptions of everyday MCTL they’d plan for a class they expect to teach and to trace the kinds of questions students ask in an addendum written at the end of that class session. (2) Look beyond the course by surveying the 102 alums of my sections of GRAD 8101 to determine whether they have maintained, gained, plateaued, questioned “new identities, assumptions, explanations, roles, values, beliefs and behaviours” related to MCTL as an everyday philosophy and practice, and to understand whether the redesign of GRAD 8101 provided these future faculty with tools for on-going theorizing and reflective practice that allow them to make sense of “disorienting dilemmas” (Brookfield, 2000) that accompany teaching and learning in the diverse settings that characterize 21st century classrooms in the US.

The three-part on-line survey will include a reprise of the course confidence survey, three short response questions about current teaching practices, and a request for select demographic data. (3) Invite alums who now hold academic appointments to opt into a short semi-structured interview during Summer 2010

to discuss one course they currently teach, focusing on decision-making processes related to syllabus construction, structure of class sessions, patterns for/of classroom interactions and student assessment, and on feedback from students along with their own personal reflection on the course in its specific instructional context.

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Paper 14

Partnership curriculum delivery: issues of affordance and agency in re-contextualising curriculum aims (Part 1)

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Abstract

Partnership approaches to curriculum delivery are increasing, particularly in vocational education. An example in the UK are Foundation Degrees, requiring a validating university to work with one or a number of Further Education Colleges delivering the curriculum, and employers who both provide the students and help shape the curriculum. Such approaches in both policy and practice are taken as unproblematic. Discourses of ‘partnership’ and ‘collaboration’ are highly normative, and much of the research reflects these values.

This paper traces the implementation of collectively agreed curriculum goals in a variety of partner contexts over a two year period. In doing so it uses a number of theoretical perspectives, including Ball’s (1993) ‘localised complexity’, Billett’s (2006) ‘relational interdependence’ applied to partnership contexts and borrows conceptually from theory on work-based learning (in particular Fuller and Unwin’s (2004) notions of ‘expansive-restrictive’ affordances). It demonstrates and categorises a range of factors that impact on processes of delivery of collectively agreed curriculum objectives.

The methodology is based on a critique of an interventionist research strategy (Development Work Methodology), after Engestrom (2001), developed by the author (Doyle: 2008, 2008a). It produces a typology of categories of implementation of the collectively agreed curriculum based on degrees of partner strategic and operational synergy in processes of situating the espoused learning outcomes within the affordances of the college learning environments. In doing so it problematises partnership approaches to curriculum delivery and considers how such localised complexity impacts subsequently at the partnership level. The paper re-models the notion of interacting activity systems to incorporate a notion of expansiveness that is de-centred and differentiated.

The research also demonstrates the need to deconstruct the premises on which partnership approaches to curriculum design and implementation are based. It demonstrates the responsibility on partner organisations to consider the strategic and operational implications of engaging in such curriculum initiatives. It also illustrates the affordances that need to be provided to the representing agents involved in the practice to support the delivery.

Introduction

This paper uses recent developments in socio-cultural theory, and in particular Activity Theory (Engestrom, 1987, 2001), and its interventionist ‘Development Work Methodology’ (DWM, Engestrom (1991, 1999); Warmington et al (2004)) to investigate a partnership, multi-site approach to curriculum development and delivery on a Foundation Degree over a two year period. It uses a critique of DWM developed by the author (Doyle: 2008, 2008a) to extend the unit of analysis beyond the immediate interface of partnership activity, as in ‘boundary-crossing’ sessions associated with DWM, to accommodate processes of local implementation by partners, and consider how these impact subsequently at the collective level.

The paper has two purposes. The first is to investigate examples of actual practices of implementation in processes of ‘re-contextualisation’ (Doyle: 2008a) away from a partnership interface, involving issues of affordance and agency in local implementation of decisions made collectively. The premise is that

meanings, procedures and intended practices discursively constituted at the interface, or ‘knot’ (after Engestrom et al, 1999) are subject to priorities constituted at locales away from the ‘knot’, both by the subjects (or partners) within the capacities of their relative agency, and by the affordances offered by the locality, such as degrees of cultural, organisational, pedagogical and strategic synergy with the broader partnership or its prevailing discursive direction.

This position facilitates an ontological depth enabling analysis and comparison across different partner sites or ‘activity systems’ pursuing an ‘object’. It enables an analysis of power from beyond the interfacing contested discourses at the collective levels to a consideration of the relative impact of the partners in implementing collective decisions within their own activity systems. It also provides a conceptualization of ‘expansiveness’ (development, learning, Engestrom:1987) that can be de-centred and differentiated; local and relational between partners, as well as systemic (the partnership). To illustrate: there are situations of transition and development at local levels within the partnership which are essentially dyadic (for example between a college and an employer), which may have a differential impact subsequently on what happens at the partnership interface.

This strand of data analysis contributes directly to the second purpose of the paper: a remodelling of Activity Theory. For example the data from the localities might have impact on the dynamic and direction of what happens at the collective, discursive level of the Workshops and vice versa, and also has roots in the data on subjects’ (partners’) conceptualisations of and motivations on the object (aim) of the activity. This illustrates the theoretical and ontological position: the individual and collective levels of analysis are not distinct, but dualistic, and framed by time and space (locality). Issues of scale between partner and partnership (Hodkinson et al: 2008), in the relationship between the local and the systemic, are also significant in this regard, and will be discussed in the final part of the paper.

Activity Theory

Activity theory is associated with Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of mediation between subject and object in the process of learning, and was subsequently developed by Engestrom (1987, 2001) with the concept of the activity system (see Fig.1).

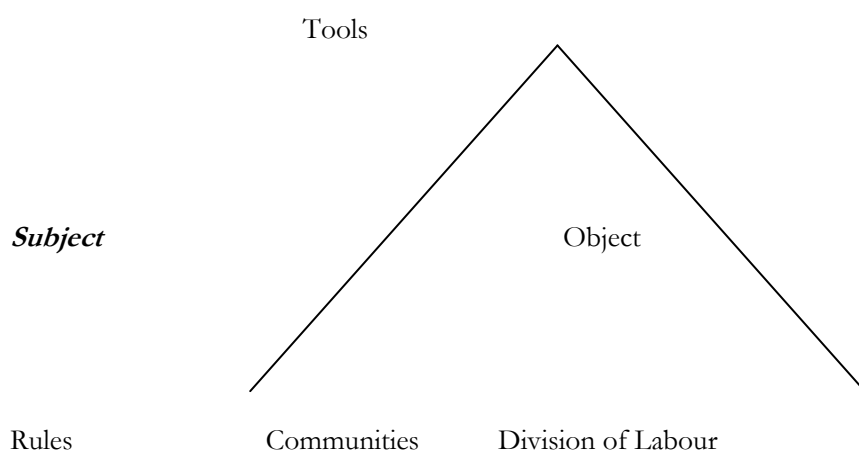


Fig. 1 The Activity System (Engestrom: 1987)

Alternative theoretical perspectives include Actor Network Theory (Law, 1994; Miettinen, 1999; Latour: 2005), situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998), and socio-cultural theory of mediated action (Wertsch, del Rio and Alvarez, 1995). These approaches are also associated with Vygotsky, as they share an emphasis on mediation of human action by cultural artefacts. For Activity Theory contradictions within the system are the basis for development and what Engestrom refers to as 'expansive learning', emerging through methodological instruments which are 'interventionist' (Engestrom, 1999: 2), giving access to 'the inner contradictions of practice'. Engestrom (1990: 105) describes 'development work research' as a 'test-bed of activity theory', but asserts that it is not distinct from theory; rather it is a

...laboratory where new theoretical concepts and methodological principles are created, not only tested. In this sense, the test-bed is the centre of the theoretical endeavour.

Engestrom (2001) identified new work practices across activity systems (partnership working) as becoming the norm, and developed a third generation of activity theory, modelling interacting systems (Fig. 2) operating horizontally across boundaries, with 'expansiveness' resulting through addressing contradictions directly, rather than more conventional liberal partnership practices of avoiding or reducing barriers to partnership working.

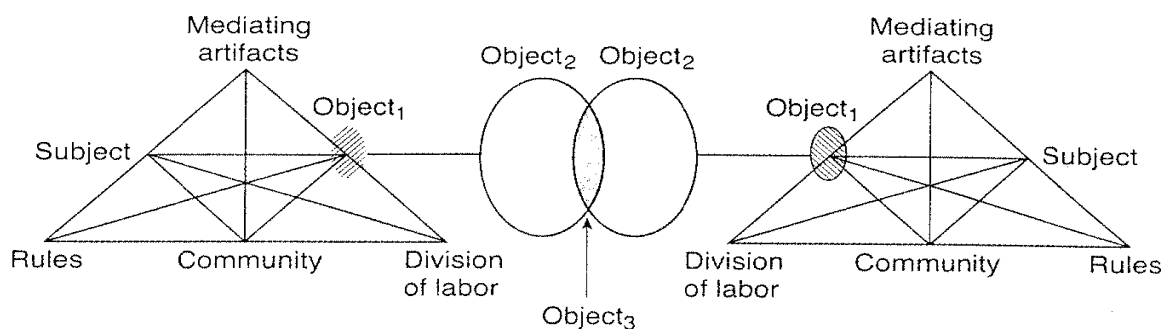


Fig. 2 Boundary-crossing in the Third Generation of Activity Theory (Engestrom: 2001)

Recent theoretical developments in Activity Theory are grappling with the issue of the subject (the partner) and subjectivity within the activity system (Daniels: 2005, Daniels and Warmington: 2007); on the 'privileging' of learning in the activity system rather than the 'learning needs of individuals' (Wheeler, 2007: 194); on the constitutive relationship of emotion, motivation and identity with activity (Roth: 2007) and on the need to uncouple motive from object to access the subjects' perspectives within the unit of analysis (Nardi: 2005; Kaptelinin: 2005). Considerations of the self, rooted in Leontiev (1974), which link social and individual dimensions of development, are also facilitating this

theoretical debate (for example, Stetsenko and Arievitch: 2004). Such developments contribute to the theoretical basis for this paper, as well as the conceptual framework for the data analysis.

The paper uses recent theoretical developments in socio-cultural perspectives on work-based learning (Billett: 2006, on the relational interdependence of individual and social perspectives; Lee et. al. (2004) and Fuller and Unwin (2004), on 'expansive/restrictive' affordances of workplaces and 'learning territories' and Hodgkinson's et al's (2008) use of Bourdieu's notions of habitus, capital and field), linked to phenomenological theory on processes of implementation (Ball: 1993), to analyse the relative impact and expansiveness of the collective discourse from the partnership development workshops at local levels.

The paper concludes by identifying issues from the data that need to be incorporated in an elaborated and redeveloped Activity Theory. These issues will also be used to provide a remodelled conceptualization of Activity Theory that spans dimensions of time and locality in a way that helps to explain the expansive experience researched, but also is consistent with emerging theoretical perspectives in socio-cultural theory. Activity Theory is a work in progress, and in this case the paper adapts its function as a 'clarifying and descriptive tool rather than a strongly predictive theory' (Nardi, 1996: 7).

The structure of the paper is as follows: the theoretical dimension of the duality of the individual and collective dimensions of the partnership are used to explain the differential impact of the collective discourse across the partnership, and a de-centred notion of expansiveness. Data from the second interviews with the partners then is used to model a typology of the partners which incorporates differential strategic and operational synergies and degrees of expansiveness. The final part of the paper will focus on a reflective reformulation of Activity Theory based on the research.

The research

Foundation Degrees in the UK require a validating university to work with one or a number of FE Colleges (five in this case) delivering a vocational curriculum, and employers (five local authorities) who both provide the students and also have a voice in the shaping and delivery of the curriculum. The initiative provides an example of Engestrom's (2001) 'new work practices' requiring boundary-crossing in developing a shared object. One of the five employers chose not to participate in the research, and two others left their posts over the two year cycle, but did participate in the interviews. The process used a combination of three workshops (equivalent to Engestrom's interventionist boundary-crossing laboratories) interspersed with two semi-structured interviews with each 'subject' (four employers, five FE tutors and three HE tutors) away from the collective 'knot' within individual partners' work contexts over a two year period. The data for this paper is largely based on the interviews rather than the workshops, to give access to issues of perspectives on issues of implementation, or 'recontextualisation' of the espoused workshop outcomes. The discussion below, however, emphasises that the two strands of data are not to be seen in a dualistic way; rather it demonstrates the relational nature of the data and the contexts in the development and expansiveness of the partnership.

Re-contextualisation – issues of cultural and organisational synergy and embodied, positional agency

'Re-contextualisation' is used to avoid the dualism of 'context' and 'de-contextualisation' (Lave, 1993:22) based on the premise of context as a container. Rather, the context is processual and what happens in partner localities in processes of implementation impacts to varying degrees on the activity and learning at the 'knot', and vice versa. Re-contextualisation is therefore an extension of an ongoing relational process between different localities by the same actors. Ball's (1993) distinction between 'discourse' and 'text' is particularly relevant to the way the Foundation Degree discourse has been framed within hegemonic discursive practices of the University in this partnership. However, the emphasis in using these terms is not dichotomous, but rather relational (after Henry: 1993, Ozga: 2000) and 'intertextual' (Fairclough: 1992). Away from the collective discourse, dominated by the University, the outcomes of the Workshops have had to go through a

process of ‘textual’ re-entry, to varying degrees, into the prevailing discursive practices of the partners’ activity systems. Ball makes his distinction to accommodate ‘localised complexity’ in his phenomenological position on policy implementation. Foundation Degrees are policy driven, and the localised implementation of collective curriculum discourse is equally problematic. Thus:

...the enactment of texts relies on things like commitment, understanding, capability, resources, practical limitations, co-operation, and (importantly) intertextual compatibility. (Ball, op. cit: 13)

The intertextuality of implementation at the local level, away from the ‘knot’, also involves engagement between the colleges and employers to varying degrees; a process of local ‘knotworking’. Such enactment therefore also depends on degrees of situational affordance, and on the positional ‘capital’ and degree of agency afforded to, and exercised by, the individual partner representative in the process of re-entry. These themes and metaphors are briefly developed as instruments to analyse the processes of re-contextualisation.

