Tuesday 11 June
Parallel Session 1

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Parallel Session 1.1: Workshop

Learning from International Practice

Chair: Professor Roni Bamber
Queen Margaret University, Scotland

Speakers:
Dr Emma Bond - University Campus Suffolk
Dr Pete Coffee - University of Stirling
Dr Chris Lukinbeal - University of Arizona
Dr Simon O'Leary - Regent's University London
Dr Judith Lane - Queen Margaret University
Heather Gibson - QAA Scotland
Jane Denholm - Critical Thinking

This session will focus on the findings of the LFIP TPGSE (Learning from International Practice in the Taught Postgraduate Student Experience) project: www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/sheec/learning-from-international-practice/taught-postgraduate-student-experience. The project is investigating 'What does it mean to be a master's-level student, and how are they supported in making that transition?'

We will discuss the project's findings (including facets of PGT learning and teaching, and postgraduate Graduate Attributes), and what the implications are for our practices in supporting the learning of postgraduate taught students.

After a briefing on key ideas, there will be short (mainly virtual) inputs from case study contributors, from a range of subject areas. Participants will be invited to discuss what 'master's-ness' means for them, and feedback their ideas.
**Parallel Session 1.5: Workshop**

**Public-Private Partnership in Higher Education**

Chair: Professor Frank Coton  
University of Glasgow, Scotland

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The speakers in this session will engage in a facilitated discussion with conference delegates on the issues around supporting enhancement through public/private partnership in higher education.
Abstract

In this paper we reflect on the curriculum implications of some recent initiatives undertaken by The Open University in Scotland (OUiS). The University has traditionally delivered a flexible curriculum aimed at a part-time student population who are predominantly in work. More recently there has been a development of work-based learning (WBL) qualifications across a range of different discipline areas. We consider examples of workplace learning initiatives that have made use of both more traditional curriculum and curriculum designed specifically as WBL. We also consider examples of the impact of the growth of the curriculum through the development of non-accredited Open Educational Resources. In reflecting on some representative examples we look at how a Higher Education (HE) curriculum, whether conventional or work-based, can intersect and interact with work experience. In the course of this we share a “rich picture” developed to help us conceptualise work and learning.

1. **Introduction**

Developed economies face demographic challenges. The workforce is ageing; the majority of people who will be in work in 2020 (70%) have already left education (Leitch 2006). The skills required within the economy are changing, and the recession continues and as older workers remain in the labour market for economic reasons (and young unemployment increases) (Goodwin and O'Connor 2012), so the role of Higher Education changes. Following Leitch, HE providers have been encouraged to engage much more clearly with economic productivity. Despite a relatively high investment in the production of skills in Scotland labour productivity lags behind other developed economies (Scottish Government 2007). Within this policy focus there is recognition that economic productivity is not simply a supply issue, but also a demand issue, and that employers may be under-utilising the skills present within the workforce. The move from simply supplying graduates, to engaging more directly with employees and employers, in particular about how to use existing and newly developed skills, what might be called ‘workforce development’, lies at the centre of the OU in Scotland's engagement with work and learning.

The OUiS has a distinctive role in the Scottish sector as the largest provider of part-time HE. The curriculum is flexible, modular and credit based. Nearly three-quarters of the 16,000 students are in work and the majority say that they are studying either to improve their skills, to progress in their career or to make a change of career direction (Cannell and Caddell, 2012). The OUiS is part of a much larger institution, the UK Open University which supports over 200,000 students across the four nations of the UK and internationally. The OU's pedagogic model, ‘Supported Open Learning’, allows students to study high quality, interactive learning materials while supported by a personal tutor who provides academic support and feedback on assessment. The curriculum is developed centrally by teams of academics and learning technologists on a Fordist model that expects and affords large-scale delivery, and provides a consistent student experience irrespective of the student's location. Although online forums and optional face-to-face tutorials provide opportunities for
interaction with other students the model is essentially one of individual support. Underpinning learning design and pedagogy across the curriculum is an assumption that adult learners bring knowledge and skills to their studies that should be valued and respected.

The last decade has seen two important curriculum developments; firstly, the development or work-based modules and qualifications and secondly a huge growth in the development of non-accredited Open Educational Resources (OERs). Each of these developments has impacted on, and helped to shape, some of our practice and our understanding of the relationship between work and learning.

WBL curriculum in the OU conforms with our general Supported Open Learning model but can be distinguished in the way it requires students to be able to actively engage in, and reflect on, particular kinds of work-based experience. The workplace is not just part of the individual's lived experience, but part of the study environment. Critically then it might be expected that WBL students on a given module share common experiences. The growth of explicitly WBL curriculum in the OU is rooted in two related phenomena. The first chronologically is a response to regulation and the requirements of professional bodies and was initially located primarily, but not exclusively, in the Health and Social Care sectors. The second was prompted by an initiative of the then Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 2000, which called for the development of Foundation Degrees (FDs) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The aims of this new qualification were to provide graduates with the skills needed to address shortages in particular sectors and to contribute to widening participation and lifelong learning by encouraging participation by learners who might not previously have considered studying for a higher-level qualification. The design principles for these new qualifications are intended to ensure that they are work-based qualifications. In the OU’s case these two hundred and forty credit point degrees must include 50% of the credit achieved through work-based modules. The Open University now offers the Foundation degree (FD) in a range of subject areas. In Scotland the OU badges these work-based qualifications as Diplomas in Higher Education (Dip HE). There are some parallels between the role of FDs and Scottish Higher National Awards and also some significant differences (Reeve et al, 2007). There are also variations between institutions in the way that WBL in FDs is construed.

The other development that informs thinking in this paper is the rapid growth of OERs, which began in 2001 when the Massachusetts Institute of Technology launched OpenCourseWare. OERs are defined by the OECD (2007: 10) as:

‘... digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research’

The OU’s OER platform OpenLearn was launched in 2006 with the development supported by the Hewlett Foundation1. The ready availability of free, easily accessible learning resources adds a new dimension to the curriculum and opens up possibilities for redefining relationships between universities, learners and, in the context of this paper, learning and work.

In §2 we look at three case studies, which illustrate different aspects of our experience in developing approaches to work and learning. Then in §3 we draw this, and other, experience together in a suggested model to conceptualise work and learning. Finally in §4 we draw some tentative conclusions and consider what the implications are for curriculum development in the next decade.

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1 [http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education-program/open-educational-resources/]
2. Case studies

2.1 Developing the use of better skills in the care sector

Our first case study is based on an initiative supported by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and linked to the Scottish Government’s interest in skills utilisation (Scottish Government, 2007). Supervisors in care settings who have responsibilities to manage staff are required by the Scottish Social Services Council to gain a professional qualification (usually SVQ level 3) and a supervisory or management qualification that provides a minimum of 15 credits at SVQ level 7 or above. Typically the care workers who require this accreditation have little post school education and no HE experience. The project team made the decision to make use of an existing Management module (B121, 30 credits at SCQF level 7), written with an explicit WBL focus, with groups of care workers in both public and private sector workplaces. Goldman (2012) in the final report to the SFC explains that the project approach

‘… seeks to better motivate the learners through developing a supportive workplace learning culture including a shared understanding of the contribution made by learner and organisation, the benefits of the learning to the workplace and finally through the development of peer support.

The pedagogical model has reflective practice at its heart which we suggest has further encouraged motivation and consideration of skill use.’

Findlay and Warhurst (2012), in an overview of the Skills Utilisation Projects, note also that:

‘… in conceptual terms this project […] focused on the use of better skills rather than the better use of skills.’

In the context of this paper it is important to note that B121 was part of existing WBL curriculum and that no modifications were made to the mainstream OU delivery model. However, it was possible to assign personal tutors with a health and social care background and, through several presentations of the module, contextual materials were produced to enhance the mainstream materials that any student in the UK receives. The project was a success with excellent outcomes for students from 12 cohorts across five different workplaces. Evaluation reports (Payne 2011, Goldman 2012) highlight a number of important factors that contributed to rates of completion and attainment that are significantly higher than the norm for the module. Critically, while the module was not in any way bespoke, the context of a workplace group and the relationship between tutors, students and line managers that was developed in the project as an enhancement to the mainstream OU Supported Open Learning model meant that there was a powerful sense of ‘bottom up’ contextualisation for the specific circumstances of the Scottish care sector and for each workplace. One of the module tutors, quoted in Goldman (2012), remarks that

‘Before they started each assignment we would discuss how it was related to their role that they presently carry out, this helped them apply the theory to practice.’

In the SFC commissioned evaluation of all the skills utilisation projects, Payne (2011) comments that:

‘The strength of this project has been in the way it has sought to engage line managers in discussion around how students’ leaning on the B121 can be put to effective use within their everyday working life. The project started with a quite

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2 Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
traditional focus on course delivery, but has developed over time and has influenced thinking within parts of the OU about how courses targeted at the workplace can be best delivered.’

Thus there was development at the level of the cohort and the workplace but also evidence that this then fed back into future curriculum development.

‘There is evidence that some project teams, such as the OU social care project, have developed their understanding over time, and that this has now begun to stimulate discussions within the OU in terms of how it might deliver work-based learning programmes in the future.’ (Payne, 2011)

Goldman in the final report reflects that:

‘… workplace delivery of the tuition and support has kept a strong focus on the application of learning to the workplace. The use of reflective practice throughout the learning has enabled students to better understand the relevance of the learning to their practice as supervisors. Furthermore, the pedagogy has encouraged the development of a workplace peer support process including mentoring through line managers. This has been important to getting application of the learning in the workplace.’

2.2 A partnership approach to higher education in engineering workplaces

This case study shares with our previous example its genesis in the SFC’s skills utilisation projects. It is based on a tripartite relationship between a union, a major engineering employer and the OU. Since its inception the union has been the primary driver in the partnership – a model that is more common in Scandinavia and elsewhere than in the UK. The students are shop floor workers with high levels of practical skills acquired through work, but with HE experience usually restricted to, at most, some SCQF level 7 credit achieved as part of an apprenticeship. In the past, with a small number of individual exceptions, opportunities to study at degree level have not normally be available to these workers; and where it has happened it has typically been on a day release rather than workplace model.

Since the inception of the project successive cohorts of workers have embarked on a pathway to a BEng honours degree. Whereas in our first case study the module itself was designed on WBL principles the BEng is not a work-based qualification – although it should be noted students must ‘bookend’ their study with modules that provide the opportunity for reflection on the development of professional practice. In other respects, however, there are strong similarities. Each module is studied on the mainstream OU model. For some modules it’s possible for tutorials to be held in the workplace – however, complex shift patterns mean that not all students can access this optional support. Like the care sector example rates of completion, attainment and progression are very high. Evaluation studies suggest that there are strong parallels between the two examples although the key factors are developed in different ways. There is evidence of strong interactions between practice-based knowledge and the academic knowledge gained through the BEng. Through reflection on experience part of what HE does is to give participants the confidence to articulate and express their views on practice and this then feeds back into the work process. The role of the union is critical. Prior to the development of the degree programme the Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) in the workplace had developed a collective culture of engagement with education through less formal courses at lower levels of the SCQF. This activity, which continues, opens up possibilities, develops confidence and motivation and builds a culture of collective endeavour. The ULRs play a critical role in enhancing the mainstream OU support model and sit outside the normal employee/employer or learner/provider relationships. Along with students who have already embarked on the degree pathway the ULRs play a critical role in encouraging and clarifying commitments for
new students. This additional relationship provides a safety net for participants. They note in particular the role that ULRs play when they have some sort of problem, for example issues around funding, or pastoral support relating to the balance of work and study. One of the most important insights that has emerged from this evaluation is that for these high achieving students workplace study in a collective context with peer support is the norm. For most of them all their experience of learning has been in, through or at work. Again for most of them this is their only experience of HE. None of this is surprising but it requires the university to rethink its assumptions about the way in which students relate to the curriculum in this kind of partnership.

2.3 Collective learning at work – a role for OERs?

The OUiS signed a formal memorandum of understanding with the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) in 2007 and since that time has worked with Scottish Union Learning (SUL) to develop effective and sustainable approaches to HE study in the workplace. Much of this activity has involved the use of accredited modules, in particular short, discipline based access modules designed as a first step to further engagement with HE. In these cases the model is typically like that explained in §§2.1 and 2.2. Evidence from evaluation across a range of workplaces and modules suggests that where frameworks that support peer support are established outcomes for students are very positive. In the rest of this section, however, we would like to discuss a complementary approach, which utilises the rich resources of OERs.

The OU and other HEIs have invested increasing amounts of resource and intellectual capital in the development of free, non-accredited online resources. Arguably sustainable business models for this activity, and an understanding of who engages, (a widening access issue) and how learners engage (effective learning) is less developed. In popular debate information or online content is often conflated with learning and this can in practice act as a barrier to engagement with and utilisation of these resources. Since 2011, in partnership with SUL and individual unions we have piloted the use of OERs in workplace settings. This approach builds on the workplace learning culture engendered by ULRs and the potential for peer support inherent in cohorts of learners who share a common workplace identity. The university responds to requests from ULRs and delivers a limited amount of face-to-face tuition in the workplace. Typically the face-to-face activity is based on already existing online resources. The tutor role is to listen to the workplace need, select appropriately from the available resources, support the group to become self-sustaining and signpost opportunities to move, if appropriate, from an informal and non-accredited mode of study to more formal engagement with HE.

3. Conceptualising work and learning

Nixon et al (2006) in a Higher Education Academy review of work-based learning note that:

‘Everyone has a view on what work-based learning means and they use a wide range of terms interchangeably (e.g. work-place learning, work-related learning, vocational learning).’

The case studies considered in §2 are selected from a larger set of examples of developing practice in work-based learning which, we have been engaged with as part of a small team at the OUiS. The team meets regularly to review progress and reflect on what has been learned. The quote from Nixon et al (2006) defines an issue we grapple with on a regular basis. The initiatives we have undertaken have all engaged with groups in the workplace. For some participants, studying OU material in the workplace follows prior exposure to HE
study at college or university; for most it is a first experience. Examples range from the highly contextual and vocationally relevant such as 2.1 and 2.2, through to examples of study that are less directly related to the workplace and at the other extreme study, which on the face of it is not relevant to the everyday work roles of the participants. Only some of our practice involves modules that are explicitly badged as WBL and yet evaluation across the range of initiatives suggest that collective study in the workplace supports both the individual aspirations of group members but also has significant impact on skills and motivation in the workplace. Our examples lie in the terrain of work-based learning but don’t fit neatly into the definitions that are in use. To clarify our ideas we have drawn on the “rich pictures” approach to visualising complex problems. “Rich pictures” are a way of thinking about and visualising difficult or complex issues. They are often used at an early stage to record personal or group understanding and interpretation of a particular issue of set of issues (Bell and Morse 2012). Users are encouraged to use pictorial representations rather than text. The approach is useful in group work as the images can reflect and contain ambiguities and lead to useful discussion. In truth people often quickly move from the pictorial to the textual, in particular if it relates to abstract ideas. In a workshop setting the OUiS WBL team created a number of visualisations relating to different aspects of the topic, for example internal OU systems, and after these iterations decided to create a representation of work and learning – see Figure 1.

In the course of debating these issues and reflecting on the results of our practice we have become more comfortable in using the phrase ‘work and learning’ rather than work-based learning. All our examples involve partnership. So students have dual identities as both member of a workplace group and as student. At the heart of each initiative there is a set of shared work and study experience and opportunities to explore this through peer support. At the same time the study materials and the mainstream pedagogy is derived from a curriculum that is delivered in the main to individually supported students. Thinking of work and learning has encouraged us to reflect on the elements of our practice that seem to be important in the context of broader policy debates. Figure 1 is a tentative attempt to capture the important factors involved and the relationships between them. In the model the learner is placed at the centre, surrounded by a “positive and supportive work place culture”, the components of are

- Life Long Learning, an understanding and acceptance that learning takes place throughout ones life in a range of different ways and a range of different locations; An understanding and a commitment to seeing learning in the workplace as a partnership with shared commitments and shared benefits
- An ability to develop new and use existing skills effectively within the workplace to support the employers and employees aspirations;
- An understanding of the economic benefits that accrue to employers, employees and Scottish society from the investment in developing and supporting a culture in the workplace that supports WBL;
- A sound pedagogical base that understands, reflects and articulates the benefits of learning in the workplace, in particular the support of peers and the ability to develop and articulate knowledge and skills within the workplace;
- Content that is relevant to employers and the needs

Much of what the diagram captures is already part of the debate around work-based learning. However, we would want to emphasise that partnership is part of the structure of support, part of the jigsaw, rather than an institutional relationship between employer and university. Peer support is critical and in this respect understanding the boundaries between
In this final section we return to curriculum issues. In the introduction we noted that from the perspective of society and economy there is a critical need, over the next decade and beyond, for individuals in the workforce to develop new skills and make better use of skills that they have. At the same time there are huge changes in the availability of information and the ability of individuals to access information in new and personal ways. Universities are certainly no longer the privileged gatekeepers to technical knowledge. In these new circumstances this raises questions about what we mean by flexible curriculum. Arguably this discussion needs to go beyond dichotomies of full and part-time and accredited or non-accredited provision. OERs and Massive Open Online Courses both raise questions of who the learners are, how they engage with learning and the nature of the learning. In this paper we have reflected on our experience of working in partnership with unions and employers to promote HE learning in the workplace. We would argue that this experience is distinctive in two respects. Firstly, because in reviewing WBL across the HE sector we have noted a great deal of innovative and valuable practice, the dominant model is bespoke and it’s not clear that its practicable to grow the scale of these approaches to allow Universities to meet socio-economic demands. Indeed at present in terms of money spent, Universities have only a small fraction of the market for education and training in the workplace. In house and private provision dominates and there is considerable evidence that providers are seeking to expand in this area. In contrast to bespoke approaches the partnership approach that we
have outlined seeks to maximise the benefits of mainstream curriculum. Our evidence suggests appropriate adult learning pedagogy, space for reflection and collectively organised peer support helps those in the workplace to contextualise mainstream curriculum, and what emerges is user-generated understanding of learning and the workplace. Secondly, we have argued that potential barriers to accessing rich resources in online formats can be overcome with appropriate support and guidance. We have some limited experience of how working in partnership enables not simply better use of existing OERs but also the possibility of developing rich new resources based on shared knowledge and experience. Again this is a pedagogic issue and we feel there is real scope for further development in theoretical understanding of how social context and studying in socially connected environments can support successful learning. New developments in social media and the ubiquity of communication technology could potentially support such new pedagogy. There is a real need for further research in what we would call Open Educational Practice.

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last accessed 1st May 2013


Challenges of integrating service user and carer experiences into the Health and Social Care curriculum: reflections on a podcasting initiative at the Open University in Scotland

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Abstract
The involvement of people who use social work services and carers in the design and delivery of professional programmes and qualifications has been identified as both good practice and a professional requirement for a number of years (COSLA et al, 2003). A changing funding climate raises potential difficulties for the sustainability of this practice. This paper will explore an Open University project which produced a series of podcasts to incorporate service user and carer experiences into the wider Health and Social Care curriculum delivery. This project is then used as a springboard to consider wider debates on the purpose, and learning benefits, of embedding direct service user and carer experiences in the curriculum.

Introduction
The value of involving service users and carers in the education and training of service workers, once a radical notion, is now taken for granted in principle if not always in practice. In particular, providers of social work degree programmes have been required since 2003 to ensure that policies and procedures for the selection and assessment of students include “effective and appropriate ways of involving [and] meeting the requirements of key stakeholders”, who are defined as including “people who use services [and] carers” (COSLA et al, 2003). Similar requirements for user and carer involvement were introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by their respective Care Councils. This requirement is now extending to a wider range of professional programmes including those for nurses and child care practitioners. From 2008 to 2012, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) provided a modest grant to social work degree programmes to facilitate the involvement of service users and carers. The cessation of the grant in 2013 challenged the sustainability of practices that were developed in a more benign funding climate; it challenged the Social Work programmes to find more cost-effective approaches to continuing and indeed developing the participation of service users and carers in the Social Work degree.

At the Open University in Scotland a small group of service users and carers and Health and Social Care (HSC) staff have been working together since 2005 to develop the practice of involving service users across the HSC curriculum. This is a cross faculty initiative, rather than one which is exclusively focused on social work education. Despite the removal of SSSC funding the OU is committed to continuing to enhance student learning by embedding the voices of service users and carers in the HSC professional programmes. To achieve this the OU is developing a series of podcasts of service users and carers talking about their experiences of particular areas of health and social care services, to be available on-line to OU students and perhaps eventually, to a much wider audience of users of open educational resources.

The podcasts aim to enhance student’s learning by providing access to the voices of people who use health and social care services and carers, talking about their experiences of health and social care services. The project addresses a perceived gap in social work teaching, by
providing new resources that help students to prepare for the specific practice learning placements they will undertake to enhance their learning.

This paper will consider the OU project in relation to discussions on the broader learning implications of the inclusion of service-user and carer experience in the curriculum. It will include reflection on what this means for curriculum development and student learning, particularly through creating opportunities for authentic and critical enquiry based learning (for definition of these terms see Lee et al 2007).

Literature review
An extensive literature of journal articles and published texts on service user involvement in professional education is too large to detail here. A selection of studies specific to service user and carer involvement in the social work education context include; Beresford (1994; 2000; 2001a; 2001b; 2006; 2008; 2012); Harris (2003); Levin (2004); Molyneux & Irvine (2004); Ager et al (2005); Taylor et al. (2006); McPhail (2008); Warren (2008); Sadd (2011); Wallcraft, et al. (2012), and Smith et al (2011) who consider the lingering barriers to involvement of the most marginalized groups.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has produced a series of Guides and Position papers on service user involvement in both social care and social work education around themes of inclusion, networking and involvement of under-represented groups, which provide a backdrop to the current study. Glasby and Beresford (2006) present a case that the generation of social work knowledge which does not include the views of people who use and those who provide social work services is likely to produce a false and unsafe view of the world. However a study in England by Branfield (2009) found that despite being a requirement of the new social work degree, involvement of service users and carers remains piecemeal and patchy. Obstacles included inadequate training for service users, negative attitudes of students and staff, and practical barriers such as poor transport and slow reimbursement of expenses.

Other studies relevant to the OU podcast project focus on the use of podcasts in distance education. Lee et al (2011) for example, found that there were a number of benefits stemming from use of podcasts and other digital learning resources such as: increasing learner motivation and engagement; facilitating and enhancing learning outcomes and establishing a sense of a learning community. In contrast to earlier uses of audio-visual material in distance education, podcasts were preferred because they are file-based downloads and supported mobile or portable learning.

Another area of research studies is focused on the involvement of service users and carer in professional education via the medium of podcasts or similar digital materials. Fox et al (2011) developed an interdisciplin ary action learning set to develop an e-learning resource to enhance students to work more effectively with service users and carers. Service users were involved in the development of this resource. Within this there are case scenarios and feedback from learners. They comment that the development work was curtailed by lack of time and resource, which appears to be a familiar experience.

Project background
At the Open University in Scotland, service users and carers have worked with members of the Health and Social Care faculty since 2005 to contribute to the development and delivery of the curriculum. The contributions of service users and carers have included participation in agency approval and student selection; quality assurance of student assessment and practice learning; development of curriculum materials; management of the social work programme; and writing and/or critiquing publications to document and develop practice. A Service Users and Carers (SUC) management group of users, carers and staff has given guidance and continuity of oversight as well as providing a venue for developing new initiatives. Academic assumptions and practices have been challenged and changed in the
course of creating opportunities for meaningful engagement (and trying to avoid the traps of token participation) by service users and carers.

Development of the project proposal
The loss of grant funding encouraged the SUC to look for new approaches to maintaining and enhancing the commitment to service user and carer involvement. The SSSC’s rationale for the funding cut to social work programmes included the notion that other health and social care disciplines require to involve service users and carers in their programmes; so social work should not receive financial support that could not be offered to the other disciplines. Within the Open University in Scotland (OUiS), colleagues in the Health and Social Care (HSC) faculty were already engaging with service users and carers, and the latter were themselves advocating for their voices to be heard more consistently across all the health and social care disciplines. Meantime, feedback on the social work programme suggested that it might be desirable to develop additional resources to help students better prepare for their practice learning placements.

The nature of distance learning programmes means that it is difficult if not impossible to involve service users and carers in direct work with students on a consistent and equitable basis. Users and carers do take part in face to face tutorials in the final year social work practice learning module; but the experience of different tutor groups across the nation is likely to vary considerably, depending on who is available locally to work with them, and on the particular circumstances of their tutorials.

In this context, the deliberations of the OUiS service users and carers group resulted in a proposal to develop a series of podcasts, in which users and carers talk about their experiences of particular health and social care services, to be available on-line to OU students (and perhaps eventually to a wider audience of users of open educational resources). The intention was to produce learning resources that offer students relatively direct and unmediated access to the experience and opinions of people who have used the services in which the students will undertake their practical professional training. Relevant service areas in health and social care include: Mental Health, Learning Disability, Disability, Adult Care, Criminal Justice Social Work, Social Work with Children, Young People and Families services. A further aim was to involve service users and carers whose voices are seldom heard in professional education, such as black and minority ethnic service users and carers, and involuntary service users such as people involved with criminal justice social work services and people who misuse alcohol and substances (Smith 20011).

Process and progress to date
A bid was submitted to an OU Small Project Fund in July 2012, and initial funding of £2000 was confirmed in October 2012. A meeting of the OUiS SUC group in November 2012 agreed to proceed with the project. The SUC group constituted itself as the project management group, and nominated one of its members as project manager. Neither the project manager nor the members of the management group had any previous experience of making audio recordings or creating podcasts.

5.1 Laying the foundations
Before anyone could be approached for an interview, it was necessary to establish project procedures and documentation and to acquire recording equipment. It took four months from the decision to proceed in November 2012 until these foundations were established by late March 2013. The first step was to draft an action plan and to seek advice best practice and legal requirements in relation to data protection, informed consent and copyright. The management group held three telephone conferences to discuss and revise project documentation. Interview questions were pilot tested, the project manager and a carer member of the group participated in a training day on interviewing and audio recording, and the loan of a digital recorder was obtained.
5.2 Contribution of service users and carers to consideration of content, confidentiality and copyright

The views of the service user and carer members of the project management group significantly shaped the development of the project. As the project manager began to unpack the project proposal and to draft an action plan, the service user and professional members of the group brought different assumptions and perspectives to discussions about recruitment of interviewees, content and editing of interviews, copyright and control of the final product.

The management group determined that a "partnership approach" should be the primary principle guiding the implementation of the project, and our relationships with interviewees in particular. In order for the project to make respectful relationships with participants, and to represent their views meaningfully, it must offer people real choice about involvement, based on informed consent, and it must be open to feedback about participants' experience of the project.

Group members began to articulate an understanding of the project within a wider context of social policy and principles, for instance as an effort at co-production: "...a relationship between service provider and service user that draws on the knowledge, ability and resources of both to develop solutions to issues ... changing the balance of power from the professional towards the service user" (Scottish Community Development Centre). The commitment to a partnership approach was described by a service user member of management group as evidence of "understanding of my basic human rights and needs".

Academic vocabulary was challenged where it might be obscure or obfuscating. A draft copyright agreement based on a standard Open University document that asked interviewees to "waive all moral rights... (including, but without limitation) any of my rights under Sections 77 and 80 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or similar laws of jurisdiction" was thought to be unduly onerous as well as obscure in its implications. So at this preliminary stage, the project action plan, information sheets and consent forms were revised and reviewed several times until they were acceptable to all members of the management group.

The need to edit recordings - to modify an interviewee's account to fit a pre-determined podcast format - was questioned. The transcription of interviews was advocated, so that interviewees would be able to identify what might be missing from the edited audio, and then decide whether they would approve the publication of the edited version of the interview.

All members of the management group were venturing into unknown territory in this project, and as the commitment to partnership with participants was explored, the project began to develop an "action research" quality. Reflections offered by members of the management group during this period indicate both the challenge and stimulation they experienced:

"... completely outside my comfort zone... have developed a whole new set of skills"

"An interesting and thought provoking journey - I have got a lot out of it"

"... challenges of co-production - learning as we go along"

"How long it all takes!"

5.3 Pilot interviews

At the time of writing, three interviews have been recorded with members of the Service Users and Carers group. They all challenge one of the core aims and assumptions of the project, i.e. that podcasts should be short and focused. Participants have been informed that the interview is an opportunity to talk about their experience of a specific service, and to identify what a student, as a prospective service provider, should know in order to be helpful.
Although they seem to understand the purpose of the interview, people want - or perhaps need - to tell their story in their own way and in their own time. Recordings are 40 to 60 minutes long.

Having asked the initial question to set the ball rolling, the interviewer has felt that it would be disrespectful and probably counter-productive to be over-directive about what should be said and how. The experiences the interviewees describe are very personal, often very challenging and emotionally charged; they may be in the past or they may be very recent. So far at least, the stories told do not fit into simple, easily-labelled boxes. They do, however, have the potential to communicate the pain, confusion and distress that have entered and sometimes taken up residence in the lives of the speakers; while their darkness throws into vivid relief people’s resilience and their appreciation of meaningful help when it is given.

5.4 Next steps
To complete the first stage of the project, it is intended to undertake three more interviews; to prepare the interviews for publication online; and to offer a small number of students access to the podcasts for initial user testing and feedback.

With regard to publishing the interviews online, the intention is to present the complete interview both as a single recording, and also broken into a set of shorter recordings, annotated and labelled to inform the potential listener of the topics included in each individual item. The recordings will be packaged with a context-setting introduction and questions for consideration when listening.

Reflections
The impacts on the project manager of interviewing and recording carers and service users may indicate the potential impacts on the intended audience of listening to the podcasts. Giving people time to speak about their lives encourages awareness of the burdens of living with long-term illness or disability, and the burdens of caring for a relative with such illness or disability. There is no doubt that everyday life is hard work, physically and emotionally. For some, there may be little or no prospect of improvement or relief, so it is painful to hear about the callousness of professionals and services when they forget or ignore the reality of people’s lives. Being reminded of our common humanity may lead to the understanding that “there but for the grace of God go me.”