The analysis borrows concepts from literature on learning through work. In looking at ‘Learning as Work Research’, Lee et al (2004) questioned how workplaces may shape individual learning and opportunities for learning, how learners are active participants within learning processes at work and links between organisational structures and individual engagement in learning at work. Such issues are of relevance in looking at the relative expansiveness of the experience for partners in processes of re-contextualisation. Their study, also citing Ashton (2004), Billett (2001, 2002b), and Fuller and Unwin (2003; 2004), showed that decisions to participate within learning environments in the workplace are not simply grounded in free-will, but are constrained or enabled through the positions individuals occupy across the multiple contexts and sets of relationships they experience. Billett (2001) notes opportunities are not evenly afforded; that there is differential positioning. However, this does not determine who takes up what is afforded in terms of opportunities, and a degree of agency is involved. Also, regarding localised ‘knotworking’, a partner might have a significant degree of agency within the college, but horizontal links with the local employer might be ‘restricted’, limiting affordances for development.

Fuller and Unwin (2004) developed the notion of an ‘expansive-restrictive’ continuum of affordances for learning and development for individuals. ‘Restrictive’ means opportunities for development and learning are limited, while ‘expansive’ means a variety of opportunities are facilitated. They are not advocating a structural determinism; rather they develop the notion of ‘learning territories’ (consisting of the range of opportunities for learning and development). They state:

The character and scope of the individual’s learning territory (as well as how they respond to it) influences how he or she engages with opportunities and barriers to learning at work. (Fuller and Unwin: 2004: 133)

They state this involves the structure-agency dynamic in ways that avoids both voluntarism and determinism. Billett (2006) argues that the workplace affords particular kinds of experience, but these experiences are not available uniformly. Despite his more agential and individualistic perspective, Billett acknowledges that while individuals are ‘reflective’ and ‘evaluative’, they are differentially positioned and that agency is relational. An interesting notion in terms of accessing the subject is Billett’s notion of ‘relational interdependence’, which he summarises as ‘individualising the social, and socialising the individual’ (op. cit: 54); a neat way of viewing the duality between the individual and the collective in both the ‘embodied’ links between activity systems, and the individual partner engaging with his/her activity system.

Hodkinson et al (2008) take these issues further through linking ‘participative’ (after Sfard: 1998) theories of learning with a Deweyan notion of ‘embodied construction’, and using Bourdieu’s notions of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ to understand the relative impact and agency of individuals within the cultures and organisations in which they operate. Relevant to processes of re-contextualisation by partners, they state

Cultures are (re)produced by individuals, just as much as individuals are (re)produced by cultures, though individuals are differentially positioned with regard to shaping and changing a culture – in other words differences in positioning and power are always an issue too (Hodkinson et al: 2008: 34)

In terms of affordances they go on to assert, after Bourdieu (1986):

The impact of an individual on a learning culture depends upon a combination of their position within that culture, their dispositions towards that culture and the various types of capital (social, cultural and economic) that they possess. (op. cit: 37).

They use Bourdieu's notions of 'habitus' to demonstrate 'structures operating within and through individuals' (op.cit: 38), and explain dispositions, which 'amount to more than attitudes, motivations and interests, and include a sense of reality, of what is possible' (op. cit: 39). Such a sense of what is possible is important in understanding the sense-making and understanding of their own agency that the partners have in the process of re-entry. Early in coding the data an affective dimension, labelled as 'will' or desire, was identified. The college tutors and one employer (E1) had this more than the HE tutors. Hodkinson et al (op cit: 39) seem to capture this difference:

Sometimes existing dispositions were reinforced. Sometimes new dispositions could be formed or existing dispositions changed. One way of understanding learning is as a process through which the dispositions that make up a person's habitus are confirmed, developed, challenged or changed.

Dispositions and the various forms of capital used by Hodkinson et al. may not be enough, however, unless they accommodate something which is essentially outside the person, but perceived in and recognised by others in the person – a form of relational and 'positional' or 'professional' capital which enables, endorses and legitimises, but which is not sufficiently articulated by these other forms of capital. Hodkinson et al go on to embrace the term 'horizons' for learning, 'established through the ongoing and sometimes changing interrelationship between their dispositions and the learning cultures in which they participate' (op. cit: 40). The point is made that such horizons are 'relational'. This is important in both understanding the subjects' conceptualisations of the object, the relational positioning of their horizons in terms of power and role taking, their motivation and the issues of re-contextualisation within the refractive processes of re-entry within their activity systems. It also influences the potential for subsequent processes of localised 'knotworking' between colleges and employers.

There is no intention to engage in detail with the intricacies of Hodkinson et al's theoretical position, particularly on Bourdieu. However, it provides, heuristically, along with Fuller and Unwin's notions of differential agency within 'expansive-restrictive' affordances, conceptual and analytical tools to facilitate access to processes of re-contextualisation, and the variation in degrees of expansive learning through these processes. Such degrees facilitate questioning of the extent to which processes of expansive learning are systemic at the collective level, and differentiated and de-centred locally, and what the consequences of this are in subsequent iterations for the collective expansive cycle.

Paper 15

Case Studies of re-contextualisation (Part 2)

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This paper reports on the empirical case studies carried out in the development of a Foundation Degree. The key responsibilities for actions to be implemented from Workshop 1- the first boundary- crossing session at the end of semester 1 for the first intake - (cross-modular themes to teaching and assessment, skills embedding in the modules, extended induction and the implementation of personal development planning and professional development) were located between the colleges and the University, but the fact that the courses were being delivered in the colleges means the data from the college interviews is particularly important. The second cycle of interviews took place approximately a year after the first, and ten months after Workshop 1. The case studies are categorised in three ways, as designated in Table 1.

Table 1. Degrees of partner strategic and operational synergy in processes of re-contextualisation

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Strategic and operational synergy	Strategic and operational synergy	Strategic and operational synergy
Examples: E 1 and FE 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High employer-college 'localised knotworking' • High Employer commitment • High College commitment • Medium University commitment 	Examples: FE 3 and 5 E 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low employer-college 'localised knotworking' • Low employer commitment • High College commitment • Medium University commitment 	Examples: FE 2 and FE 4 E 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low employer-college 'localised knotworking' • Low employer commitment • Low college commitment • Low University commitment

The categories represent relative degrees of strategic and operational synergy. Category 1 involves a high degree of synergy by the partners (college and employer) within their own organisations and in engaging with processes of 'localised knotworking' between the college and the employer, but medium degrees of synergy between the college and the University in engaging with the collective outcomes from Workshop 1. Category 2 involves a high degree of strategic and operational synergy in processes of re-contextualisation within the colleges, but little 'localised knotworking', and medium degrees of synergy between the colleges and the University in implementing the collective outcomes. Category 3 involves partners in the colleges with minimal 'positional capital', little 'localised knotworking' with employers, and low degrees of synergy between the colleges and the University in engaging in collective outcomes.

The categorisation is to facilitate a more detailed analysis which incorporates issues of disposition, positioning, and degrees of affordance in processes of re-contextualisation, and this paper uses Categories 1 and 3 to analyse issues of expansive learning. The focus for the analysis of the categories will be the college representatives (designated FE 1-5), but issues of implementation with the employers (E1 and E2) and the University will also be considered when appropriate. The research interventions were supplementary to formal encounters, such as assessment boards.

Category 1 High employer and college, medium university strategic and operational synergy

As a manager within his college, and with responsibility for college links with Higher Education ('I write the HE strategy') FE 1 is in a strong position within his organisation to push forward the collective decisions from the workshop. He is highly experienced, and respected, by both management and staff. He has a direct link to the College's Director of Curriculum (the Vice Principal), and strategic and management support for engagement with the Foundation Degree. This has resulted in the college developing a specific building in the college, the 'Management Unit' as 'a more professional base' for 'prestigious courses'. Also the college, based in North East Lancashire, an area with no local facility for higher education at that time, saw this as a strategic investment linked to its expansion of higher level work. The course therefore also had wider management and strategic support. This was helped by the fact that the chief executive of the local authority, providing the students for the course, was also a college governor. This formal support had recently resulted in the college investing in a computer suite for the programme. The strategic significance to the organisation was reinforced by the fact that this was the only curriculum link with a university:

...there is that perpetual link (with the University)...we are not franchising with 300 other universities, doing all sorts of things.

FE 1 was therefore in a strong position in terms of his social, cultural and 'positional' capital within the organisation to support the re-contextualisation of the Workshop outcomes, within the capacities he had. In terms of his disposition to utilise his position he was also keen to ensure progress, to the extent that he appointed an extra member of staff for the programme, and gave half that lecturer's time in the first year of appointment to be based with the employer and the workplace mentors, enabling 'localised knotworking' in a highly practical sense. From a perspective of a 'restrictive-expansive continuum of affordance' (Fuller and Unwin: 2004) he was positioned to learn, on behalf of his organisation, and clearly was acting to use the experience as expansively as possible for the strategic development of his organisation. His experience with the University after the Workshop was limiting, however. He referred to the 'academic drift' of the programme, of Module Leaders simply 'handing down' materials in module packs and of the University not fulfilling its side of the bargain from the Workshop – hence he had to use the college's own Personal Development Planning (PDP) processes and skills packs, thereby situating Workshop outcomes within the college's own practices. This occurred for all of the colleges.

The link with the employer, through E 1, was extremely strong, to the extent that it was effectively dyadic within the larger partnership activity system. This is relevant to discussions of 'scale' (Hodkinson et al: 2008), later in the paper. It was reminiscent of Engestrom's ideal notions of boundary-crossing (Fig 2). This was influenced by the experience, reputation and degree of agency afforded to E 1 within her organisation. It also resulted from the strategic synergy of the activity with the organisational priorities at that time, and the fact that E 1 contributed to the shaping of the collective outcomes, and indeed subsequently decoded them in ways that clearly aligned with her objectives. In this she enjoyed the direct interest taken by her chief executive, and was supported by his social and positional capital.

She was able to utilise the increase in staffing provided by the college. However, she also actively embedded the appropriate outcomes of the Workshops within the organisation's own professional development strategies and actual work practices in the departments. For example, in supporting the curriculum development and assessment strategies for the cross-modular assignments she stated:

We have a role to play in providing them with the most effective type of piece of research that they need to do – not being dreamt up for them, but real live issues.

E 1 involved the ‘service managers’ in ‘shaping the learning’, and even used the PDPs developed locally with the college as part of the appraisal and ‘CPD’ process:

We ask the line manager and the individual to consider the impact of any learning and development that they have participated in over the previous year.

E1 clearly sought to maximise the potential afforded by her position in the process of re-contextualisation, and align it to developments within the organisation. The Local Authority had identified and appointed forty ‘Change Agents’ as it continued its process of continuous evaluation and development. All Foundation Degree students were invited to be members of this group.

The affordances and positional capital of these two partners, boundary spanners in processes of co-configuration between their organisations, simultaneously supported by and enacting strategic and organisational priorities through the partnership, a ‘force field’ of synergy (Hodkinson, op. cit: 35, after Bourdieu: 1985), led to a relatively expansive local experience of re-contextualisation. The ‘textual’ (Ball 1993) interpretation and implementation was situated to maximise local benefit to these two partners. The designation of ‘medium synergy’ with the University is based on the commitment both showed throughout to attendance and participation not just at the Workshops, but in other more formal meetings, such as moderation and exam boards, and at the University days for the students.

Category 3 - Low employer, college and university strategic and operational synergy

FE 2 and 4 were effectively marginal or marginalised during the process of implementation within their organisations, both personally and strategically. They had little opportunity to compensate for this by engaging in ‘localised knotworking’ with the employers, who showed little interest in engaging actively with the programme. However, in spite of this re-contextualisation was expansive to a degree in that it demonstrated to them the limitations and boundaries, the localised contradictions in their own activity systems that they did not have the power to influence or advance. Their learning was essentially situated within the classroom practices they experienced and developed, and through the links established externally through the partnership. In terms of professional dispositions there was a significant commitment to the programme, and indeed to the outcomes of the Workshops, but their limited capital, particularly professional and positional within their organisations, meant the affordances available to them were limited, even negative, and they were operating in relatively ‘restrictive’ rather than ‘expansive’ circumstances (Fuller and Unwin: 2004).

FE 2 and FE 4’s positioning is a result of tensions between ‘managerial’ cultures in the colleges and ‘professional’ cultures in the University (Pritchard 2000), changes in strategic priorities (particularly for FE 2, both with his college and in dealings with the employer) and pedagogical tensions between the University and the colleges in prioritising knowledge transfer over learner development. These strands are used to analyse both of these cases.

FE 4 had a long absence through illness during the research, and the college’s response to this illustrated the hegemonic managerialism in which he was operating. In discussing the tension between the college and the University on the suitability of the part-time member of staff appointed to cover his absence he stated:

...they (the students) almost took a walk. They were the wrong decisions. People became entrenched in their power... I am the manager, therefore this is the person I’m going to put in’...if you’re a manager in a college like this it’s just a matter of resources and availability...there was no fit there and it was very difficult for the students.

His perception of management's attitudes to the programme was negative ('We probably came onboard kicking and screaming'). He said at the time nobody knew what Foundation Degrees were, and

...there still is confusion, and I constantly get from line managers mixed messages – 'we're not making any money out of it...there may not be a course next year'. I mean, this is the kind of environment which I'm working under.

He said he is constantly questioned by managers in ways that make him feel undermined and marginal. In particular the processes of collaboration, requiring time, are questioned. He is regularly being asked

'What're you doing this for? Why are you going to the University? You can't go – we need you here.'

FE 4 rarely attended events at the University, and he could not attend the Workshops.

FE 2 went from a position of significant positional capital within his college to complete marginalisation with the change of college principal. Before the change the principal had been a key player with the University in initiating the partnership and the bid to be a prototype. He had the support of the chief executive of the local council, who also was a college governor, and earlier in his career had been a college principal. However, the principal retired and the chief executive changed jobs. The focus of the new principal was on recruitment of his core student base – sixteen year olds doing traditional full time courses. FE 2 was quickly isolated, with courses delivered off the main campus, and the principal constantly asking about student numbers and questioning 'what's in it for the college'. These circumstances led FE 2 to state:

If I got run over by a bus tomorrow I have no idea what would happen (to the programme).

He sits outside the main college reporting, resourcing and quality assurance systems. For these issues:

Channels are via the University. These are the channels I feel this programme is responsible to. In many ways this is just an environment. I am employed by the college, and that is the only involvement they have. We follow the University's guidance, and everything in terms of quality assurance and systems.

FE 2 however, had the personal resources of professional experience to fall back on. He had previously been a head of department in a college, and in interpreting the requirements of the University and the Module Leaders his experience equipped him with the professional capital to make judgements about the priorities in the classroom and in assessment, based on the needs of his students. In contrast the limited professional experience of FE 4 reinforced his feelings of professional isolation, and this led to confusion and disagreement with the University on issues of assessment and standards. This was reinforced by his own manager questioning the quality of the teaching materials provided by the University. Of course this might have been motivated by issues other than pedagogy.

FE 4 felt power was with the University and with his management, and he was somewhere in the middle. However, commitment to the programme and the students meant he had a degree of power in the classroom to influence students. He mentioned this in the context of relations with the University and the materials and schedules handed down by the University:

'You've got to do this, this and this' (quoting the University)...but, this is the way we'll handle it alright. It comes down to ...trust.

Effectively this was a plea for the University to recognise the expertise and professionalism of the college tutors, and for the University to recognise the conditions under which the teaching was being delivered:

You need somebody on board who knows what it's like in these places, how the teaching is done, and what the constraints are. The University doesn't understand the constraints.

Both FE 2 and FE 4 had problems in dealing with employers, in that for FE 2 the loss of the chief executive meant the key driver at the local authority left, and the initiative no longer had priority. FE 4 never had any opportunity to link with E 2, who although aware of and interested in the development, it was peripheral for her in her strategic position at a time of corporate reorganisation.

The tensions and difficulties experienced by FE 2 and 4 came about as a result of attempted re-contextualisation within their own activity systems. The experience exposed to them the limited affordances of their positions and what they would be likely to achieve. To a limited extent the process can therefore be argued to have been expansive – both at their level, and at the level of the principal for FE 2, who made a decision to withdraw from higher level work based on recruitment to this programme. Of course these decisions and outcomes might have been reached eventually, but these experiences contributed to the emerging acquisition of knowledge on which decisions were made. This relates to Blackler and McDonald's (2000: 847) experience; that it is '...not possible to shake free and walk away from the knot unchanged'. The process itself is developmental, even if for the range of partners involved it is highly differentiated, and even negative.

The categorised data in processes of 'textualisation' within affordances of 'base' activity systems illustrates the complexity and diversity of the journeys the espoused outcomes of the collective decision making at the 'knot' have to undergo. It also demonstrates that in spite of the discursive hegemony of prevailing practices at collective levels, power within the 'partnership' is essentially distributed through processes of implementation which will also impact differentially on subsequent collective practices. It is through practices of engagement with 'base' activity systems that processes of expansive learning are distributed differentially throughout the wider partnership.

Differentiated and decentred expansiveness and a remodelling of the Activity System

This section summarises issues from the theory and the data around the differentiated and decentred nature of the expansiveness across the activity system, and links to Hodkinson et al's (2008) use of the concept of scale, before concluding with a re-modelled notion of the Activity System based on the experiences provided through this research.

Expansive learning through DWM results through constructing and addressing the contradictions of collective experience at the 'knot'. The data demonstrates that experience away from the 'knot' is equally important in terms of expansiveness – indeed it is dualistic, in that there are degrees of mutual interdependence. However, this expansiveness is differentiated in terms of the degree of learning and impact, and decentred in the sense that it is situated in the localities of the partners, as well as at the collective level in a relational rather than fragmented way.

Differentiated expansiveness for the partners is affected by the issues influencing re-contextualisation discussed throughout this paper. For example, issues of disposition and the various forms of capital of the individual partners, including 'positional' capital, and the affordances provided by the colleges and the employers (in particular to the individuals) are all significant in processes of re-contextualisation.

Processes of re-contextualisation, of engagement and re-entry with partner activity systems, also resulted in expansiveness that was also de-centred in terms of the whole activity system. For example, the term 'dyadic' is used to categorise the developments between FE 1 and E 1, a parallel with Engestrom's (2004) notion of 'co-configuration', in contrast to the experiences of marginality of FE 2 and FE 4. Even here, however, the experience had impact for the partners and the management of their institutions.

This differentiated and decentred expansiveness impacts subsequently at the collective level in Workshops – it contributes to, or even shapes the process. In Workshop 2 for example the experiences of implementing previous collective outcomes from Workshop 1 within the varying affordances offered by the colleges exposed the absolute and relative feasibility of those outcomes, and therefore provided the foci for the double binds and critical sites for development (Doyle:2008). It therefore provides the links between the individual and collective experiences. Hence the issue of scale is significant in modelling links between the individual partners' activity systems and the collective, systemic experience.

Hodkinson et al (op cit: 36-37) use the metaphor of 'scale' from map-making, and link it to Bourdieu's notion of 'fields' and 'forces' operating at all levels:

Seeing fields as primarily concerned with forces, as having imprecise and overlapping boundaries, and as existing at all scales, overcomes several of the weaknesses in existing participatory views of learning. It ...can operationalise the links between learning cultures and wider social structures, whilst retaining the possibility of a large scale focus on localised learning sites.

Therefore 'large scale' analysis within the activity of the whole partnership enables access to localised variations of expansiveness through examination of re-contextualisation, as illustrated in this paper. A 'small scale' analysis would be more characteristic of the one dimensional systemic analysis of 'knotworking' of activity systems outlined in Engestrom's (2001: 136) characterisation of the third generation of Activity Theory (Fig. 2), which focuses on the collective, situated practice of interfacing activity systems in 'boundary-crossing laboratories'. Therefore this paper demonstrates a need to conceptualise a model of the process which captures both levels of scale (local-individual and the collective), and incorporates notions of time and locality, as well as differentiated and de-centred expansiveness. It also therefore needs to include the relational development between collective (small scale) and individual or local (large scale) levels of activity, reinforcing their interdependence as a duality within partnership development.

The model is effectively two dimensional: temporal-longitudinal, and socio-spatial. The research and development process and sequence is encapsulated within Fig. 3. Engestrom's (1987) triangular representation of the activity system is adapted to the developmental phases of the research design (temporal-longitudinal). Processes of re-contextualisation by individual participants (socio-spatial) in processes of situating the collective 'object' within their own activity systems are also included. Of course, a function of models is to represent, heuristically, and in so doing they can oversimplify. Re-contextualisation does not necessarily take place at the points in the model as illustrated, nor to the same degree with different partners, as this paper illustrates – in that sense it is symbolic. The same applies to expansiveness – learning is not necessarily linear, and can be retrospective and reflexive, cyclical or even helical, and feeding into subsequent learning.

Re-contextualisation is therefore the 'textual' (Ball: 1993) process of interpreting and situating the task within the affordances of multiple parallel contexts by partners with varying degrees of 'capital' after the immediate face to face boundary encounter. In explaining Fig. 3 the narrative starts on the left and moves right, but the critical socio-spatial dimensions are around the Workshops and processes of re-entry (re-contextualisation). The triangle on the left, below level 1, represents the different partner activity systems before the first interviews, and S_n relates to the number of subjects in their base activity systems, with O_n relating to the range of perspectives on the 'object' at this early stage.

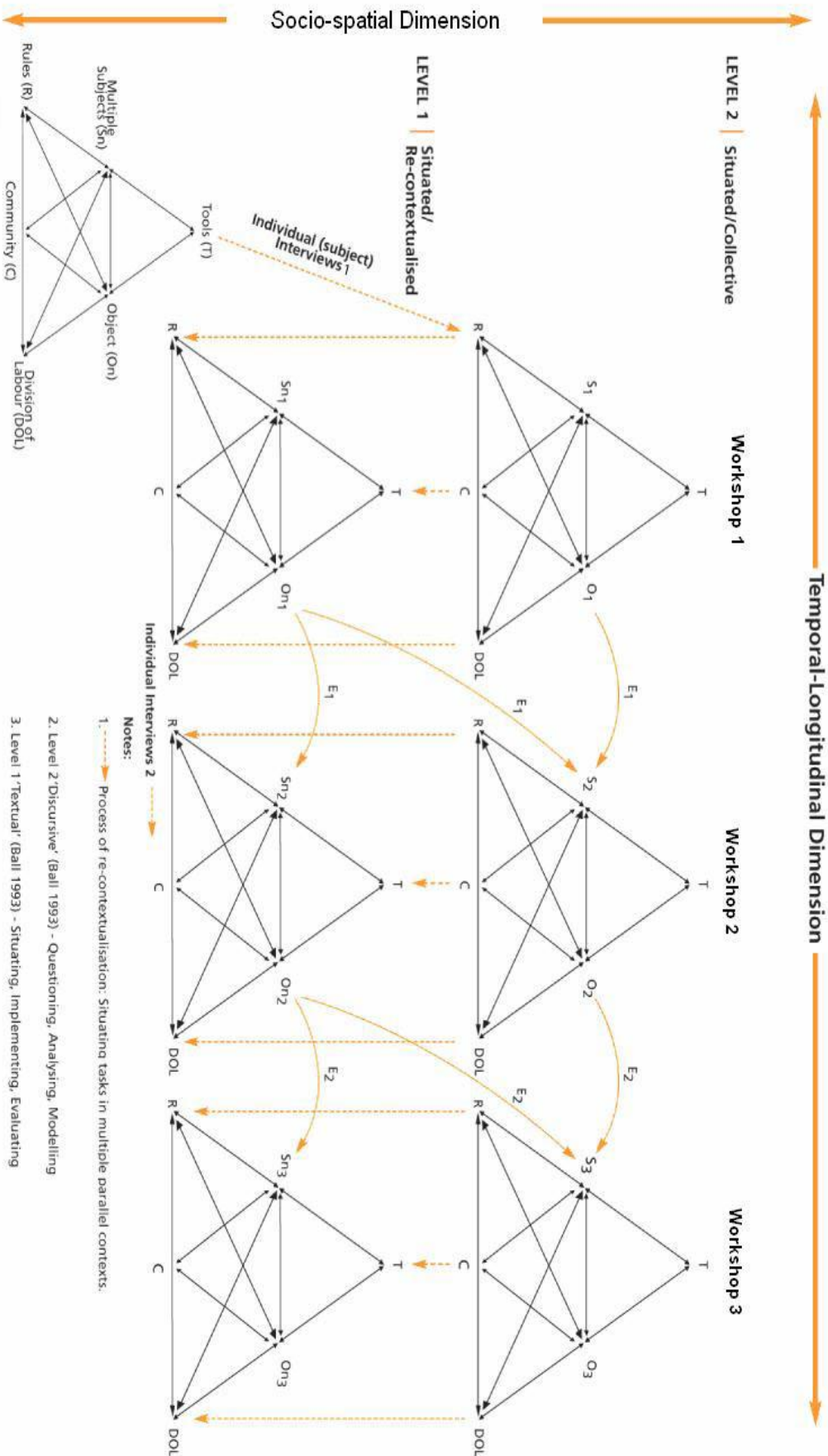


Fig. 3 Modelling collective and re-contextualised activity

After the first interviews the first boundary-crossing session, Workshop 1, takes place, with S1 relating to individual subject positions in the process in formulating the emerging 'object' (O1). The broken lines leading to the parallel triangle directly beneath represent an attempt to model individual subjects' (Sn1) attempts to situate the outcomes, through re-contextualisation (On1). In effect, at Sn1 individual subjects are starting the process of re-engagement within their own activity systems. This means the expansive cycle within the contexts of their organisation's prevailing discursive practices needs to be engaged. Of course this is not a new experience, and 'premediate experiences' (Billett, 2006: 53), as well as other factors discussed in this paper will influence this process.

In some cases this was less problematic than with others – hence the idea of differentiation. For example, the relative priority given by the colleges and the employers (as activity systems) to delivering Foundation Degrees and aligning quality, teaching and resource models to those of another 'system' depends precisely on issues of affordance, disposition and positional capital as demonstrated in the data analysis.

Fig. 3 incorporates issues of scale in that it represents the expansiveness of the experience at the collective level (Level 2) and the local level (Level 1), and the interplay between the two at all stages of the development (E1 and E2 – in this case E refers to expansiveness). The arrow crossing the levels represents a reinforcement of the duality of the process, avoiding a polarised ontology of 'collective' and 'individual', and 'contextual' and 'de-contextual'.

To summarise, the model presented in Fig. 3 has emerged from the critique of Activity Theory developed through the data produced by this particular case study. In particular it helps to conceptualise the relational nature of collaborating contexts, the tensions in processes of implementation and in re-contextualising discursive collective intentions, and it offers a conceptualisation of expansive learning that is decentred and differentiated depending on a range of affordances. The analysis and critique of the 'third generation', represented in Fig. 3, also offers an accommodation of power within both large and small scale analyses of the activity system through the relational interdependence of 'discourse' and 'text' in processes of development at the collective level, and implementation through re-contextualisation.

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Paper 16

Understanding the pedagogical significance of higher education wherever it's taught

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Abstract

This paper discusses the findings of a project run in association with the FDTL5 project 'Engaging Students with Assessment Feedback: What works?' The original FDTL project, based at Oxford Brookes University, started in the academic year 05/06 with a group of lead institutions developing a set of four models designed to enhance student engagement with assessment feedback in Higher Education (phase one). During 06/07 the findings were disseminated to an extended group of cascade partner institutions who were tasked with testing and evaluating these models (phase two). At this stage all project work had been done in business schools, but by the end of phase two the project team was keen to further test the models with a series of micro projects in other disciplines.

Following a presentation of their work by the project team at the University of Sunderland I agreed to run a micro project to test the models with HE taught in Further Education Colleges (FECs), using as a case study a Foundation Degree (Fd) in Education and Care which is delivered across a number of collaborative partner colleges. This case study was considered to be a particularly useful test of the project models, since Foundation Degrees like the example chosen have been criticized for inconsistencies in the feedback and assessment of student's work, which is unsurprising given the number of staff and students involved. However, anomalies such as this provide a platform for challenging such inconsistencies and trialling of new approaches to engage students with their assessment feedback and learning opportunities.

This paper outlines the process used to implement the project model, and reflects on the delivery of that process. An overview of the educational challenge was to use one of the models with those teaching and learning HE in FECs. In particular, the challenge presented was to ensure high quality education with a range of diverse and engaging scholarly activities supported by the institution, but challenging to those seeking higher level qualifications. However such ideals are contested by research (Hounsell et al. 2007c) who revealed through their study of undergraduates across four subject areas and eleven universities, that despite the teaching and learning environment tending to support learning there was a notable 'pervasive student dissatisfaction with the adequacy of guidance and feedback.