6.1 Reflections on the process
As the work has proceeded, management group members have had to recognise and work with tensions between project aims (“short, focused podcasts”), respect for participants (“giving people time to tell their stories”) and the limitations of resources and expertise currently available to us. There has though been a willingness to learn together, valuing the distinctive contributions of the professionals and the experts-by-experience. The challenge of managing differences in status and experience, in order to share power and decision making in the management group, has mirrored a firm intention to respect and give meaningful choice to project participants.

An interviewee who is also a member of the management group tells of a case conference on her newly-disabled adult son, when she refused to allow the meeting to start until he was brought to sit at the table. Our work on the podcast project has confirmed for us that “…partnership is about managing power; it requires constant attention and is always ‘work in progress’.” (Taylor et al, 2006, p. xiv)

6.2 Reflections on the implications
This project stemmed from the need for a more cost effective means to deliver service user and carer perspectives on professional education programmes, without losing the authenticity of the input from service users and carers. The project addresses concerns of service users and carers having to repeat their personal experience year after year to new
cohorts of students on professional programmes of study. An additional feature of this project is that management members are keen to avoid reliance of individual case study experiences and to include more collective voices of service user or carers.

Involvement of service user and carers’ experiences in the curriculum raises pedagogical questions about the place of authentic personal and collective experience in the HSC curriculum. Should it always be tied to learning outcomes, as Fox et al (2011) and others state, or does this approach open the way for a more direct and unmediated learning? How does this project relate to the issues and discussions regarding the basis of open learning, for example as supporting self-determination and independence of learners with guided learning? Key features of an open learning approach are: informal learning, student self-direction, authentic learning using real life situations, access to rich resources versus approaches using written materials, and acknowledgement of what the learner brings to the learning situation (after Dewey 1997). How much guidance and support do students need to structure their learning? What is the role of individual and collective service user and carer narratives in the production of health and social care knowledge? The next phase of the project, evaluating the podcasts as learning resources, should enable some fruitful enquiry into the possibility of differential learning from the podcasts as students move through sequential stages of the social work degree.

The greatest learning so far from this project is that the co-production of podcasts with service users challenges assumptions about the production and the creation of a rich and valuable source of learning and knowledge; in particular, that it is indeed costly in time and resources if it is to be carried out as a respectful co-learning activity.

**Conclusion**
At this relatively early stage in its implementation, the project has already shown that it can engage service users and carers in both managing the process and in providing content. There are clear indications that it can involve and challenge academics and professionals. We look forward to presenting and testing the podcasts with students. If this pilot stage proves successful, it will both strengthen the voices of people who are seldom heard and will give students a deeper understanding of their professional responsibilities.

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Perception of Competency in School Psychology Interns

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the self-perceived competencies of 96 culminating school psychology candidates in relationship to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) standards. The NASP standards formed the base of the inquiry and daily, routine activities of school psychologists were identified as examples of each standard. The findings of 4-point Likert-type scale survey indicate an inconsistent pattern of perceived competencies. The means ranged from 2.29 to 3.30 with the high representing more traditional skills and the low representing non-traditional skills. The findings of the study will be used to examine the effectiveness of the curriculum and course signature activities.

INTRODUCTION

There is no greater characteristic necessary for job acquisition and maintenance than competency. Every profession delineates the ability to perform a job well, as the primary essential attribute. Qualified, competent staff is valued and demanded by health professions, corporations, and educational institutions in order to assure a level of performance that will guarantee the highest degree of professionalism and performance. Competency is different for each occupation; however, the common premise is the ability to perform a procedure and be measured against a standard. School psychology, being a blend of psychology and education, is highly demanding and requires quality performance in both domains.

The competency of school psychologists is governed by several organizations; some are professional while others regulate licenses and credentials. Professional organizations include the International Association of School Psychology (IPSA), National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), California Association of School Psychologists (CASP), and the American Psychological Association (APA). In the United States, each state establishes a procedure for licensing or credentialing (some states provide both). In California, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) is the regulatory body for accreditation of school psychologists. Each of these organizations and associations has established ethics and criteria for professional performance. Competencies that are common to the organizations include the ability to: 1) diagnose and assess psychological disorders, 2) counsel clients, 3) consult with stakeholders and other professionals, and 4) identify program treatment (behavior and/or academic). Ethically, the shared traits include 1) performance within areas of expertise, 2) client's well being is always taken into consideration, 3) do no harm within the professional experience.

Standards to determine the ability and quality of work performed are found in all professions: business, health/medical fields, and education. The level of quality accepted is specific, identifiable, and measureable. The attainment of competency is usually determined through observation, rating, and/or peer-review. A person may question the determination of competency by another person. Self-perception of competency, however, is subjective and based upon an individual's own feelings, opinions, and impressions. The perception can be measured and/or rated, but it continues to be subjective rather than based upon facts. The purpose of this paper is to identify the perception held by culminating school psychologists regarding their competency in domains identified by the NASP as required to adequately perform their job.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

General

The establishment of competency in the health and medical fields is prominent in the literature. The medical profession establishes and continues to examine, the undergraduate and graduate training of medical students and interns, in the United States and in other countries (Leung et al, 2002). On-going competency is examined by the American Medical Association (AMA) through professional activities and recommended assessments through licensing (Carraccio et al, 2004). The field of nursing reports a highly motivated movement for competency training. Mozingo et al (1995) discuss the desire by nursing candidates to participate in "more practice of technical skills". At this time, technology and on-line training has become an issue of discussion in the nursing profession (Reneau, 2012). Competency is a factor in other health professions. The areas of physical therapy, occupational therapy, public health and pharmacy all continue to develop core competencies in their curriculum, improve training, and provide on-going examination of proficiency in their specific field of expertise (Maize et al, 2010).

The business community shows concerns about competency, as well as ethics. With the increase focus on technology, businesses are establishing competency levels in those areas. Competency issues are important in other countries as global technology is strengthened (Camuffo et al, 2004). The need for human resource management is seen in the literature. Initial training of personnel for this area and the establishment of standards and certification, is assuring businesses are becoming more competent in their hiring and training practices (Lievens et al, 2007).

Ethics in business is a recurrent subject in the literature. The training and teaching of ethics has become a focus in Europe, Southern and Eastern Asia, as well as the United States (Rossouw, 2011). Sligo et al (1998) and Allmon et al (1997) reviewed perceptions of business ethics. There appears to be consistency in perceptions of decisions made in ethical practices, although business profit tends to hinder some ethical decisions.

Accountability has been a primary focus in education for over three decades. The correlation between good teaching methods and successful students is key to maintenance of a fully productive educational system. Competency-based curricula has been discussed in literature in almost every aspect and group, from preschool (McWayne, 2004) to university. Most literature centers on kindergarten to high school enrollees and identifies methods by which students are evaluated on a variety of subjects (Eckert, 2013). Teacher preparation and teacher quality are also a strong focus of interest (Futrerll, 2010). Ball and Forzani (2011) discuss the infrastructure of a meaningful university program from the standpoint of policy and recognize the need for a common core of principles that will be taught to all teacher candidates. The use of technology and on-line learning are examined for competency-based curriculum in their areas of learning (Ash, 2011). Competency in the area of employable skills is a concern for educators and employers (Poole and Zahn, 1993). In conclusion, Hackett (2001) evaluates competency and reflective practice. Diverse definitions of competency-based curriculums are identified as one of the problems with the consistency of the concept.

School Psychology and Competency

The competency of school psychologists is widely discussed in the literature; however, little is written about candidates' perceptions of their competencies. Rubin, et al (2007) reviewed
the history of the competency movement which began in the 1970's. Current interest in competency began when the American Psychological Association (APA) revised their Code of Ethics (2002) and gave competency a section of its own, placing greater emphasis upon the concept. Accreditation and credentialing of psychologists by states and organizations followed as a next step. Competency became a specific behavior that can be measured and quantified for authorization. University programs stepped up and focused their programs on terminal degrees (doctoral programs) and educational models which emphasized the importance of knowledge and skills related to proficiency.

School psychology is a specialty with specific competencies and complexities (Tharinger et al, 2008). School psychologists practice in educational settings with clients from the age of birth (0) to maturity (21 yrs). The profession is bound by both Federal and State regulations governing education and the identification and instruction of handicapped persons. The practice is focused on the psychology of problem-solving and application of interventions with outcomes in the school setting (Tharinger et al, 2008). The NASP Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists, Standards for the Credentialing of School Psychologists, and Principles for Professional Ethics (2010) identify ten roles and competencies expected of school psychologists in their practice. Traditionally, the school psychologist's role has been that of assessor of students with learning and/or behavioral difficulties. The identification for state and federal assistance in school has been the focus of their professional duties (Fagan and Wise 2007). School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice III (NASP, 2006) identifies many roles of school psychologists other than test-giver, such as consultant to educators and administrators, collaborator, mental health professional, family consultant, program planner and researcher. Kratochwill and Bergan (1978) discuss the school psychologist as a behavioral consultant and identify the competencies and training required for that specific responsibility, while Cummings (2002) and Collins and Proctor (2009) see consulting as a major role for school psychologists. Working with culturally and linguistically different students is discussed by Lineman and Miller (2012).

University programs have moved from a course-driven curriculum to a competency-based model. This requires each institution to develop a set of courses with specific outcomes matching the desired competency. As the roles of school psychologists are broadened, the length and breadth of programs increase in size and intensity (Mowder, 1979). Each course must have its own set of standards to be met for satisfactory conclusion of the program and emphasis is placed upon a broad base of skills. The culmination of a candidate's program is the Practicum and Internship. The two practice-focused experiences total 1,650 clock hours and must be completed in a K-12 public school setting, as established by the NASP and California Committee Commission for Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). Tarquin and Truscott (2006) surveyed candidates regarding their perceptions of their practicum experiences and found there was little change in roles even though university programs had moved to a broader based curriculum. This paper emphasizes that the role of psychometrician continues to be the focus of the school psychologist's role even though universities have altered their curriculum. Catterall (1973) discusses the assessment of competency in the field and outlines activities and assessment in each identified area. Although this paper was written three decades ago, it follows the model of more current work delineated in the NASP Professional Standards (2010) and the Model for Compressive and Integrated School Psychological Services (2010). Competency is considered a prominent attribute in school psychology programs, training, and practice. The candidate's competency is evaluated, but whether or not they see themselves as competent (perception) was not found in the literature review.

METHODOLOGY
Instrument

The primarily instrument used in this study was the School Psychology Student Survey (SPSS) developed by the authors. The survey is used in a multidimensional longitudinal study. For this paper only one element of the survey will be discussed, i.e. school psychologist candidates’ perception of their skill competency. Other parts of the survey, not reported in this paper, reflect information about practicing school psychologists’ daily activities, the importance of the activity, the amount of time devoted to each activity and perception of roles (Smedley and Wheeler (2010)).

The survey asked the respondents to rate perceptions of their competency on ten activities that correspond to the NASP domains. The respondents rated their skill competency on a Likert scale of 1 to 4, with 1 “very high”, 2 “somewhat high”, 3 “somewhat low” and 4 “very low”. The selection of activities presented was based on the training identified by the NASP: Practices that Permeate All Aspects of Service Delivery (Data-Based Decision Making and Accountability, Consultation and Collaboration); Student- Level Services (Interventions and Instructional Support to Develop Academic Skills, Interventions and Mental Health Services to Develop Social and Life Skills); System-Level Services (School-Wide Practices to Promote Learning, Preventive and Responsive Services, Family-School Collaboration Services, Family-School Collaboration Services); and Foundations of School Psychological Service Delivery (Diversity in Development and Learning, Research and Program Evaluation, Legal, Ethical, and Professional Practice). Table 1 shows the ten activities which correspond to the domains.

Table 1: Survey Questions from SPSS

1. Participate in assessment of individual students
2. Provide consultation with teachers and staff regarding mental health issues
3. Develop and implement academic interventions, including IEPs
4. Develop and implement behavioral interventions
5. Assist administrators in developing school policies and practices
6. Provide and/or contribute to prevention or intervention programs
7. Promote and provide collaboration with families and others in the community
8. Participate in evaluation of site/district programs
9. Participate in professional development activities
10. Access, analyze, and utilize information sources from cutting-edge technology

Procedure

The survey was completed in a course entitled “Internship Seminar” (PED 685) which is the culminating course coinciding with the later section of the candidates’ internship. Thirty minutes was allotted at the beginning of the last class session for completion of the survey. The instructions included the respondent’s anonymity and that the information gathered would be used by the Lead Faculty of the program for research. Participation was voluntary. The research was approved by the university institutional review board.

Sample

Characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 2. Of the 96 respondents, 75 responded to gender, identifying 87% as female. The profession has historically been male dominated up to about 30 years ago (Fagan and Wise, 2007). This change to a female-oriented profession may be due to economics and length of the program, both having an
influence on the ability of a head-of-household to enter into a 3-year university program. The age of respondents ranged from 24-51 years of age. Seventy-three percent of the group was below the age of 36, with nearly half of the group below the age of 31. Seven percent of the group indicated their age as over 45 years. Responses indicate 70% of the candidates do not have a professional background. Of those stating a current occupation (other than full-time student), 56% held educational credentials (State issued) and 44% held licenses issued by the State Board of Behavioral Sciences. The latter included Marriage Family Therapist and Behavioral Therapist. The degrees not in these areas, ranged from sociology, liberal arts, criminal justice, political science, to accounting. The majority in the “Other” category related to some segment of social science.

Table 2: Demographic and Educational Characteristics (N=96)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
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<td>24-30</td>
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<td>41-45</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>46-51</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>70</td>
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RESULTS

The first part of the data analysis evaluated data in global aspects. Ninety-six candidates responded to the questionnaire. Eleven surveys were returned with no data and 3 were not usable. Of the eighty-two respondents who completed the data, 9 gave partial responses in a range from 2-9 questions. There were potentially forty possible responses per survey, with a total potential of 820 responses. Of the possible responses, 814 were calculated.

Mean scores were computed for each of the 10 questions. The means ranged from 2.29-3.30. The total mean score was 2.82, the median was 2.89, and the mode was 2.87. “Very high” was chosen 22.2% of the time by the candidates; “somewhat high” was selected 44.2%, “somewhat low” was chosen 25.4%, and “very low” was marked 3.5% of the time. (Table 3)

Table 3: Mean Scores of Perception of Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.30</td>
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Frequencies in percentages were computed for each of the 10 questions in the SPSS. Item 1 asked candidates to rate their perception of competency in data-based assessment; an overwhelming number (99%) rated themselves as very competent or somewhat competent in this area. On item 2, which pertained to competency to provide consultation with teachers and staff on mental health issues, 53.6% rated themselves as somewhat high, a fairly even distribution was seen on very high (20.7%) and very low competency (21.9%). For the third item, 51.2% agreed they were somewhat high and 28% agreed they were very high. This item asked about the developing and implementing of academic interventions and Individual Educational Plans (IEP). The development of behavioral interventions was the topic of item 4 in which 52.4% of the respondents said they were somewhat high in competency, with 21.9% agreeing they had somewhat low competency. Item 5 pertained to assisting administrators in developing school policies and practices. Only 38.5% of the candidates agreed they were very competent or somewhat competent in this area. Almost 60% said they had very low competency (9.76%) or had somewhat low competency (48.7%) in this area. A somewhat similar split pattern was seen on item 6: provide and contribute to prevention or intervention programs within the educational system. On this item, the majority of the responses (48.7%) indicated somewhat high competency or very high competent (17.1%), with 34.2% feeling they were very low or somewhat low in competency in the area. Item 7 focused on collaboration between school and families. The majority of candidates agreed they were very competent (23.5%) or somewhat competent (48.8%) in this area. Almost 1 in 4 candidates, however, perceived themselves as having low or no competency (22.1%) in family-school collaboration. Item 9 related to participation in the development of professional activities, such as teacher in-service and trainings. This question was the most negative of all 10 items; 57.5% of the candidates stated they had low (44.3%) or very low competency (15.2%) in this domain. Only .09% of the respondents perceived themselves to be very competent and 31.6% said they were somewhat competent in giving teacher training in school psychology information. The last item related to the ability of use technology in professional work. Sixty percent of the candidates identified themselves as very confident (22.4%) or somewhat confident (37.5%), while 32% perceived themselves to have low or very low competency in this area.

DISCUSSION

A foundational premise of competency-based education is the assumption that skills, which are primary to a profession and necessary to effective performance of the required tasks, will be identified and taught in courses and evaluated through assessments and experiences in the internship period. When this process is completed a supposition is formed that candidates are proficient and confident in the areas identified in the curriculum as essential to retaining employment.
In this study, the dichotomy between competencies perceived as high and those that are perceived as low, flow along the lines of traditional vs. non-traditional skills. Traditional skills are those that school psychologists have practiced since the inception of the discipline: assessment of students for placement in special programs, consultation with teachers and parents regarding the student’s academic and/or behavioral needs, and the reporting of data for records. Skills which have recently been promoted (non-traditional) include a greater emphasis on team problem-solving, development of programs beyond an individual student, affecting the general education population as a whole, and school and district planning (Fagan and Wise, 2007).

The most positive areas affecting perceived competency levels were related to assessment, consultation with teachers and families, development of IEP and behavioral interventions, and participation in professional development. These activities are all related to the identification and placement of students in special education programs which is the major role (traditional) of school psychologists today. The most problematic items related to candidate's perceived competency in working with site and district personnel to develop programs, plans, and policies. In most traditional school psychology programs, assessment has been the primary focus of the curriculum. It is also the most time consuming task in daily practice in the field. Therefore it was not unanticipated that the vast majority of candidates perceived themselves to be exceedingly competent in that domain. The next grouping of items demonstrating higher levels of competency were in the domains of consultation and collaboration. Like assessment, consultation skills are emphasized in several courses throughout the program and are frequently highlighted in the internship daily tasks. These skills are those that are in a direct one-to-one relationship with school staff. In other words, the school psychologist is competent when working with a singular or small group of teachers or parent. The activity is also one that places the psychologist in a role of giving information more often than receiving it. The responses also showed that candidates felt comfortable in areas that were directly related to course instruction and internship opportunities. Assessment and consultation have been major elements of school psychology programs for many years; therefore, supervisors in the field have a strong understanding and experience with these skills. It is probable that candidates follow the model of their supervisors and focus their activities on tasks displayed by them.

Negatively rated perceived competency were activities that are often outside the traditional focus of school psychologists. Candidates strongly identified activities with administrators as areas in which they were very incompetent. Often school psychologists are perceived by administrators to be "independent contractors" who come into the school, test students, and do not participate in the educational process. It has been only in recent years that the NASP (2006) has put emphasis on a broader range of domains, including those that place the psychologist in a working relationship with site and district administrators to assist in problem-solving and development of programs. University programs may not place the same emphasis in these areas as they do other skills; therefore, there is less opportunity for the candidates to understand the roles required to fulfill this new responsibility. Without opportunities and support from site supervisors during the internship period, candidates may not have favorable environments and encouragement to pursue uncharted waters.

There are several implications for university faculty from this study. The first is the clear separation between skills in which candidates perceive themselves to be competent or non-competent. Program curricula should be evaluated and analyzed to determine a balance between traditional and non-traditional skills. Candidates clearly perceive themselves as competent in traditional areas. However, there does not appear to be a connection between the traditional base competency and the use of it in other areas. For example, courses lending themselves to the assessment process should focus on using the information in a broader arena than only for identification purposes. Using the analytical skills taught in the
curriculum to evaluate site and district programs would expand the role of school psychologists and place them in a position of managers rather than providers.

Course learning outcomes should be recognized and opportunities be given to practice explicit tasks supporting the competencies. Course syllabi should identify activities which give candidates situations in which they can understand the purpose of the role. Instructors must be proficient in the required skills and use them within their own practice. Identifying the competencies early in the process and having on-going formative evaluations would provide candidates with information regarding their skill level prior to the internship period. Lastly, the selection of site supervisors should be carefully evaluated. If specific skills are not available for candidates to practice during the internship due to the lack of skill by the supervisor or the district's policies, the university must intervene to assure the competency of their candidates as this is the primary function of the training program. Although evaluative data is collected throughout the internship, it is usually at the determination of the site supervisor whether or not the candidate has exhibited the skills and is competent. Ongoing dialogue between the candidate and faculty is necessary to assure opportunities are given for experiences in all domains.

The small number of respondents is a limitation of this study. This study is a part of a larger longitudinal study evaluating several aspects of the school psychology program at one university on six campuses. The results, however, do mirror the a priori experiences of the researchers who have been in this field for many years. More research is needed in the area of perceived competencies of candidates in school psychology programs prior to their graduation.

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First Year Assessment ReDesign – A Programme Approach

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ABSTRACT: A key priority of University College Dublin’s (UCD) Education Strategy (2009-2014) is ‘to foster early and lasting student engagement’. A central strand of this was a strategic Assessment ReDesign Project. In 2011/12, the project was implemented in five programmes, with the Deans leading the process and involving all their first year Module Coordinators. The project methodology centred around three full-day facilitated workshops with these Programme teams. A programme mapping tool was used to reflect on gaps/overlaps in the programme and actions plans were devised for first year assessments. In evaluating the Deans’ and Module co-ordinators’ views, the Deans in particular valued the opportunity to take a programme overview and to a lesser extent the changes made to first year assessment. The coordinators highlighted a significant intention to reduce assessment overload and to develop assessment for learning activities in their first year modules. In summary, findings from this project demonstrated the success of a collaborative and flexible programme approach to curriculum innovation.

1 Introduction

UCD is Ireland’s largest single-campus institute of higher education and was the first Irish university to achieve a fully modular programme structure in 2005. While initial energies were focused on implementation of a re-structured curriculum (2005-2008), the most recent UCD Education Strategy (2009-2014) prioritises enhancement of the learning experience and identified as one of its key aims ‘To foster early and lasting student engagement’.

This paper evaluates a programme approach to the review and re-design of first year assessment to achieve effective learning and student engagement, while still being efficient for staff. This project was developed by UCD Teaching and Learning as a central strand of a wider strategic initiative – Focus on First Year. The design of the project, particularly the dual-emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency, was informed by a similar (though much larger-scale) initiative undertaken by University of New South Wales (UNSW).

The UCD approach centred on three full-day workshops involving programme teams, each with clearly defined outputs. A central element of this programme-based approach was a curriculum mapping exercise which involved mapping stage 1 modules to stage 1 outcomes and programme outcomes. Revision of assessment was framed in terms of alignment with UCD First Year Assessment Design Principles (O’Neill & Noonan, 2011a & 2011b).

In this paper ‘programme’ refers to a full degree programme, ‘module’ refers to accredited self-contained component of the programme and ‘stage’ refers to progression points towards completion of programme, generally corresponding to year of study.

3 Launched in 2010 a major ‘Focus on First Year’ strategic initiative explores the development of the most effective curricular structures, assessment strategies and academic supports for first year students across all undergraduate programmes.
2 Literature Review

2.1 Curriculum Design and Programme Mapping (focus on assessment)

Knight (2000) in his work on assessment highlights the importance of addressing assessment issues from a strategic perspective. He emphasises that many of the tensions associated with assessment, for example the challenge of efficiently obtaining both validity and reliability, can only be addressed by taking a wider more strategic approach to assessment change. Mutch (2008) and Ross (2010) reiterate this strategic approach to ‘thinking about assessment’. Many of the authors in the field of curriculum design (Fink, 2003; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) discuss the efficiency of a programme approach and in addition they advocate the importance of alignment of assessment to the programme’s educational philosophy, the programme outcomes and/or its graduate attributes. This driver for both efficiency and alignment has, in recent years, produced a growth in the practice and literature around curriculum mapping (Ducasse, 2009; Sumson & Goodfellow, 2004). In particular there has been an interest in how these are mapped to graduate attributes (Lowe & Marshall, 2004; Sharp & Sparrow, 2002; Treleaven & Voola, 2008). A review of some of these tools notes how the level of detail and presentation of these can vary, but they have in common the intention to map the assessments to the graduate attributes or programme outcomes (O’Neill, 2009).

The UCD Assessment ReDesign project had a focus on first year assessment, however it was decided that the most useful way of addressing this would be through developing a programme approach and to use a curriculum mapping tool as the first step in exploring these assessment practices.

Over the last 10 years there has been international interest in the first year experience and as part of this, a focus on first year assessment (REAP, 2010; Krause & Coates, 2008; Nichol 2010). Based on the literature in this area UCD had developed a series of assessment design principles for first year, both for staff working at programme level (i.e. Deans, Heads of School) and for module co-coordinators considering their first-year assessments. Table 1 sets out these nine assessment design principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme Design Principles</th>
<th>The Module Design Principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Create space in the curriculum for inducting learners into the key discipline/subject concepts</td>
<td>4. Regular low stakes assessment with feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop a strategic approach to the selection of assessment methods, i.e. mapping assessments to ‘core’ learning outcomes for the stage</td>
<td>5. In class student peer review of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Implement a range of approaches to streamline assessment workload for staff and students</td>
<td>6. Well-structured collaborative learning and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Effective sequencing on module learning and assessment activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Active/task-based learning using authentic assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Reduce student assessment workload within and across modules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Curriculum change processes

Blackmore and Kandiko (2012), in their analysis of strategic curriculum change in research-intensive universities, identified a clear sense of purpose and strong leadership as important factors in successful curriculum change initiatives. They also argue that universities are complex and diverse organisations and that disciplines and professional groups “have their own way of knowing and being that are not readily reducible to a common formula” (p 209).
They cite examples of effective change where local interpretation of an institutional priority/framework was encouraged, resulting in greater ownership and flexibility in relation to the change process.

Dempster et al (2012) also focus on the importance of ‘ownership’ in their evaluation of the ‘Course Design Intensive’ (CDI) model of academic development. This model focuses on programme-level development and highlights the importance of making time for staff to work collaboratively and reflectively on issues of curriculum innovation and design. They also note the importance of ‘buy-in’ by programme leaders and department heads in facilitating this. Healey et al (2013) conclude that “discipline-based department teams, rather than individuals, can be strategic targets for effective change” (p. 42).

3  The Project

Although UCD has adopted a learning outcomes curriculum, there are no meta-level policy instruments nationally, such as Programme Specifications or Subject Benchmark statements, which draw attention explicitly to Programme outcomes and their link to curriculum. Therefore placing attention on the articulation of programme outcomes and their alignment to module outcomes provided a useful starting-point to the change dialogue by focussing attention on the role of First Year Assessment in achieving the programme’s ultimate educational aims. Additionally, while professionally accredited programmes are subject to a regular cycle of review, non-accredited programmes are not reviewed holistically though constituent modules are reviewed annually by Schools.

3.1  Key features of the UCD Assessment ReDesign Project

Phase 1 of the Assessment ReDesign project was implemented in 2011/12 with five UCD Programmes, who had expressed an interest in assessment enhancement as part of the Focus on First Year project 2010/11. The participating programmes were: Architecture, Physics, Radiography, Social Science and Veterinary Medicine. In keeping with the programme approach to assessment, the project was led locally by the Dean/Head of School and also involved Stage/Programme Directors and all first year Module Coordinators. UCD Teaching and Learning staff (working in pairs) facilitated the project process with each of the five programme teams. The project timelines were tight (December 2011 – April 2012) to align with curriculum management system deadlines. Table 2 sets out the structure of the project and the outputs, content and participants for each workshop/meeting.

Table 2: Structure of the Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview of Workshops facilitated by UCD T&amp;L Staff</th>
<th>Staff Involved</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparatory Meeting</strong>, including review of Programme and Stage 1 baseline assessment data</td>
<td>Programme Dean and Programme ‘Lead’(^5)</td>
<td>Agree details of project format to address specific context of programme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Workshop 1 (full-day):**  
1. Overview of project & expected outcomes, followed by Q&A session  
2. Focus on articulating programme & stage outcomes (aligning with UCD Graduate Attributes & relevant professional body frameworks). | Programme Team | Headline Programme & Stage Outcomes |
| **Workshop 2 (full-day):**  
1. Using the mapping tool, evaluate each stage | Programme Leaders & | A map of teaching, learning & |

\(^5\) From here on out the Programme Dean and Programme Lead are collectively referred to as ‘Programme Leaders’
vis-à-vis the teaching, learning & assessment activities. Identify assessment gaps & duplication.

2. Introduction to the idea of ‘Programme Assessment Equivalence Guide’ for different assessment approaches. *(take-home exercise)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop 3 (full-day): Using the a) First Year Assessment Design Principles, b) revised stage outcomes, c) overview of current practice, re-design your module assessment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme Leaders &amp; all first year module coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1 Plan, outlining individual module assessment changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Workshops (post-project): 1 hour workshops post-project to support first year module coordinators to implement new approach to assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open to all staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview, practical examples and resources on specific assessment strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A programme mapping tool was developed as part of the project and was based on the aforementioned literature in this area. The tool was developed to be used within the time constraints of workshop 2, using an Excel spread-sheet. The tool allowed an in-workshop score on the extent to which the programme outcome were addressed (and assessed) for each module. However, the ‘score’ was used primarily as a tool to promote reflection and discussion on the programmes outcomes in relation to their assessment.

As in Table 2 above, the workshops therefore focused on both senior programme leaders (Workshops 1 and 2) and the module co-ordinators (Workshop 3), although these categories of staff were not always mutually exclusive and, based on the Programme/School size and context, many staff attended all three sessions.

4 Research Methodology

In order to gather the view of these two groups of staff, the formal evaluation of the project consisted of separate elements:

I. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with the individual Programme Leaders (*n*=7), exploring their experience of the project process, the extent to which the project objectives were achieved and analysis of changes in assessment in their programme. At least one representative from each of the five participating programmes was interviewed.