Such dissatisfaction made public has unnerved many Higher Education Institutions, (HEIs) and in particular such dissatisfaction on aspects of assessment and feedback has been fuelled by the explicit findings of the National Student Survey (NSS). Research from within our home university extrapolated from Sanders'(2008) first phase work with the FDTL project research included:

- Feedback often concentrates on the 'negative' i.e. what the student has done wrong, and there is insufficient focus on informing students what they have done well and why, so that they can build on their strengths.
- Academic staff are often unaware of how students perceive or use the feedback provided; there is often a 'perception gap' between staff who feel that they have provided feedback (e.g. verbally in seminars; to groups; via WebCT) and students, who feel that no feedback has been provided (see above).
- Students are not always aware that feedback is being provided; they tend to perceive feedback as only the written comments on summative assessments. Thus, the emphasis that has recently been placed on formative feedback techniques is not having as great an effect as intended.

- Some students do not know how to use feedback to improve their future performance. They lack skills of reflection, may not understand the academic ‘jargon’ often used to provide feedback, and they often see the ‘mark’ as the only valued feedback. (In some modules up to 30% of marked assignments are not collected by the students).

Furthermore students’ perceptions included:

Personally I felt feedback was uninformative and feel that grading criteria could have been more useful.’

‘The marking scheme and lack of feedback is sometimes very, very poor. In fact, it knocks your confidence.’

‘I didn’t understand the assessment criteria and didn’t receive effective feedback in order to improve my grades at the next assessment.’

‘The tutor gave the wrong feedback that resulted in my group taking a turn we would not have done if the feedback had not been given. Feedback made the final product worse.’

‘When I asked for an interpretation of the feedback I was given on a piece of coursework, the lecturer became defensive and unwilling to make comment.’

Overwhelmingly the views stemming from original FDTL project concluded that that the promotion and actualization of quality dialogue between students and staff was the key to resolving such issues.

‘One tutor wrote on my assignment ‘Think about your structure’. What was that supposed to mean? So I had a little think about it and then carried on with what I was doing! Useless!’

The above findings that have now been disseminated widely to Universities, however, as a specialist in vocational education and collaborative provision, I considered the most interesting findings to be around inconsistencies.

‘There’s inconsistency in the marking schemes between different lecturers. Sometime you get penalised, sometimes you don’t. It’s unfair as we’re not told why by the lecturers.’

‘At a previous University I submitted the same assignment twice and it was marked by two different tutors. I got marks of 35% and 80% -for the same work! Experience has taught me not to give too much importance to feedback.’

With higher education programmes now stretching beyond the boundaries of the campus across the region and wider UK and been offered in local further education colleges, the potential is for greater and increased inconsistencies rather than parity of experience and a reduction of inconsistency. The FDTL5 invitation to participate in a micro project proved to be opportunistic and the catalyst to attempt to model consistency and alignment with that of the awarding institution. Most importantly, earlier studies had all focused on provision within the HEI not their partner institutions.

Historically, new ideas for HE tend to be developed by academics and researchers in traditional HEIs, but caution must be taken to avoid overlooking those whose contribution and capacity can add to this scholarly mass, those who have empirical understanding of the discipline as they have responsibility for the teaching and learning of HE in FECS. This work has largely been viewed as ‘building capacity in relation to widening participation and learning and teaching...’ (Jones 2008 cited Parry et al. 2008). The fact that there is recognition of such duality of regimes for advance level study should in itself be a stimulus to ensure that those teaching and learning HE in an FEC do not become entrenched in systems that are detrimental to the

student experience, or deviate from the ideals of higher education. Parity of learning, alignment with current developments, modes of teaching and innovation in pedagogical approach are therefore all critical to HE *wherever it is taught*.

Jones (2008) cautions that currently the work of HE in FECs tends to be about subject updating rather than pedagogy. This is supported by the work of Parry (2009) who suggests that HE in FE partnership arrangements tend to be over simplified and paradoxical in terms of a zone of exchange, transition, and transgression with numerous transactions and trade offs. HEFCE's 2009 good practice guidance 'Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges: Policy, Practice and Prospects' explains the scholarly activities of colleges as having a 'broader definition (2009:106). Yet this is countered, in part, by a caveat which suggests that most colleges are now functioning in a parallel mode, by developing research strategies as part of their overall strategic plan, but their staff engage in research and scholarly activity in a very different climate to that of the HEIs. The engagement of FEC staff in research and scholarly activity can depend on 'the level and health of the relationship' established with the awarding body, 'where research is enabled this is achieved through joint research projects', and 'there is potential for more such development' (Ibid:107).

Opportunities for alignment

The FDTL 5 project in its secondary phase was presented with the clear intention to actively engage students in their learning and enable them to make sense of the feedback provided by their lecturers (Gibbs and Simpson 2002, Higgins, Hartley and Skelton 2001, Hyatt 2005 and Skidmore 2006). The ability to understand, value and use formative feedback as guidance to improve comprehension, critical thinking, referencing, and presentation of work, impacted on the quality of students' work and enabled further development of knowledge and application which is instrumental in terms of the learning process. The lecturers engaged in the micro project were furnished with the national research collated by Oxford Brookes. These were supplemented with statements that reflected the views of our HEI students' such insightful comments indicated that there was a 'a perceived unfairness', 'lack of trust', 'emotion', 'meaningless feedback', 'lack of understanding of the assessment criteria' and these findings had been collected and collated across the institution for work on the student experience and the psychological contract (Millar, J and Sanders, G 2009; Sanders, G 2008).

The local students comments had provoked the need for staff development sessions. The HEI was making a conscious effort to redress such issues by embedding in the FDTL formative feedback processes and introduce new and alternative pedagogical approaches for teaching and learning, whilst being mindful of the need to enhance the student experience. The critical issue seemed to be that while there were and are many policy drivers to engage students with their HE experience, there is little in the literature to guide teachers and students to models of good practice in the process of learning through engagement with feedback. Quite simply, nobody has addressed the issue of how to become scholars for teachers in FECs who teach higher education courses.

The duality of regimes mentioned earlier remains a major research challenge particularly for HE in FEC institutions. Experience highlights there is the ability and capacity to undertake pedagogic research, but this is sporadic and patchy to date, largely because the duality of regimes aligns more closely with FE rather than HE provision. This in turn highlights the disparate alignment between HE in HEIs and HE in FECs, it also sends out a warning that the vision and models of good practice from the widening participation agenda which impact on all higher education has not historically embedded within it a strong pedagogic research function.

Although several micro projects commenced in the second phase there was only one which considered HE outside of the HEI. College Staff interested in the project with a remit for teaching FDs were able to consider their role and understanding of the possible effect and affect assessment has upon individual students. The adoption of one model from a group of possible four had a schedule of time framed tasks and

what should occur in terms of ‘in-class’ and ‘out- of- class activities’. This paper presents the findings of the offsite HE in FEC collaborative college participants.

Methodology

In order to address the issues outlined above it was decided to access a group of staff and students based in FECs who were collaborating with the university. The approach was to be a case study of a 2008 – 2009 cohort working with the Foundation Degree Education and Care offered by a range of local colleges working through the University of Sunderland. We wished to explore different models of learning, in particular how feedback operated to allow both students and staff demonstrable ownership of learning and increased awareness of self and further learning potential. The focus of this study would involve the exploration of different models of feedback and the choice of one which could be evaluated. The basis of this evaluation would be increased satisfaction with the learning process for both staff and students involved in higher education in the FECs. A key component was that dialogue was pivotal and the core for improvement.

The micro projects therefore provided staff and student cohorts with a tool to test out, or measure the effectiveness of one of the four assessment and feedback models provided by the FDTL team at Oxford Brookes University. These models had been designed, tried and tested earlier, they reflected the ideas from literature and had utilised the empirical evidence gathered from phase one. It offered those interested in formative feedback a series of tangible frameworks for use across a broad range of subject areas. The four frameworks included: 1) the use of exemplars; 2) peer review; 3) generic feedback and 4) self critique and CRAFTing feedback across wider discipline (see appendices 1-4)

The merit of each model was considered in the light of its appropriateness, questioned whether or not it was fit for purpose to be used to attempt consistency on the giving of formative feedback in Higher Education (HE) in the Further Education Colleges (FECs). The rationale formulated for the adoption and use of such a model was to challenge inconsistencies which are frequently raised at moderation events, standardisation meetings and has been noted by external monitoring and reported upon in external examiners reports. Most importantly, the critical question of comparability of HE experience across the partnerships tends to be avoided or driven by quality measurements rather than enhancement opportunities. Two key aspects of scholarship concerning FEC teachers were their lack of interest in research into their own pedagogical approach and their interest in standards.

The FDTL5 micro project offered a challenge, it was opened to a single Foundation Degree whose lecturers were willing to listen to the findings of earlier work and participate in staff development about the possibilities of entering into the second phase and micro project. A two day workshop was provided to lecturing staff from seven partner colleges, some of whom had several years of experience whilst others were in their first year of teaching. Lecturers were given an opportunity to consider the project as a response to their external examiners’ constructive criticism; were presented with a summary of the salient issues from current literature; assessment and feedback issues from the National Student Survey and shown the four available models of engagement with assessment feedback as illustrated in fig 1-4. The model selected through wider discussion with the college participants was Model 3 Generic feedback and self critique.

Of the seven colleges running the same Foundation Degree five colleges agreed to send staff and they participated in two days staff development. Again the colleges were asked if they wished to participate in the formative assessment and feedback project subsequently four colleges chose to actively engage with the micro project and utilise a model of assessment feedback on their chosen module. The participants included ten members of staff; one hundred and thirty five students with a time scale of September 2008 – February 2009, twelve weeks was the time scale of the actual micro project ‘engaging students with their assessment feedback’. The remaining weeks were allocated to data gathering and reporting.

Initial meetings were held with the four separate colleges' lecturing staff within the HE departments of the FECs, providing an opportunity to talk through the process, resolve concerns and answer any questions or issues staff had not considered or raised in the two initial days staff development. Staff had previously been shown all four models prepared by the Oxford Brookes team, but collectively selected model 3 'Generic Feedback and Self Critique'. Staff worked on creating a hybrid version of the original model 3, this was necessitated by the fact that the staff felt there were omissions at the beginning and close of the model, it was also welcomed by the FDTL5 team as they wanted users to own the model they worked with. The amendments were made to ensure the relevance of the model for those widening participation or non-traditional students unfamiliar with the workings of higher education. A diagram of the hybrid model was then re-produced in very large scale with a high quality finish and displayed in the college programme base rooms, so that they could be a visual reminder of the process. Every student was also furnished with a personal A4 copy and provided with a rationale for participation in the project, this was explained at length to each respective student cohort and they were given an opportunity for questions and answers. Students were also reassured that they like other students 'on campus provision' were also participating in the phase two of engaging students with assessment feedback through other micro projects, in other disciplines. Staff and students were encouraged to participate in discussions, and each member of staff was given a pack of resources on Assessment and Feedback and provided with a list of URLs so that they could download and read further on this important aspect of learning.

The duration of the project was twelve weeks long, at the end of which the micro project lecturers were asked to seek students' reflections and retain comments from discussions. Additionally they were asked to complete questionnaires and participate in semi-structured interviews. It is worth noting that these took place as stated at the close of the module, but all comments from students were taken prior to the allocation and consideration of their marks.

Table 1. FEC sample participants

College	No of Staff	No of Students	No of Staff Question's and Interviews
A	2	16	1 – non participant
B	3	24	1
C	2	18	2
D	2	19*	2
E	3	74	3
	10	135	10

At the end of the project evaluation of staff and student experience was carried out using open ended qualitative questions and reflections. Staff were asked a number of questions which included aspects of change, attitudes and classroom behaviour with students and staff. They were also asked about the number of referrals for the modules when they had used the hybrid model of engaging students with their assessment feedback and whether or not they actually liked using the provided model framework with its build in time scale. Finally, staff were asked if they considered whether the model was worthy of further use on the Foundation Degree. Students were largely asked to reflect on the merits of such a model of formative assessment, what they had lessons learned. In particular they were encouraged to consider their own learning in line with such a framework. They too, were asked to consider whether or not the model would be a valuable tool for future modules and as an aid to student learning.

Findings

All of the staff indicated that there was indeed a change in relationships and improved levels of interaction. For example, even as students were entering the classroom staff observed that there was sharing of ideas and interaction which resulted in their moving chairs and seating positions. Because of the change in student's classroom behaviour staff became increasingly aware of the changes to the increased self confidence of students, which led to an increase in their resilience to learning an essential aspect of learning power that Claxton deems to be 'worryingly low' in all university students (Claxton, 2000:298).

Despite the project offering an opportunity for formative feedback midpoint, which was perceived by staff as an opportunity to ease or reduce student concern, the teaching staff indicated that instead of worrying about the final deadline, some students were 'worried about the draft assignment'. All of the participants achieved a 100% pass rate in their modules. In addition, it was noted that through the intervention strategy that one student in college D* appeared to need additional learning support, therefore early identification of learning need was an unforeseen/additional finding. All students passed their module, and marks appeared to have peaked in comparison with other years. There were more marks above in the mid 50 – 70 + range than in earlier years, and even those who achieved in the 40-49% range did so at the higher end of this classification.

The evaluative judgments of the staff teaching HE in the FECs was that the level of engagement had increased and that students became very vocal, they talking more about their assignments; there was less questioning of whether 'is this right?' The idea that there was only one possible way to write an assignment task seemed to be dispelled; it increased research skills and definitely improved the quality of the bibliographies. Most significantly it broke things down for students and there was no tension, and no panic for their busy lives. There was a great variation in the drafts submitted for formative assessment as students were permitted to present drafts as plans, pen pictures, mind mapping of ideas or a more traditional written draft assignment, but it was the traditional draft submission that appeared. It enabled the students to take ownership and gave assurance of what was written or well planned and this led to a growth in confidence. As there were no referrals at the close of the module, this meant that it greatly benefited the staff, as they could then move on to new modules having finished the module with no outstanding referral, deferral or additional support and supplementary resources to find for students.

The most negative comment received was about the trialling of the model was the early engagement and formative feedback micro project had impacted and weighted heavily the work for both teachers and students from the earliest days of the module.

The students said:

It was a good way of improving your work.

I could check I was on the right track.

I do feel this technique was useful when reading my draft essay however, I feel my essay is satisfactory after using the generic feedback and self critique.

When writing my next assignment I will use this format to push myself toward the good elements and improve.

I found the micro project process hard... Overall, it was worth it, to find out my strengths and weaknesses.

The generic feedback and self critique was interesting, but had you thinking whether or not to put extra work into the assignment.

The feed-forward approach helped me to understand where I was in my assignment and where I needed to get to. Points made about the whole group were beneficial to me too.

Although the adoption of the model was accepted all of the students said that they didn't particularly like the model approach, but it had merit as 'it clearly was a good way of improving the quality of your work'. Although there have been both positive and negative influences by the adoption of such a model, three additional colleges are now going to invest in the micro project and consider hybrid approaches of their own including the use of electronic and auditory feedback systems. It is worth remembering at the point of seeking students' reflections none of them had yet received their marks, so perhaps the findings would be different if they knew of their success.

Conclusion

The intervention strategy raised and realised aspirations of students. This was stimulated by the opportunities to remedy or improve their ideas, structure, argument and use of literature that had been highlighted through self critique and generic feedback. The second chance to submit meant students were really able to discuss and identify where they had gone wrong, and what they could and should do to demonstrate understanding of the topic. As they had to sift through and sort out areas of weakness, they appeared to take ownership 'of really useful knowledge' Johnson (1998). Most importantly they owned the experience and their work this was clearly evidenced in their use of the use of personal pronouns 'I', 'my' and 'your'. The behaviour shift and self directedness toward independence has a synergy with what Knowles (1996) refers to as *Andragogy*, his work has greatly influenced a conceptual shift when working with adult learners and provides core principles which include the need to know, valuing prior experience, readiness to learn and motivation. The experience of students and their increased dialogue is suggestive that students were 'not just banking problem, but posing' them Friere (1993), again this illustrates an orientation to learning.

Throughout the in-class activities and self critique the learning increased and changed the students application of knowledge by understanding and critically sharing ideas on wider curriculum perspectives and indeed their own learning, such notions are akin to the theories of Experiential learning (Boud and Miller 1996); Transformative learning (Mezirow 2000) and through individual achievement a demonstration of 'developing power to perceive critically'.

A most important lesson learned from both the staff and students using the model included the idea that learning was hard; it required more work than they had perceived it required early interventions in their thinking, processing and use of knowledge as well as increased dialogue with peers and students to staff. Although all were critical of the model 3 approach, there was genuine appreciation and enthusiasm for the development of staff and student knowledge, building up a repertoire of skills which fit with the necessary requirements of becoming scholarly. As the coordinator and participant observer I thought that there were many lessons learned by the running of this micro project. One of which, is it is not acceptable to align HE in FECs with further education practices merely because that is the bulk of the FEC's portfolio and practice. HE in FECs is uniquely placed and established as part of the lifelong learning agenda. It has many positives which include small class sizes, identified HE locations and buildings, dedicated teaching teams and the quality of the education which in many colleges is supported through internal and external CPD programmes. A one size fits all approach or overgeneralization of the quality of collaborative partnerships does not reflect the FD Programme or the skills of staff who participated in the micro project. They were all committed to improving the student experience and willingly engaged in the research.

As such the dialogue of the staff became increasingly vocal and was heard regarding their role and their findings. The effect is that they have become change agents for formative feedback not merely in their own discipline areas, but across HE provision in the FECs. All of the participants are continuing to use this model or want to trial one of the other models. Two members of college staff have since presented the models approach to their colleagues and have initiated additional micro projects on engagement with assessment within their partnership HE provision. Furthermore, participants from other colleges who did not participate in the micro project but came to a colloquium on the findings, have sought workshops and are currently embedding the use of 'Audacity' a mechanism for the giving of verbal feedback into the framework of formative feedback. Therefore a new approach would be to highlight and acknowledge the difference of HE in FECs and allow for a differentiated, not seamless alignment of HE in FECs to current pedagogical research and practice of HE wherever it is taught, in this instance it has fired more enthusiasm off site and extended practice further than first initiated or planned.

There are clearly limitations to the method adopted here to date there is no comparative samples of study that this material can be measured against. Even if comparisons could be drawn with an HEI, it may reveal the duality of regimes rather than evaluative and comparable data of such a model. Therefore there needs to be a

strong call for further pedagogical research if higher education is truly valued wherever it is taught, as there is a tacit requirement that staff and students should implicitly understand and own scholarship as a learning process.

Finally, there is still not yet enough research on the pedagogical frameworks of HE and alignment with traditional HEIs for those responsible for teaching and learning HE in FECs however, this micro project serves as a warning to any HEI in terms of complacency toward collaborative partnership growth. It seems that having worked with collaborative college partnership provision, and in particular the dedicated staff teams teaching higher education, that I have become increasingly aware of the development of skills, knowledge and the aptitude of these teaching staff. Such realisation of skills goes beyond Whitehead's notions of 'performativity', I refute his ideas and generalisation that such staff are 'no longer trusted nor relied upon to make informed professional judgments'. Yet the difference for students accessing HE from local college or a University is said to be the 'research culture' HEFCE 2009. Projects such as this and the enthusiasm shown toward small scale research will begin to refute such over generalizations. Woodrow back in 1993, cited in (Young, 2002:273) also described the growth and distinction between colleges and universities as a 'quiet revolution', which blurred the distinction of provision. In the context of this small scale study, the blurring has changed into clarity of vision, determination to offer a comparable experience and address inconsistencies.

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Paper 17

Science or Science Fiction? The application of scenario techniques to the study of possible futures for learners in higher education

Abstract

This study has utilised scenario techniques to explore possible futures for learners in Institute of Technology (IoT) sector of Irish higher education towards 2020. A six stage modified scenario development design was used to develop and subsequently test a series of sixty scenario statements. The results were presented at a seminar held at the site of inquiry. In order to provide a coherent interpretation of the findings a positive scenario was written. The feedback from the seminar and the work of a Delphi panel was used to guide the writing of the scenario. The scenario includes five sub-scenarios, which are: access (sustaining the widening participation agenda), curriculum (utilising delegated authority), resources (attracting funding and staff), management (competition or collaboration?) and the external environment (meeting social and economic needs). The five scenarios provide an account of five possible futures for the IoT sector. The purpose of this study was to generate discussion and inform strategic planning at the site of inquiry and across the whole IoT sector.

Introduction

‘At the start of the twenty-first century, we inhabit a globe in the grip of consensus. The world’s voters think their governments can and should deliver economic prosperity. The elites agree with them – and even agree with each other on how to do it. Increasingly they sign up to the same package: free trade, market economics, the virtues of entrepreneurship – education, education, education’ (Wolf 2002: ix). Vincent-Lancrin (2004) explains that in many countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), higher education provision has already changed significantly over the past decades, but these changes will become even greater in the future, as a result of the rapid evolution of the post-secondary education landscape. It is therefore timely, possibly urgent, to consider the possible future of higher education in Ireland. A futures study helps to create a common understanding of the changes affecting Irish higher education, and helps stakeholders propose adequate responses to these changes. As the university and IoT sectors are different, experiencing different changes and almost certain to experience significantly different futures, this research is focused on one sector of Irish higher education, the IoT sector. The urge to reflect anew on the future of Irish higher education, specifically the IoT sector, is highlighted by ongoing strategic planning by the HEA and the individual IoTs. In addition there is an increasing amount of literature on this subject (Avila and Léger, 2005; Enders, 2005; Fink and Marr, 2005) as well as new policy papers on future directions for the IoT sector (OECD, 2004; Government of Ireland, 2005, 2006, 2007; HEA 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2006a; 2006b; 2007a; 2007b).

The higher education system in Ireland comprises the university sector, the IoTs and the colleges of education; all are substantially state funded. Since the 1960s the number of higher education students has grown from 18,200 to almost 140,000. The seven universities are autonomous and self-governing. The IoTs, in emergence since 1971, differ from the universities in that they are centrally managed by the Department of Education and Science, but since 1999 the IoTs have through *Delegated Authority* become self awarding bodies. The thirteen IoTs in Ireland are; Athlone IT, IT Blanchardstown, Carlow IT, Cork IT, Dundalk IT, Dun Laoghaire IT, Galway-Mayo IT, Letterkenny IT, Limerick IT, IT Sligo, Tallaght IT, Tralee IT and Waterford IT. There are five Colleges of Education for primary teachers which offer three year full-time courses leading to a degree which is the recognised qualification for primary teaching.

The last forty years have witnessed significant changes in occupational structure. Pre mass education power and status in Ireland were based primarily on property, but are now rooted in educational competence and waged employment (Farnham, 1999; O’Donnell et al., 2001). The ability of educators, policymakers and business to persuade students in Ireland of the value of a higher level education has significantly contributed

to economic success. The starting point for recent higher education reforms in Ireland was the White Paper 'Charting the Future of Education' (1995). The principles of this document address the role of higher education in advancing social and economic well-being; rights, equality, pluralism, partnership, accountability and the importance of knowledge and skills for national competitiveness and development (Skilbeck, 2001). Understandably, considering the very rapid rates of growth, much interest is expressed in the change agenda, both for the sector as a whole and the IoTs. Targets have been set by government, industry bodies and higher education, which include substantial enrolment increases, innovative course design, course redevelopment, the allocation of substantial state finance to develop infrastructure, staff development, strategic visioning and efficiency gains. Central to this vision of higher education, Lueddeke (1999) outlined that there is an expectation that higher education can make a distinctive contribution to the development of a learning society, not only by nurturing notions such as life-long learning, but also by enhancing an institution's capacity to meet international standards as these relate to teaching, scholarship and research.

Methodology

In order to explore possible futures for the IoT sector in Ireland this research applies a six stage modified scenario development design. Schwartz (1996, p. 1) explains that 'no matter what future takes place, you are much more likely to be ready for it – and influential in it – if you have thought seriously about scenarios.' Scenarios as a strategy methodology were originally brought to most people's attention through Pierre Wack's (1985a; 1985b) description of Royal Dutch Shell's use of them during the 1970s and 1980s. Scenario development, testing and planning are established elements in planning and management in an educational context (Enders 2005; Vincent-Lancrin 2004). Scenario development has been successfully used to set a context for strategic planning in work with senior staff in higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) (McNay, 2005). Furthermore scenario development, testing and planning are tools which can be used to measure perceptions about alternative and possible futures (Van der Heijden 1996; Ringland 2006).

In this research a six stage modified scenario development design was used to explore possible futures for the IoT sector. In stage one an extensive review of policy, strategy and plans for the IoT sector was undertaken. This review generated in excess of 100 potential scenario statements. In stage two a Delphi panel representing a variety of staff and key stakeholders worked to generate circa 150 scenario statements. In stage three the researcher in conjunction with the Delphi panel ranked the list of scenario statements and short listed sixty of the statements under five headings: access, curriculum, resources, management and the external environment. In stage four the scenario statement questionnaire was designed and circulated in paper and electronic format to stakeholders of the sector as a whole, and to staff members at one IoT. The scenario statements were then ranked to give a perceived probability rating (PPR).

Drivers of change

The management requirements of the IoTs have expanded dramatically in recent years, mainly because of the IoTs' growth in size and the complexity of the issues now confronting higher education. In order to identify the drivers of change for the IoT sector data were collected and analysed from various sources, including policy documents, publications, the strategic plans of the thirteen IoTs, and the Websites of the HEA, Department of Education and Science, the ESRI, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Central Applications Office (CAO) and CDIT. Furthermore, two informal interviews were held with the head of the planning committee at my institute and an academic delegate to the HEA. The eight drivers of change identified in this study are:

1. OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland (2004)
2. Institutes of Technology Act (2006)
3. Strategic Innovation Fund (2006)
4. Re-branding of IoT Sector (2007)
5. Higher Education Authority Action Plan (2007-2009)
6. Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (2006-2011)

7. National Development Plan (2007-2013)
8. Europeanisation (Lisbon Convention 1997; European Ministers of Education 1999; EU Commission 2003)

The research presented in this paper has coincided with a significant reorientation of the IoT sector. The policy initiatives will, in the opinion of the researcher, be the strongest drivers of change for the IoT sector over the period towards 2020. The final list of sixty scenario statements and subsequently the five scenarios have been framed accordingly.

Realms of change

Informed by an extensive review of the policy context, literature, and work of the Delphi panel this research has identified five realms within which research into possible futures for the IoT sector can take place. When the initial list of circa 150 scenario statements had been devised each of the Delphi panel was asked to propose a suitable number of realms within which the scenario statements could be grouped. The proposed realms were then ranked by the Delphi panel. In total eight realms were proposed. The five top ranking realms were; access, curriculum, management, resources and the external environment. The three realms that were not ranked in the top five were: research, learners and funding. However, issues that relate to these realms are included in the final list of scenario statements. As an example scenario statement 59 which states that *'Ireland will meet the EU objective set out in the Lisbon Strategy to invest 3% of GDP in Research and Development'* would sit within the research realm but in its absence was situated in the realm of the external environment in the final questionnaire. Furthermore, the scenario statements that relate to learners were situated predominately in the realms of access and curriculum. While the scenario statements associated with funding appear in the realms of management, resources and the external environment as deemed appropriate by the Delphi panel.

Findings

Based on the expectations of staff at the site of inquiry and stakeholders of the IoT sector presented, it is possible to identify several trends that are likely to characterise the IoT sector towards 2020. There is an expectation that the IoTs will evolve to include: greater competition for funding and students; more efficient management; a greater diversity of learners, more demanding learners, flexible teaching patterns and closer links to the needs of the economy and society. The findings that emerged from the use of a six stage modified scenario development design indicate scepticism about government policy and also a lack of awareness of developments in national policy and policies that relate specifically to the IoT sector. Both of these findings are in line with those of McNay (2005). The findings raise questions about national policy, the missions and management of the IoTs, teaching and learning, assessment, research and development and human resource management

When reviewing the policy context and the eight drivers of change an overarching theme was that the IoT sector was at an *'exciting juncture'* in its development. The eight drivers indicated that the IoT sector was likely to grow and develop into a more dynamic sector. There was no indication of regression or significant difficulties. Therefore, a second *qualifier* is that the scenario has been written positively. The scenario is written based on the assumption that the drivers for change will drive positive change and that the impact of the findings will also lead to positive developments in the realms of access, curriculum, resources, management and the external environment.

The scenarios

The IoT sector in Ireland has undergone substantial change. 'A great deal of re-appraisal and analysis of the education system has been undertaken during the nineties, leading to the formulation of an education policy and legislative agenda which is the most significant in the history of the state' (Murphy and Coolahan 2003, p.