II. An online survey was distributed to the first year module coordinators (*n*=41), using Survey Monkey. This survey aimed to capture the extent and nature of planned changes to assessment in their first year modules, aligned with the UCD First Year Assessment Design Principles (see Table 1). There were 41 modules in the first phase of the project. (As some co-ordinators had more than one module in first year, the full sample of module co-ordinators in the project was 35 staff). 22 module co-ordinators had completed the on-line questionnaire, i.e. a response rate of 62%. These responses represented 31 (76%) of the 41 first year modules on the project. Table 3 sets out the responses by Schools/Programmes on the project.
Table 3: Responses by School/Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture Programme</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science Programme</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Physics</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiography Programme</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary Medicine Programme</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethical approval was sought and granted from the institution to carry-out the research. Participants were assured that their comments would remain anonymous.

5 Research Results

5.1 Programme Leaders' Perspective

In analysing the results of the interviews, some key themes emerged from the data.

5.1.1 Motivation for getting involved in the Project

All of the Programme Leaders identified an existing interest in curriculum review/change and saw the project as a good opportunity to address a number of specific issues for their programme. Concerns about fragmentation across the Stage/Programme as a result of modularisation were cited by a number of participants who saw the project as an opportunity to re-focus on the overall programme ('big picture'). The participating professional programmes regarded the curriculum mapping component of the project as a good preparation for professional accreditation review. Awareness of some problems/challenges with particular modules, highlighted through poor student feedback, was a further motivation for a couple of programmes to engage with the project. The Programme Dean/Head of School was main driver of the project in all cases.

5.1.2 Strengths of the project process

The strengths of the project process are categorised under three main themes: flexible and adaptable approach; the workshops; and the role of T&L team.

Flexible and adaptable approach

While the aims of the project were clearly defined the approach adopted by the teaching and learning unit was seen as very flexible and the project was tailored to the needs of individual programmes. Advance collation and analysis of baseline data relating to the overall programme and assessment across stage 1 modules, which was undertaken by the facilitators and followed by a preparatory meeting with the programme leaders, resulted in the workshops being customised to focus on issues of import to the individual programme.

“I think the fact that they were adaptable was very important, a real strength”

The workshops

The full-day workshops ‘away from the office’, though logistically difficult to organise, was identified as an efficient way to work.

“... the one-day workshop is a very efficient way of focusing, the getting things done in block. If you try to do it in one-hour steps here and there, and you follow-up with paperwork,...it doesn't work”.

The involvement of a group of staff with a common interest/purpose (i.e. the programme/stage) facilitated the emergence of shared understanding of the overall
programme and stage outcomes. The staff group extended beyond ‘the usual suspects’, with all participants having an equal voice.

“To understand your own programme is very useful because you’re tinkering around every day with it, but you don’t have a healthy distance, critical view to see what’s really happening with the programme. So this exercise was ideal to look back – not look back – look forward – to see where we are heading really”.

All of those interviewed reported that the workshops were well-structured and outcome-focused. The curriculum mapping exercise was particularly well-received and there was general consensus among the participants that they could apply the curriculum mapping exercise to other stages/programmes. Professional programmes in particular recognised the potential of the mapping exercise as a means of addressing accreditation requirements.

“It was a very nice simple approach to it [curriculum mapping] …..where in a few hours you could run through a stage in a programme and get a pretty accurate mapping exercise done. So from that point of view it provides use with that tool, and now we have it and have used it with other stages as well”.

Other remarked on the value of making connections between programme outcomes, stage outcomes and then looking at what’s happening in individual modules.

“The mapping exercise was very useful….it highlighted the kinds of demands on students and ‘bunching’ of assessments.”

The role of T&L team
All of the participants commented favourably on the role of the T&L facilitators:

“So if there is someone watching from outside it’s always interesting, because first of all they tidy up what you’re doing and make sense of it, and second of all they point out to you things that are invisible to you because you are ‘native’.

“It’s really useful to have people coming from outside to a close-knit community and asking questions.”

Interviewees also emphasised the importance of the exposure to new ideas around assessment and related expertise, seeing this as a key benefit of external facilitation. The post-project development workshop we also welcomed as important enablers of change.

5.1.3 Measuring the success of the project
The primary objective of the project was to redesign first year assessment to specifically address issues such as: overload of assessment; over-reliance on one type of assessment; lack of a Stage or Programme overview of assessment; and disengagement by students. In interviews, participants were asked to comment on (a) any specific changes to first year assessment as a direct result of the project and (b) any other outcomes that emerged.

In the interviews, all participants cited one or more examples of changes to first year assessment as a result of the project, such as: (i) introducing some assessment for learning activities, mainly in the form of frequent low-stakes assessments; (ii) re-distribution of the weighting for various components of assessment within a module; (iii) some reduction in assessment across Stage 1; (iv) significant revision of assessment in an individual module; (v) implementation of a strategy to manage the timing of assessments across modules to minimise ‘bunching’; (vi) development of online resources and associated formative assessment to enhance student engagement. While acknowledging these positive developments, the over-riding feeling among programme leaders was that the extent of
changes implemented was limited and that a radical revision of assessment across the stage had not occurred (yet).

“We knew already there were a couple of modules that we weren’t completely happy with the mode of assessment, and we have restructured those as a result of going through assessment redesign.”

“We said we would assess less but not sure if/when this will happen.”

“Change takes time – at least two-three years”.

The programme leaders identified other tangible outcomes from the project, which many perceived to be at least as valuable (if not more so) than specific changes made to first year assessment. The articulation of programme and stage outcomes was regarded by a number of participants as significant project outputs:

“The more we zoned in on the first year modules and what we would do differently it felt like the law of diminishing returns. The ‘big picture’ programme stuff was great, but when it came down to ‘just change that bit in that module’, it was like ‘so what’.”

“There is no point in having programme outcomes if you don’t have the building blocks towards those.”

Three of the five programmes introduced a new stage 1 core module aimed at introducing students to some fundamental concepts of their chosen discipline and supporting transition to university learning.

5.2 Stage 1 Module Coordinators’ Perspective

The project was informed by the nine First Year Assessment Principles (see Table 1) and co-ordinators were introduced to these in the final workshop as part of the process. The survey explored the extent to which they planned to implement changes in these areas. Note that the original Assessment Principles 1 and 2 are collapsed into an overall question on Assessment for learning, as was done in workshop 3 in the project. The co-ordinators were asked whether they planned to use these at all, a little, or a lot (See Table 4)

Table 4: Assessment Design Principles in order of Intention to Implement (n= 22 coordinators)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Design Principles</th>
<th>W*</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Assessment Design Principles (Table 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consider the demands of other parallel modules in the stage when planning my assessments.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce assessment work-load for staff, i.e. attention to word-count, reducing number of submissions.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design a more efficient and effective sequencing of the learning and assessment activities, i.e. focus on the sequence of lectures/tutorial/labs/on-line learning and assessment.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce assessment workload for students, i.e. reduce number or size of assessment tasks.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow more assessment FOR learning opportunities, i.e. in/out of class activities where the primary focus is to allow students to get feedback on their progress.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>4 &amp; 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37
Introduce more authentic assessment, i.e. use of assessments that reflect the subject/discipline in real-life, relevant contexts.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Weighting (W*)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Modules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce more authentic assessment, i.e. use of assessments that reflect the subject/discipline in real-life, relevant contexts.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop multiple opportunities for collaborative learning, i.e. peer or group work (assessed/not assessed)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create more time for introducing learners to the key challenging discipline or subject concepts, i.e. module is organised by themes/threshold concepts, etc.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: W* = The weighting to include the amount (a little, a lot), N = Number of co-ordinators who applied this principle to their module(s)

The four highest weighting (W*) statements that they planned to address all related to the efficiency (reduction/streamlining) of assessment (see Table 4). Interestingly, the most popular approach to this was ‘considering the demands of other parallel modules when planning their assessments’, mentioned by 14 (64%) of the module co-ordinators. Given that the sample of 22 staff represents 31 modules, this figure could account for around 17-19 of the modules that had this principle applied to them. The intention to allow for more Assessment for learning opportunities was also an intended action by 12 (56%) of these co-ordinators. In exploring this in more details, the survey also teased out the approaches/activities that these staff hoped to use. There was a good range of new activities to be introduced (2012/2013) that would assist students in monitoring how well they are doing in their learning. Many were to be done as in-class activities. The in-class quizzes, in-class discussion group and other in-class group work were to be introduced by many (between 7-10) of the staff. Given that the sample of 22 staff represent 31 modules, this figure could account for around 13-15 of the modules that introduced these activities. Interestingly this appears to be implemented despite the large class sizes mentioned by many in the survey. The use of the on-line environment for formative MCQ’s (including those with some additional feedback) and some problem-solving activities were quite popular activities, yet blogs and discussion threads were not introduced by anyone.

In summary, the modules coordinators, in particular planned to improve the efficiency of their 1st year assessment approaches, and planned to use a range of assessment for learning activities.

6 Discussion and Conclusions

Both sets of data acknowledged that there were planned changes for first year modules in relation to increased assessment for learning activities and an improvement in efficiency in staff and student time. Both programme leaders and the module coordinators reflected on the importance of awareness of assessment activities of other modules, across the stage and/or the entire programme. The project appeared to be successful in using a collaborative and discipline-based process (Healy et al, 2013) that supported a strategic approach to assessment (Knight, 2000; Mutch, 2008, Ross, 2010).

There was very positive feedback on the curriculum mapping tool, particularly in relation to its simplicity and its use in stimulating discussion and reflection on overall curriculum design. This contrasts with the experience of other curriculum mapping tools which have been criticised for: (a) emphasis on audit function; (b) complexity; (c) perceived lack of relevance to the discipline.

There would appear to be a different emphasis in the perceived outcomes of the project between the two groups. The programme leaders highlighted the value of a strategic overview of the programme and the opportunity to reflect on the programme in its entirety. They believed that the modest changes to first year assessment were less significant project outcomes. In contrast the module coordinators (n=22) reported a range of planned changes
to first year assessment. The extent of implementation of these changes needs further research. In relation of the differing perspective around the key outcomes of the project and the extent of revision to first year assessment, this could be explained by the differing roles of the two groups.

Although the extent of changes to first year assessment need further investigation, the longer term impact of a more strategic review of the programme, which engaged a wider group of staff, has the potential for strategic curriculum change. There is some evidence emerging from the participating programmes of curriculum innovations that were stimulated by discussions over the course of the project.

The process designed by UCD T&L focused on a macro approach to curriculum change which actively involved a wider community of colleagues in sharing their practice and reflecting on innovative design ideas. Dempster et al (2012) maintain that this approach to curriculum has “the most potential for sustaining innovation curriculum designs” (p 136). The flexible and adaptable approach adopted by UCD T&L, which allowed for customisation of the project to the programme context, emerged as a key characteristic of the success of the process and is consistent with the finding of Blackmore and Kandiko, 2012.

The participants maintained that the workshop format was an efficient way of working collaboratively to achieve curriculum change. Similar models such as the Course Design Intensive (CDI) model developed by Oxford Brookes University have produced evidence of success in fostering innovation as well as being efficient. These models maintain that “learner-centred, evidence informed design, developed in the peer-supported environment, is fundamental to successfully embedding new modes of delivery or pedagogic innovations.” (Dempster et al, 2012, p 135).

7 Summary and Key Recommendations

This project was generally well received by the participants who noted its strategic impact on curriculum design including changes to first year assessment. The flexible, focused and evidence based approach were the hallmarks of this successful intervention. Some key recommendations for similar projects include:

- This programme review process is transferrable to other strategic projects locally and internationally
- Consideration needs to be given to the balance between the long-term impacts of a more strategic approach versus the achievement of immediate module-level changes. Ultimately the balance will be driven by local priorities and context.
- Further research on the curriculum mapping tool needs to be carried-out and disseminated.

References


“How will we be examined?”
Aligning learning outcomes and assessment criteria for thesis courses in physiotherapy at bachelor and master’s level

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ABSTRACT
Students only learn what they think they will be assessed on, and not what is in the curriculum. In curriculum development work, we addressed how to achieve a more explicit constructive alignment in thesis courses for optimising students’ learning at both bachelor- and master level in physiotherapy. A project group (re)formulated, compared, and contrasted assessment criteria. Both students involved in writing theses and teachers supervising and examining the theses were involved in the implementation. The project was evaluated through interviewing students, supervisors, and examiners in focus groups. The results highlighted the importance of validating the level of assessment criteria with other programmes’ criteria and between bachelor- and master level to ensure criteria are explicit and that students know what is expected of them.

INTRODUCTION
Aligning learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment criteria to curriculum objectives is proposed to be a system for high-level learning and quality of outcome. However, students only study and learn what they think, or know, they will be assessed on, not what is actually stated in the curriculum (Biggs, 1996). From experience, one of the first question students raise during the introduced to a new course is “How will we be examined and on what parts will we be examined”?
Students have, or should have, a reason to believe teachers will measure what is essential. The resentment that students focus on what is anticipated in the examination rather than focussing on learning outcomes can be taken advantage of by making expected course outcomes explicit through concrete assessment criteria. Thus, the students’ results will reveal if they have achieved the course objectives or not.

Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, presents guidelines for educational activity and development in the programme “Teaching and learning at Uppsala University”. The guidelines are intended to be an active form of support for the heads of different programmes and for individual teachers and students. The guidelines emphasise how the responsibility for quality in teaching and education must be taken at several levels, such as the structural and supporting level, and as part of day-to-day activities. Quality in teaching is the shared responsibility of both teachers and students, and students responsibility has been given the same prominence as teachers’ responsibility in these guidelines (University, 2008).

Thus, in order to optimise their study results, in all courses students have the right to be informed of the conditions for learning, the expected outcome in relation to assessment criteria, and how theses are linked to the examination.

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria
Learning outcomes in higher education curricula are often global in character. Thus, they are often perceived as unclear, and sometimes ambiguous, and of little assistance to student’s understanding of what is expected in examinations.

The assessment criteria state what students are required to do and how well they are expected to achieve the desired learning outcomes. The use of assessment criteria is important for all students, and especially students who are nervous before an examination (Ramsden, 2002), and are valuable for students unaccustomed to studying at a higher level. Clear assessment criteria make it easier to communicate the result of an examination and facilitate and guide supervision and examination of, for example, a bachelor or master level thesis (Elmgren and Henriksson, 2010).

The link between learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment criteria may appear obvious, but it is still not characteristic in higher education. The term “constructed alignment” was first presented by Biggs (Biggs and Tang, 2007). The term “constructive” is used to clarify the constructive part of the process, that is students construct their learning, and by that their knowledge. The word “alignment” is used to clarify the direct relationship between learning outcomes, learning activities, and examination.

**Bachelor level thesis in physiotherapy at Uppsala University**

The physiotherapy programme consists of six semesters i.e. three years. The teaching of scientific methodology starts in the first semester, with reading and reviewing scientific articles in physiotherapy, and finished at the end of the sixth semester, with a bachelor thesis corresponding to 15 credits. A project plan for the thesis is written and examined in the fifth semester. The project plan and the final thesis are written in student pairs: the reason for this is to encourage peer learning. Thus, the students are assessed twice in the thesis courses, first on the project plan, and then, on the final thesis.

The bachelor theses are mainly supervised by teachers with a master degree in physiotherapy. At Uppsala University (physiotherapy), approximately, 20 project plans and 20 bachelor theses are examined every semester and the pass rate is 100%. Senior lectures with a PhD degree examine the bachelor theses and the students can either fail or pass these courses.

Although the process of aligning learning outcomes and assessment criteria for these courses at bachelor level has been initiated, it is unclear and incomplete, particularly in distinguishing the difference in expectation of outcomes for the master level thesis.

**Master level thesis in physiotherapy at Uppsala University**

Students writing a 15-credit master’s thesis at Uppsala University can either be physiotherapists with a bachelor degree finished up to 20 years ago or newly examined from the bachelor program. Courses in scientific methodology and specialisation in physiotherapy corresponding to 45 credits are required before of writing the master thesis and it is the same for all applicants. Before a thesis at master level can be started, a project plan is examined and the students can either fail or pass this course.

Master theses are supervised and examined by teachers with a PhD, and about 10 project plans and 10 master theses are examined every year in Uppsala (physiotherapy). However, the alignment between learning outcomes and assessment criteria for both the project plans and thesis at the master level has not been fully developed.

The aim of steadily increasing the expectations and results of both bachelor and masters level theses raised the question among both the directors and teachers of how well the assessment criteria mirrored the difference between outcome expectations between the bachelor and a master thesis. This in turn raised the question of whether the bachelor thesis was almost a master level thesis. Several times, we asked ourselves whether the
expectations at bachelor level are being escalated steadily and unreflectively. As a result, we addressed how explicit constructive alignment in the thesis courses could be achieved for optimising students’ learning at both bachelor- and master level in physiotherapy, while maintaining a reasonable and valid difference between the two levels. The overall aim was to set up a learning environment on the program that supported students’ learning and their ability to achieve the desired learning outcome in relation to writing a scientific thesis, while simultaneously supporting and guiding supervisors and examiners.

Furthermore, students raised the question of the need for “fair” assessment of their theses, particularly at bachelor level. Course evaluations revealed students felt the theses were examined differently and the results of the examinations were dependent on the examiners own opinion. In addition, there were consistent requests from students, supervisors and, examiners for clearer guidelines in the thesis courses of the alignment between learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Assessment criteria would maintain a standard of high and consistent quality throughout the theses, as they clarify the outcome expectations for students, supervisors, and examiners. Therefore, we hypothesised clear assessment criteria in alignment with learning outcomes for theses courses at both bachelor and master levels would facilitate thesis supervision for students, supervisors and, examiners.

The overall aim of the curriculum development project was to enhance students’ learning of how to write a thesis, critically review thesis work at both bachelor and master levels, and to ensure equal examination of the final theses. The aim was to enable students, supervisors and examiners to be able to distinguish the difference between expectations for theses at bachelor and master levels and to guide students their work. Hence, a more specific aim was to formulate, implement, and evaluate the assessment criteria for bachelor and master level theses in order to clarify the expected outcomes and requirements.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The curriculum development project was a continuous process planned and carried-out between January 2011 and February 2013. The project group consisted of four senior lecturers in physiotherapy. The composition of the project group reflected aspects and requirements relevant to the respective level being represented, and included supervisors, examiners, and master students. Unfortunately, no student at bachelor level chose to participate in the project.

Process
The project included four overlapping steps and was continuous.

Step 1: Formulating assessment criteria
The first step included the revision of unclear assessment criteria by course coordinators at both bachelor and master levels, who in turn suggested new assessment criteria. Then the project group formulated assessment criteria in each thesis course in relation to the learning outcomes at the respective level. The formulation of criteria was guided by the objectives of the SOLO taxonomy, which is a hierarchy of verbs for aligning teaching, learning activities, and assessment, and included verbs as describe, explain, analyse, relate and reflect. The assessment criteria suggested were then discussed with the supervisors and examiners and tested in the respective courses. In order to enhance validity and a progression in the learning outcomes between bachelor and master level theses, the assessment criteria were discussed and contrasted among teachers in our own department. The assessment criteria for “students critical reviewing” of another thesis were also formulated during step 1, with the aim of supporting the students’ ability to systematically
analyse each others’ project plan and thesis. These criteria were formulated to emphasise both the scientific and communicative aspects of the learning outcomes.

**Step 2a: Reformulating and implementing new assessment criteria**

The second step in the process included a seminar with the teachers in Nursing at the Department of Public Health and Caring Sciences at Uppsala University. This seminar was considered worthwhile because two similar caring programs, within the same medical faculty, would have a common level of assessment criteria, although not necessarily identically worded. The seminar aimed to exchange, evaluate, and discuss each department’s theses and to discuss the validity and progression in learning outcomes between bachelor and master level theses. The seminar resulted in explicit formulation of assessment criteria and expected outcomes for achieving, consistency in the assessment criteria across programs and clearer distinction between bachelor and master level theses at both programs.

After discussion with colleagues at the Department of Public Health and Caring Sciences and comments from students, supervisors and examiners in our own department, the criteria were reformulated and shortened.

**Step 2b: Implementation and further validation**

This step included two seminars with supervisors and examiners at master level from the Section of Physiotherapy, Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. The first seminar included comparison and discussion of the reformulated criteria and a comparison of the different levels of the theses: a bachelor thesis was compared with a master level thesis. After this seminar, the master level criteria were again reformulated, and later tested in the master level course at Uppsala University. A future step would include exchanging master level theses between Uppsala University and Karolinska University for validating equal assessment criteria at master level in the respective program.

**Step 3: Evaluation**

The curriculum development was evaluated through three focus group interviews with students, supervisors, and examiners on both bachelor and on master courses to explore experiences with the new assessment criteria. Each group represented both bachelor and master level.

A specific interview guide for the focus groups was created and covered areas such as experience, knowledge, use, and understanding of the assessment criteria. Follow-up questions explored individual answers. An example of a question to the supervisors was “Tell me about a situation when you think it worked well with the assessment criteria and a situation when you think it did not worked well with the assessment criteria in a supervising situation”.

One moderator stimulated an informal discussion between the participants and ensured that sessions progressed smoothly, and that all topics were covered. The discussions in the focus groups were tape recorded and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were transcribed externally.

**Analysis**

The process of analysis followed modified guidelines for qualitative content analysis according to Graneheim and Lundman (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). The interviews were read several times by the project group to become familiarised with the material. The participants’ experiences of the assessment criteria were extracted and combined into one text, which constituted the unit of analysis. The text was divided into meaning units and than condensed to sub-categories, which constituted the manifest content. Finally, the underlying meaning, the latent content of the categories (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004), was identified. The analysis of the transcribed data was in Swedish, which was translated into English at the time of submission of this paper.
RESULTS

The four steps in the curriculum development project gradually generated an explicit formulation of the assessment criteria in relation to expected outcomes, which were formulated in the learning outcomes of the courses. An example of an assessment criterion at bachelor level for the introduction of the thesis:

“Introduction with logical structure; description of problem area, definitions of key terms, relevant literature review, problem statement, limitation of aim, distinct questions based on aim”.

This is to be compared with the corresponding assessment criteria on master level:

“Introduction with logical structure; description of problem area, definition of key terms, thorough literature review clearly linked to theory and/or empirics, clear problem statement based on identified knowledge gap, limitation of aim, distinct questions based on aim”.

The difference between the two levels was that master level students were required to perform a thorough review of references, including critical evaluation, and present an obvious link to theory and/or empirics.

Another outcome of this project was the results from the focus groups interviews. For the purpose of this paper, only the main results are presented as categories and sub-categories (Appendix 1).

One category formulated from the discussion with bachelor and master level students was “Control” which indicated the assessment criteria served as guidelines for control i.e. the mandatory parts of the thesis were included in the thesis before the actual examination seminar. The assessment criteria provided a sense of support and security for the students as they felt they were on the “right track” i.e. a determination of level of their thesis.

However, the students claimed the assessment criteria could not stand alone, highlighted in the category “Operationalisation needed” meaning elaborated, information and description in the course manual/study guide was necessary to complement the criteria e.g. how to write the design and result section. The category “Consensus”, which also emerged from the student group, indicated a request for more consistency between the examiners and between the supervisors and examiners. According to the students, assessment criteria could improve this consistency.

Finally, another suggestion from the students summarised in the “Push and remind” category, implied both teachers and supervisors should regularly emphasise the use of the assessment criteria during the work with the thesis.

A central answer from the supervisors, compiled in the category “Authority”, was that the assessment criteria provided a feeling of support in their role as supervisors i.e. they felt they had authority when supervising the students, and were supported in the determination of level of the thesis. For instance, a supervisor’ demands were not their own personal demands, but the demands were the same for all students. The assessment criteria provided security and control, brought together in the category “Control”, meaning the thesis being supervised would pass the examination. The assessment criteria helped the supervisors to perform an activity-promoting form of supervision, which was summarised in the third category “Responsibility”, meaning they could pass more of the responsibility for the progress of the thesis to the students. The category “Room for interpretation” implied supervisors considered the assessment criteria created uncertainty, in that discretion sometimes left them with undefined variables and difficult decisions during the process of supervision. The supervisors requested continuous dialogue with the examiners.

The most experienced examiners used a combination of the assessment criteria and their tacit knowledge as a guide, which was compiled in the category “Internal compass”. However, the novice examiner more frequently used the assessment criteria as a checklist for control, resulting in the category labelled “Control”. Experienced examiners considered
the advantage of the assessment criteria was that the criteria provided a freedom for interpretation of the content in the theses, whereas, novice examiners felt insecure as examiners when presented with the possibility of individual interpretation: this is summerised in the recurrent category labelled “Room for interpretation”. The category “Quality” was highlighted as examiners discussed the need for calibrating the assessment criteria in a dialogue between examiners and between examiners and supervisors. The examiners considered the work with assessment criteria is a never-ending story!

DISCUSSION
Students, supervisors and examiners argued coherently that the assessment criteria gave a valuable feeling of control, security and "being on the right track". The students and the supervisors argued the criteria were more valuable when used in conjunction with more detailed information in the course manual. The examiners mainly combined assessment criteria with their tacit knowledge. However, when and how the criteria were used differed between the individual informants, between novice and expert supervisors and examiners, and between students at bachelor and master levels.

The results highlighted the importance of continuously reformulating and validating the level of the assessment criteria between the supervisors, between the supervisors and examiners, with students and with other programmes criteria. This, "never-ending process" is necessary to produce clear and explicit criteria for ensuring students know what is expected of them at each level, and for how the difference between the two levels is expressed and made visible in the assessment criteria. The assessment criteria of "how well the student can analyse and discuss another student's thesis" help students become systematically and analytically confident and able to communicate this.

During this curriculum development work, the quality of the theses at both levels increased. The students achieved increasing ability to formulate research questions and to review critically. There was also an increased consciousness among students, supervisors, and examiners about fulfilling the required learning outcomes. A combination of these outcomes may mirror the result of the Swedish Higher Education Authority from 2012, which judged the physiotherapy program at Uppsala University to have the highest quality of education (very high quality).

The curriculum development work implies several recommendations for future. For achieving a constant level of “very high quality” within the program for examining new physiotherapists ready to be consumers of research, and attracting students to be scientists, the joint interpretation of assessment criteria, though joint seminars is necessary. The students emphasised that both students and supervisors need to use the assessment criteria continuously throughout the thesis process. In addition, new examiners and supervisors require further support, which highlights the need for continuous internal education and dialogue between examiners and supervisors.

Table 1A, 1B and1C
All categories and sub-categories from the focus groups interviews with, students, supervisors, and examiners.

1A. Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Determination of level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operationalisation needed</td>
<td>Necessary to be combined with the course manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Feeling of consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push and remind</td>
<td>In teaching and supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1B. Supervisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Determination of level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Make sure the students pass examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consensus between examiners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Peer-learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility for their (students) own learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room for interpretation</td>
<td>Create uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Define variable concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dialogue with examiners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operationalisation needed</td>
<td>Necessary to be combined with the course manual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1C. Examiners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal compass</td>
<td>Together with tacit knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Determination of level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room for interpretation</td>
<td>Overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Dialogue between examiners and between supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calibration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process evaluation needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never-ending!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES


The curriculum challenge in business schools, post GFC: What, and who really matters?

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ABSTRACT:
In late 2008, just after the onset of the Global Financial Crisis, a large Australian business school embarked on a curriculum renewal process. I was a member of the panel, and the project became the site of my PhD study. My research showed that discourses relating to managerial, business/competitive and global issues are highly evident. What is far less evident is a discussion of the student as a learner, a particular issue with trends in technology creating a new “species” of student – a “singularity” of human and machine. The paper attempts to demonstrate that higher education curriculum change includes a layered set of discursive practices, and that the topics of these discursive practices are as likely to be the organisation, as about the student experience of curriculum. Challenges and opportunities related to researching the practice of curriculum renewal are raised.

1. Introduction

This paper covers a subset of findings of a PhD study on the practice of business curriculum change – findings which are intended to be of immediate relevance to curriculum practitioners at this conference. The paper includes a brief literature review, and describes the methodology. The discussion highlights the dominance of certain discourses, and the limited presence of others, which might be expected to be dominant. The paper ventures into theorizing of higher education curriculum change, aims to raise questions about the nature of the practice, and to suggest new areas of focus. Although the study was undertaken within a business school, the findings have relevance to higher education curriculum practitioners in general. At this point I would like to acknowledge the commitment of all those involved in the whole curriculum project, and my research, even though their contribution may not be specifically referred to in this paper.

2. Background and literature review

In late 2008, a large business school within an Australian City University embarked on a curriculum renewal process for the main undergraduate business degree. This occurred just a few months after the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the beginning of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Prior to the GFC there had been criticism of business/management education, but much of this discussion was considered marginal, Ghoshal, (2005), Pfeffer (2005), Clegg and Ross-Smith (2003), as business schools were generally highly successful in a booming global economy.

With the onset of the Global Financial Crisis, critiques of business education moved from fringe to mainstream. The media critique began to spread beyond the behaviour of individuals and institutions, and to include the nature of business, financial and economic knowledge, and theory itself. Lord Turner (2009) in the inquiry into the UK Banking Sector noted that financial sector staff were not equipped to understand the complexity of the system. Alan Greenspan - leading free-market economist, ex-Chairman of the US Federal
Reserve, was forced to admit “I was partially wrong”. The review panel was faced with the challenge of renewing curriculum, to respond to the demands of a post GFC global economic environment. These demands appeared primarily in media, and from managers of business schools, who, while critical of the current status of business and management education, provided little practical advice on what should be done, and how this might be achieved.

2.1 Curriculum and curriculum theory in higher education

While my primary role in this project was as an academic developer, in my parallel role as a researcher, the problematic nature of the term “curriculum” soon became evident. A useful starting point in this area was Fraser and Bosanquet’s (2006) The authors suggest that in all communications on “curriculum” we should consider that the various conceptions of curriculum are rich in tacit epistemological underpinnings that neither the user of the term, or the reader/listener, may be aware of.

UK curriculum theorists, Barnett and Coate (2006) note the lack of writing on higher education curriculum, and even note the absence of the word within government reports. They express the concern the result of limited understandings of curriculum amongst higher education academics is leading to a “curriculum by stealth” - that curriculum is being transformed, but in a way which is not inviting broad-ranging dialogue. Some parallels may be drawn with the Australian context. One of the most recent and influential policy documents on learning and teaching in Australian higher education, the Bradley report, (2008), uses the word ‘curriculum’ 6 times in 304 pages, but it is not defined or explained, and is used in the form, “xxx (a new thing) should be included in the curriculum”, suggesting a content emphasis.

Curriculum theory is however well developed within the education discipline and particularly, in the schools sector. These theoretical perspectives have relevance to the higher education sector, even if not particularly evident in higher education literature. Pinar (1999) refers to curriculum as a ‘site of struggle’. Although this concept did not originate within the higher education curriculum sector, this description of curriculum provides a richness of the social context in which curriculum is created and shaped, and has relevance to my proposed study.

“So understood, curriculum becomes intensely historical, political, racial, gendered, phenomenological, postmodern, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological, and international. When we say that curriculum is a site on which the generations struggle to define themselves and the world, we are engaged in a theoretically enriched practice. When we say that curriculum is an extraordinarily complicated conversation, we are underscoring human agency and the volitioal character of human action” (Pinar, 1999).

The documented curriculum in the higher education tends to be developed at a more localised level than schools based curriculum. In Australian Higher Education, there is little requirement for students to undertake standardised diagnostic tests, nor is there a requirement to complete standardised final year exams. Even in business education, where there are requirements to conform to external professional accreditation requirements, it appears that individual academics and faculties have a great deal of autonomy in content and delivery. Furthermore, teaching is generally only one aspect of an academic workload, and contends with research, community service, and other activities in the determination of local and personal priorities. Pinar refers to the contestation between curriculum imposed by an external bureaucracy, and the autonomy of academics, as a major issue within curriculum studies. The issue of agency in higher education teaching and learning innovation has also been raised by Paul Ashwin (2009) as an area which is worthy of further exploration.
2.3 Higher education curriculum change

Although, my work may offer insights into the nature of higher education curriculum, it is primarily focused on the practice of curriculum change. From my experience, and my reading, academics who are or who have been engaged in large-scale curriculum renewal view the process as difficult. Bamber et al (2009) and Ramsden (2006) review a number of examples of curriculum change, sometimes called teaching innovations or enhancements - some of which are successful, some unsuccessful. In analysing the reasons for the success or otherwise of the change, the authors and contributors tend to evaluate the change after the innovation has been implemented. I have found that within higher education research, there appears to be little published work which investigates the practice of the creation of a higher education curriculum innovation. The current status of higher education curriculum research suggests that there is a great deal of space for exploration, and also the potential to develop descriptions, and conceptions of higher education curriculum from research originating within the higher education sector.

3. Methodology

This study was undertaken at the Australian city university, where I am employed as an academic developer. In my work, I was engaged in this curriculum renewal project as part of the undergraduate review panel. My role as a researcher was both as participant-observer, and insider-outsider – insider to the institution and the academic field, but outsider to the business school. Although there are legitimate concerns about researching one’s own workplace, my insider understandings allowed me to follow connections through the organization, both relational and documentary. This project ran for more than two years, from inception until the first iteration of the new program structure. While the site offered access and the potential for in-depth insights into the process of large-scale curriculum change, it appeared to provide the potential for broader generalization of its findings.

The site of the case study may be considered as a representative case of a large Australian business school. First year, main intake, cohort sizes are around 1,500, and, as is the case in many other business schools in Australia, there are a large number of international students. It is generally recognized that business and management education tends to be influenced by trends originating in the leading international business schools, and is therefore global in nature. The school had demonstrated its international level of quality through its international business school accreditation.

At the beginning of the study, there could be no guarantee that the curriculum renewal would be successful, however, the renewal process was supported by two deans, both of whom expressed a desire for an innovative outcome. The project was supported with administrative personnel, and led by experienced academic staff who understood university administrative practices and priorities, and also the interests of many of the staff from the business school. The process was likely to provide valuable data for my original research question: “How are social, historical, policy, academic and disciplinary discourses incorporated within the process of documenting curriculum?”

Since the completion of the curriculum review, there have been objective external assessments made about quality processes in the school suggesting that the processes would be considered exemplary practice and some curriculum practices have been recognized as highly innovative by the university and industry. When generalizing findings from the study, the case could be considered a ‘critical case’. If there are good practices occurring in this case, yet some practices are not occurring, then perhaps they are not occurring in other similar cases as well. In this paper, I will be suggesting that the discourses
which are less evident, also have significant relevance to business education, and the higher education sector as a whole.

My data included many texts, included collaboratively produced documents, and interview transcripts. This documentation produced was accumulated into an 800 page document which was presented to the Business School Faculty Board for approval. This document was viewed as a text and analysed to determine the various discourses which were evident in the process, and as this was produced by a large number of different people, is data which is to some extent distanced from my subjectivity. At the completion of the project, I also undertook 9 interviews with staff who were involved in the project – members of the core undergraduate review panel, senior school management, and senior institutional management, all of who had influence on the project. Based on “the assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life” (Fairclough, 2005) the texts were analysed using various forms of discourse analysis after Fairclough and others.

4. Findings and Questions

4.1 Remarkable... A successful curriculum renewal project in an already successful business school

The project was considered successful, albeit in different ways by the various stakeholders. From an objective perspective, comparison of the old and new versions of the degree shows that changes were made both in the structure of the course, and in the content and assessment processes of individual subjects. New assurance of learning processes were implemented, and were recognized as excellent practice by an international business school accreditation agency. A radical new transdisciplinary flagship subject was created, and this has been recognized as innovative by industry and in formal institutional recognition processes.

What is remarkable about these changes is the context in which they were made. Published cases of successful curriculum change often refer to a crisis-driven change, for example a lack of viability, or unacceptable quality Bamber et al (2009), Ramsden (2006). Yet, this was a normal five-yearly scheduled curriculum review.

This school was not in an immediate crisis. It was recognized for its practice-oriented offerings, and the undergraduate business degree attracted large domestic and international enrolments. Although most countries were affected by the GFC, Australia’s economy, and its higher education sector, remained relatively healthy in global terms.

A significant discourse of stasis permeated discussions and documents with the theme actually stated in interview texts “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Even the need to respond to the issue of the potential failure of business and management education, post GFC, was contested. One manager commented on the challenges faced: “I mean, when you have a very successful product and business is going well, … and everyone knows that products have life cycles and there should be a refresh and renewal, it’s very difficult to get people to engage with thinking completely differently about curriculum renewal.”

Reputational and financial risks of curriculum change

Within the texts there was a strong discourse of the reputational and financial risks of

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6 The discursive construction of “success” warrants a full discussion on its own, and will be dealt with in a separate paper.
change. Business School enrolment income was not only important to the school itself, it was important to the institution as a whole, and specifically, to senior university management. Although the data is confidential, it is well known at the institutional level that Business contributes significantly to the university’s enrolment income, from both domestic and international markets. In Australia, and more broadly, the contribution of business enrolments to university income is significant. While there is strong domestic demand, within the period of the renewal, there was also strong international demand related to the possibility of obtaining a Permanent Residency visa with a Business Degree. A project leader commented: “This is such a big program and brings in so much money, there was always that pressure on making sure it doesn’t mess up.”

4.2 Drivers of the “new” – Layers of interconnected practices

Within the strong discursive context of stasis, where were the drivers of the “new”? Analysis of the texts suggested that the drivers of change existed at many layers of academic practice. Although my study initially focused primarily on the core project team and their activities, there were a number of references within the texts to influences outside the team. Where there were many references, from different texts, I explored these further, using my insider knowledge to follow a trail of connections. This led to a layered approach to interviews, and investigation of related texts produced at these three layers - the immediate project team, business school management, and university management. In addition, policy documents and reports on the Australian Higher Education sector were referred to.

The following example demonstrates the interconnectedness of these layers.

Although the school, and the university, were at that time in a healthy financial position, partly through good financial management and luck, management communications revealed concerns with uncertainty within the sector, volatility in the government funding of higher education, possible changes to funding relating to university performance against defined targets, and the potential of lower international student demand due to the GFC. Research shows that international student enrolment income subsidises many activities within the university sector, (Bradley, 2008).

At the University level, a new research-informed strategic plan covering the period 2009-2018 was developed and published. This included the statement relating to teaching and learning priorities: “Our competitive advantage is in the excellence of our teaching and relevance of our courses, our reputation for producing highly employable graduates, and our leadership in industry.” In alignment with the strategic plan, performance objectives and financial resources were allocated.

At the project team layer, when participants were asked how they thought change had happened, many of the participants referred to a series of off-site residential retreats, which were attended by the project team and many faculty academics. These retreats provided space - physical space, time space, and an intellectual space – for the exploration of ideal and innovative approaches to curriculum, and it is through these retreats that in an open, creative, dialogic process, the radical transdisciplinary subject, and a more integrated approach to the program were collaboratively envisioned and planned. I attended these retreats, and the outcomes of these form part of the renewal document.

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2. A multi-million dollar investment had been transferred from the sharemarket to an interest bearing bank account, to fund a major capital works program just before the onset of the GFC.
Tensions between academic autonomy and unnoticed challenges

The funding for these retreats was over $50,000, and was made available through a competitive grant scheme which was the responsibility of two senior institutional managers. One of these managers participated in an interview which shed light on the managerial influence on curriculum change. The manager referred to "sustainability" of change and, based on literature and experience, the difficulty in sustaining the change when the innovation was undertaken by individual academics. In order to embed sustainable change, curriculum renewal was aligned with the strategic plan, and large course-based grants were made available. In this interview the manager also acknowledged tensions between academic autonomy and demonstrated the need for the leadership of strategic change in response to trends and challenges which may be unnoticed by individual academics.

Another senior manager commented on the tensions between academic autonomy and management objectives: "unilateral decisions are very rarely taken. Decisions are part of a broader consultation which always takes longer but the effect is that people buy into the result. Nothing is more important in a university where you can't actually proceed by instruction. It's not like any other organisation in society. If you proceed by way of instruction, you will come a cropper, as many deans and vice chancellors (in other institutions) have over the years."

This example demonstrates the interconnectness of the layers of practice as noted by Gherardi (2006 p47). “a field of practices arises in the interwoven texture that connect practices to each other, and that the texture is held together by a certain number of practices which provide anchorage for others.” Academics within the project team applied for the grant, with a proposal to use the funding in a way which they felt would be effective within the school. They were not obliged to apply and may have been unsuccessful. In this case, a strategic managerial initiative in one layer was transformed discursively through the interconnecting practices of teaching and learning grant funding into an act of creativity in another layer, underpinned by academic autonomy. After project completion, the team was recognized in the institutional teaching and learning awards process, managed by the same manager who had responsibility for the grant funding.

Importantly, in this study, these interconnections exist, and are recognized and developed by specific participants in the practice, but may also be unrecognized by others. Some academics were not aware that the funding for the retreats was sourced from an institutional budget, rather than the school budget. Even fewer would be aware that recognition of the value of the work on the project resulted in permanent changes to the document the awards guidelines to specifically include contributions to curriculum renewal, in addition to contributions to teaching and learning.

It is also possible to consider the practice of curriculum renewal as relating explicitly to Bourdieu's representation of action within the social space or field, in this case the academic field. The action of grant application may be seen as a practical reaction within the academic field, with the potential to assist in the accumulation of academic capital.

“It (The social space) is a relatively stable site of the coexistence of points of view, in the dual sense of positions in the distribution of capital (economic, information, social, etc.) and of the corresponding powers, but also of practical reactions to and representations of that space, produced from these points through habitus that are structured, and double informed, but the structure of the space and by the structures of the schemes of perception that are applied to it. (Bourdieu, 2000 p183).

At other layers, the interconnections are more explicit. Business School managers allocated funds to resource the project, agreed on documented terms of reference which specifically recognised the potential for stasis within the faculty, and indicated that the panel would be supported to go further than small changes to subject content and delivery. - "The review is
not to be constrained by the way in which funds are currently allocated to deliver programs” (Internal Review Document, p21).

At the project team layer, academics and general staff worked in formal and informal settings, over 18 months. At various points in the process, the project was reviewed by Business School managers, and there were opportunities for consultation with academic staff, and other stakeholders. The renewed curriculum included research informed pedagogical and assessment approaches, competitive analysis, consultation process reports. The proposal was presented to the Business School Board and approved, almost without discussion, as staff had had many consultation opportunities earlier.

In interviews after the document approval, comments on the intention for significant structural/curriculum change, and an understanding of the structural barriers to change was demonstrated in these quotes from two different managers. “We wanted to - my role, I think, was to make sure that it just wasn't a tweaking of existing curriculum and to facilitate discussions around a whole of program review versus a silo, discipline-based review.” (Manager 1) and “It may be that student numbers will change a little bit from one discipline area to another, and we do have to take account of that in resource allocation. But the point is to make decisions on a pedagogical basis - not on whether you're advantaged or disadvantaged by resource allocation” (Manager 2). In short, the contribution at every institutional layer “mattered” in the success of the project.

4.3 International Accreditation – An internalised external layer

The school was accredited by an international business school accreditation association. It was, and is now, widely agreed amongst the business faculty members, that maintaining this accreditation enhances the reputation of the school, and this is in turn important for marketing purposes, and attracting enrolments from both domestic and international markets. Within the course curriculum, accreditation compliance required structural and micro-level changes - the mapping of graduate attributes, learning goals, and learning objectives into specific assessment items, in specific subjects so that student performance against the defined goals and objectives could be demonstrated. Discursive practices related to accreditation played a strong role in embedding change, as represented in subject descriptions, assessment type and requirements, and reporting processes.

4.4 Did the Global Financial Crisis Matter?

It might be expected that at this time, the GFC and discourses around the “evils of business and management education” would result in an instant desire for business academics to change the curriculum. One participant commented that he had attended an international meeting of Business School leaders who were making statements such as “Marx was right, it’s the collapse of capitalism”. However, an immediate school-based movement to change the curriculum was not what occurred. Even after the new curriculum had been approved, the nature of the GFC and the culpability of business education was contested. During this time, Australia’s economy had remained one of the strongest economies in the world. It was in the middle of a resources-led boom, had high levels of employment, and government policy had ensured that the country did not fall into recession. On an everyday basis, the GFC was not obvious.

Researcher: Anything about the global financial crisis or anything? Do you think that had any impact or not?

8 For brevity, this paper cannot include the details of the project team’s activities, and this will be covered in a collaborative paper.
Participant: Not that I'm aware of.

However, although the GFC itself might not have acted as a rallying call for change in curriculum and teaching practice amongst the faculty as a whole, the renewal project addressed and incorporated ideas and actions arising from the critiques of business practice and education. The GFC inspired members of the project team to review business education literature, and the few reports that became available about the GFC. Within popular media, there was a call for teaching ethics in business schools. International accreditation agencies foregrounded the need for incorporating ethics into curriculum. Reports of unemployed Harvard MBA’s suggested that the Harvard influenced management degree may not be producing the type of graduates needed for the future. One participant in the Project team described the GFC “An excuse to try and drive a change”. Another stated: “That was the driver for change, I guess, more in terms of the ethics and doing things differently, thinking smarter, being multidisciplinary, not just being narrowly focused”

In effect, it appears that critical GFC discourses worked to provide a basis for conversation and creative approaches to change, without a need to agree that the “evils of business education” caused the GFC.

4.5 Money matters

It is unsurprising – especially for a business school - that there is a significant financial discourse throughout all the texts. Hours of competitive analysis, and analysis of the admissions data resulted in more than 20 pages of the final document. However, within the school itself, an underpinning financial discourse was evident in many subtle ways.

Students as consumers of the education product, and skilled graduate employees

Students are represented in the texts in many different forms. Various words refer to the students, - “students”, “graduates”. and in some cases students are constructed as potential consumer of the business school’s product, “enrolments”, “course demand”. Often this is implied, rather than stated, with proxies used to denote this meaning. Students are referred to as the object of education, “provide graduates with a broad knowledge of the business disciplines and their interconnectedness”, and with the technical skills required for their chosen profession.” Employability was a dominant discourse:

Academics noted that income for the whole program was important, and within the reports of the consultancy/review processes, academics and academic leaders responded with input on the financial implications for the school’s various discipline groups, and possible impacts on staffing and research endeavours. A senior manager summed up these dual considerations supporting the finding that business school curriculum in this case is as much about the organization as it is about the student experience: “this is about what will be best for the students and for the business school as a whole.”

5. Where is the student with two, or two billion, brains, the bionic student, the borderless student?

The emphasis in this paper has been on the discourses which were evident in the data. While current students were represented within the data, and curriculum changes were made incorporating outcomes from recent higher education research on teaching, learning, and assessment, there was little evidence of a conception of future students. Some students who will complete the new degree are in their early teenage years, have never known a world without internet, and have been babysat by iPads. Many current secondary school children may already have global connections maintained through social media such as
Facebook. Potential students have access to all the published knowledge of the world, and to some extent are even unlimited by foreign languages through the availability of free online translators – imperfect now, but not for long. Voice-to-text and text to voice is available either for no charge, or very cheaply, through phones and other mobile devices. The trends in technology have created a new “species” of student – a “singularity” of human and machine. (Silva) or the potential “bionic” student. Recently, After attending a talk by futurist Jason Silva, a sixteen year old family friend asked, “So if we are already the singularity, why can’t we take our computers and iPads into our exams?” Why not, indeed…

Madeleine Grumet (1988) provides this apparently straightforward definition of curriculum- “Curriculum is what the older generation chooses to tell the younger generation.” Here, the generational nature of curriculum is foregrounded, and the values laden nature of the definition is evident. When we consider curriculum in 2013, and into the future, the validity and authority of knowledge and its modes of transmission, (Bernstein 1975) may need to be called into question. In 1978, Apple (1978) noted that the focus on curriculum has been on the “measures of the acquisition of information, propensities, skills, and dispositions and the effect of such acquisition on later life”. He suggests that in questions of curriculum the focus should be on “the prior set of questions to those usually asked about school success and failure… Whose knowledge is it? Why is it being taught to this particular group, in this particular way?” Although we are now in a technological world which most would not have envisioned at that time, the same question remain. It is also likely that the full and future impact of the availability, affordability, and ubiquity of these new technologies is unnoticed by many academics. In the US, moves to force academics to “conform” to new modes of education such as MOOCs are meeting with resistance. This study suggests that changes to higher education curriculum which incorporate new technologies and new modes of knowledge and transmission will require very complex approaches to change within all layers of the institution – and externally.

6. Conclusion and Implications

6.1 Curriculum as layers of practice

My study demonstrates that in this case higher education curriculum renewal is indeed a “extraordinarily complicated conversation” and that “human agency and the volitional character of human action” (Pinar, 1999) are critical considerations in Higher Education. This study also demonstrates the layered nature of the discursive practices at many managerial and operation levels of the institution, and that the discursive connections between the layers, may sometimes be obvious, and sometimes non-obvious. Importantly, in this case the practices appeared to influence the social spaces in which the academics worked, and created a discursive practice where “practical reactions” of the staff involved contributed to a successful curriculum renewal process. When presented with the difficult and we could even say “wicked” problem of curriculum innovation, smart people, when provided with the necessary resources and required spaces in time and space to explore – will innovate.

6.2 The process of researching curriculum practice matters...

Clearly, both the concept of higher education curriculum, and the practice of higher education curriculum are laden with complexities. This study, and the work of others, suggests that these complexities are worthy of further exploration from both the research and practice perspective. My own analysis, and reflection on my own practice, has enabled me to contribute more effectively to curriculum change in my everyday academic practice, to challenge orthodoxies and to feel confident to introduce new discourses into the process, – for example new conceptions of young learners, as “bionic”. The process of curriculum renewal tends to generate significant documentation which may lend itself to discourse
analysis approaches. Various theories of practice such as those of Gherardi and Bourdieu may be useful starting points.

While PhD study is a special case, and imposes requirements for approaches which are both feasible and ethical for an individual researcher, the often collaborative nature of curriculum renewal creates many opportunities for collaborative, and possibly more extensive research with larger datasets. As curriculum renewal practice is imbued with contestation and tensions between various discursive practices, I suggest that the possibility of researching the practice is best raised at the outset of the project with the project team, participant review processes agreed, and ethics approval obtained. The data that is produced through the process is likely to provide insights, which would not be evident from an evaluative analysis undertaken after the project.

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Abstract
The widening participation (WP) policy agenda has raised questions about pedagogies in higher education (HE) and the ways they might be further developed to address issues of inclusion, participation and diversity. Enhancement activity also calls for certain types of engagement which may exclude some students or be based on assumptions about the student experience. There have been calls for nuanced research that draws out the complexities of learner identities and pedagogical experiences (Burke and Jackson, 2007; Leathwood and Read, 2009). In addition bodies such as the National Union of Students (NUS) have called for more support for academic staff to review and develop inclusive practice and for students to better understand HE pedagogic relations (HEA /Guardian Debate 2012).

Introduction
The Higher Education Academy funded NTFS research project ‘Formations of Gender and Higher Education Pedagogies (GaP) took place at ‘Riverside University’ 2010-2012. Its aim was to develop a detailed understanding of the relationship between social identities, and pedagogical practices and experiences. Another was to extend the focus of educational development to consider teaching and learning identities, relations, contexts and positions.

Participatory methodology (Burke 2009) was at the heart of the GaP Project. This comprised, amongst other methods, 64 in-depth individual undergraduate student interviews across six programmes; 10 student focus groups; 15 focus groups with the academic staff who taught these students; workshops with invited students from a range of higher education institutions and a national workshop with academic staff. This methodology ensured very rich data on the University experience, from both staff and student perspectives. The data was used further to generate discussion and reflection amongst staff about inclusive pedagogic practice and the extent to which they are able to respond to the range of identities in the HE classroom. These discussions resulted in deep reflection on practice, were highly appreciated by staff and led some teams to reconsider their practice. Underlying assumptions about student engagement were particularly troubled. Most importantly this highlighted a disjuncture between the pedagogic intentions of staff and the ways in which the learning environment was experienced by the students they were teaching. For example before hearing the student views many staff described students as passive and disengaged, somehow different from students ‘in the past’ who were more aware of what university required. Students however told us they were often bored and they were rarely invited to engage in meaningful discussions or raise issues and ideas a ways which felt ‘safe’. The research team, made up of academics and educational developers are exploring ways in which these kinds of conversations can become an integral part of solving teaching problems reframed as an intellectual active process that moves people beyond fixed identities, official discourse and subjective notions of ‘the academic role’. This conversational framework has echoes in Kandbinder’s (2007) term ‘deliberation’. He describes it as demanding a form of communication that is different from everyday conversations. Mann (2005) describes deliberation in relation to on line communities as ‘opening up possibilities
for expression, seeking understanding, making explicit norms and assumptions in order to question and configure them more appropriately, getting to know the other, checking out different experiences, needs and purposes, voicing different experiences, histories and positions and having these accounts heard.'

**Troubling ideas around engagement in the HE classroom**

The quotations from students have encouraged some academic staff to confront their conceptions of teaching and the kind of learning approaches which are privileged or assumed alongside the tacit knowledge believed to be common amongst the teaching team. Like Boaler and Greeno (2000) they came to consider the extent to which the learning environments they were creating, were determining the development of student identities as learners. Discussions arising from reflection on the student quotations helped illuminate underlying feelings about agency (Fanghanel 2007) and issues of power, room to manoeuvre, disciplinary traditions and surveillance.

Interestingly, some quotations seemed to provide what Meyer and Land (2003) have termed threshold concepts or troublesome knowledge in a more powerful way than other educational development strategies. A *threshold concept* can be seen as a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress. As a consequence of taking on a threshold concept there may thus be a transformed internal view of subject matter, subject landscape, or even world view. Examples of transformed interpretations which emerged through the project included those relating to silence in the seminar room, boredom during lectures, assessment methods and curricula.

*Troublesome knowledge* is explained as knowledge that is ‘alien’, or counter-intuitive or even intellectually absurd at face value. Examples of troublesome knowledge include those linked to power, fear and space in the classroom, opportunities to engage in a meaningful way, the kinds of learner identities which are assumed, privileged or marginalised by particular pedagogic practices, academic identities (or that part which dominates) and the consequences of mis-reading each other, the extent to which students are encouraged to determine pace of learning, content and assessment.

Participative methodology is by its very nature dialogic. Colleagues from across the institution trusted the research team with very personal reflections on aspects of their professional role and discussed issues openly and without reservation. It was therefore incumbent on us to ensure that data were not used in any way that could be undermining or threatening and that it was presented to other staff and to students in such a way as to remain meaningful, whilst respecting confidentiality and anonymity.

Equally, the students have raised many very interesting points, particularly for an educational development unit. In using the data as resource material and as a lever for change, we have had to be aware that data were collected as part of a specific research project, making wider use problematic. At the same time, the students have been very forthcoming and open in their observations and it is incumbent on us to show them that their views have been listened to and acted upon, thereby closing the feedback loop and demonstrating impact. Failure to do this, suggests that candid participation in such projects does not result in change.

Another important sensitivity is the extent to which colleagues welcome student views on the efficacy and suitability of the pedagogic practices they have experienced. Whilst acknowledging that students have significant and varied experiences of learning in different sectors and will doubtless have preferences with regards to the teaching style they most appreciate, many have come from educational regimes that are very different from those at
university. Whilst recognising the importance of the student voice, there is, therefore, the question of whether raw experience is a valid measure of the quality of learning and teaching. This raises the issue of meeting expectations, clarifying and explaining practices and embracing flexibility and difference.

A final ethical issue is that of imposing interpretations on the analysis of the data. An example of this is the notion of ‘students as consumers’: a lens regularly used by the academic staff in the project but rarely articulated by the students themselves. Relatively few students alluded overtly to the fact that they are funding their studies and positioned themselves as customer or consumer and yet this discourse did permeate focus groups with staff.

Practically, recruitment of the students initially seemed very straightforward: members of the GaP team explained the project to Year 2 students in teaching sessions and this engendered a significant level of interest. Establishing dates for interviews was, however, more problematic, especially as the term progressed and other, important aspects of university life were prioritised. Recruiting an even number of male and female students made this even more difficult, because of an under-recruitment of male students. Because of a shortfall in terms of numbers, students were recruited from the pool of student representatives. This was very effective, but meant that the sample became somewhat unrepresentative, including a high number of particularly engaged students. When drawing conclusions this has had to be borne in mind.

There was genuine interest amongst the academic colleagues taking part in the project and, more surprisingly still, in being observed whilst teaching. Taking part in a research project about pedagogic practice repositioned teaching concerns and challenges as intellectual work (Hutchings, 2002). Staff very much valued having the space and time in which to talk about teaching and their experiences of working with the students. Reflective dialogue was particularly rich in those sessions where academic staff were ‘troubled’ by powerful and insightful student quotes and conversations regularly centred around ‘how likely are students to say this about me or our course?’

**Troublesome student views**

| 1. | I’m picking my modules specifically because of the lecturers. It makes a massive difference. I’ve already decided what I am taking next year. The teaching of the lecturer is more important often than what the content is because a good lecturer can make a dull subject interesting. A bad lecturer can make an interesting subject dull. So it’s really important how they teach and whether you get on with them. |
| 2. | In the first year you were given so much help like borderline spoon-fed and in the second year they took it all away so you had no help, no support, nothing. You were just left to try and find…. anyone you could find to help you were like ‘oh thank God.’ The first year was like school and then to have it taken away when in really mattered, starting counting towards your degree was very hard. That was when I started thinking, ‘I don’t know what I am doing here anymore.’ |
| 3. | Some say they want discussion but they stand there ‘we are the lecturer’ and if you critique something you get a steely eyed stare and complete ‘no way’ and it’s almost too frightening. We can’t really say anything we feel and so there is just silence. Do they know it’s easier to learn if you are arguing from your own point of view rather than being read out somebody else’s ideas? |
| 4. | Sometimes the seminars are lecturey seminars so it’s like they do a lecture and then split the group up but it’s like they don’t have much time. She was like blah blah blah de blah and she had so much in her presentation and so many points and she was just basically reading them at us very fast and then not |
saying just adding more stuff on and it just goes completely over your head and you don't learn anything.

To conclude, the participatory methodology at the heart of the GaP Project enabled the sharing of students' and academics' views in a safe and supportive environment, allowing each group to examine the other's experiences of pedagogic practices in a dialogic context for which there is usually little opportunity. The use of direct quotations from the focus groups with academic staff and students provided a powerful means of facilitating dialogue and troubling long-held conceptions about pedagogic practices, enabling the research team to act as a 'context provider' rather than a 'content provider', creating reflexive space for the problematizing of pedagogic concepts. This form of professional development can be described as the creative orchestration of collaborative conversations (Burke et al, 2013) engendering a richness not usually found in the more usual staff development events.

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Researching under-represented groups: how to empower students through targeted learning development support

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ABSTRACT: The Scottish Government has tasked Higher Education Institutions with improving the recruitment, retention and progression of students who are classified as living within the lowest deprivation quintile according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Government, 2012). The Scottish Funding Council allocates ringfenced funding for this purpose and negotiates specific outcome agreements with each institution to measure and evaluate success. As an initiative funded in this way, the School of Health and Life Science’s Learning Development Centre (LDC) at Glasgow Caledonian University is required to support students from low participation postcodes.

The LDC provides enhancement-led, learning support to all students in the School through a blend of timetabled, in-programme teaching, workshops and one to one appointments. Support for, and monitoring of, those identified as belonging to the ‘multiple deprivations’ category (MD20s), however, is becoming an increasing priority. Whilst clearly a desirable aim in terms of social justice and widening participation, it is less obvious how best to target and measure support. The risks of stigmatising, alienating or even creating dependency amongst what is surely a heterogeneous group are manifold.

This paper will report on research conducted by the LDC members that attempted to better understand the diverse group of ‘MD20 students’ who attend, or potentially attend programmes within the School. The aim of the project was to provide an evidence-base on which further support activities could be built. Cognisant of the diversity of the group in question and the risk of labelling or categorising students, the project employed a narrative or biographical approach which aimed to capture and explore the individual life histories of students (Field, Merrill & West, 2012). In particular, it investigated the paths their lives had taken to lead them to study at university, how they felt about the MD20 focus and what kind of support, if any, would empower them to succeed in their studies. Alongside in-depth, qualitative exploration of the issues, academic performance and baseline demographic data were collected to gather as full a picture as possible of the group in question.