1). The impacts of these changes reflect the rapid expansion of the sector and the changing role of the IoTs. The main period of substantial change occurred post 1960, predominantly since the mid 1990s. Since then the IoT sector has received a greater numbers of applicants, seen a changing complexity in its relationship with the socio-economic world, stresses on resources and an expansion in its range of functions. The IoT sector in 2020 will be very different from the sector that exists in 2008. The key changes that are likely include increases in participation, increases in research capability, the establishment of major collaborative ventures among the IoTs and the universities, and continued fluctuations in student numbers in various disciplines, programmes and institutions. The findings of this study pose a number of challenges for the IoT sector:

1. What strategies need to be put in place to facilitate increasing numbers of international students?
2. Funding changes and the introduction of greater competition: what challenges and opportunities will this pose for the IoTs?
3. The widening participation agenda: what next?
4. The needs of the labour market: what are the implications for course development and provision?
5. International agreements and targets how can they be met? Should they? Will they?
6. If the targets within the Lisbon Strategy are not met what alternative sources of funding can be secured for research?
7. If fees for part-time courses are not removed how will the IoTs remain competitive with private and non-Irish providers?
8. What impact would/will an economic recession have on the IoT sector?

This research indicates that by 2020 the diversity of learners attending the IoTs will have increased to include greater numbers of international students, adult learners, first and second generation immigrants and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The funding streams available to the IoTs are changing. These changes mean that by 2020 the IoTs, in addition to a block grant from government, will have to compete for funding and be expected to secure funding from industry and their alumni. These changes will be framed by a need to provide evidence that the outcome(s) of activities are aligned to national strategies. Finally, the IoTs will need to deliver greater efficiency in a post '*Celtic Tiger*' economy in which government spending will be reduced.

Scenario 1 Access: sustaining the widening participation agenda

Achieving equality of access to higher education will continue to be a strategic priority for the Irish government in 2020. The specific challenge set in 2008 for the IoT sector to lead the drive to grow participation rates from 55% to 72% by 2020 (HEA 2008b) will have been successful. This growth will result in greater diversity in the student population, specifically in terms of previous academic attainment. This will have created a challenging teaching and learning environment. The HEA (2008b) target of growth in the participation rate from 55% to 72% by 2020 will have been realised. The HEA through its National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education will have dramatically improved the opportunities for learners from all backgrounds to participate successfully in higher education. As a result, applicants with a disability, adult/mature learners and those facing social, economic and cultural barriers will have adequate opportunities to participate in higher education predominantly within an IoT. Based on research by the EGFSN (2007) which indicated that the adult participation in higher education in Ireland is very low by international standards, the IoTs will have played a key role in upskilling 500,000 members of the workforce by one level of education over the period to 2020. The achievement of targets will be enhanced by increased opportunities and incentives for part-time higher education participation. These incentives will not include the removal of fees for part-time courses, but will incorporate time off, social welfare subsidies and/or a maintenance grant.

The number of international students studying within the IoT sector will have substantially increased by 2020. This will reflect improvements in management structures, marketing, student services and the greater range of programmes introduced under delegated authority. The IoT sector will have developed a portfolio of postgraduate programmes and will market places nationally and internationally. As a result the range of diversity in nationalities studying for postgraduate programmes will have increased. The influx of circa 400,000

immigrants into Ireland since 2000 has dramatically changed the society and economy of Ireland. Since the economic downturn of 2008 migrants who had come to Ireland to work in low skill jobs, left as the economy struggled. Migrants in possession of high skill, high wage employment remained. The short term impact on the IoT sector was small. However, in 2020 there are significant impacts as second generation migrants enter higher education.

Scenario 2 Curriculum: utilising delegated authority

Towards 2020 quality teaching and learning, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, will be at the centre of the mission of the IoTs. The HEA (2008b) state that programmes within the IoTs need to meet both the demands of learners and national needs. Formal review processes will be in place and the IoTs will continually review their programmes, and be subject to intensive external review. The balance between provision and skills needs will not be exact, and the medium to long-term skills needs of the economy will not always match the immediate output of the IoT sector. This is particularly characteristic of a country like Ireland (Stephens et al. 2007a).

As a result of economies of scale the IoTs have not developed centres of excellence across all disciplines. Instead the IoTs have developed strategic alliances with other IoTs and the universities. These alliances have facilitated the development of a number of small, specialised, high quality research centres. A by product of these collaborations is that students are facilitated when looking to progress from an excellent education at Masters Level to doctorate level education at a university. The IoTs will have developed a portfolio of programmes which include modules on work skills and industry placements.

Only a minority of programmes will have compulsory modules in the Irish language. These programmes will be targeted at the public service where the Irish language has been introduced as a pre-requisite for job applicants under the Official Languages Act 2003 (GoI, 2003). New and existing programmes will be delivered predominately through established teaching techniques, but eLearning will have emerged as a complementary delivery and assessment forum. Learners will be expected to spend in the region of 75% of their college week in lectures, tutorials and workshops and private study. This time will be supplemented by time spent in a virtual learning environment such as WebCT www.webct.com, and include innovations such as an improved version of podcasting. This trend will be a continuation of the development of virtual learning platforms that started circa 2000.

Delegated authority will have created greater competition among the IoTs. The diversity in programme provision, coupled with better transport provision, will have facilitated greater mobility among learners. The IoTs will have developed greater marketing capabilities with the expansion of campaigns across all media formats and outside of regional boundaries. An element of this competition for learners will include the expansion of student services and facilities. The IoTs will follow the practice of the universities and seek funding for sporting and cultural organisations to help increase scholarships and bursaries in an effort to attract learners. A number of the IoTs will prioritise sporting success as a strategy to promote their institution, while others will promote academic achievement.

The IoT sector will develop programmes to help foster diversity, both in terms of the curriculum and the levels at which awards are made. These developments will run parallel to developments that address the needs of full-time, part-time, continuing and professional education. The adoption of a modular approach to curriculum development as proposed by the EGFSN (2007) will improve the responsiveness of the IoTs to the needs of society and the economy. This transition will enabled widespread interaction on curriculum design, delivery, assessment and the attainment of relevant awards. Accreditation arrangements will be characterised by greater flexibility for joint industry/IoT employee programmes.

New access models and modular approaches to curriculum development, have facilitated those already in employment in addressing their lifelong learning needs. Such developments have been a byproduct of

industrial placements, accreditation of work-based learning and the recognition of experiential learning. The success of new initiatives in these areas is based on patterns of closer interaction between IoT staff and their colleagues in industry. The result is suitable linkages to productivity, performance, quality and safety which have positioned access to the IoT's as a strategic imperative for industry. Industry is no longer viewed as a customer of the IoT but as an active partner contributing to the educational process.

Scenario 3 Resources: attracting funding and staff

The major changes which have occurred in the area of financial resources mean that there is now a system-wide, strategic, performance-based funding element for overall block grant allocation to the IoT's. The new funding instruments provide a basis for assessing both the contribution of an IoT to national targets and to sector-wide performance. The most significant change is that the proportion of funding that is received directly from the government is reduced. As a consequence there has been a transformation in the ways and the sources from which funding is received by the IoT's. The IoT's have developed links with industry through their new research activities and the increased numbers of learners participating in a placement as part of their studies. These linkages facilitate the attraction of support and funding from industry. These changes are similar to strategies which operated in the university sector in 2008. For example, Limerick IoT will have developed a successful partnership with the locally based Dell Computers Corporation. Under the PRTLI, the IoT's will have formed partnerships to facilitate collaborative projects that attract funding. In addition this need for collaboration will have increased linkages between the IoT's and the seven universities, who will predominately remain the lead partners in proposals.

The IoT's will have worked to realign their human resources with the sector's evolving research ethos. There have not been major policy concerns regarding the recruitment, selecting and assigning of academic staff during the twelve year period. There are better qualified applicants for academic places than the places available. The result is a higher level of competition for the job vacancies which become available. This is particularly the case for the very limited number of permanent academic positions advertised annually. Most job vacancies are for fixed term contracts subject to the requirements of the Employment Equality Act (GoI, 1998). A notable exception to limits on recruitments is that significant improvements have been made in the provision of various categories of support staff at the IoT's. The priority for management regarding recruitment/selection is to ensure the continuance of the high quality of entrants to the profession. The introduction of career breaks and the expansion of secondments have been of benefit to academics, and have also been of benefit to the sector and its students.

Significant progress has been made in the provision of continuing professional development support. The IoT's have expanded staff training to incorporate postgraduate qualifications in teaching practice and research practice. In addition the IoT's provide supports in the form of funding and time off to staff to encourage greater take up and subsequent completion of doctorates. Existing research staff have been encouraged to apply for funding and to engage with a research and publication strategy. This has been achieved by a reduction in the teaching load of those who engage in publishable research. These developments have been overseen by an institutional research coordinator and by research coordinators within each faculty. The coordinators are charged with attracting funding, project management and dissemination. In a drive to increase efficiency the IoT's will have minimal part-time staff in 2020, and there will be greater clarity and diversity in regard to the contractual obligations of academic staff. By sub contracting '*non-fundamental*' administrative functions, such as maintenance, security and the management of recreational facilities, the larger IoT's are more like big businesses, achieving notable reductions in total operating costs. These reductions have freed up resources to improve research infrastructure and student services.

Scenario 4 Management: competition or collaboration?

By 2020 the IoT's will have devised strategic targets aimed at achieving greater levels of accountability and efficiency. Closer working relationships will have been developed and sustained with other IoT's and the

university sector. This strategy will ensure that applicants have the opportunity to access higher education from a diversity of routes. Management within the sector will have worked hard to engage with the other institutions to develop strategic partnerships which are used to secure funding. One element of this process will be that the IoTs located in the greater Dublin area will be working closely together to secure funding. Conversely, in relation to learners and staff, there will be a greater level of competition between the IoTs. Management within the individual IoTs have worked to ensure that institutions are promoted to maximise applicants, and to ensure that the correct calibre of staff are attracted to meet the challenges of a changing remit. One of the primary challenges for the HEA and management at the individual IoTs will be to ensure that competitive pressures do not undermine the potential for collaborative partnerships.

The IoTs will remain closely linked to their regions, and due to political pressures mergers will not have occurred. The mission of the IoTs will have evolved to encompass a wider range of activities explicitly linked to social, cultural and economic needs. The scale of this expansion will be subject to the individual IoTs ability to source funding from industry, alumni and their regions. However, the universities will also have developed, especially in regards to the level of research being conducted, the number of doctoral students, the number of leading academics and the development of centres of excellence. Strong policy commitments by successive Governments, coupled with institutional ambition to move towards a unitary system which aspires to the priorities, values and practices found in the university sector, has resulted in the introduction of a federal university system. In this system the IoTs are designated as National Technological Universities. The introduction of the university *'label'* has aided recruitment of students and improved the ability of the IoTs to compete for research funds on the international market. The separate mission and focus of the IoTs has been retained, ensuring a complementary provision to that of the seven universities. The change has implied a unification of roles with those of the seven universities; however, competition and market forces have ensured that the seven universities are to an extent perceived as *'premier division'* especially in areas that have been prioritised for research.

Scenario 5 the external environment: meeting social and economic needs

Successive governments have continued the process of privatisation, restructuring public spending, and encouraging competition which began with the centre-right government of 1997. Ireland's position in the global marketplace has been enhanced by reducing tariffs, promoting exports, and targeting knowledge intensive, high skill FDI. The benefits of the restoration of power sharing in Northern Ireland in 2008 has seen the emergence of greater cross-border movement of people, goods, services, capital and students. After the economic downturn of 2008 the Irish economy has stabilised. The delivery of transport 21 is all but complete, enhancing mobility and communication within the IoT sector. In 2020 computers have evolved into sophisticated personal technology units which are carried by the entire student and teaching population within the IoTs. The sector takes for granted the extensive network of telecommunication portals which facilitate virtual learning in every possible location and at any possible time. The health service has been restructured providing an improved standard of care, and the efficiency levels within the system are at all time high. The result is additional funding for other government policy areas including higher education. The success of the Public Private Partnership model in providing a range of public services has led to its use in delivering infrastructural provision, specifically the provision of research centres and postgraduate study facilities.

The growth in the numbers of graduates required by the service sector has dropped, but the need for additional skills continues. The industrial base has moved from low cost manufacturing to innovation knowledge intensive activities, which have altered the type of graduate required from the IoT sector. Recruitment drives in science and engineering have achieved improved graduation numbers. There are also higher levels of research being conducted by the IoTs in the areas of science and engineering. The result is that linkages between industry and the IoT sector been dramatically improved. Many postgraduate programmes now operate a dual system of management, with industry advisors participating on course and examination boards with academics.

The continued process of European integration, coupled with the success of the Bologna process, has resulted in greater movement of students both into the IoT sector from abroad and from Ireland to other European higher education systems. Although the commitments under the Lisbon Strategy were not completely achieved, the influence of international agreements is evident particularly in the funding targets of the sector. The strategic planning guidelines introduced by the HEA have resulted in greater accountability within the sector. The IoTs have developed sophisticated operational plans which include measurable outputs. The outputs are checked annually against national priorities and the needs of society and the economy.

Conclusion

The scenarios presented in this paper provide an account of the probable/possible course of change that will occur between now and 2020 in the IoT sector. The changes presented may not happen. This may be because of an external shock, the action/inaction of staff, stakeholders or students, a shift in government thinking either in Ireland or at a European level. However, the aim of this study is to stimulate conversation and aid the development of appropriate strategic responses. Therefore, the dissemination of the results from the questionnaire and the five scenarios has focused on improving the understanding of the drivers of change, people's expectations of what changes will occur and facilitating discussion about the course of change towards 2020.

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Paper 18

Open Enrolment Programmes at Salford Business School: challenges and opportunities

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Abstract

The vision of the recently established Salford Business School (SBS) includes the improvement of open enrolment programmes to provide executive education. Open enrolment programmes differ from traditional credit bearing programmes in that they do not normally lead to an award and their participants do not need to have prior qualifications. The programmes are taken up by learners primarily to advance their knowledge and skills in order to proceed their careers (Schaap, 2008). In a Business Schools' context these programmes are offered in management and leadership related subjects (Maes, 2003). It is a challenging move for SBS due to the existing competition between such programmes across the UK, but there are a number of drivers that highlight the need for developing such programmes including the business school rankings (Peters, 2007) and the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF) that will measure the economic impact of research as part of future research funding allocations.