1. Introduction

As a result of the economic downturn, The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has taken an ‘outcomes based approach’ to funding post-compulsory education for the period 2012-2015 (SFC, 2012a). Eight outcomes have been identified including efficient and effective college structures, an internationally competitive research base and, most importantly for this project, ‘access for people from the widest possible range of backgrounds’. Each Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Scotland must, in negotiation with the SFC, outline how it will meet these outcomes based on their strategic planning, demographics, strengths etc.

The SFC measures access using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), although HEIs are encouraged to use this alongside any other measures of deprivation that they feel would allow them to evaluate success. This is a system by which the Scottish Government divides the country into ‘datazones’ and ranks the level of deprivation in each area based on a comparison of 38 indicators, involving domains such as income, employment, health and education (Scottish Government, 2012). The datazones are ranked from 1 (most deprived) to 6505 (least deprived), with each area or postcode consisting of approximately 800 people.
The information is used to target policy and funding to specific areas. The Index is usually described in terms of centiles, with those postcodes in the lowest fifth representing the areas experiencing the greatest deprivation (known as MD20). Glasgow City has a disproportionate share of those living within Scotland’s most deprived areas. 26% of the country’s MD20 population live within the city limits. Glasgow also lays claim to 45% of the Scottish population living within the lowest 5 centiles of the deprivation index.

As a new university that prides itself on a reputation for widening participation (GCU, 2013), Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) receives substantial funding under the SFC’s ‘access’ outcome. The recruitment and retention of students from under-represented groups, including those residing in MD20 postcodes, is a key institutional priority. Part of this funding is directed into each of the three Academic Schools’ Learning Development Centres (LDCs). Although each LDC operates differently, based on the School’s specific programmes and student populations, they all provide learning development support with a view to improving progression and retention of all students. How best to support MD20 students and whether current activities and services are used by this particular group remains little understood, however. The LDC in the School of Health and Life Sciences set out to explore these issues.

2. Views from policy and research

Whilst there may be consensus on the need to widen access to higher education and support those who undertake learning at that level, how this is best achieved remains a matter of some debate, at policy, institutional and research level. GCU’s 2013/2014 Outcome Agreement focusses on ‘inclusivity’ rather than specific provision or support for target groups: ‘Our new Strategy for Learning enshrines our aim to continue to improve on progression, retention and completion for all our students’. Such an approach is supported by the findings of ‘What works?’ a recent, large-scale Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded project (Thomas, 2012). It suggested that, whilst general activities can be supplemented by targeted support, nurturing a sense of belonging amongst students is key to retention and success. Any approach should, therefore, be mainstream and ‘opt-out’ – an embedded aspect of HE that encourages collaborative working between staff and students and support before crises occur.

Some researchers have challenged prevailing notions of widening participation, perhaps signifying that mainstream support is preferable to specific provision. Williams (2011), for example, has argued that the language of former government policy may have resulted in ‘psychological disadvantage’ amongst those categorised as ‘socially excluded’; the ubiquity of the term ‘support’ implying a vulnerable, infantilised group. Leathwood and Hey (2009) similarly suggest that strategies targeting ‘non-traditional’ students are constructed in terms of a deficit, one which seeks to change the student. Yet, whilst there are undoubtedly difficulties with such a problematising discourse, it seems clear that those who enter HE from non-traditional backgrounds—mature learners, those from socially deprived neighbourhoods etc—experience particular challenges. They may have less access to physical and emotional resources and fewer academic role models, suggesting that specific forms of support are fundamental to social inclusion (Benson et al, 2012). Pampaka et al (2012) argue that there is no single dominant factor for learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds, yet such students have a wider range of issues than ‘higher social class’ students.

The SFC’s outcomes approach seems to suggest they favour targeted interventions and specific targets. It is certainly possible that purely mainstream activities may fail to engage certain groups of learners. The vast majority of the LDC’s funding is derived from SFC access monies provided to GCU. There is thus a moral, financial and politically expedient need to attend to the issue of MD20 students at the very least. There is evidence that strategies which aim to improve access and support for specific groups can be successful.
Institutional interventions and monitoring, championed and supported by Buttle UK (2012), have resulted in significant improvements in the recruitment and retention of Care Leavers, for example. The very fact that Buttle UK collates information on care leavers in HE has allowed for the evidenced recognition that such young people were hugely unrepresented in education. This focused attention has, according to Buttle UK, ‘enabled institutions to consider the needs of Care Leavers as distinct from other vulnerable groups’ (2012, p8). MD20 students are clearly a very different group from Care Leavers, but this example demonstrates that the needs of certain learners can remain unacknowledged unless their experiences are monitored and evaluated.

3. The project

3.1 Aims and objectives

It is evident an array of drivers, research findings and policy objectives impact on the issue of recruiting and retaining students resident in postcodes identified as experiencing multiple deprivations. The LDC provides enhancement-led, learning support to all students in the School through a blend of timetabled, in-programme teaching, workshops and one to one appointments (Mckendry, 2012). Support for, and monitoring of, those identified as belonging to the ‘multiple deprivations’ category, however, is becoming an increasing priority. Though a worthy goal, it is essential such support is considered, research-informed and eliminates or minimises any potential stigma associated with postcode ranking. Up to now, the voices and views of one of the most significant stakeholders involved, namely the students themselves, can often appear largely absent from the debate. As a team, we thus sought to provide an evidence-base on which further learning development support could be established.

The overall aim of the project was to improve understanding of the learning and teaching needs and experiences of the diverse group of MD20 students who attend, or potentially attend, programmes within the School of Health and Life Sciences. A number of objectives were identified:

- To use a narrative or biographical approach to capture individual life histories and student journeys from within the wider, diverse MD20 group (Field, Merrill & West, 2012).
- To explore the student experience and learning development needs of those entering higher education from under-represented groups.
- To employ qualitative instruments to gather data on whether, and in what ways, students within the MD20 category engage with LDC support.
- To understand the institutional policy and wider funding context of MD20 recruitment, retention and support.

3.2 Methodology

An inquiry/interpretative based approach provided the methodological foundation for the project. In particular, student data collection harnessed narrative, life story methods aimed at exploring individual biographical narratives: the paths their lives have taken to lead them to study at university; how they feel about the MD20 focus and what kind of support, if any, will allow them to succeed in their studies. As researchers, we aimed to situate the project within the growing body of literature on adult transitions and lifelong learning (Field, Gallagher Ingram, 2009) using biographical or life history research as ‘an important and powerful way of seeing learning as a fundamental dimension of living’ (Field, Merrill & West, 2012, p. 80).

Such a particularist method can potentially suffer from what Field et al (2012) label ‘excessive methodological individualism’: stories are embedded in specific circumstances
and habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and influenced or conditioned by the dialogue between narrator and researcher. The potential for generalisability or extrapolation are limited. Yet the approach allows for the collection of rich data and is mitigated by other mixed methods. These, though primarily qualitative in nature, allow for the widest possible collection of relevant data and the greatest scope to iteratively develop further cycles of research. The project thus involved documentary examination of policy data, performance and retention monitoring and the tracking of LDC usage data. The analysis of the mixed data drew on indicators from social and cultural capital to help understand the various perspectives of the students and gain in depth knowledge of the student population and its issues.

Ethical approval for the project was sought and granted by the School’s Research Ethics Committee.

3.3 Research phases

The project consisted of several research phases:

1. Statistical analysis of performance and progression data and LDC data, documentary and policy audit.
2. Semi-structured interviews with students currently studying in the School who live within the MD20 residential category.
3. Semi-structured interviews with staff members with a role in recruiting, retaining and supporting students from MD20 backgrounds.
4. Semi-structured interviews with college students considering studying in the School who live within the MD20 residential category.

At the time of writing, phases one and two are near to completion with phases three and four planned for the next few months.

4. Phase 1: quantitative data collection and analysis

4.1 Profile of MD20 students in the School

MD20 students are identified from within the broader population of full-time, Scottish-domiciled students. Such a measurement inevitably excludes other categories of students, many of whom may also reside in, or come from, MD20 areas or their equivalent in other parts of the UK. Part-time, postgraduate and international students and those moving from the rest of the UK are not included. For academic year 2012/2013, 19% of the School’s full-time, undergraduate, Scottish-domiciled student population lived within an MD20 area according to the university’s records. For new students entering the School, this figure rises to 25%. The School recruits a greater percentage of students from these areas than other institutions. SFC (2012a) research suggests that the MD20 group accounted for 14% of the total university population in Scotland in 2010/11, and represented 11% of the population at Scottish old universities.

Since this was such a significant proportion of full-time students, institutional data was further explored to try to determine the broader demographic profile of the group.
According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2013), mature students are defined as those who are aged 21 or over on commencing their course. 85% of students in the School’s MD20 group fall into this category, 50% are over 25 years of age and 24% are over 30.

Over half of the MD20 students (56%) were undertaking nursing degrees and a further 11% were enrolled in Psychology. Further work is required to explore the ethnicity and gender breakdown of the MD20 group. In addition, details on the percentage declaring a disability and the number entering university through FE would also be useful. Such characteristics are often used as part of a ‘basket of measures’ when targeting access (SFC, 2012a). Comparison with students in the least deprived centile (LD20) may also prove useful and will be undertaken in the future.

4.2 Usage of Learning Development Centre by MD20 students

The LDC follows an opt-out model of learning development support. Tailored, module-specific learning and teaching is delivered within classes ensuring all students receive academic skills development. Further ‘opt-in’ support is available however, and accounts for
a significant proportion of the LDC’s activities. Students can sign up for workshops or request an individual or small group appointment with a lecturer to discuss an academic skills issue. Attendance at both workshops and appointments was tracked for trimester one and two of the current academic year in order to determine overall and MD20 usage. As the charts below show, MD20 students made up 19% of the School’s population and accounted for 26% and 22% of workshop attendance in trimester 1 and 2 respectively. MD20 students would thus appear to be opting to attend extra-curricular activities in greater numbers than expected.

![Workshop attendance tri 1 2012/13](chart1.png)

![Workshop attendance tri 2 2012/13](chart2.png)

Similarly, whilst MD20 students represent 19% of the total School population, they accounted for 20% and 25% of the LDCs individual appointments in trimester 1 and 2.

![1:1 attendance tri 1 2012/13](chart3.png)

![1:1 attendance tri 2 2012/13](chart4.png)

Once again, students from the MD20 category appear to be accessing the LDC at a proportionally high rate – they account for a greater portion of the LDC’s activities than they constitute as a portion of the total undergraduate, full-time population.

4.3 Retention and progression data: is there a problem?

Initial exploration of LDC usage statistics appears reassuring and possibly suggests that current activities and publicity approaches are effective in attracting students from all groups, including those with MD20 backgrounds. Further work is required to examine if LDC support is effective, however, and a number of questions remain. What impact does engagement with the LDC have on retention and progression, for example, and is it possible to measure that impact? Also, a percentage of MD20 students in the School are accessing support but what of those who do not? It may be that they will engage in later years and at a time when they need it. It may be that they do not require academic skills support outwith their timetabled provision. The MD20 category is now being considered in the collation of institutional retention and progression data, thus some answers may be forthcoming in the near future. One of the key issues is whether MD20 students are as academically successful as their peers.

There are some indications that students from MD20 backgrounds are more vulnerable to academic failure or withdrawal than other students. The National Union of Students Scotland
(NNUS, 2011) compared retention rates of MD20 students and the total full-time, Scottish domiciled student population. Although somewhat dated, this research suggested that rates were continually lower for those from the bottom centile.

More recent research from England highlights similar findings. The Leaving University Early research report (John-Adams, 2013), funded by HEFCE and conducted under the auspices of the Open University (OU) and the Universities and College Admissions Service (UCAS), drew on data from more than 35,000 early leavers over the period 2006-2012. Key findings suggest that 'non-traditional' students are more likely to be early leavers than ‘traditional’ younger students. The former category included mature learners, those from neighbourhoods with low HE participation and those entering from FE. Several of these characteristics appear to coalesce with what we know of MD20 students in our School. There is also evidence that non-continuation is highest amongst mature students (SFC, 2012a). Given the age profile of MD20 students it is imperative that longitudinal monitoring of retention and progression is conducted with MD20 status as an additional identified characteristic. This work is now being undertaken and will inform further stages of the research.

5. Phase 2: semi structured interviews with students

5.1 The interview process

In February 2013 an email invitation was sent to all students in the School who had been identified as living within an MD20 postcode. Eleven students responded and it proved possible to conduct interviews with nine of them. The table below outlines the profile of each interviewee. Although a convenience sample, they are nonetheless broadly representative of both the School population and the smaller MD20 category of students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Programme of study</th>
<th>Route to university</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Psychology &amp; interactive entertainment</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learning Disability Nursing</td>
<td>FE Access course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Transferred from other HEI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Biomedical Science</td>
<td>Direct entry from FE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GCU retention rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>all students</th>
<th>MD20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>86.60%</td>
<td>83.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>90.90%</td>
<td>89.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>88.60%</td>
<td>86.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given the narrative methodology, semi-structured interviews were designed to unearth life journeys and biographies, to encourage participants to reflect upon and discuss their life path. Open ended questions were used and there was very little prompting. All four members of the project team conducted interviews after extensive discussion and planning. Time was spent between each, listening through recordings to develop a similar interview technique. Questions included ‘Tell me about how you came to be studying here’ and ‘do you think that coming from an MD20 postcode has played a role in your life?’.

5.2 Coding and initial thematic analysis

Following verbatim transcription, each member of the research team coded the data individually before coming together to discuss emergent categories and themes. The richness of the data suggests that further analysis and theory generation is both possible and warranted and will be undertaken in the next few months using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initial themes and sub-categories have been detailed in the mindmap below.

Thematic collation of the data has proven fruitful yet such an approach inevitably searches for similarities, patterns and differences between experiences. This does not necessarily allow for the illumination of individual student journeys and biographies. A case study approach has, thus, been an additional aspect of data analysis and will be completed shortly.
6. What’s next

The MD20 category has proven useful in building understanding of the student profile and as a tool to monitor usage of the LDC and evaluate our reach. It is imperative that we determine the respective performance rates of the MD20 group and the general student population. Where there are differences, the LDC may need to adopt strategies specific to that group, though this does not appear necessary or fruitful at this point. The institution has a duty to ensure that those students who enroll on programmes are supported in the attainment of their degrees. If particular students are more vulnerable to academic difficulties, greater support may be necessary.

The identification of the MD20 category amongst students provoked discussion, anxiety and even some anger amongst participants in the project. Some students viewed the category as potentially stigmatising for example, and the group is as diverse as anticipated. Whilst it was never our intention to produce publicity materials or activities for that group alone, it appears that any targeting of support in this way may be counterproductive. The project has made clear that there are other categories or identities that could prove more useful when considering targeted support—mature learners, articulating students, those entering from FE, care-leavers and carers. These groups are often over-represented within the MD20 category and can face additional challenges in negotiating HE. Students also seem to more comfortably identify with these labels and may thus more readily engage with activities aimed at them.

These remain tentative conclusions, however. The project has a number of phases still to be completed. Staff interviews will be conducted over summer, and potential college students have already been identified. Further longitudinal tracking of MD20 student usage of the LDC and general progression will also continue.

References


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Transformative Student Engagement through Courageous Conversations

Lynette Ireland and Sharon Moore
James Cook University

ABSTRACT:
This paper highlights how to enact transformative pedagogy to embed cultural frameworks into higher education that are innovative, sustained and valued by diverse student cohorts, the academy and the Indigenous community. Our teaching centrally places students at the heart of the experience, embracing challenging racial issues in supportive and inspiring ways through ‘courageous conversations’ and, in the process, motivating students to learn when discerning and engaging with the Australian cultural landscape. The overarching pedagogy, utilising an interactive delivery jointly facilitated by Sharon Moore, an Indigenous lecturer and Lynette Ireland, a non-Indigenous lecturer, centers on inclusivity within this cultural interface.

1 Introduction

The Australian cultural landscape is still a contested site. Australian Indigenous peoples, specifically, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are often rendered invisible, marginalized, exoticised, exalted or are simply considered as ‘the other’ by the dominant mainstream Australian society. The notion of reconciliation is too often considered a panacea to the cultural pluralism that exists and does not actually achieve its own intents of recognizing and valuing Indigenous cultures and peoples. In fact, embedding Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum is difficult; the contentions, sensitivities, protocols, racialised imaginings and resistances to change are all fraught with complications. Altogether, these elements compound and confound the issue of reconciliation and thus teaching within higher education. However, in a regional University – James Cook (JCU), both (a) a commitment to achieving “genuine and sustainable reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community” (University Plan), and (b) an implementation of strategies to engage in pedagogies where this will occur, has become a reality.

Our first year subject, Linking Indigenousness, exemplifies an actualised plan and best practice where reconciliation and thus attitudinal moves can occur in powerful, positive ways. Our pedagogies not only reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemologies and ontologies, but also draw upon the worldviews of our diverse student cohort. An interactive delivery jointly facilitated by Sharon Moore, an Aboriginal lecturer, and Lynette Ireland, a non-Aboriginal lecturer, aims to engage students by utilising innovative approaches through the creation of a safe space for cultural interactions. This space reflects the notion of the Cultural Interface (Nakata, 2002), where cultural crossings, encounters, and convergences happen. However, despite political and often conflicting discourses in play within this space, we contend that it also offers reconciling dynamics if we consider the individual in the mix. Our central tenet therefore places all students at the heart of our subject. Our belief is that if students can connect with the subject matter via the human element of our offered stories, then they are more likely to willingly traverse difficult topics imbued with sensitive racial issues. We had to deepen the dialogue with them not to them. Therefore the pedagogies we adopt are intentionally inclusive and respectful of all. In this manner, we encourage our students to become active agents of change fostering possibilities for cultural transformations to occur. This is clearly demonstrated via both (a) qualitative (individual exemplars) and (b) quantitative (statistical) data, included throughout this paper. Overall, as
the evidence testifies, the experience of actively engaging in the Cultural Interface is a worthwhile and empowering one. As National Citation winners for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for this program in 2012, it seems that the Australian Academy does as well. The overwhelmingly positive feedback on our pedagogical approaches indicate that we are on the ‘right track’, taking our students with us into the challenging, yet inspiring space that comprises the Cultural Interface.

2 The Cultural Interface

The theoretical space and actualised place where different cultures meet in cross passages is referred to as the Cultural Interface. This ‘space’ of interface exists at the conjecture of cultural crossings where cultural entities interact. In Australia for this subject, it predominantly, but not exclusively, focuses on the mix between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This space represents an intermingled construction representing all cultures, a ‘third’ space as it were, as suggested by Routledge (1996). These third space interactions are neither straightforward nor homogenised; rather they represent a tangled mass of interchangeable, fluid movement between different cultural agents who engender a vast array of historical, political and spiritual schemas suggesting multiple, ideological positions. This then infers complexities, tensions, possible misunderstandings and miscommunications, ignorance and resistance. Added to this is the internal interplay with the prevailing socio-political climate to consider. Altogether then this space presents as a potential plethora of pitfalls. Our intent, however, is to neither invalidate nor undermine Indigenous or Western cultures, knowledges or peoples. For as much as the interlacing of these various layers produce discordant dichotomies, these also comprise reconciling dynamics. Therefore these connections can actually work to produce cohesive, consensual and co-operative social practices as long as these cultural interactions are undertaken in a respectful manner. Rather we aim to identify the cultural, political, social and economic variants in the mix that influences and positions these interactions to simply make the individuals and their epistemological and ontological perspectives more relatable. In the higher education sector this is not easy, because as Cowlishaw (2006, p. 432) contends “it seems that the majority of Australians have neither seen or heard Indigenous people and are quite unfamiliar with their social worlds.” Therefore, within our teaching/learning space, “…we are faced with both the challenge as well as the opportunity of actively rethinking modes for human interaction and recasting the difference that difference makes” (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012, p. 42). So, with this in mind, we reviewed and then re-designed what our pedagogical practices might look like in this third space.

Our thinking therefore echoed Nakata (2002) sentiments, when he contended that, “This notion of the Cultural Interface as a place of constant tension and negotiation of different interests and systems of Knowledge means that both must be reflected on and interrogated.”(p. 8). Thus critical reflexion of this idea meant that we adopted a courageous stance whereby lively, passionate and active debate was encouraged as the normal par for the subject, rather than be regarded as something to be avoided. Ultimately, this is how honest, open conversations and convergences of “cultural connectivity” (Ireland, 2009) can happen. Linking Indigenousness provides the space whereby the authenticity of these cultural interactions are realized, and a space for meaningful dialogue across cultural divides is possible:

What is needed is a reconsideration of a different conceptualisation of the cross-cultural space, not as a clash of opposites and differences but as a layered and very complex entanglement of concepts, theories and sets of meanings of a knowledge system…(and) should be primarily about bringing them into conversation…in order to negotiate a new set of meanings and reinterpretation of meanings. (Nakata, 2004, p. 14)
Like Nakata we attempt to ‘story’ our experience to provide a springboard for the difficult
dialogue we are having at the interface of Indigenous and western knowledge systems to
make the appeal for more productive engagements that are essential to reconciliation.
Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009, p. 56), in discussing an educational framework utilising the
“interface between Western curriculum knowledge and Indigenous knowledge”, posited that
it developed into “…a central metaphor for working synergistically in the overlap between
multiple social realities and ways of knowing.” As such, our students are strongly
couraged to engage with synergistic dialogues requiring active risk-taking through
“courageous conversations” (Singleton and Linton, 2005). As lecturers, we also model these
interactions and risk-take these negotiated spaces to promote the value we ascribe to this
space. We disclose our personal life experiences and demonstrate divergent viewpoints on
several topics to show that approaches to issues of identity, representation, history and
knowledge are not fixed as entities, but rather exist as multifaceted stances; emphasizing
that difference can be thought-provoking rather than fearful. Whilst these perspectives are
cognizant of differing cultural belief systems, this does not infer that either the Indigenous or
non-Indigenous worldview should be relegated above the other in this space. Rather, we
instill the concept that we need to investigate, explore and critically reflect upon both, as
asserted by Nakata (2002). In this manner, we make the invisible visible and the familiar
more noticeable.

As such, we shift the conversation. Safe spaces are formed within the cultural interface that
is our subject. Resistance is eased and inclusivity is enacted. The interface is seen as an
springboard for authentic dialogue and the harnessing of these two systems creates new
meanings, new knowledges and new narratives. When students discern the experience as
collectively ‘theirs’ and not as an individualised experience, therein lies the possibility for
transformation. The principle of the cultural interface shifts the focus from the “I” to “us” and,
herein exists the ability to truly connect. The embodied truth lies within the possibilities
arising from these interactions of people working together within the space itself to co-create
fresh insights. In the dynamics of these promising cultural interactions lie potential for
growth, creativity, discernment and enhancement for students to become informed
individuals open to the opportunities of ‘seeing beyond themselves’. Pedagogical practices,
reflective of this mindset, can open doorways by which students can enter into the place of
the Cultural Interface safely and assuredly.

Student Feedback: “Before joining this class, I was somewhat unaware of the
existence of the Cultural Interface and I shied away from engaging in cultural
discussion because of how difficult they can be. This class has shown me that
although existing in the Cultural Interface is difficult; it is necessary and very
rewarding.”

“I am just one person, but if everyone could have the experience I had in this
class, the Cultural Interface would become a thing of sharing and beauty not
tension. Because we are active agents in our own lives, we must use our
learning to create cross-cultural understanding on a day to day basis. This is
where the cultural interface and classes like this become very useful.”

3 Pedagogical Framework

Rather than just ‘embedding’ Indigenous perspectives, our subject is designed to ensure
‘engaging’ is a core element of our pedagogy and that all students feel an integral part of the
academic fabric which comprises the Australian cultural landscape. As such, we critically
reflected upon our own teaching practices to ascertain how we could achieve this type of
engagement. Consequently, we intentionally determined that a different philosophy,
pedagogy and practice were required to develop an effective program that could enact a real difference to student perceptions, inclusive of ‘hearing’ and ‘valuing’ students’ individual voices.

As educators, we therefore intentionally planned to ‘create spaces and make places’ to educate a culturally safe context by which our students could examine emotionally difficult topics relating to cultural arrogance and ignorance, colonialism and violence, systemic racism and our identities as Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. We achieved this through a blend of fused intent and sheer passion, modeling our differing cultural perspectives and experiences, and demonstrated our willingness to risk-take. Specifically, we created a ‘cutting edge’ learning space that sought to actively engage students in “courageous conversations” (Singleton et al, 2005), where open and honest dialogue could occur. We deliberately employed the term ‘cutting edge” because this subject is about cutting across boundaries, dissecting complex conversations, breaking down binaries of black/white, good/bad or them/us, and deconstructing how we make sense of our connections with each other. Therefore, the design of our curriculum places the individual students into a critically self-reflective mode of thinking. By adopting these explicit and courageous teaching stances, the effect upon and enthusiasm from our students was infectious, as indicated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Feedback:</th>
<th>“I thoroughly enjoyed this subject. The teaching staff created a safe environment for discussion of important issues. Where there were requirements to discuss the issues and peoples, the approaches to them...were handled in a sensitive and non-judgmental manner. I think this should be a compulsory subject for all students at JCU as it is delivered and taught in a manner that serves to enhance individual awareness of Indigenous issues.” (2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“This was a phenomenal learning experience for someone from a different country. I loved learning about Indigenous Australians and their culture and views and how all Australians and even those of us from overseas have the opportunity to be part of this in a positive way.” (2010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the pedagogical re-design, a scaffolded framework was utilised. In this manner, students gradually and confidently offered their opinions in a safe environment, knowing that these would be acknowledged and valued, rather than ridiculed and denigrated. Explicitly, we employed teaching approaches where:

- collaborative teaching is modelled to overcome the challenges of emotionally difficult topics and replicate reconciling cultural interactions;
- deconstruction of texts to demonstrate how values and positions are taken up by individuals is examined;
- strong positioning of Indigenous voices as primary sources of stories is promoted;
- opportunities to build relationships and foster synergy between students, Elders and Indigenous scholars is strategically integrated into our delivery;
- ‘mirrored’ spaces to allow students to ‘look back’ upon themselves to critically self-reflect is enacted at various stages of the subject.

Our transformative pedagogy then, focuses on three (3) key approaches:

1. Modeling and facilitating ‘courageous conversations’ at the cultural interface
2. Narrative inquiry including personal multilayered and multi-media stories
3. Experiential or encounter learning with cultural guides.

3.1 Modeling and facilitating ‘courageous conversations’ at the cultural interface
In our team teaching approach, we model difficult dialogues through sharing our own personal experiences to demonstrate how to reflect and interrogate our own positions and that of others. For example, we explore the ways in which dominant discourses have been perpetuated and invite students to critically engage in conversations based on the varied perspectives of both past and present events, not to engender guilt, but to simply deconstruct these stereotypical constructions. We discern the Australian cultural landscape as a site of contestation, where multiple narratives, representing settler and Indigenous relationships, are examined. Stories, often silenced and misunderstood take courage to speak about, especially within the first year experience. As educators, we encourage students to embrace their fears by indicating that ‘no topic is taboo’. The underlying philosophy of these conversations is simply that they need to be exposed to be understood. Therefore, we explore the ways in which hegemonic discourses are perpetuated and initiate courageous conversation based on the politics of representation to deconstruct these polarised imaginings. Specifically, we focus on issues of racial identity in terms of authenticity. We set the context whereby we explore how perceptions of authenticity arise, why they persist and the social impact of such acuities. Furthermore, we examine conflicted terminology, such as ‘settled versus invaded’, ‘civilised versus uncivilised’, ‘ownership versus belonging’ and consider these oppositional binaries as artefacts of colonisation. This act of deconstructing these post-colonial constructions allows the complexities of the cultural landscape seldom made explicit to become visible. In this manner a revitalised approach to the shared Australian cultural landscape can be appreciated and seen with refreshed eyes and heard with combined voices.

**Student Feedback:** ‘I thoroughly enjoyed this subject. The teaching staff created a safe environment for discussion of important issues. Where there were requirements to discuss the issues and peoples, the approaches to them...were handled in a sensitive and non-judgmental manner. I think this should be a compulsory subject for all students at JCU as it is delivered and taught in a manner that serves to enhance individual awareness of Indigenous issues.” (2011)

“Sharon’s teaching methods were sensitive to what could be considered a confronting subject, especially in view of the past treatment of the Indigenous population. She discussed current issues with thoughtful insight which generated discussion amongst student groups.” (2007)

### 3.2 Narrative inquiry (multilayered stories and multimedia experiences)

We energise the curriculum through the use of multi-layered stories surrounding the events that have shaped the Australian historical, social and cultural terrain. We draw on the idea that ‘our metaphors define us and our stories sustain us’ (Foeman and Nance, 2002). In other words, we examine the socially constructed terrain of past events and mindsets surrounding both Indigenous and settler histories to contest and re-present current perspectives of Indigenous Australians. Our focal points are those that prioritize Indigenous stories and give a multi-directional gaze into the diversity and depth of Indigenous Australia. This is why we draw upon a number of Indigenous media such as the film, ‘One Night the Moon’ by Rachel Perkins and the autobiographical text ‘Maybe Tomorrow’ by Monty ‘Boori’ Pryor to deconstruct the layers of meaning as learning experiences. These ‘situated stories’ are at the heart of our approach and fundamentally reflect narrative inquiry theory and practice. Mary and Ken Gergen also perceive the importance of this approach when stating that these: “narratives [are] as cognitive structure or schema through which we understand the world” and “narratives as discursive actions” (2006, p. 118). Furthermore, “…the small story approach is able to theoretically and methodologically enrich traditional narrative
inquiry...by more radically re-positioning big story approaches as grounded in dialogical/discursive approaches such as small story research” (Bamberg, 2006, p. 139). This is well exemplified by the two aforementioned texts, ‘Maybe Tomorrow’ by Boori Pryor and the film ‘One Night The Moon’ by Rachel Perkins. In the first scenario, Boori Pryor’s text presents as a counter-narrative of his familial experiences that, at times, is diametrically opposed to the meta-narrative of mainstream history. Through rich anecdotal narratives, he is able to capture a ‘lens-scape’ that is intimate, authentic and relatable. He tugs on the heartstrings of our students by presenting a story that is traumatic, yet strangely uplifting, as it moves beyond recriminations. Likewise, the film One Night The Moon, created by a contemporary Aboriginal storyteller, Rachel Perkins, interrogates conflicting attachments to and representations of the historical Australian landscape. The underlying themes explore how Aboriginal peoples’ intimate knowledge and attachment to ‘country’ can unsettle the settlers’ claims to ownership and therefore challenge notions of place and belonging. But more than this, it also encompasses a multiplicity of ‘situated stories’ of all the characters, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, within the film. The contextualisation of people within the historicity of their time is utilised to connect with these figures as human beings, not to judge their actions, but to understand their roles and relationships with the world and each other at that time.

In doing so, both the film and text honour the experiences of Indigenous peoples and contribute to multiple, collective and collaborative readings of ‘Australian-ness’ in a non-threatening manner. Whilst autobiography and film are powerful tools for constructing what Smith (1999) refers to as “counter-histories”, these can also be perceived as a means of expiating pain and forging connections with those who have been mis-informed by Western practices. By doing so, students gain new ideas about the complexities of power, oppression and resistance and are able to link this examination to the ways in which they are situated within dominant traditions. Via these narratives, the Linking Indigenousness curriculum ‘deepens the dialogue’ and ‘humanises’ the subject space, so that our students can perceive how the mindsets, events, and actions of the past have impacted upon and shaped the present. In this manner, we strongly challenge our students to become active agents to imagine and ‘story’ the futuristic place of geographical imaginings that can be a reconciled Australia.

**Student Feedback:** "The different ways of presenting information was extremely beneficial. I liked how you displayed images, shared stories...One night the moon told the core story. Monty’s book was worth the read!" (2009)

"A wide range of literature allowed for active engagement and discussion thoughtfully provoked. Lyn’s particular strength was in playing ‘devil’s advocate’ to open lines of exploration into areas that were otherwise taboo.” (2010)

### 3.3 Experiential or encounter learning with cultural guides

We regard this subject as a journey of discovery for our students, ‘linking’ a direct field trip experience as the connector between the academic ‘theorising’ to the practical ‘living’. This is epitomised by us in an internalized classroom and our interpretative guides in an externalised classroom. Experiential learning allows students to reframe their understandings of the world following this experience with an interpretative guide. The significance of our cultural guides as interpreters therefore is an integral and significant part of their journey. For example, ‘Uncle Rusty Butler, a local Aboriginal elder, who leads the field trips in Townsville and the Kuku Yalanji people from Mossman (for Cairns students), breathe ‘cultural life’ into the subject content. The interpretive guides epitomize the heart of this subject’s success. Their honest and caring interactions allow all of our students to approach, value and engage in positive and respectful cultural exchanges enabling them to
talk openly about sensitive issues. The significance of our interpretative guides cannot be understated. Their inclusion breathes life into the cultural content of our subject, revealing a side of life, which cannot be gleaned from texts. Importantly, through our respectful partnerships and strong connections to the local Indigenous community, we model for the students the need to engage with different worldviews. This then becomes a ‘mirrored space’ as these experiential encounters require them to examine their own place within these cultural interactions. These experiences are the basis for interactions, dialogues and reflections creating a lasting, positive impact. This then supports the initial transformation in students’ understanding of Indigenous Australians as the quotations in the textbox indicate.

**Student Feedback:** "It was great to go on a field trip with ‘Uncle Rusty’ and see nature in a different light. I really liked hearing about history from someone who was talking from experience. I learnt a lot of things I did not know; this knowledge was gained in the lectures, the field trip and the visit to the Cultural Centre.”

(2010)

"I loved interacting with Uncle Rusty on the field trip. He is truly a deep and thought provoking man." (2011)

However, underpinning this cultural teaching is a powerful philosophical framing derived from ancient times. Prior to the Field Trip experience, all students engage in an awareness of this philosophy that informs Indigenous knowledges.

### 3.3.1 Indigenous Social Theory

Aboriginal philosophy is often presented as a metaphorical allegory. Mandawuy Yunupingu (1993) offers the following example of **Ganma** when discussing ‘brackish water’, Ganma brings another image to mind. A deep pool of brackish water, fresh water and salt water mixed. The pool is a balance between the two different natural patterns, the pattern of the tidal flow, salt water moving in through the mangrove channels, and the pattern of the fresh water streams varying in their flow across the wet and dry seasons. Often when I describe this vision to Balanda, non-Aboriginal people, they wrinkle up their noses. For Balanda, brackish water is distasteful. But for us the sight and smell of brackish water expresses a profound foundation of useful knowledge – balance. For Yolngu Aboriginal people brackish water is a source of inspiration. In each of the sources of flowing water there is ebb and flow. The deep pool of brackish water is a complex dynamic balance. In the same ways, balance of Yolngu life is achieved through the ebb and flow of competing interests, through our elaborate kinship system. (p.8)

This concept of Ganma therefore is a metaphor, and more importantly, a social theory. It becomes then, a cultural framework of complex meaning; a conceptual structure by which to regard the world and our place within it, while providing a guiding set of principles of what that interaction should look like. In this manner, as it is socially constructed and socially situated, it can be construed as social epistemology. However, this Indigenous philosophical perspective does not always easily sit within Western paradigms, which give far more weighting to the scientific, rational patterning of thought. As such, with our students, we critically appraise the inference that all knowledges are equal and valuable, but arise from different perspectives for different purposes and from different systems of beliefs.

Linking Indigenousness is primarily designed to examine issues and theories supportive of Indigenous knowledges and highlight the contestations and contradictions in affirming the place of the Indigenous knowledges in the predominantly westernised Academy. In this
manner, as suggested by Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt (2012) we situate our students in meta-thinking learning.

By learning to focus on the conditions of the Indigenous arguments, in relation to the conditions of Western theorizing, students can be led to develop awareness of the limits of various positions, the persistent pervasiveness of ‘all-knowing’, ‘taken-for-granted Western frames, an awareness of the reproduction of those frames in Indigenous analysis, and an appreciation of just how intricate and open to interpretation the dance round worldview, knowledge and practice is as a result. (p. 133)

Once students engage in this process of meta-thinking, the configuration of practical and theoretical elements become highly visible and students feel informed, challenged and motivated to engage wholeheartedly with these complex concepts, as per both the qualitative and quantitative data demonstrates.

4 Evidence of Effectiveness (Feedback)

Irrespective of how important a subject is, or how well designed its curriculum, unless students can ‘see’ the value in undertaking it, then their interaction and success with it may be limited. Our success in respecting and supporting our students along the journey of exploration into the Cultural Interface has been demonstrated by highly positive evidence from student feedback. This has clearly demonstrated via both (a) qualitative (evidenced throughout) and (b) quantitative (statistical) data as below. Overall, as the evidence testifies, many of our student cohorts felt that the experience of actively engaging with us in the Cultural Interface was a worthwhile one.

4.1 Quantitative: Statistical Evidence:

The following table highlights the sustained quality students (over 1000) have accorded this program. It displays the percentage of students for 2009 to 2011 who reported above average to outstanding satisfaction on the questions listed:

![Graph showing satisfaction levels for student feedback questions]

5 Conclusion
This paper outlines how we successfully utilised three innovative elements of transformative pedagogy: (1) modeling ‘courageous conversation’ at the cultural interface; (2) narrative inquiry including personal multi-layered and multi-media stories; and (3) experiential or encounter learning with cultural guides; to engage, motivate and inspire student learning. The challenging, contentious, yet enriching space that exists in embedding Indigenous perspectives within the Australian higher education context cannot be understated. The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) cites the importance of this as a strategic goal at the national level. Linking Indigenousness stands as testimony to how this can be achieved and how reconciliation becomes more than just rhetoric. To see students who were previously, culturally cautious or withdrawn take ‘a leap of faith’ and engage in these ‘courageous conversations’ denotes the ultimate act of transformation.

Student Feedback: “I just want to share a story with you...Sometime before Christmas I was waiting for a taxi in the mall and was confronted by an inebriated and angry young (Aboriginal) woman. Rather than flinch from her and ignore her, I took a chance and asked her where she was from. To my surprise, she told me. This opened up a dialogue between us and we sat there for quite some time, whilst she told me her sad story. Although she was young, her pain was obvious. I know this does not sound like anything special, but I just wanted to thank you for your program. Without it, I would not have had the courage to talk to her and hear her story.” (2009)

References


Realising and developing student’s potential: personal and spiritual reconciliation.

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ABSTRACT: Realising and developing students’ potential: personal and spiritual reconciliation

Spiritual care has been and remains a key area of health and nursing practice. Spiritual care is identified as intrinsic to nursing programmes and considered part of the work of health care staff (NES, 2009). Literature, symbols and story-telling are well known approaches to learning and researching about spiritual and emotional health (Kellehear et al, 2009; Sandelowski and Carson Jones, 1996; Seymour 2009, NES, 2009).

Existential loneliness afflicts people in troubled times; relationship troubles and breakdown, work troubles, illness and particularly impending death prompt a need to consider existential questions, issues and problems. Our busy secular lives often cause spiritual issues to be buried deep.

In troubled times throughout our complex lives when confronted with difficulties, lost and broken relationships our spirits can require peace, balance, resolve and acceptance. Achieving completion, forgiveness and coming to peace with oneself, one’s life and existence require skill. Taking responsibility for ourselves and eradicating blame is often painful and difficult.

In this paper we will suggest innovative teaching and learning methods which use story-telling and reflection to expand health care students’ personal and professional understandings of spiritual and emotional care.

We will discuss how students are encouraged to hear the stories of patients/clients, reflect on their own personal and professional stories and find meaning that has significance for patients in their care and to recognise the need for reconciliation in themselves and their patients. The emotional labour of reconciliation is painful but enables people to come to resolve and acceptance, to move forward at times when their inner self/spirit is troubled.

Our teaching strategies and resources have been developed over many years and in the context of established modules such ‘Spiritual, Religious and Emotional Health’ and ‘Caring through the Arts and Humanities’ and will be presented with student evaluation of the work.

1. Setting the scene

Nursing students learn from both the sciences and the arts. Spiritual care, an example of teaching and learning about the art of nursing, has been and remains a key area of health and nursing practice (NMC, 2010). Spiritual care is identified as intrinsic to nursing programmes and considered part of the work of health care staff (NES, 2009; NMC, 2010).

In this paper we discuss the teaching and learning experiences of students undertaking an established module in spiritual health. Students take this module in their final year of a pre-registration nursing programme and the module is an elective. During this academic session 2012 – 13, the 10th year that the module has run, there were 60 students taking the module. As the art of care is intrinsic to the module, the teaching methods are drawn from literature, symbols, story-telling, film and museum or gallery visits which are well known approaches to learning and researching about spiritual and emotional health (Kellehear et al, 2009; Sandelowski and Carson Jones, 1996; Seymour 2009).
Existential loneliness afflicts people in troubled times. These include relationship troubles and breakdown, work problems, illness, dying and death. Such problems prompt a consideration of existential questions and bring to the fore the spiritual issues normally deeply buried by every day material living.

When confronted with these difficulties there is a desire to find peace within ourselves, balance, resolve and acceptance. However developing these personal qualities requires attention, awareness and skill and includes taking responsibility for ourselves and eradicating blame. The emotional labour of reconciliation is considerable but enables people to come to a place of resolve and acceptance, to move forward at times when their inner selves are most troubled (Robinson et al 2003).

1.1 The purpose of this paper

In purpose of this paper is to suggest innovative teaching and learning methods which use story-telling and reflection to expand health care students’ personal and professional understandings of spiritual and emotional care. We will discuss how students are encouraged to hear the stories of patients/clients, reflect on their own personal and professional stories and find meaning in themselves and the lives of their patients. Our teaching strategies have been developed over many years within the context of the module under discussion and a module entitled, ‘Understanding caring through the arts and humanities’. In addition we will discuss the findings of an evaluation study undertaken by this year’s student cohort as they wrestled with the concept of reconciliation, a key topic within the module.

1.2 Background considerations relating to spirituality and reconciliation

There are pressing incentives to find ways of teaching spirituality and reconciliation to students of nursing/health and those incentives relate to the less attractive aspects of the human condition. Reports such as those investigating the failings of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust (Francis 2013) indicate that society needs to find ways of dealing with the painful consequences that arise due to violating the intrinsic dignity of human life. Such human failings raise serious questions about why we fail and point to the need to find ways of defusing conflict which arises when different beliefs, values and perhaps cultures, supersede the intrinsic worth of being human. In putting spirituality on the curriculum agenda it is hoped to raise consciousness of the various manifestations of the human spirit in the belief that if it is an aspect of humanity that applies to anyone of us, it applies to us all.

It is possible to consider the noumenal, the kind of knowing which cannot be gained through the senses – such as that of spiritual knowing - in a similar vein to aesthetic knowing, perhaps even as one and the same thing. For example, in an effort to emphasise spirituality as central to holism, McSherry and Draper (1998: 688) describe it as ‘a unifying force at the foundation of holistic philosophy’.

It is difficult to investigate a concept like spirituality as it has many different meanings and the significance of any one interpretation of the concept can vary according to individual beliefs, values and circumstance but it invariably has something to do with personal truth - as Cicero states, ‘For that man whom your outward form reveals is not yourself; the spirit is the true self’ (De re publica bk. 6, ch 26). However we teach this module believing that students cannot understand the world they live in, with its joys, conflicts and suffering unless, to borrow a phrase from Glen (1995), they have enough critical spirit, the force which motivates people to be willing and sufficiently discerning to arrive at well-thought-through, albeit tentative, views of their own. So, difficult though the area of study may be, it is essential to examine the personal thoughts and values which direct educated nurses as they endeavour to provide spirited, critical and compassionate care to patients irrespective of race, lifestyle, culture and religious or political beliefs (NMC, 2010).
By its very nature education in relation to spirituality in nursing has to be evocative of the personal beliefs, values and experiences of the student; it includes the kind of knowledge Carper (1978) described as ‘personal’. Thus, the teaching methods in most of the classes enable a time for discussion so that students can talk about their own experiences of spirituality both in relation to themselves and patients. The emphasis on centring learning round the thinking and experiences of students leads naturally to the course culminating in a reflective assessment, a method chosen because it offers students the opportunity to examine a prior spiritual experience thereby uncovering insights that can inform future spiritual care practice. In a sense, reflective inquiry helps students assert a degree of control over their own theorising or metacognition (Eraut, 1994) thereby developing their cognitive and affective skills in a way that opens up new perspectives. By applying the skills of self-awareness, description, critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Atkins and Murphy, 1993) students can tease out their learning from practice - in Schon’s (1987) sense of reflection-on-practice.

Another reason for the reflective assignment is to capture students’ thinking about what they perceive to be a spiritual experience rather than colouring their thinking by providing a more fixed directed assessment framework. Bearing in mind our increasingly secular culture it is important to give credence to the breadth and depth of experiences that students report as spiritual, whether those transpire to be grounded in a belief system or not.

This assessment approach was chosen to try to uncover what individual students believe constitutes a spiritual experience and is an attempt on our part as lecturers to avoid prescribing what students ought to believe thereby conforming to our notions of a spiritual experience. Reflecting on that experience was based on the premise that in so doing, students would gain deeper understanding of the meaning of the experience and be able to connect their experiences to practice (Glen, 1995). Thus, reflection facilitates the development of professional expertise by bringing to consciousness tacit knowledge inherent in practice (Schon, 1987).

Spiritual knowing also embraces the kind of knowledge that Carper (1978) described as ‘aesthetic’. Aesthetic knowledge requires perception and empathy to form creatively elements of a situation into a cohesive whole. There is a sense of occasion, a coming together, even enlightenment in aesthetic knowledge as well as a sense in which this ‘all at once’ interpretation of the situation results in transformation (Carper, 1978, 1992; Smith 1992).

1.3 Students’ accounts of their spiritual experiences: an example
The following story illustrates one student’s (Mary’s) experience of the transformative power of a spiritual experience:

Mary: The spiritual experience I have chosen to reflect on is a personal one that happened to me nearly seven years ago, it’s not a particularly pleasant one, but it is the strongest one that I’ve had, and it changed my life. I was married with a four year old and a six-month-old baby and my husband was becoming increasingly violent. On the night that the incident happened we had been at a function and had had a pleasant evening but when we got back to the house the atmosphere changed. My husband started an argument and it escalated, to him putting his hands around my neck and strangling me. Well at first I struggled and fought back but it was pointless as he was stronger. As I couldn’t breathe I was terrified, panic-stricken, fighting. Then suddenly those feelings just vanished. Disappeared. I still couldn’t breathe but there was no panic and I thought I’m going to die but I wasn’t scared anymore and I felt strangely uplifted. It wasn’t a superficial thought that I was
going to die it was a fact. No bright light at the end of a tunnel, just a warm peaceful feeling that everything was ok.

I must have passed out; when I came to I was alone except for my four-year-old standing in the doorway, silent. I do not know how long he was there, or why he woke up he never usually did overnight. Did he disturb his father? What woke him? These are my unanswered questions. I believe that something woke my son, and he disturbed his father saving me. Why else that overwhelming feeling of peace?

Although I had a Christian upbringing and did the usual Sunday school things went to church etc. I didn’t have any serious beliefs in religion. In fact I had rebelled against it became a bit cynical about the whole religion thing. But since this experience I feel that there is a force, a God whatever, and it controls when it is our time to live and die.

However unpleasant the incident leading up to my ‘spiritual experience’ was, it has been a positive experience. I felt that I had been given a second chance for a reason and it was time to make changes. So over the next few months/years I divorced my husband, made a new home and settled environment for my kids, went back to education & married a new man, basically completely changed my life for the better….

I wouldn’t wish my experience on anyone else, and I certainly don't want to experience anything like it again. But did it change my life for the better, or was that me? One thing I know is that when my time to die does come it’s not something to be frightened of. I am more aware of other people’s spiritual needs now, how many other people have had similar experiences and I do try to be aware of that in my practice.

Characteristics of this spiritual experience include suffering, transcendence, feelings of peace and of finding that life has meaning (‘I felt that I had been given a second chance for a reason’). The resultant transformation was characterized by actions that required courage, an ability to learn through suffering, a balanced perspective on life, a desire to seize the moment and pursue desires, sensitivity towards others, and reconciling the past.

This reflective account is a good example of the ‘transformative’ nature of spirituality. It demonstrates how a spiritual interpretation of events can bring about a radical change in a person’s life-style, beliefs, values and attitudes. Moreover spiritually significant events can have an impact across contexts. As the above story illustrates, there were positive outcomes in the student’s professional work as well as the more obvious transformation of her personal life. To use popular educational language, spiritual learning may be transferable from one situation to another. Also it indicates that personal spirituality, although a unique and private experience, affects other people in that it can change family life and professional practice.

1.4 Key considerations when teaching reconciliation.

When we teach reconciliation we clarify that we are addressing personal reconciliation and not political/mass/post-war reconciliation. The teaching focus is the importance of reconciliation in the end-times of a person’s life which Robinson et al (2003) suggest is an important part of end of life care for many.

As students are concerned with providing care for other people, as a first step, it is important that they learn to experience reconciliation in their own lives. Therefore self awareness is key to the process of reconciliation and students are encouraged to develop a sense of understanding and meaning of life, a sense of fulfilment and wellbeing.

Students can relate to and engage with scenarios such as broken relationships causing unease and needing resolution and the therapeutic nature of reconciliation in terminal care (Cellarius 2008). Skills to promote and understanding and reconciling state of health, illness and lifespan need careful development.

What proves difficult is developing the skills of finding and helping patients find reconciliation of matters which do not have ‘fairytale endings’ or unrealistic wishes.
The teaching of the skills to be able to work with patients in reconciliation promotes dignity in death, closure and improves quality of life (Mok et al 2010; Johnston et al 2012).

We presently only teach this to senior student nurses but their engagement with this work and their feedback has led us to believe that this could be taught more widely and be valuable to many students not just students of healthcare.

1.5 Evaluating student’s learning of reconciliation—
Academic year 2012-13
From the 52 students on the module, 64% completed the evaluation questionnaire.

Overall there were no negative comments and students were highly positive of their experience of the module and its value.

Quotes from feedback

| ‘It’s about finding individuals’ own answers to their own questions with guidance’ |
| ‘It has helped me make sense of a long term disagreement with s family member that I have not seen for a long time’ |
| ‘I can distinguish between reconciliation and forgiveness’ |
| ‘Will be able to approach the matter with knowledge and confidence’ |
| ‘allow understanding of patient behaviour in their past experiences they have encountered in their life.’ |
| ‘Has opened my mind on various elements of spirituality and how to effectively utilise them in my practice and personal life.’ |
| ‘This module has been great, uplifting and refreshing.’ |

We were interested in how the students thought the session would be valuable and how much they felt it would be of personal and professional value so we asked the students two different questions that were really asking the same thing to see if their answers were consistent.

We asked them 1. To rate the value on a 1-10 scale of the value in both their personal and professional lives. 2. To rate on a 1-10 scale the value in palliative care, nursing, with family and friends and for themselves.

Both these question yielded the same results as can be seen in these pie charts.
References:


Empowering students to articulate into second year of a nursing degree programme

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Abstract
As an institution the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), School of Health, Nursing & Midwifery has endeavoured to enhance the articulation of nursing students from Further Education (FE to Higher Education (HE) with involvement & support of local Health Boards. This area of work also recognises that the Nursing & Midwifery Council (2010) require HE Establishments to recognise students prior learning to facilitate career pathways. Students articulating into second year need to feel empowered to succeed. Long standing partnership working with local colleges and the work of the South West Articulation Hub saw the development of a module to facilitate some students joining the degree programmes in second year. The module provided by UWS over the summer time enables those selected from their HNC year to commence early engagement with UWS. The empowerment process then begins socially and academically to facilitate the transition from FE student to HE students equipped with the skills and practice hours to succeed in second year.

This presentation will discuss the module and its role in empowering the students and highlight the evaluations of the first group of students through the module. The findings will suggest the empowerment process is vital to student’s engagement and success.

Introduction
Following the Project 2000 proposals (UKCC 1986) nurse education changed fundamentally and moved into Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s) from traditional schools of nursing. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC 2004) stipulate the standards of proficiency for pre-registration nurse education. These standards also incorporate a requirement for HEI’s to acknowledge students prior learning and this has contributed to a widening of access to pre-registration nursing courses. This widening access has allowed students to enter in greater numbers and has increased the diversity of the student nurse population (McCarey et al. 2007).

Over the last number of years the widening of access to Further and Higher Education in Scotland has also been encouraged by various policy initiatives (Scottish Executive 1999, Scottish Executive 2003). The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), established in 2001 amalgamated the main qualification frameworks creating a single structure with an aim to “assist people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential” (SCQF 2001, p.1) further supporting lifelong learning in Scotland.

The development of articulation routes into Higher Education Institutions has become key to facilitate the creation of additional pathways into university. (Scottish Funding Council 2011). Articulation is the process whereby a previous qualification allows a student to enter directly into second or third year of a university degree programme. Gallacher (2006) suggests that these articulation pathways require close partnership working between Further and Higher Education Institutions to adequately prepare students for advanced entry into university. This facilitation of career pathways endorses the Scottish Government’s undertaking to promote the creation of adaptable articulation routes (Scottish Government 2011).

This paper explores the long standing partnership working with local colleges, Health Boards and the South West Articulation Hub in the development of a model to facilitate the
articulation of a number of students into second year of the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) undergraduate nursing degree programme.

Articulation

As an institution UWS School of Health, Nursing & Midwifery (HNM) has endeavoured to enhance the articulation of nursing students from FE to HE with involvement of local Health Boards. UWS although a modern university has a long standing philosophy of widening participation and providing local education (UWS, 2008)

Robbins (1963) suggested that Higher Education had four aims: (1) instruction in skills; (2) promoting the general powers of the mind; (3) the advancement of learning and (4) the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship. Robbins (1963) therefore provided the basis for an expanding higher education system which encouraged wider participation and accepted diversity of missions between institutions. The more recent Scottish Government report (2011) sets the educational context in more modern terms by suggesting that Higher Education in Scotland should be a civilising force making key contributions to the economic success of the country.

The vision of UWS is that it will have “transformational influence on the economic, social & cultural development” within its local area and beyond by providing “high quality, inclusive higher education and innovative and useful research” (UWS 2008, p.2). UWS (2008) stated in its strategic plan (2008-2015) that it aims to be uniquely responsive to partnership working and new demands made on education. This module that has been developed is an exemplar of such partnership working through articulation.

Since 2007 the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) designated articulation hubs have been working in local areas and at national level with the common aim of articulating students into years 2 / 3 of degree programmes (South West Articulation Hub, 2009). Prior to this within UWS a career structure existed for local health board employees (as care assistants) to remain “employed” whilst undertaking the three year nurse education programme. This was by attending a local FE college in year 1 and articulating into UWS for years 2 and 3, whilst remaining on their salary. Gradually however with the changes in economic climate and funding for this initiative the places for this are extremely limited to one local area. However, in working in long standing partnerships with local FE colleges and Health Boards UWS recognised the need for such work to continue through new articulation opportunities.

The South West Articulation Hub (SWAH, 2009) was set up and sets out its aims in its “Forward plan” (2008-2013). Health Nursing & Midwifery (HNM) was part of the SWAH but also had to work within the constraints of the Nursing & Midwifery Council for entry of students to the national register (NMC 2010). A small team within HNM bid through SWAH for funding for a project which was completed 2010/11. This involved inviting students from local HNC FE courses to come into UWS twice during their HNC year and link in with UWS environment, staff and students. The evaluations from this work and meetings with local FE colleges from the SWAH formed the basis for discussions for a new learner journey through articulation.

Students commence HNC with local FE colleges and are then selected by UWS for year 2 Nursing Degree (Adult or Mental Health). They then complete a bespoke module (Extended Practice Learning Experience – PLE) over the summer months prior to commencement at UWS. The outcomes of their HNC year and UWS year 1 are mapped together so that any potential deficit can be addressed. It is important that the students are prepared with the knowledge and skills required to commence their higher education (Cree et al, 2009)

Transition
For students to become properly integrated in their new university environment they must complete three steps: separation, transition and incorporation (Tinto 1987 cited in Whittaker 2008). McInnis et al (2000) advocate that students experience four main forms of transition: personal and social; geographic; administrative and academic.

According to Harvey et al. (2006) students require assistance to settle into university and to become independent learners. The growth of Higher Education and the diversity of the student population have brought about an increased need to support this heterogeneous student group (Harvey et al. 2006). The feeling of fitting in within Higher Education and the establishment of friendships has been advocated as being vital in assisting students’ personal and social transition into first year (Yorke and Longden, 2007).

Support has been highlighted as being crucial in the assistance of integration into higher education. Support can come from various sectors including family; friends; peers; tutors as well as formal student support organisations (Steele et al. 2005). Woodfield (2002) indicates that the friendship support networks that students establish provide a vital support system as they experience the fluctuating highs and lows of student life.

Geographical transition issues are linked to the impact large spread out campuses have on students (Whittaker 2008). Cree et al. (2009) advocate that large universities can be overwhelming for students as can large classes, with many students who enter higher education being exposed to large class sizes for the first time. Thomas and Hixenbaugh (2006) purport that large classes can have an effect on both traditional and non-traditional students and can lead to a decrease in the personalised approach to learning.

Administrative transition involves issues including enrolment, access to information networks and academic staff (Whittaker 2008). Universities now use information technology for many of their administrative purposes (Haigh 2004). Peyrovi et al (2005) advocate that students should be encouraged to use the support of Information Technology (IT) departments, tutors and peers to become more familiar with the institution’s IT applications and environment. Fleming and McKee (2005) indicate the importance of including IT skills support for all IT competence levels and also endorses the inclusion of IT skills support in induction programmes.

The political drivers which have led to the philosophy of widening access to higher education have contributed to the increase in non-traditional students who enter higher education with a varied spectrum of educational qualifications (Scottish Government 2008). This changed student profile have led to some academic staff raising concerns in relation to students’ academic performance and their ability to successfully undertake the academic demands placed on them throughout their nursing degree (McCarey et al. 2007).

Cree et al. (2009) carried out a longitudinal study of 45 social work students’ experiences of transition from further education to higher education. Cree et al. (2009) report the students found the transition to be particularly challenging and the results indicated that students did not feel as prepared as they had hoped for university study. Students reported that they had not had experience of formal exams or of the different types of assessment they were now undertaking. They also stated they found academic writing and referencing difficult.

Moir (2010, p.3) advocates the purpose of higher education is one of “Transformation rather than Transmission” with increased focus on the student. He purports that personal values and social experience are now being seen as important graduate attributes compared to the traditional view that focussed on gaining knowledge and understanding. The higher education experience is more than ever about empowering students to engage and take ownership of their learning.

**Empowerment / Engagement**
Empowerment is multi-faceted and not just about making sure the students have the knowledge to enter year 2. Empowerment according to Bradbury Jones et al (2010) involves knowledge and confidence. Bradbury Jones et al (2010) further suggest if knowledge and confidence are addressed then enhancement of self-efficacy will follow. Lowe and Cook (2003) highlighted in their study a substantial minority of students (up to 20%) were failing to come to terms with the academic and social demands of university life. Hence it is important that students are prepared in every way to address this. Lowe and Cook (2003) suggest that universities need to provide appropriate academic, attitudinal and social preparation but that this “induction” is not seen as a one off event but rather a process involving staff, students and peers.

It is suggested by The Quality Assurance Agency for Scotland, (QAA 2008) that in order to be empowered students must be engaged and feel they have a sense of belonging. This engagement commences with meeting the students informally to advise them about the articulation opportunity and follows through selection, pre module information then the summer module. This engagement encompasses academic, social, personal and professional engagement.