The current paper is part of an ongoing action research project by the open enrolment programmes development team within the SBS. The objective of this research is to improve the provision of open enrolment programmes across the SBS. This paper discusses lessons learned from the first action research cycle of a two-day pilot course in Search Engine Marketing Management. The research is based on the reflections of the course delivery team and feedback on the processes undertaken and on feedback from course participants. The findings of this study suggest that the development and delivery of research inspired open enrolment programmes can and should lead the way in the development and provision of executive education. Positive impacts of this include the improvement in Business School rankings, favourable REF assessment, generation of additional income for the course facilitators and the School and the enhancement of the reputation of the School as a benefit to other undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Despite positioning itself as an enterprising university, this study illustrates a number of university wide issues, which actually reduce the competitiveness of the institution in the executive education market. Recommendations for improvement include the development of physical space for the delivery of open programmes; streamlined course development and delivery processes; high level support for academics interested in developing and delivery of short courses and the development of effective marketing channels.

Introduction

The University of Salford (UoS) traces its origins back to 1896, acquiring university status in 1967. The mission of the University is to be an enterprising university, achieving internationally recognised excellence in Education for capability, Research for the real world and Partnership with business and the community (Harloe and Perry, 2005). The UoS has a long-standing record of working with employers and industry, and engagement with business and industry is embedded within the University Strategic Framework 2005 -2015. The UoS is now seen as one of the UK's leading universities for enterprise (Mandelson, 2009).

The University of Salford's Business School (SBS) was created on 1 August 2006, from the merger of four schools. The merger created one of the largest business schools in the United Kingdom with approximately 200 staff and a budget of £18m. SBS launched an ambitious Vision 2017 strategy with the aim of turning SBS into an international learning community. Salford Business School aspires to become a top twenty business school in the UK (currently 68th) and to be in the top 10% in Europe (currently not listed) by 2017 (Conway et al., 2008). One of the key strategic aims outlined in SBS's 2017 Vision strategy, is to become one of the

largest providers of business and management education in the UK. To achieve this strategic goal, SBS have established the Enterprise Hub. The Hub was formed in 2008 to enable industry and public bodies to access all the services that SBS offers. These include four key services: executive education, consultancy, knowledge transfer and innovation.

One of the key aims of the recently established Enterprise Hub includes the improvement of open enrolment programmes (open programmes) to provide executive education. Open enrolment programmes are different from traditional credit bearing programmes since normally they do not lead to an award and their participants do not need to have prior qualifications as would be the case for traditional undergraduate or postgraduate programmes offered by Universities. Open programmes are taken up by learners primarily to advance their knowledge and skills to proceed their careers (Schaap, 2008) and are differentiated from in-house or customised programmes where the physical teaching and delivery of the programmes take place at the organisations' premises. The Open Programmes strategy aims to bring the amount generated by 2012 to \$2 million which would allow Salford Business School to be registered in the Financial Times Executive Education league table (Heinze, Wells, and Kalantaridis, 2009). This is a challenging move for SBS due to the existing competition between such programmes across the UK, the "credit crunch" and subsequent economic recession and not least the internal issues associated with restructuring Salford Business School itself. However, there are a number of drivers that highlight the importance of developing such programmes including the business school rankings (Peters, 2007) and the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2012, that will measure the economic impact of research as part of future research funding allocations (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2009).

Open Programmes in the Salford Business School include two major externally recognised and designed programmes: the Institute of Directors (IoD) and the Leadership and Development Programmes (LEAD), these two combined can potentially generate nearly £1million in turnover annually. The focus of this study is a small-scale short course, which would be delivered by an academic working on a cutting edge research topic that could benefit local economy and generate the 'Impact' that is necessary to meet the REF criteria. The current paper examines the challenges and opportunities encountered in developing and delivering an Open Programmes short course in Search Engine Marketing Management (SEMM). It is a new short course and is used in this paper to illustrate lessons for future courses that may be offered as part of the Salford Business School's open programmes.

The paper is structured as follows: firstly, the wider literature is outlined focusing on the need for the engagement of employers and organisations in higher education. Secondly, the case study of the Search Engine Marketing Management course will be presented. Thirdly, the lessons from the case study will be discussed in relation to the themes identified in the literature. Finally, conclusions and recommendations on future short course provision will be proposed.

UK Higher Education Context

Over the last thirty years, there has been a huge change in the role that Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) play in terms in economic and social development across the UK. This has seen a shift away from traditional views linking Higher Education with teaching and research, towards a new strategy of university "wealth creation" through employer engagement. Employer engagement is assumed in this study to be any commercial activity that a HEI engages in with external organisations, which does not concern conventional undergraduate or postgraduate teaching and research. For example, employer engagement encompasses the development of Open Programmes such as IoD, LEAD and short courses such as Search Engine Marketing Management. These activities are viewed as a third mission for universities that involve forming close links with business and are strategically encouraged in the UK by funding bodies (Ashcroft, Bebb, Kalantaridis, Heinze, and Lawrence, 2009).

In (2003, the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration stressed the economic need for a better flow of innovation and ideas between business and universities. Following this, the Leitch Review (2006) identified employer engagement as a key element in its recommendations of how to increase investment in skills in businesses. Both these reviews have acknowledged the economic development potential of Higher Education Institutions in the UK. The rise in importance of the knowledge economy has made the role of HEIs even more vital. At a policy level, there has been clear acknowledgement of the economic and social development potential of HEIs, especially in the context of the knowledge economy. Policy design and discussions have been based around developing a 'partnership' between the state, employers and individuals, with all expected to 'play their part' in up-skilling the nation (Brown, Clarke, Johnson, and Hewitt, 2004: 45). Also, at operational level, this recognition has resulted in the recent merger of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) resulting in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) created in June 2009 (number10.gov.uk, 2009).

It has been emphasised that UK HEIs must conduct their business of teaching and learning significantly differently if they are to meet the skills requirements of the workforce market that is recommended in the Leitch report (Wedgwood, 2008). These views are echoed in the recent reports that highlight the government's ambitions for Higher Education with financial support, which has doubled the investment in higher education since 1997 (Mandelson, 2009). Not only does the investment cover traditional qualifications but also the opportunities for companies to benefit from a grant by their attendance on open programmes in schemes such as TraintoGain (traintogain.gov.uk).

The ongoing theme of these developments is the significant change recommended by Leitch (2006) that the provision of vocational education and training should be demand-led, adaptable and responsive. However, despite HEFCE employer engagement funding being made available to Universities, many employers have little experience of working with higher education. They are unaware of what is on offer and of the developments that have taken place within the HE sector. According to HEFCE the barriers to employer engagement in HEIs that need to be addressed are as follows –

- “the role of HE in improving productivity is not sufficiently promoted in policy discussions, and is poorly understood by employers and employees;
- outside certain disciplines, the workplace is not yet widely valued as a place of HE level learning;
- there is a lack of a shared language between employers and HE that could help to make clear the relationship between HE learning and skills and competence;
- the HE sector lacks the capacity, and possibly the incentives, to engage in riskier markets linked to employer needs, when traditional young entrants continue to represent a safer investment;
- we need to develop quality assurance systems that are sufficiently flexible to meet the special needs of workplace delivery of learning (there are lessons to be learned from the experience of foundation degrees).”

(Higher Education Funding Council, 2006:7)

The UK's CBI (Council for Business and Industry) and Universities UK have issued a report, *Stepping Higher: Workforce development through employer-higher education partnership* (Lambert and Trainor, 2008). The report looks at how the two sectors can cooperate more closely in developing the workforce. The findings include that many employers and universities are already working together to develop employees. There are an increasing number of universities and higher education colleges who see engaging with employers as an essential institutional activity. However, the report emphasises that there are many improvements that still need to be made. For example, the research found that most employers interviewed

for the study were not confident that there will be enough skilled people to meet their future needs although this doesn't mean increasing the amount of traditional undergraduates going into the workplace. It was discovered that employers need more people who are already in the workforce to develop higher-level skills. The message is that Universities need to increase their share of the training and professional development market. Universities can play a key role in growing the market, by encouraging more employers to recognise the benefits of higher-level skills. The report discovered that

“nearly half of training is already delivered by outside training companies or providers, but less than half of employers use a university for workforce development”. (Lambert and Trainor, 2008:10)

The above statement is positive in that it highlights that external training is becoming more commonly accepted by organisations, however, the fact is that universities are contributing less than half towards this trend.

Search Engine Marketing Management

To reflect upon the developments in Open Programmes in the Salford Business School, we will use the development and delivery of a course in search engine marketing management. The following table outlines the key activities in the Search Engine Marketing Management course and the planned and actual dates of their completion.

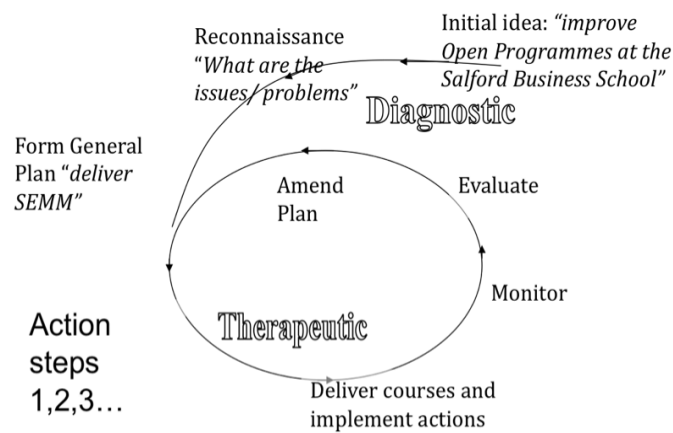
Table 1: Key activities in developing the Search Engine Marketing Management course

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Planned Due Dates in 2009</i>	<i>Actual dates</i>
<i>a) Develop material</i>	<i>30 January</i>	<i>Feb – July</i>
<i>b) Develop marketing material for the short course</i>	<i>28 February</i>	<i>May</i>
<i>c) Advertise the Short Course Pilot</i>	<i>March-April</i>	<i>May-ongoing</i>
<i>d) Recruit at least 20 participants</i>	<i>April - May</i>	<i>July</i>
<i>e) Pilot the Short Course at Salford Business School</i>	<i>April - May - July</i>	<i>June/ July</i>
<i>f) Evaluate the material of the short course</i>		<i>July</i>
<i>g) Evaluate the processes of marketing and short course delivery</i>	<i>July - August</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>h) Disseminate the findings to a wider audience</i>	<i>September</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>

As can be seen from the table above, the project of developing and delivering the course to a commercial audience was subject to a delay of at least a month in most cases. The main discrepancy was the recruitment of participants to the course and the consequent delivery dates, which were later than anticipated. This was largely due to difficulties in recruiting enough participants to make the course viable.

Work done

The course was undertaken within an action research framework, which directed the Open Programmes' team to focus on potential improvements in terms of programme development and delivery. Since the project lead is also the Director of Open Programmes within the Salford Business School, and another key member of the project – Stuart Wells is the Enterprise Development Manager, it was their joint intention to use this project as a pilot for other courses, which could be delivered by Salford Business School. The following diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the Diagnostic and Therapeutic stages undertaken by this project. First of all, the Open Programmes delivery team started with the desire to improve Open Programmes at Salford Business School and in order to identify potential improvements the issues were firstly experienced by the team and then reflected upon.



Lewin's cyclical model (Burns, 2000)

Figure 1

The current paper focuses on the first provision of the course in July 2009. The course attendees included members of five local organisations all of whom have had some previous dealings with the University of Salford. Two of the participants were business directors, two were employees in online marketing related roles and one works for a charity. The course evaluation is based on staff observations and reflections and course feedback questionnaires.

As part of the wider issues encountered by the Open Programmes team, the following infrastructural factors of the current university systems such as: catering, room bookings, and finance are highlighted and explored in more detail below:

Catering

The university based catering team required one-week's notice for any catering provision. This makes sense for internal meetings, but in the case of commercially offered courses, where participants could potentially book giving only a days notice, it makes it difficult to confirm order numbers. This requirement was eventually negotiated down to three days with the catering team, but still remains a problem – why can the final order numbers not be made on the morning for the lunch provision, as is the case in commercial operations? Our competitors set this standard and our customers would be looking to receive a similar service and would be perplexed as to why this cannot be provided.

Room bookings

Despite the wide range of computer labs on the University of Salford campus, there are few rooms that are suitable to accommodate a professional audience. To deliver the course effectively, a computer suite, break out areas and adjacent refreshments room are required. The rooms that were identified as being potentially viable were unfortunately subject to demolition due to the increasing need for office space and hence were not available due to the restructuring of the University of Salford. In particular, since Salford Business School was offering the course it would have been particularly useful for the participants to attend and see the business school building and for them to be immersed in the "business school environment". However, the actual physical location for the course was the University_library building.

Finance

The cost model of the course was designed to meet the requirements of the TraintoGain funding criteria and was pre-approved by the North West Development Agency and the relevant TraintoGain broker from Business Link. The experience of working with government agencies such as Business Link and the training

brokers supports the views reported in the literature that there is a major shift in providing support to companies in helping them to access training. Those companies that were able to comply with the relevant criteria have successfully benefited from the grant offered.

Marketing and the challenges of employer engagement

The marketing and selling of the Search Engine Marketing Management course was unsurprisingly most effective where a relationship between the course participant and the University of Salford already existed. Four out of five participants on the first course were already aware of the University of Salford. Therefore, establishing the initial links is a challenge in the context of higher education policy in terms of employer engagement.

Our experience shows that those individuals who have experienced higher education of some sort are more likely to engage with the university. However, those who have never been to a university before are unaware that a university could offer courses that are relevant and could be of benefit to them, and tend to be sceptical. This was highlighted by the telephone appointment making exercise. The stereotypical image that an HEI only offers academic knowledge and is an “ivory tower” where only research and high level learning take place has a detrimental effect on the successful marketing of commercially oriented courses.

Marketing channel

A number of strategies for marketing the course were used; these included a trial of telephone sales and appointment making. This was a disappointing result with these efforts not achieving any returns. Over 600 telephone calls were made by the marketing agent yet not a single individual was interested in booking an appointment with a representative from Salford Business School. However, on the other hand a simple email to an existing contact resulted in a conversion to an attendee. This highlights the importance of developing relationship marketing and building up networks of potential course attendees through alumni management.

Bureaucracy and priorities

The University of Salford seeks to be enterprising and recognises “academic enterprise” activities in its mission. However, in delivering open programmes, Salford Business School is facing similar market conditions to those commercial organisations operating in the management and leadership training and development market. The internal processes of Salford Business School involved in developing a course for £15k are the same as where they offer a course at £100k level, making it much tougher for the university to compete in an extremely crowded and price sensitive market place. For example, every order form has to be signed off by at least three different people irrespective of the monetary value of the items involved. This is just another aspect, which is repeatedly highlights in the literature where large organisations engaging in dynamic markets and the challenges they face (Kanter, 1989).

Resources allocations

The priorities of staff in dealing with courses at lower cost level in terms of devotion of time are also naturally lower than to the main income generators such as the LEAD or Institute of Directors programmes or the delivery of undergraduate or postgraduate teaching. At this point in time, the major opportunity in involving more academic staff who could potentially be interested in communicating their research findings to local commercial community is not the main priority for Enterprise staff.

Academic members of staff are less likely to devote their time to developing short courses if they are not offered considerable support from the Open Programme team. Engagement in these activities is “above the workload” and the financial incentives can be achieved in other less time consuming ways. This highlights the

need for the Open Programmes team to offer excellent service to internal stakeholders such as academic staff if sustainable programmes offerings are to be developed.

Conclusions

Salford Business School is making good progress towards realising its vision 2017 in the area of enterprise development. However, this is not because of the university wide infrastructure but in spite of it. The main drawback is that the processes and procedures at operational level are geared up to substantial projects of £100k+ value and not to those that involve a couple of thousand pounds. This observation goes some way towards explaining the findings identified in the CBI report when it comes to universities provision of employee development – that universities do not have the efficient and effective infrastructural frameworks to deliver competitive options to employers. The standards set by commercial providers in terms of processes and facilities are very high, making the only competitive advantage of universities, the knowledge that is being offered.

Overall, the Search Engine Marketing Management course project was a success, with several local SMEs attending the course. The development of the course involved an extensive study, which piloted the way for short course development processes in the Salford Business School. The feedback from the participants was very positive, in particular highlighting the cutting-edge knowledge aspect that made the course attractive to them. A comment made by one of the participants supports the views that the knowledge offered at a university is of interest to organisations:

“...the course was aimed at businesses looking to find out how to help them achieve website optimisation, delivered with a hands-on approach with all cutting edge knowledge and from a leading business university.”
(Chadwick, 2009:21).

Future work

As identified in the marketing experience, the building of a reputation by the university, where it is identified and perceived in people’s minds as offering commercially focused Open Programmes, is most easily achieved where individuals know the University from previous positive experience. Alternatively, where potential clients are able to meet academics in other settings for an informal chat, this helps to dispel preconceptions that ‘universities have nothing to offer me’. Hence, Salford Business School has taken over the ownership of a local meet-up group – North West Small Business Meetup Group (www.meetup.com/NW-Small-Business-Meetup-Group). This ‘meetup’ will be the vehicle for encouragement of and engagement with local small businesses where in an informal environment people can meet the Open Programmes team and engage in what could be the first step to many interactions with the University of Salford. Additionally, Open Programmes Open days aimed at those who have never heard about the University of Salford and the open programmes that it offers, will be facilitated. These are also great opportunities to market Open Programmes to internal stakeholders such as staff who might be interested in communicating their cutting edge research knowledge to commercial organisations.

The team will be building strategic partnerships with local agencies and business groups such as the meet-up groups and the Chapel Street Business Group, which have proved useful for marketing and sales. The Salford Business School Executive Education Needs analysis (SEEN) for the North West of England will be developed to further understand the market of executive education and how we as a Business School can develop programmes and courses in this area.

Recommendations

Whilst the above future work is within the control of the Open Programmes team, two factors are beyond their control: physical space and fit for purpose University wide administrative support and resources. For the

Salford Business School to offer high quality experience and support to its staff in delivering Open Programmes, it is of high importance to have the physical space that offers the equivalent to those standards set in the commercial sector. The course development and delivery processes must be streamlined to allow a high level of support to academic staff involved in the delivery. The frustrating level of bureaucracy makes the experience of new programmes development very difficult.

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Paper 19

Can teamwork skills be assessed fairly in higher education?

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Abstract

Teamwork is widely acknowledged as an essential skill for students in higher education to prepare them to the real-life team working environments (Lynch, Heinze 2007). But, it is not easy to assess team working skills (Cooper and Heinze 2007). Moreover, some authors such as Hyland and Johnson (1998) argue that transferable, generic, core, key skills cannot exist outside of a context, but should be replaced by curriculum experiences which are not structured enough to be assessed adequately. Teamwork is also full of pitfalls for students, making each individuals' experience unique.

This paper reports on findings from three years of action research on a team project based learning environment at a Higher Education Institution. It is followed by a discussion at a workshop aiming to address some of the common issues of teamwork and assessment. Particular attention is given to "fair" assessment of teamwork and strategies to make the assessment a "fair" process, drawing on experience of one of the schemes run in the Salford Business School.

The findings highlight that issues of passengers, selection of team leaders and team composition have a direct link in relation to fair assessment. Moreover, it is argued that to make the assessment process "fair" assessment is to be undertaken continuously throughout the team working process. Assessment has to ideally focus on the project deliverables as well as the process the team members engage in and finally that peer assessment, which allows all team members to reflect on their own and the performance of their peers, can be an effective means of assessment.

Introduction

Graduate employability is a term than encompasses several elements, such as knowledge and skills and personal self-esteem. Generic skills, also known as transferable skills, have varying listings, but most commonly used lists include: working in a team, creativity, planning and communication (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007). All of these are typically expected to be developed to a greater or lesser extent in team project working. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) also use the term "emotional intelligence", which links together an awareness of others with personal reflection as a factor of employability and also suggest that work experience or projects for clients will play a part in developing employability skills. However, Hyland and Johnson (1998) argue that transferable, generic, core, or key skills cannot exist outside of a context, so should be replaced by talk of learning experiences within the curriculum. Any suggestion of a general skill should be closely related to the context with its associated body of knowledge.

The design of a team project as a learning activity gives learners an opportunity to interact with the learning material in a way that embeds it into a typical working scenario, which Quinn called "engaging learning" (Quinn 1997). For example to develop a website the team have to negotiate the requirements with the project client who might not be familiar with the web development process and cannot advise the team on what it is exactly that they require. This means that the team have to use knowledge gained in other modules such as systems analysis and design, and need to clarify the specifications needed. Making a learning experience engaging involves interactivity and embeddedness, qualities noted in different learning preferences, so the range of experiences afforded by a team project makes learning accessible to different types of learners, and provides the practice and reflection elements of an experiential learning cycle, to complete the process.

Reflection on the learning and the processes of team working form a part of the PDP reflection, valuable for applying for employment upon graduation.

One commonly acknowledged drawback of teamwork is the possibility of being dragged down by weak students, and the phenomenon of “free-riding” also called social loafing (Piezon and Ferree 2008) or unequal contribution or distribution of tasks (Burdett 2003). Positive and negative emotions may also affect the progress of a project, and emotions are only a symptom of other aspects of team working (Peslak 2005). There have been few studies into the affective or socio-emotional aspects of team working with students, except for Jones and Issroff (2005), who suggest that more longitudinal studies need to be carried out, if an understanding of affective aspects of team working is to be gained. This workshop aimed to identify some of the real issues in student team working that affect the potential to assess the individual students “fairly”.

Description of our context

In the context of information systems or computing, team working encompasses various practical skills, such as programming, design, analysis and project management, as well as softer skills such as people management, negotiation, listening and communication. The primary purpose of student team project working is to provide the opportunity to gain experience of team working, and practice the practical skills in a context close to a real world experience (Cooper and Heinze 2007). The Team Project module is compulsory for all students undertaking Business Information Systems, Business Information Technology and E-Commerce Systems degree programmes. Students from different programmes are combined in one team of about 7 to 10 people. Because team members comprise second and final year students, this provides a mix of abilities and encourages inter-team learning. Working in teams may benefit individuals as they learn from each other, pool their resources, make decisions, share ideas or create an artefact in a mutually supportive environment (Jaques 1984:80). In the Salford Business School each team project is unique in the way that that it is set-up, because the projects are provided by external entities, such as charitable organisations or commercial companies, so that the projects are as near “real life” as is possible without taking students to new premises and exposing them to the work environments of different organisations.

Student teams are provided with allocated space in computer labs, meeting rooms and support from the virtual learning environment. These projects form a substantial proportion of their study time, i.e. about 20%. Although each project is unique, all teams have a common set of marking criteria on individual and team basis; the team and individual graded components are given in Table 1. These criteria have been refined through the years and because of the high credit level of assessment weighting associated with team project work towards the final degree classification it was decided that the distribution of 70% individual mark and 30% team mark were adopted. The procedure for assessing adopted by the module tutors is to each mark one of the components, and to then meet together to verify the component grades and agree the resulting team and individual marks, by considering all of the assessment components as a whole.

Team mark (30%)	Individual mark (70%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tutor observations •Monthly meetings with the team •Team report •Client feedback form (end of semester) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tutor observations •Peer assessment •Ad-hoc meetings with individual where needed •Individual report

Table 1 – Assessed components of the team projects in Salford Business School

Last year assessment and feedback were two of the main areas for criticism of the Salford Business School (SBS) from the National Student Survey, and the team project module has been said to lack consistency in marking. This workshop was arranged in an effort to try to find out the process of team work assessment currently used across other faculties and universities, and to see whether best practice could be derived from the attendees at this workshop, through sharing their practice.

Workshop process

The aims of the workshop were to:

- share what is commonly meant by “teamwork” skills;
- share common issues and challenges in assessment facing educators who utilise team work;
- propose possible multiple action to resolve the potential challenges.

The workshop took the form of a short presentation giving the context for the workshop and two breakout sessions to elicit ideas from attendees. The first breakout session was to give attendees the opportunity to discuss and identify common issues and challenges of team working facing educators, by listing the constituent parts of teamwork skills and identifying which of these is it possible to assess. The second was to find out how assessment of team projects is approached in the individual attendees’ discipline areas, and whether there are issues that make this assessment “unfair” in some ways. All comments from attendees were noted and collated on flip charts for further discussion within the whole group of workshop attendees, and are given in full in the boxes in the next section of this paper.

The workshop ended with a general discussion focusing on the issues the groups identified, in order to provide some answers to the questions:

- Is assessment of team projects a fair process?
- Can we assess teamwork skills?
- How can learners also be encouraged to reflect on their experience?

Workshop findings

From the first breakout session a number of common issues and challenges were listed as a result of the discussion from two separate groups of attendees. As is often the case with workshop discussions, the questions given to discuss were not fully adhered to, as issues sparked comments which sent the discussion off at a tangent from the original questions set for discussion. As a result the list coming from the discussion merged the questions and developed into ways to manage the issues and challenges as well. In presenting the findings from the workshop in this section, the order of the questions posed has been disregarded, so that more meaningful analysis of the findings can be made.

Common issues and challenges were listed as:

- Communication of assessment expectations
- Too much assessment
- Reviewing the team
- OK to fail
- One person doing all work
- More objective if company input
- Fragmentation of groups
- Freeloaders
- Preparation of students for this type of assessment
- Students do not understand assess criteria
- Assessors skills – facilitators skills
- Personalities – each student an individual

The main difficulty students in a team are reported to encounter is an imbalance of the workload, with a consequent opportunity for freeloaders who contribute little to the team outputs and fragmentation of the team. It is notable that some of the traditional issues of team working, such as leadership (Aranda, Aranda 1998), trust (Henttonen and Blomqvist 2005) and communication (He, Butler 2007) did not feature in this list. The issues of team working may vary from team to team, so assessing the team outputs becomes difficult when individuals within a team have experienced certain issues, which may have contributed considerably to their learning of team working skills, but not to their learning of the practical skills of the task, as

demonstrated by the outputs from the project, which can be assessed in a transparent manner. It must not be forgotten that students are individuals

Workshop attendees identified ways to help the students with their team working, including better preparation for team working, communicating to students the expectations of tutors for the assessment, the need for assessor and facilitator skills, to enable tutors to review project work and provide formative feedback. There was a feeling that perhaps tutors include too much assessment of team projects, but that in terms of individual learning within team projects, tutors should emphasise that it is alright if a team fails to achieve the set goals, provided the team skill learning is evident. Finally, the input of outside organisations can contribute significantly to the objectivity of the assessment.

The next part of the workshop discussion responses were collated according to current practice in assessing team projects. The following list shows that student reflection (5 attendees mentioned this in relation to assessment) and negotiation (4 mentions) through peer assessment were used by attendees. Real world assessment, based on an appraisal, together with observation, measuring interaction and individual contribution, shown by a portfolio, and product based assessment were commonly used. These methods raised the issue of whether assessment should be centred on the product or the process of team working, or indeed whether both should be assessed.

Current practice in assessing teams were:

- Portfolio – Identify individual contribution.
- Continuous assessment – process and product.
- Real world - appraisal style
- Individual projects
- Measure process
- Measure learning
- Product based assess
- Same project
- Whole class
- Individual reflection
- Real world assessment
- Contribution
- Negotiation (4)
- Observation
- Interaction
- Peer assessment
- Reflection (5)

Returning to the constituent parts of team working that attendees identified, there were listed as follows, with the number in brackets representing the number of attendees agreeing that this part could be assessed:

- Leadership, time management (5),
- Communication, to resolve a problem (4), negotiating, setting objectives (5), analysis (5), cooperative learning,
- Respect (3)
- Goal setting (7)
- Self-assessment
- Communication (5)
- Integration of theory and practice (7)

Clearly from this list there are many constituent parts to team working that could be assessed, and communicating a clear rubric for assessment to the students is essential. Some of these assessment

components are relevant to the process of team working, and some to the product of the team effort. The learning objectives of team projects need to make assessment clear, and these must be communicated to the students. Perhaps there should be learning agreements for each part of the team project. From the student perspective they need to be aware of the importance of working together, and that sometimes a lot of work is brought together, and some should be discarded if it is not relevant to the project outcomes.

Conclusions

In rounding up the workshop session a number of conclusions were proposed, which attempt to summarise the contributions of the attendees at the workshop.

Assessment should ideally focus on the process the team members engage in, as well as the project deliverables. Although some of these may be difficult to assess, clear learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are communicated to the students should make this possible. A procedure for continuous assessment that is undertaken throughout the team working process should make the assessment transparent, and more likely to be perceived as “fair”.

Students will experience various difficulties as they carry out their team projects, such as freeloading. Team composition and team leader selection can play an important part in the perception of “fair” assessment, so tutors should take care when allocating students to teams. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their team processes, both on their own performance, and that of their fellow team members, and peer assessment can be an effective means of assessment.

The findings and conclusions from this workshop did not answer all of the questions originally posed, indeed the outcomes of the workshop demonstrate that assessing student team projects is extremely complicated, and requires careful planning from the outset. More research into the administration of team projects is suggested, so it is hoped that this paper may serve as a starting point for further work into this topic.

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