QAA (2008) argue that students who are engaged emotionally, cognitively and behaviourally in their education will have enhanced affililation with their institution and in turn higher levels of motivation, attendance and persistence. Purnell (2006) argues that first year is the ideal time to set up the infrastructure for student engagement. However if they are entering at year 2 it is imperative that this potential gap is filled. QAA (2008) define empowerment broadly as the student’s competency to engage effectively with their studies which involved them becoming independent learners. Part of becoming an independent learner is confidence which was explored by Bloy & Pillai (2006). They concluded that students need to be given the tools (including confidence and competence) to help them engage. The work done by Bloy & Pillai (2006) provided evidence of the positive benefits of engagement, including enhanced motivation & increased awareness to seek help when needed.

Learner journeys according to the Scottish Government (2011) have changed and universities must be flexible and adaptable whilst facilitating these journeys so that the learner is not set up to fail. Thus this new innovative learner journey seeks to engage students early and empower them to succeed in higher education.

**PLE Module**

This stand-alone module allows articulation of a group of HNC students into year 2 of the Undergraduate Nursing programme. It is levelled at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 7 and awarded 20 points. All relevant HNC classes from the partner FE Colleges are given information about the module and the criteria for articulating into year 2. This allows the students to put themselves forward to be selected. The criteria includes: completion of full HNC in college, graded unit at mark A or B; completion of 760 hours by the end of the module (NMC, 2010) of which 180 must be completed within the module and at least 450 hours done as part of HNC; completion of UWS selection process; satisfactory health screening and Criminal Check – Protection of Vulnerable groups (PVG).

The FE colleges then collate a short list of students they would support to undertake the module. These students are invited to a personal interview at UWS and if successful are offered a place through the Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

The number of places on offer is reviewed and agreed with the colleges annually. It is derived by reviewing the last number of cohorts through the year one period and balancing any losses against the number of audited practice experience areas UWS has available. The outcomes for the HNC and the UWS first year are meticulously mapped together (NMC, 2010) to identify any core elements requiring to be covered in the summer module. Meetings
take place 3-4 times a year with the colleges, university & Health Board partners to fully discuss module developments and student’s progress.

The module’s overall aim is to aid transition into university socially, academically & professionally. The more specific aims are to facilitate the development of knowledge, skills and professional values within the healthcare environment that will enable students to demonstrate that they have met the requirements for the progression into year 2 of the pre-registration nursing degree programme. The bespoke module includes study days (subjects covered include maternity and paediatric care, mental health issues, personal and professional development and skills teaching), simulated practice and practice experience hours. Students complete a portfolio of evidence over the module. The overall assessment is twofold, clinical assessment (50%) and reflective portfolio (50%).

**Realities of the module**

The inaugural implementation of the module highlighted several realities. Firstly the students had no financial assistance. Although a fee waiver was put in place no bursary support or expenses for travel costs was available. Secondly the students had to undertake this module over the summer months immediately following their HNC studies. They also had little time off for private work or leisure with their families.

**Module Evaluation**

The PLE module commenced July 2012 with 20 students from 9 different FE colleges. 17 completed and 17 evaluated their experience.

The purpose of evaluation is to make judgements about a course / programme and thus improve its effectiveness (Patton, 1987). Gullickson (2000) suggests that evaluation is an integral and inevitable feature of all aspects of education. It is further highlighted by Gullickson (2000) that student evaluations are particularly useful to provide feedback, inform academic growth, enhance School policy and provide public accountability.

In the case of this new bespoke module students were evaluated as were their clinical mentors and the FE College partners involved. This paper highlights the students’ evaluations and shows how these link to empowerment.

**Student evaluations - Findings**

**Evaluation of UWS – Practice Learning Experience Module**

On a scale of 1-5 , 1 being the worst and 5 being the best please answer the following by circling as you feel appropriate

1. This module was useful to me

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Comments included: “better insight to the university”, “Gave me better confidence”, “prepared me for university life”, “opportunity to learn more skills”, “gave me knowledge”

2. This module was informative for me

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3. This module helped prepare me for year 2 entry

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Comments included: “prepared me for entry to year 2”, “I think I have been given all the tools I need to progress effectively to year 2”, “the experience of meeting the teaching staff”

4. This module helped prepare me to start at university

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<td>29%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments included: “after being told what was expected of me and the support that was given to me by my lecturer I feel I am confident”, “it covered aspects of new theory and skills which will help me progress in university”, “meeting other students who were acting as buddies was a great relief and provides support and familiar faces”, “it gave me a good understanding of academic expectations...meeting with my personal tutor has been a great help as i have begun to build a working relationship with her”

4. Do you feel inspired to succeed after this module?

Yes  NO

16  1 response was in the middle!

94%  6%

Comments included: “I feel motivated to continue and learn more”, “the lecturers support has inspired me”, “I feel more motivated to achieve”
Model
Empowering Students

Knowledge
‘I think I have been given all the tools to progress effectively into Second Year’.
‘Allowed me to progress my learning and understand what is needed’.

Confidence
‘After being told what was expected of me and the support that was given to me by my lecturers, I feel I am confident to proceed into Second Year’.
‘Feel a lot happier going into second year after doing this Module’.

Preparation
‘It covered aspects of new Theory and Skills which will help me progress in Uni and has made me feel prepared to progress’.
‘It gave a good understanding of academic expectations’.

Link to empowerment
The main themes to emerge from the qualitative comments were confidence, knowledge and being prepared. Previous discussion in this paper highlighted the vital role that confidence and knowledge plays in empowering students (Bradbury- Jones et al 2010, Lowe & Cook 2003, QAA 2008, and Harvey et al 2006). The aspects of transition discussed earlier further elicit the area of being prepared personally, socially, & academically. Work alluded to by Bloy and Pillai (2006) provided evidence of the positive benefits of engagement and empowerment.

Future of module
Research has been proposed to follow this first cohort of students and track their progress through the journey to registration and graduation. The team feel this will provide more complete evidence of the support needs to empower students to succeed within university.

The re mapping of all the HNC programmes feeding into UWS year 2 has been successfully completed and proved very helpful to both FE and He partners. UWS have selected the students for the summer 2013 module and they have already had an introductory session in university.

Conclusion
Higher Education (& nurse education) has been constantly changing since Robbins aims were set out in 1963. Learner journeys have evolved and UWS has responded by providing this unique opportunity to articulate into a much sought after nursing degree programme. At the heart of all this change are students with individual learning needs. We believe that such students can be, and are empowered through confidence, knowledge and being prepared. Through this journey they are inspired to succeed.

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The relationship between university integration and help seeking in first year university students

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RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT: The present study is a longitudinal survey design that investigated first year students’ attitudes towards help seeking and their expectations and experiences of integration. Results indicated that students’ expectations of integration at the beginning of the year significantly predicted their attitude towards seeking help from both an academic staff member and the university counselling service at 3 and 9 months. Willingness to seek help from either source was relatively low at the beginning of the year, and did not change significantly over the course of the year. Throughout the year, attitudes towards help seeking from the university counselling service were significantly more positive than from an academic staff member. This study suggests that integration at university is useful in predicting later attitudes towards help seeking; efforts to improve student connectedness at the beginning of the year may empower students to seek help later in the year.

1 Introduction

1.1 Integration

Integration at university can be described as having two components: social and academic (Tinto, 2012). Social integration is the interactions between students and the degree of congruency between each student and his or her social environment. Tinto notes though, that friendships are more important than “social fit”, suggesting that students who do not fit the social norm of the university may still feel socially integrated, as long as they are able to form a friendship circle of similar individuals. Academic integration is measured by grade performance (an external factor) and intellectual development (an internal factor). Grade performance indicates that the student is able to produce work that is satisfactory to the requirements of the university, while intellectual development indicates that the student is engaged with, and is being challenged by, the academic content. Taken together, they are indicators of a good “academic fit” between student and institution. Withdrawal from university is “a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college” (Tinto 1975, p. 94). The interactions that students experience in both social and academic realms lead to modification of their study goals and commitment to university – ultimately impacting on their decision to stay or leave.

Decisions to stay or leave university are influenced by factors inside and outside the university. Competing demands constitute the push and pull factors that either keep an individual at university or contribute to dropout. Forming friendships at university (social integration) and receiving positive feedback for academic work (academic integration) is likely to “pull” the student towards the university, while feeling socially isolated (lack of social integration) or struggling academically (lack of academic integration) may “push” the student away. Likewise, factors outside the university will affect students’ decisions to stay or leave: financial difficulties will pull the individual to paid employment instead of university study, whereas the incentive of receiving a degree will push back to the university. These decisions are made early: dropout rates are highest in first year, therefore the focus is to ensure students are integrated as quickly as possible.(DeBerard, Spielmans & Julka 2004). As a result, social and academic integration are generally presented as issues of transition to university.
One crucial factor that is likely to impact on students’ decisions about continuing their education is the presence of mental health problems. Such problems also directly impact on their studies (and therefore their academic integration) and their social interactions. Heiligenstein, Guenther, Hsu, and Herman (1996) found a significant correlation between depression and academic impairment amongst students who attended the university counselling service with symptoms of depression. Of their sample, 92% reported academic impairment, with more severe depression being related to greater impairment. The high rates of impairment in this study may be explained by the sample – students are more likely to present for mental health treatment only after they recognise a functional impact in their lives. The authors also noted the bidirectional relationship between depression and academic impairment, where a vicious cycle may exist (e.g. absenteeism from class leads to worse mood, which results in further withdrawal).

Precursors of mental health problems such as high stress levels also play an important role. Stewart, Lam, Betson, Wong, and Wong (1999) investigated the stress-academic performance relationship amongst medical students and found that academic performance affected stress, regardless of pre-existing levels of anxiety and depression. They noted that academic performance before and during medical school was negatively correlated with stress – that is, those performing the best academically were also the least stressed. The authors of this study also noted that the relationship between stress and academic performance is likely to be bidirectional, noting a number of confounding as well as pre-existing factors (e.g. high school academic experiences). Despite some mixed results regarding the exact nature of the relationship, mental health and academic performance appear to be related.

Mental health difficulties are also likely to impact, and be impacted by, a student’s ability to integrate socially into the university. For example, social withdrawal is a feature of depression, and a diagnosis of depression includes “clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupation, or other important areas of functioning” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 349). The relationship between social withdrawal and mental illness is also likely to be bidirectional. In an epidemiological study of over 10,000 Irish adults, Lente et al. (2012) found that positive mental health was predicted by lower levels of loneliness and better social supports. Conversely, lower levels of social wellbeing was the strongest predictor of poor mental health.

Tinto’s (1975) model of university dropout suggests that poor social and academic integration is likely to lower students’ commitment to their institution, which in turn increases the likelihood of voluntary withdrawal. In the short term, withdrawing from study may be beneficial to students’ mental health (e.g. decreased stress), however over the long term, these individuals are not achieving their goals or fulfilling their potential – the long term impact of withdrawal from university due to mental health difficulties is unknown. If poor mental health leads to withdrawal because of low integration (both social and academic), intervening via integration initiatives may assist individuals at risk of withdrawing due to mental health difficulties to stay at university.

Other student attributes can also be used to predict student success. For example, McKavanagh and Purnell (2007) described three traits of “at risk” students as being difficulty in maintaining motivation, unrealistic expectations about managing studies, and reluctance to seek help. Using data from 1100 interviews with students who were not academically progressing to a satisfactory degree, they found that negative interactions with the university impacted on motivation. Furthermore, over half of those students interviewed were working more than 30 hours per week, indicating lack of awareness as to what is required to complete a university degree. Most relevant to the current research, the interviews found that only 12% of students had sought help once they identified that a problem existed.
1.2 Help Seeking

When faced with a mental health difficulty, perceiving and understanding that there is a need for help relies on mental health literacy. Mental health literacy is “the ability to gain access to, understand and use information in ways that promote and maintain good mental health” (Lauber et al. 2005, Background section, para. 1). In a review of the mental health literacy and help seeking literature, Hunt and Eisenberg (2010) reported that awareness of the need for help is one of the most significant barriers to help-seeking; therefore understanding and promoting mental health literacy is essential.

Yorgason et al. (2008) argued that it is insufficient for information to merely be posted somewhere on the university’s website: universities should engage in improving awareness through commercial marketing techniques. Furthermore, access to counselling services should consider students’ time constraints during what is likely to be a time of heightened anxiety and stress (if they are experiencing difficulties). Given the likelihood that as symptoms of mental illness progress it is less likely that individuals will actively seek treatment themselves, it is important for universities to proactively promote mental health literacy and help seeking. As well as promoting mental health and counselling, ensuring students remain engaged with the university is also important; students not attending campus or classes due to mental health concerns are even less likely to actively seek services.

The literature indicates a general lack of awareness of on-campus counselling services and minimal uptake of these services by university students. Lack of awareness of services is another major barrier to seeking help (Hunt & Eisenberg 2010). Yorgason et al. (2008) surveyed 266 undergraduate students on the connection between their mental health and knowledge and use of university mental health services. Those most in need of assistance cited lack of time (9% of overall sample) as the reason for not seeking help, followed by lack of knowledge (6% of overall sample). When asked about future help seeking behaviour, the same responses were most prevalent: 33% of the sample cited not enough time as a major barrier, followed by lack of knowledge (25%). Given these results, the authors highlight the importance of easy access to counselling services.

Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Gollust (2007), in a survey of over 2500 undergraduate and postgraduate university students, noted that while 30% of students had perceived a need for professional help for a mental health or emotional problem, in the last 12 months, only 15% of students had actually sought help. Of those not seeking help, the most common reasons were believing that stress is normal at university, that they did not perceive a need for help, believing the problem would get better by itself, not having time, thinking “no one can understand my problems”, and worrying about what others will think. The authors note that while the financial barriers to help seeking is generally not present in university student populations as on-campus counselling is generally free, there is still a significant gap between the perceived need for help and actual help seeking behaviour. Furthermore, the authors argue that improvements in access to counselling must be matched with efforts to improve mental health literacy, reduce stigma, and ensure adequate service provision once the student makes contact with the service.

1.3 Aims and Hypotheses

The aim of the study described in this paper was to investigate the role of integration as a predictor of attitudes towards help seeking over the course of the first year of study. University integration is a convenient predictor variable to examine, as it is a construct that can be targeted for change through interventions conducted across students and within the classroom. As discussed, students come to university with a variety of pre-existing attributes,
some of which are not under the control of the university. Students develop mental health problems because of both university and non-university related issues. The institution is best placed to intervene in an area that is under its control, such as integration. Based on a review of integration and help seeking research, it was hypothesized that expectations of integration at the start of semester would predict help seeking scores at the end of first semester and end of the year and that actual integration at the end of first semester would predict help seeking scores at the same time and at the end of the year.

2 Method

Participants

Participants were 241 first year students (73% female, mean age 20.92 years), enrolled in a number of programs at a single large urban Australian university. Figure 1, presents participant numbers at each time period. Only one significant difference was found between single and multiple responders at time one (Expectations of Staff Concern).

Figure 1. Participant Attrition

Materials

Academic and Social Integration Scales: a suite of five scales used to measure social and academic integration (Pascarella & Terenzini 1980), including: Peer-Group Interactions (7 items), Interactions with Faculty (5 items), Faculty Concern for Student Development and Teaching (5 items), Academic and Intellectual Development (7 items), and Institutional and Goal Commitments (6 items). The suite of scales was designed to test Tinto’s model of college dropout. Scale items are written in the past tense (i.e. it is expected that students will have already attended the university for a period of time). For the initial data collection, conducted at the beginning of first year, items were re-written to be future-orientated. A sample item is “During the upcoming academic year, do you think you will be able to do each of the following: Develop student friendships that are personally satisfying”. The subscale “Academic and Intellectual Development” was omitted from the survey at the beginning of semester one, as items could not meaningfully be re-written to a future-orientation (for example, “My academic experience has had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas”). Response options are on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) report acceptable reliability alphas for each of the subscales.

General Help Seeking Questionnaire: a scale designed to measure help seeking intentions for different problems and from different sources of help (Wilson, Deane & Ciarrochi 2005). The measure allows the researcher to specify the type of problem (depression, anxiety and stress were chosen as they are high-prevalence disorders found in university students) and the source of help (the university counselling service or an academic staff member were chosen as common sources of help). The scale asks “If you were experiencing depression, anxiety, or stress, how likely is it that you would seek help from each of the following people?” Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Extremely Unlikely) to 7 (Extremely Likely).

Procedure
Participants were recruited initially during face-to-face lectures in the first two weeks of semester in 14 different courses. Students were provided with the option of a paper based survey with reply paid envelope or a bookmark that provided a link to the online version of the survey. Course coordinators provided reminders to students and a link to the online survey via the university’s online learning system. Responses were collected over the first three weeks of the academic semester.

Participants who provided their student number were invited by email at the end of first semester to participate in a follow up online survey. This survey was a modified version of the first survey. Students were sent two reminder emails, and were able to respond over a one month period, which included the University’s first semester exam period. Students were followed up again by email, using the same procedure outlined above, at the end of second semester. All students who completed the first survey and provided their email address were contacted, including students who did not complete the mid-year survey. Ethics approval for this research was provided by the University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Regression analysis was used to evaluate the predictive power of each integration scale in predicting subsequent attitudes to help seeking. Significant regression analyses were then calculated simultaneously to determine if any integration scale was uniquely predictive of subsequent integration.

3 Results

Initial analysis indicated a significant difference at each time point between the two sources of help seeking. Paired-Sample t-tests in Table 1 show that on a 7-point Likert scale, attitudes towards counselling help seeking was endorsed significantly higher than attitudes towards academic help seeking. The results are then presented in four parts.

Table 1
Differences between Academic and Counselling Service Help Seeking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Academic Mean</th>
<th>Counselling Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2</td>
<td>2.74</td>
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<td>3.58</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<td>Time 3</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>.001</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Time 1 predicting Time 2

Table 2 shows the predictive power of each integration scale at Time 1 predicting help seeking at Time 2. While a number of scales were predictive of help seeking, only two scales provided unique predictive variance. Peer Interactions and Staff Interactions each uniquely predicted help seeking from an academic source, while Peer Interactions uniquely predicted help seeking from the counselling service.

Table 2
Integration Scales (Time One) Predicting Help Seeking (Time Two) (df=1,64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Help</td>
<td>Peer Interactions</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>11.86</td>
<td>.001*</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Interactions</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>14.97</td>
<td>&lt;.001*</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Concern</td>
<td>.18</td>
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<td>0.084</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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<td>Peer Interactions</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>11.69</td>
<td>0.001*</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td>Predictor</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>Partial Eta Squared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Help</td>
<td>Peer Interactions</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>2.36</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Interactions</td>
<td>.44</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Unique Variance

**Time 1 predicting Time 3**

Table 3 shows the predictive power of each integration scale at Time 1 predicting Help Seeking at Time 3. Unsurprisingly, Staff Interactions uniquely predicted attitudes towards help seeking from an academic source, while Peer Interactions uniquely predicted help seeking from the counselling service.

**Table 3**
Integration Scales (Time One) Predicting Help Seeking (Time Three) (df=1,45)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
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<td>12.38</td>
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<td>0.16</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Interactions</td>
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<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.12</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>6.56</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Unique Variance

**Time 2 predicting Time 2**

Table 4 shows the predictive power of each integration scale at Time 2 predicting Help Seeking at Time 2. While many of the scales significantly predicted both forms of help seeking, no single integration scale provided unique variance in predicting either form of help seeking.

**Table 4**
Integration Subscales (Time Two) Predicting Help Seeking (Time Two) (df=1,64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>Peer Interactions</td>
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<td>0.21</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Counselling Help</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Interactions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.27</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Growth</td>
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<td>10.32</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>.31</td>
<td>6.56</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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</table>

**Time 2 predicting Time 3**
Table 5 shows the predictive power of each integration scale at Time 2 predicting Help Seeking at Time 3. While many of the scales significantly predicted both forms of help seeking, no single integration scale provided unique variance in predicting either form of help seeking.

Table 5
Integration Scales (Time Two) Predicting Help Seeking (Time Three) (df=1.29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
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<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta Squared</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5.98</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Growth</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>0.025</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.18</td>
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</tbody>
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4 Discussion

The results of the current study partly supported our hypothesis. Expectations of Peer Interactions (Time 1) uniquely predicted attitudes towards help seeking from both an academic source and the counselling service at Time 2, but only attitudes towards the counselling service at Time 3. Expectations of Staff Interactions (Time 1) uniquely predicted attitudes towards help seeking from an academic source at Time 2 and Time 3.

At Time 2 (Actual Integration), no individual scale uniquely predicted help seeking, although Peer Interactions, Staff Interactions, Staff Concern, and Academic Growth all individually predicted attitudes towards help seeking from an academic source at Time 2, and Peer Interactions, Staff Interactions, and Academic Growth individually predicted attitudes towards help seeking from an academic source at Time 3. Peer Interactions, Staff Interactions, Academic Growth, and Commitment individually predicted attitudes towards the counselling service at Time 2, while all five integration scales individually predicted attitudes towards the counselling service at Time 3.

The results suggest that any efforts by the university to promote the counselling service have not been able to change students’ attitudes towards help seeking. It does indicate though that students were more likely to use the counselling service than seek help from academic staff. It is possible that attitudes towards help seeking from an academic staff member will be more influenced by perceived social norms than help seeking from the counselling service. Attitudes will also be impacted by previous interactions with individual staff members. The counselling service at the authors’ home university is discreetly located away from the main campus, where students can access services with greater anonymity. While this addresses issues of perceived public stigma, self rather than public stigma may be more of an issue for mental health help seeking (Golberstein, Eisenberg & Gollust 2009). Help from an academic staff member may be problematic if the student has ongoing regular contact with that person – perceived stigma will continue to exist beyond the help seeking encounter. Aligning student counselling more with each school or program, may also increase help seeking. Worryingly, willingness to seek help from either source was relatively low at the beginning of the year, and did not change significantly over the course of the year.
Students at each time point significantly preferred to go to the counselling service than discuss an issue with an academic staff member. There may be many reasons for this – it may be perceived that staff members do not have the necessary skills, concerns about confidentiality, and concerns that revealing a personal issue may negatively impact on students’ grades. Despite this, academic staff (and in particular tutoring staff) are likely to be more accessible to students for brief, informal support. Many front-line tutoring staff, those that first year students get to know and interact with the most, are often postgraduate students or early-career academics. While enthusiastic, they may not have the necessary skills to identify and intervene with disconnected students, or those with emerging mental health problems. While engagement and support at an institution level is necessary, those at the point of delivery must also be engaged and skilled in order to effectively improve. Simply adding another responsibility onto the list for academics and casual staff is unlikely to provide genuine buy-in. Tutoring staff may still be able to positively intervene just by providing academic support, given the correlation between depression and academic impairment (Heiligenstein et al. 1996).

As dropout rates are highest in first year (DeBerard, Spielmans & Julka 2004), students at risk need to be identified early, and proactively encouraged to attend support services. The results of this study indicate that those who are least integrated are also least likely to have positive attitudes towards help seeking. Those who need support most may therefore not be getting it. At present, we assume that students have sufficient knowledge about services, mental health literacy, and an attitude that does not include high levels of self-stigma, in order to seek help. This may be a big ask, considering that mostly, students self-refer to the university counselling service, and for those in distress, may be unlikely to be attending classes, let alone additional time spent on campus to address a mental health concern.

Intervening to improve mental health and wellbeing should be done initially at the program level and as part of the curriculum. Important too, that any intervention is seen as complementary to the core function of education and the production of successful graduates, rather than as an add-on service. Recognition is required that beginning students require more assistance, guidance, and direction than later year students. Help seeking is something that may initially require staff facilitation, both in the recognition of problems and where to go to address them. Second, students change in their level of responsibility and maturity through university. Telling students there is a counselling service and then leaving the responsibility with them to contact such a service may not be sufficient. Expecting students to reflect on their attitudes towards mental health and help seeking, particularly early in their university career, may also not be sufficient.

As students develop their sense of identity in their first year, building mental health literacy and help seeking into that identity can facilitate help seeking and address self and other stigma. For example, shifting the identity from “university students are smart and should cope” to “students get stressed, and sometimes need help” changes the identity of what it means to be a student, and also help seeking behaviour. This can be done at the institution level and reinforced at the program level. Recognising the messages we sometimes give students that go against this identity is important. Do we inadvertently suggest to students that seeking help is a sign of weakness or failure?

Rather than universities directly promoting the counselling service, the results presented here suggest that improvements towards help seeking behaviour could be achieved through programs aimed at improving student integration. Integration can be used throughout the year to address help seeking. It is not surprising that these variables are all inter-related. Change in one is likely to lead to a change in another. Up to this point though, integration has been largely seen as a variable in the teaching and learning literature. This research, however, provides evidence that integration is also a valid variable for discussion and use in the mental health literature pertaining to university students.
The results of the current study must be read in the light of one important limitation. Help seeking questions may be influenced by whether a person perceives a current problem. Although the question asks "if you were experiencing", some students may discount the question if there is no perceived problem. Further they may not have ever given much thought to what help seeking might be like, or how they would react if a mental health concern arose. On the other hand, many people with a mental health concern spend considerable time contemplating help seeking and imagining positive and negative scenarios.

Although help seeking has been presented in this paper as an outcome variable, it could also be regarded as a predictor, and the research would have focused on how attitudes to help seeking at the outset of university life impacted on integration, and therefore subsequent academic achievement and retention. This is a suggestion for future research, however the current research is focused within the clinical psychology stream, and is therefore interested most in how to improve mental health help seeking. The rationale for selecting integration as the predictor (and therefore intervention-focused variable) is because this is where universities have the most control, and can implement change at the broadest level. The focus here is on identifying cost-effective areas that will have the broadest utility.

Future research in the area of integration and help seeking would benefit from following students over the course of their entire degree. In addition, following up with students as to their actual help seeking behaviour will further assist our understanding of how attitudes towards help seeking, actual help seeking behaviour, and integration relate. By doing so, we will have a more complete understanding of students’ experience. Integration has benefits in the classroom, but may also assist students to seek help outside the classroom for issues such as mental health difficulties, and is therefore an important part of the services available that improve students’ university experience.

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Vibrant and engaging online social learning: an innovative response to threatened part-time study in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT: Austerity measures and increased tuition fees place heightened pressures on universities to provide sustainable, cost effective, high quality provision. This paper analyses how a team of staff in a School of Education at a UK University are leading collaborative work with partner colleges, to deliver a model that ameliorates the financial pressures, whilst developing high quality student-centred engagement for part-time students. When face-to-face teaching sessions were significantly reduced, an online academic social network for tutors and students was introduced to encourage collaboration, peer support and ‘coffee room’ discussion. Feedback from participants through focus groups and surveys confirmed a social support network as important for engagement and was perceived as supporting achievement, even by those who were reluctant to join the network. Recommendations include: more time face-to-face at the beginning of the course, more online tutor presence and scaffolded activities to build confidence in using an academic social network.

Introduction

This paper begins by describing recent changes in the delivery of a part-time Educational Studies Degree at a UK University. The first section is an explanation of how the course team has endeavoured to retain the core values and philosophy of the course, despite tighter constraints on contact time and class size. The use of blended learning and a social learning network in the first year of delivery is outlined, before moving on, in section two, to describe the methodology used to investigate how students of the course have responded. The third section of the paper reports on the outcomes of this investigation. In the fourth section, the implications of the use of social learning networks are further explored and recommendations for future developments made before concluding in the final section.

1 Context

UK governments have increasingly identified Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as key players in the production of flexible knowledge workers for the new global economy. The neoliberal marketisation of education by all political parties in office over the past 25 years has created a shift in thinking about HE provision. What counts as ‘world class education’ and its purpose in economically stringent times has become a highly contested notion and there are differing perspectives on how to balance economy, quality and social justice. The call of the Browne Review (2010) to ‘secure a sustainable future’ for UK HE through a competitive marketplace was used in September 2012 to justify a new funding structure that removed much of the public funding and introduced substantially higher student fees. Despite the availability of student loans for part-time students, this has resulted in fewer overall applications for many HEIs (Ratcliffe, 2012). At the same time, growing international and private provision delivered in increasingly flexible formats demands a response. The metaphor which the course team used to visualise these new pressures and constraints was of themselves as the innermost of a series of Russian dolls, the outermost of which is globalisation, within which lies neoliberal ideologies, the UK coalition Government, their educational policy and the implementation of that policy within the HE sector and at institutional level. At times congruent with and at others running counter to the direction and constraints dictated by this context, the course team approached curriculum design by
looking for the ‘rattle room’ that would enable them to hold on to their core educational values and to continue to deliver the kind of educational experience they believed to be of value to their students. In particular, as one type of educational space in the form of class contact time became scarce, other spaces within which educational outcomes could be achieved were sought. Coffield’s (2008, p 1) invitation to ‘Just suppose that teaching and learning became the first priority,’ underpinned their response and informed their choices wherever possible. This lead to a radical redesign of the course in question, which made use of novel spaces for teaching and learning, including an online social network open only to students and tutors of the degree.

This degree is a key progression route for teachers and trainers working in the lifelong learning sector. Students have typically completed a Certificate in Education or a Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector prior to enrolment. Their aim is to obtain a full honours degree that is professionally relevant to their work in post-compulsory education and training. From its inception as a Bachelor of Education programme in the early 1990s, it has evolved into a two year, part-time Bachelor of Arts degree, delivered across a consortium that includes the parent HEI and 16 partner colleges across the North of England. The delivery model has hitherto been a pattern of weekly, three hour classes, with separate cohorts at each of the centres. Starting in September 2012, face-to-face contact became limited to nine Saturday day schools across two academic years. At the same time and largely due to fee increases, cohorts at each of the centres dwindled, so that they were no longer financially viable as stand-alone provision. The day schools were therefore operated at regional level, with students from a number of different colleges converging on a regional centre. This pooling of resource and effort meant that cohorts as small as two students at any given centre were nonetheless financially viable. This was important in terms of the survival of the course but also in terms of the availability of opportunity at a local level for adult returners to education, whose lives and commitments root them to a particular locale. Selwyn’s (2010) work highlights the contrast between this and young people’s social autonomy when choosing where, when and how to engage in Education. The issue was seen therefore as not merely a set of economic considerations but also as one of opportunity and social justice, regardless of the age of participants and their status as parents, carers or breadwinners for a household.

At the heart of the degree lies the desire for individuals, previously trained as teaching practitioners, to acquire a sense of agency with regard to their work in education. Their prior teaching qualifications are aimed largely at developing them as highly effective teachers and trainers. The degree aims to enable them to contribute to wider debates in society about what education is and ought to be and to carry out good research that can be used to contribute to those debates:

- distinguishing between ‘merely useful knowledge’ – the kind of knowledge that keeps people in their place and supports the status quo, and ‘really useful knowledge’ that enables people to … understand the root causes of the circumstances in which they find themselves. (Thompson, 2000, p 2)

They need, therefore, to become confident in the use of what Freire calls the dominant syntax (2000); ways of speaking that enable people to question and perhaps influence what happens in society beyond the local level in which practitioners typically operate. Many of the adult returners on the degree, however, lack confidence in their ability to express their ideas in an academically convincing and persuasive way. A key plank in the delivery strategy has, therefore, been the provision of regular, iterative dialogue, through which students can develop a confident, well-informed, professional voice, both in writing and in speaking. Weekly classroom sessions provided plenty of scope for this. In redesigning the programme around radically curtailed class contact time, it was essential to find spaces in which this dialogue could be maintained and developed. It has been acknowledged that there are few
radical course designs or examples where technology is proven to enhance student interaction and communication (Sharpe et al, 2009). However, a careful choice of platforms within a blended learning approach was felt to offer the best chance of maintaining a viable, learning-led offer that would engage and empower the non-traditional students at whom the course was aimed, helping them to develop the ‘really useful knowledge’ that comes about: when individuals and groups begin to reflect upon their experience with each other ... which enables theories to be developed and linked to strategies for bringing about changes. (Thompson 2000, p2).

This is a fundamentally social activity and a prime motivator for the course team in identifying social networking as a potentially productive environment for this kind of learning.

For the purposes of this study, blended learning is defined broadly as a combination of online learning with face-to-face sessions. Bersin and Associates (2003, p 2) noted that corporate interests have found blended learning programmes had the ‘highest impact, lowest cost’ affordances, though were most effective when human interaction surrounded and supported the online component. The efficiency and economic value of the business perspective does not necessarily transfer directly to education, but can arguably be promulgated through the development of interdependent ‘communities of inquiry’ (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008, p 9). A sense of belonging is described as essential in order to sustain such a community, with a social presence proposed as of equal importance to the cognitive and teaching aspects of the course. It is well documented that high drop-out levels in blends of e-study can be attributed to the lack of a sense of belonging (Tinto, 1987; Sweet, 1986; Cohen & Garcia, 2008) and this further supports the emphasis on the social element of online learning in this instance. The blend arrived at therefore, endeavours to make provision for interplay of social, cognitive and teaching presence (Garrison & Vaughn, 2008) and is represented conceptually in Figure 1.

The students can draw variously from each of the elements of the blend to access academic content, discuss their ideas with a tutor or seek peer support, depending on their specific needs at any particular point in the course. Whilst the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) has some social affordances through discussion boards and group email, blog and wiki functionality, it was felt to be inadequate to support the frequency, degree and type of interaction that the course relies upon for some of its key outcomes. The alternative, social platform that was selected to address this perceived shortfall in the VLE was the Microsoft offering, Yammer ©, which has many of the features of Facebook, such as profile creation, ‘recent activity’ streams, ‘feeds,’ ‘follow,’ ‘like,’ ‘reply,’ ‘share an update, ‘praise’ and ‘tag’. It was also more readily accessible and useable through mobile devices and a downloadable desktop application than the VLE and for all these reasons was felt to have greater potential for student engagement. At the same time, Yammer allowed the creation of an advertisement-free, private community that cut out the ‘noise’ from the wider world that is typically associated with Facebook and Twitter, keeping the focus on the course in hand and
reducing distraction for students. The curriculum design, therefore, was informed by a series of pragmatic decisions and practical constraints but was fundamentally based upon pedagogical decisions. A cornerstone of this approach to curriculum design was the notion of the course development as an iterative process, informed by the experiences of participants. This paper reviews some aspects of the first year of that process and outlines how the course team investigated and reviewed the social learning network in its first year of use as well as their plans for future iterations.

2 Methodology

In order to establish the response of participants to the new delivery model for the course, the course team undertook an interpretivist, action research study, utilising both qualitative and quantitative data. The main research question was: 'Does the social learning network employed on this occasion have a positive impact on student engagement and learning?'

The lively, engaging, diverse, sometimes contentious, invariably supportive, occasionally and increasingly academic exchanges that we have seen on the site during the year seemed to provide, on the face of it, good evidence of this. A case study to divine whether this impression was well-founded was conducted, using action research as the basis of our methodology. Our conception of action research is based on:

Action and research are not conceived of as polar opposites but as 'inherently intertwined in real life [enabling] practical, effectual and transformational learning in action to take place’ (Chandler and Torbert, 2003, p 134). However, a particular conception of practical knowledge was envisaged here, broadening it beyond the purely technicist, operational knowledge that enables achievement of mandated outcomes. Instead, the study aimed to develop a more emancipatory knowledge, that would develop the course team's capacity to enquire, to create, to quest for an understanding of their practice and its context in their own way and to decide which way to go and how to get there in future iterations. The overall aim was to develop really useful knowledge that will be acted upon during 2013-14 academic year and as part of this aim, the researchers have elicited the interest of some of the participating students to take part in future studies as co-researchers. Simply put, the study is seen as part of a developmental action-reflection cycle, after that propounded by McNiff and Whitehead (2006, p 9) (Figure 2).

Two methods were used to gather data. Firstly, we administered a survey to the 72 students who made up the 2012-13 first year cohort. The questions were inspired by a combination of the main research question outlined above, the desire to measure our outcomes against our original aspirations for the course and our experiential hunches arising out of taking part in the social learning network during the academic year. It was evident, for example, that whilst the community was vibrant and engaging for many, the frequency and level of contribution was markedly different for different participants. Clear quantitative data that established what proportion of students were taking part, how they were doing so and why there were differing usage patterns was required to evaluate the potential benefits and encourage productive
participation in the future. Some simple statistical analysis to establish patterns in the data and identify correlations was conducted. Clear themes and patterns emerged.

To shed further light on these themes, three focus groups were held. These involved between three and six participants and a protocol was used for consistency. The intention was that the focus groups allowed for a co-construction of meaning with opportunities for participants to articulate and make sense of what they heard collectively, through the interactions of the group (Wilkinson, 2004). Participants were presented with cards, each carrying a keyword that typified one of the themes that had arisen out of the survey responses. The keywords were; unequal, democratic, engaging, collaborative, academic, irrelevant and social. Students were asked to think about these themes in silence for 30 seconds in the context of their use of Yammer and then asked to discuss what struck them about the terms. Their feedback was then transcribed and arranged according to the same themes. The outcomes of this study are presented in the following section. They focus on the survey findings but make use of commentary to illustrate and add detail. As such, the study might broadly be described as a piece of qualitatively informed statistical research.

3 Outcomes

There were 64 respondents to the survey from a cohort of 72 students. 67% were female and 33% male. 66% lie in the age range of the 30-49 with 17% in the range 20-29 and 18% over 50. The focus of this analysis is on the ways in which site use correlates with perceived benefits. Students were asked how often they visit the site. The responses were very encouraging, being far in excess of VLE usage by similar groups of students on the Certificate in Education at the same University, where visit rate to a group blog averaged once per month. However, the results do indicate that the visit rate is highly variable. The mode, at 27% is to visit once a week but a significant percentage (13%) visit more than once a day; ’It’s engaging for most people. It’s addictive to read what’s going on. I even have it on my phone.’ (Student D). At the other end of the spectrum, 13% reported never visiting the site. To shed light on the potential reasons for this variability, students were asked about their motivation, technical knowledge and confidence when using Yammer.

Only 6% of responses indicated technical barriers of not knowing how to find or use the site. All students were invited to the site by email in the first week and follow up invites were sent to those who hadn’t joined in the weeks that followed. There is a 24 hour IT Support helpline and emails were periodically sent out offering support to any experiencing difficulties. 64% of those who knew how to find the site were confident about taking part:

And sometimes if you find something that's really good, people will put that on there, “Well, have a look at this, it might be relevant.” So in that way it feels really collaborative. It's like “I've done quite a lot of work and found this but actually I'd be quite happy to share it, if it's of use to you as well.” (Student A)

However, 15% of responses saw no need for Yammer and a significant proportion (27%) whilst they knew how to find and use the site, were not confident about taking part:

I haven't done anything academic for a long time so I don't have the confidence to think that what I'm thinking will hit the mark and when you read something that others post, whether they're rubbish or not, they're written in such a way that you think, “Oh, they know what they're talking about, I better not expose myself by saying something stupid.” (Student A)

The course needs to address feelings of a lack of confidence and insecurity. The tutors need to draw people into conservations on Yammer. (Student B)
Conversely, others saw relatively unacademic contributions as unproblematic or potentially useful:

I think there are still people who are quite happy to go on and just ask an ordinary question or say, "Oh, I found this the other day, have a look at it," and they don't need to say anything else about it. It might be useful then. I know I've picked bits up that I have then ended up using in my module so it's useful in that way. (Student A)

This multifaceted response is borne out by the kinds of interactions that are apparent on the site. These range from prosaic questions about deadlines and day-school dates to light-hearted exchanges and supportive messages about the pressures of study, to relatively challenging academic posts that endeavour to prompt deeper thought and critical engagement.

Students were also asked about their perceptions of Yammer as a ‘community of discovery’ (Coffield and Williamson, 2011, p 49). (Figure 3).

The majority agree that on Yammer, educators and students are partners in learning and learn from one another and that learning is the central organising principle. Most feel that it provides intellectual space to improve through participation and that the learning is collaborative and dialogic. Most also feel that it is an expansive environment run on educational principles. Students are more equivocal with regard to whether the environment encourages principled dissent, allows individual enhancement, is inclusive and equal and is a thriving hub. The general concerns about equality, inclusivity and power in the environment were also reflected in comments from the Focus Groups:

I think some people swamp it ... I'll sit and I'll watch and I'll keep quiet and I'll put my opinion forward if I absolutely have to. But to go on there and become quite opinionated ... is not something I'd do, (Student G)

and conversely from a more vocal participant;

I don’t feel Yammer has always been as collaborative as it could be and it’s sometimes been limited and unequal as a tool. I don’t think that I’m getting much
back. I sometimes get things from conversations. It could be used better. (Student H)

In addition, students called for more face-to-face contact time at the beginning of the course to build trusting relationships with peers. The possibility of a two-day residential is currently being explored to support this request. On the basis of the findings of this study, the current blend of face-to-face and online provision is a good recipe but requires the seasoning that would be provided by knowing peers and feeling comfortable in their presence both online and in person.

The session at the beginning of the course was too quick, we didn't know each other very well and we didn't get the chance to know each other ... we had to get straight into performing which is why we didn't collaborate as much as we might have. (Student B)

Perceptions of the impact of Yammer on student achievement, however, reveal a very encouraging picture. Their responses show 54% reporting a positive impact, 46% no impact and zero students reporting a negative impact. Correlations between the visit rate and perception of impact were also identified. Unsurprisingly, 100% of those who never visit said that it had no impact on their achievement. Of those who do visit at least once a week, 66% said the impact on their achievement had been positive. The focus groups offered some explanations for the kinds of academic benefits that students perceived:

I like the fact that Yammer stayed academic, it answers lots of questions about the module. (Student C)

Yammer allows me to see how other people put things down; it gives a wider scope and alternative points of view. (Student B)

What I've seen has made me "up my game" and to realise that I can be on the same playing field as them. It made me think more about what I can do. (Student C)

In addition to asking about direct impact on achievements on the course, students were also asked about other benefits that they think accrue from particular aspects of the Yammer experience. Correlations were then sought between these more general benefits and the students’ perceptions of direct impact on achievement. Interestingly, 56% of those who said there had been no direct impact on their achievement, nonetheless felt there had been some other benefit, arising out of reading the views of others, being able to ask questions or gaining emotional or peer support. Examples of these more general benefits cited in focus groups include:

I think it is social; some people do get a lot out of it. You can see friendships forming; you know people do chat to each other and things. I don't know, I think it's engaging and social, even though I'm just a lurker. That's fascinating. (Student G)

It is engaging talking to peers and I think that you would struggle on a blended learning course without it. (Student B)

I have found Yammer dead motivating; the [weekly email] digest motivated me because I see what other people do. (Student D)

Eight percent perceived no benefit and thought the site irrelevant to their studies:
Some people might find it useful but for me personally, it's not of any use at all. So it just seems sometimes all these toys and things are really nice but at the end of the day if it doesn't fit, then you've got to find a more traditional place, perhaps. (Student, Student E)

In total, however, 81% of all responses about the potential value of Yammer reported some benefit, either as a direct impact on achievement or of a more general nature.

I thought that Yammer was irrelevant at the beginning, which is probably why I didn't use it. But I do now. (Student F)

Students were also asked about the frequency with which they contribute to the site. As with visit frequency, their responses showed a divergent pattern. The mode (29%) contributes occasionally but a similar number (26%) prefer to 'lurk,' reading the views of others but never contributing:

[I think it is] social because I think I'm a lurker. I don't post anything. I lurk every couple of days. I do lurk. I find it interesting ... engaging. (Student G)

Significant numbers again appear at either end of the spectrum, with 15% contributing frequently and 13% who never contribute because they don't visit. In addition, 18% report that they 'lurk' but are prepared to contribute on rare occasions. These responses were again cross-tabulated with the perceived benefits of Yammer (Figure 4). This shows that in general, the more frequently the student contributes, the more likely they are to perceive Yammer as beneficial. It may be that real benefits accrue, resulting in this positive perception, or that a positive perception triggers participation, or a combination of the two. Again, unsurprisingly, of those who said that they don't interact with Yammer in any way, 100% perceive no direct impact on their achievement. However, what is surprising is that of these, 88% said they perceive a benefit of some kind associated with using Yammer. This may be an anomalous result due to lack of attention to the precise wording of the questions on the survey but it may indicate that even those students who don't use Yammer feel that some benefits would accrue should they begin to do so.

4 Discussion

A key aspect of the findings outlined above that demands attention is the perception of students with regard to power and inequality in the network. The affordance for anyone to create an utterance of any length at any time on any topic holds the promise of an entirely democratic medium but it is interesting to note that it was not perceived as such by the
participants. Fluency, scholarship, confidence, frequency of contribution and forthrightness were seen as markers of power and as precluding contribution from those students who felt themselves to be deficient in any of those areas. This left the more reticent feeling somewhat disempowered and the more vocal sometimes feeling that they were not getting much back. Despite the fact that participation is not limited by the space and time constraints of the classroom, it was nonetheless seen as a finite resource, with reference made to students 'swamping' or 'monopolising' the network and a call for tutors to moderate discussion. This might have been predicted by the course team and the effects ameliorated through more careful and detailed induction into use of the site and encouragement of any and all types of interaction. In particular, Bourdieu's (1985) field theory is of use here. The social learning network can be seen as a field into which students carry varying amounts of economic, social and cultural capital, which is then evaluated within the field to accord them what they and others take to be their legitimate status within that field. Left to unfold organically, this might polarise the group into speakers and non-speakers. Whilst lurking is a legitimate learning activity (Bishop, 2007), interaction holds out the promise of further development of some of the key outcomes of the course and more support might be given to encourage all to feel able to contribute.

In order to encourage a more inclusive environment and in answer to the call from students for tutors to take a more active, supportive role, the curriculum will be adapted for the 2013-14 academic year. Tutors across the network will be encouraged and supported to participate more. In each year of the course, there is a reflective module, which provides the opportunity to incorporate some staged levels of contribution to the social network, with students given a framework for participation. This could begin with reading the site on a regular basis, moving on to 'tagging' posts that are of interest, 'liking' the posts that they rate most highly, commenting or replying to another user, posting an update or question about their own progress on the course, sharing a recommended resource such as a website or journal article, collaborating with peers in the creation of a shared resource and culminating in the student taking a lead role in a collaborative initiative. Students could then be encouraged to set goals on this continuum that suit their own aspirations for use of the site and to reflect on and ask for support or help in reaching those goals if needed, cognisant of some of the benefits that might accrue should they chose to contribute.

5 Conclusion

In summary, the outcomes of the study illustrate that the initial positive impressions of the impact of the social learning network were broadly accurate. It has provided a vibrant and engaging online learning experience for a significant proportion of the students on the course and many have perceived this as beneficial. Our initial metaphor of the site as a kind of 'coffee room' is evocative of what we observed, with people dropping in, some often, some occasionally and some never; engaging in chat or listening in silence to others; sharing resources and formulating ideas; asking questions and giving each other support. The metaphor is also helpful in evaluating the implications of our findings for future iterations, in that physical spaces in educational settings such as common rooms and even classrooms, are similarly used in different ways by different participants, depending upon their needs and dispositions. The degree to which the course team needs to problematise those varying levels of participation is, therefore, arguable. The students on the course are encouraged to see their degree as a personal learning journey and so it is, perhaps a healthy aspect of the course that it enables students to make their own choices about whether or not to participate. This paper, we hope, facilitates more informed choices, because it equips students with the wider picture of how others see the social learning network and its attendant challenges and benefits. It is also hoped that some of the strategies adopted here have wider applicability that will help valuable provision to survive and flourish in an age of austerity.
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Social Learning Space: supporting students articulating from FE to HE by utilising social media technology

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ABSTRACT: The traditional mode of e-learning in Higher Education focused on an e-publishing model whereby text based learning materials were simply made available to students electronically. However developments in web technology, such as Social Media, are driving a trend towards providing e-learning resources to facilitate collaboration and to foster a sense of academic community. The Social Learning Space (SLS) is an innovative project which makes use of Social Media technology to support students articulating from Further Education colleges to Higher Education. The SLS project aims to create computer based resources which promote collaboration, reflection and social learning. The project is situated in the School of Engineering, Computing and Applied Mathematics in the University of Abertay Dundee, and is funded by the Tayside and Fife Articulation Fund.

The focus of the SLS project has been to support articulating students by developing a number of social media based ‘apps’ and by utilising the social networking platform Facebook. The Social Media apps developed during the project can be viewed from http://www.facebook.com/SLSAbertay. The project aims and outputs were evaluated by means of student questionnaires, interviews and by computer logged data concerning the use of the software. The results indicated that most of the SLS apps were found to be useful when leveraged in a class room setting, however perhaps the most significant finding was that the resource known as the ‘Facebook group app’ was the most highly valued.

The ‘Facebook group app’ is based upon the Facebook groups facility which is a discussion forum accessed via the Facebook platform. The SLS Facebook groups were available to students either by using the traditional Facebook interface, or via ‘Facebook group app’ which was built to provide a novel interface and extra functionality, in the form of ‘social tools’ to the standard Facebook group. The ‘social tools’ function enabled students to manipulate the group listing by users and/or messages rather than merely chronological order. The users of the app included students in Further Education colleges as well as those recently articulated to Higher Education. The recommendations from this study are that Facebook groups can provide a useful means of promoting academic outcomes, and that tutor input to the group is important. However it is also recommended that there is a policy for protecting student privacy by restricting academic activities to the group and allowing students a clear demarcation line between the group and their user profiles. Perhaps the most significant finding in terms of the project goals was that students articulating from FE colleges found the ‘Facebook group app’ to be effective in assisting them in increasing their social capital and in experiencing a greater sense of academic community.

1 Introduction

Several studies have found that social learning forms an important part of the support systems necessary for successful study at Higher Education level. Gutteridge in (2001) found that reasons for non progression included social isolation and anxiety. In addition research has suggested that the more students interact with other students and staff, the more likely they are to persist (Tinto 1997). In a study, focused upon discussion forums, it was found that the software enabled some students to experience a sense of academic
community (Dawson 2008). The Social Learning Space project is focused on utilising social networking software in order to increase social capital and to foster academic community.

1.1. Social Networks

Boyd & Ellison (2004) define a Social Network (SN) as a service that allows people to construct a public or semi-public profile in order to expose it to an articulated list of friends or anyone else who also has a profile. SNs allow users to create personal profiles, and to make connections with individuals that they might otherwise not have been able to make. This is largely due to the public display of connections that each person has and also because SNs provide a mechanism for users to leave messages on friends profiles (Cloete, de Villiers & Roodt 2009). The functionality of SNs therefore provides an opportunity to support or to replace a real world social network of people.

Another study has shown that over 85% of students surveyed reported using one or more SN. Furthermore, the proportion of students who used SNs on a daily basis grew from approximately one third in 2006 to almost two thirds in 2008, (Ellison, 2008). This finding suggests dramatic growth in the years 2006-2008 and more recent trends suggest continued growth. These findings indicate that SN usage amongst students has increased dramatically. Intriguingly the study also indicated that almost half of the students surveyed have integrated SNs into their academic life. The main method of integration is reported as being a means of communicating with fellow students about course related topics. Only 5.5% indicated that their academic use of SNs extended to communication with academic staff (Ellison 2008).

1.2. Facebook

Facebook is the leading SN site for University students, with studies indicating that somewhere between 85%-99% of students use the site, (Ellison,2008; Hargittai 2008a; Jones & Fox 2009; Matney & Borland 2009). Facebook has grown at a considerable speed over the last few years, (Jones & Fox 2009; Matney & Borland 2009; Smith & Caruso 2010), and therefore there has been a similar growth in academic interest in the potential SNs have for enhancing the student experience, (Abramson 2011; Beer 2008; Eberhardt 2007; Junco 2011; Kamenetz 2011).

1.2.1 Facebook Advantages & Disadvantages

A recurring concern in using Facebook, and other SNs, raised by students is the ability for lecturers to view their profile, which they feared may have a negative impact (Cloete, de Villiers & Roodt 2009; Maranto & Barton, 2010). For example Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon and Chew (2009) carried out a study on four separate universities to explore student perception of using SNs to aid their studies. They found that students preferred to keep their social life separate from their academic life. Jones et al argued that in order to combine SNs with education, there is a need to find an appropriate demarcation. Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, and Witty (2010) carried out two studies and concluded that “only” 15% of students reported having privacy concerns about University staff. In examining this evidence it is worth emphasising that 15% is not a small percentage when considering the sensitivities in question. There seems little doubt that privacy concerns regarding the use of SN sites such as Facebook are growing, and it is therefore important that Universities proceed with caution.

There is evidence of potential benefits of using Facebook in an academic context for example by increasing students’ digital literacy skills. In addition to this the fact that SN sites are an established part of student daily routine means that there is the potential to increase academic participation by using SNs (Ellison 2007). Other potential benefits include increased interactive and self-presentation (social presence) capabilities as compared to
most virtual learning environments. It has been argued that SN sites promote student reflection, which may lead to more considered contributions from students, which may in turn increase student motivation (Griffith, S. & Liyanage, L. 2008). Further it has been stated that there is a positive co-relation between Facebook usage and the creation and maintenance of social capital, which has been defined as “the resource accumulated through the relationships among people” (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe 2007). In addition to this, in an update to the previous study, it was found by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2011) that using Facebook to learn more about people that the user knows in the real world was related to increased social capital. However it was also found that using Facebook to meet strangers whom the user did not know in the real world was not related to increases in social capital.

1.2.2. Academic use of Facebook

There are a number of examples of the academic use of Facebook, for example as described in Selwyn (2007). In this study it was found that educationally related material accounted for a relatively small fraction of the total amount of posts. When students did use Facebook for educationally related purposes, it was usually aimed at practical information such as finding out when and where lectures were being held and when assessments were due in. However the Selwyn study was passive in terms of the fact that there was no direct input from tutors to Facebook, and, unlike the SLS project, no customised software.

Several attempts have been made to use Facebook as an educational tool for content delivery and student collaboration. One such example is that of Griffith & Liyanage (2008), which details research on the educational benefits of Facebook Groups, a resource made use of in the SLS project. The Griffith & Liyanage study found that the students had a good perception of Facebook and preferred its use for education to traditional methods. One interesting observation in this study was that the amount of student activity within the group dwarfed that of the lecturer activity. However it was also observed that students “became more participant when instructors acted as moderators” indicating that some lecturer activity was required.

There are examples of the use a Facebook Group as a vehicle for course updates and announcements (Fontana, 2010). It was found that students were using the groups to ask course related questions and collaborate with fellow students, including posting images of their artwork and allowing others to provide feedback. The study found that students made more of an effort to check the Facebook Groups compared to the university’s system and it appeared that students felt less embarrassed about asking course related questions on Facebook compared to in class. Overall it was found that students were more comfortable using technology that they were familiar with, as opposed to the university’s system.

Much of the debate concerning the use of Facebook in an academic setting considers correlations as analysed from survey data. For example Heberger & Harper (2008) found that time spent on Facebook is related to real-world involvement on campus. In addition Tufekci (2008) found that users of social networking websites had more real-world contact with friends than non-users. Further it was found that creating events was a significant positive predictor of both engagement and involvement in campus activities (Kuh, 2009). However Junko(2011) in a large scale survey based study found that checking Facebook were negatively predictive of engagement score. On the other hand it has been stated that commenting on content (Junko, 2011) was positively predictive of high engagement scores.

In summary there is evidence that Facebook, including Facebook groups, can be used effectively in an academic setting. However there is evidence that students have privacy concerns about intrusion into their social use of Facebook. The SLS project endeavours to harness the potential Facebook has for enhancing social capital and to maintain a line of demarcation between student’s private and academic use of the software.
3. Methods
The social learning space project was setup in the autumn of 2010 with funding from the Tayside and Fife Articulation hub. The project involved the design and development of a range of web based applications such as: a web app named ‘Coming from college’ which leverage cognate domain specific resources, ‘SLS board’ which is a messaging system making use of a post-it metaphor, ‘peer quiz’ a collaborative quiz making tool, ‘Graduate attributes wizard’ intended to support an employability related task, ‘Access2 programming’ a domain specific e-learning resource and ‘Facebook Group App’ which is the most social of the apps and is built on the Facebook Application Programming Interface(API).

The focus of this research is into the effectiveness of the ‘Facebook Group App’. The software is a browser based application built upon the Facebook API. In practice this means that the app can be accessed from any device which is internet connected with a browser. The app makes available to the user the Facebook groups to which they are subscribed. The interface has a mobile friendly version of Facebook groups and in addition provides ‘social tools’. The messages when viewed through Facebook without the app are listed in chronological order with the most recent post at the top. The ‘social tools’ feature enables users to list by a particular user, by the most commented upon, the most liked and in reverse order.

This research was focused upon evaluating the usefulness of the Facebook Groups App and was conducted using interviews, surveys and analysis of data obtained from the Facebook API. All the participants are articulating students, unless otherwise specified. The interviews were conducted with eight students each over a period of 15-20 minutes. The students were recruited directly as articulating students and remunerated with a gift of £10.00 of Amazon gift vouchers. The interview discussion topics included Facebook usage, Facebook groups, VLEs and the Facebook Groups App.

The survey was conducted with twenty nine students who were self-selecting from an email based recruitment process with a prize of two £20.00 Amazon gift vouchers. The survey was hosted on Google Drive. The survey was tested for reliability and found to have an alpha level of .77, (Chronbach, 1951). The results from two of the questions concerning university engagement and participation with the app were analysed for correlation using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Soper 2013).

An analysis of computer logged data from the Facebook Group using the API was carried out. The data under examination is made up of a message poster’s name and the commenter’s name, if the message had comments. The data takes the form of a social graph and was analysed in nodeXL (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith 2010). The total number of students was 79 (made up of all students in a programme), including 8 articulating students and the programme tutor. The data was examined using Social Network Analysis. The first metric used was degree which measure how many comments, if any, a student’s post received. The second metric was betweeness which measures shortest paths across the graph and is, in essence measuring connectedness. The third and final measure was eigenvector centrality which measures ‘popularity’ by assigning degree scores and then recalculating based upon the scores of those commenting upon a post. Therefore if ones post is commented upon by someone who has posted and received a lot of comments, then ones score would increase in comparison to being commented by a less popular poster, (Wasserman & Faust 1994). The SNA scores were calculated both before and after using the Facebook Groups App. The two sets of scores were compared using a Mann-Whitney U-test (Siegel 1956).
4. Results

4.1 Interview Results

The results from the interview with eight articulating students include the finding that all students used FaceBook at least daily or more, and that they checked FaceBook more often than email. When students were asked about the use of Facebook Group App as compared to a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) two students stated that they would prefer to use Facebook rather than the VLE even for content delivery. All eight students said that Facebook Group App was preferable to the VLE for communication. Student’s responses to questioning about privacy suggested that they preferred to use a group specific to their course of study rather than to mix private use of the software with academic use. Students commented that using the Facebook Groups app added to their experience of study and made integrating with the existing cohort easier. It was also found that when asked about all of the apps created by the SLS project students most valued the ‘Facebook group app’.

4.2 Survey Results

Students who were using the FB group app were asked questions using a Likert scale of five points. The results are summarised in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Topic</th>
<th>Num of students</th>
<th>Agree and strongly agree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic community</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific answers to questions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General subject knowledge</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor participation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More likely to participate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1 Survey summary results*

The results shown in the table show particularly high positive scores for the academic community and tutor participation questions. Students were also asked questions to rate their engagement at University and participation in using the FB group app. The scores for these two questions were scaled high to low and a correlation coefficient of 0.70 for 29 subjects was found to be significant for two-tailed p-value 0.00002371.

Students were also asked how many (if any) friends they had gained due to articulating to the University. The mean score was 30.26. In addition students were asked how many (if any) friends they had gained as a result of using the Facebook group app, and the mean score was 36.19.

4.2 Computer Logged Results

Social Network Analysis (SNA) was carried out to determine what, if any, unusual interaction characteristics the tutor had as a member of the group. In this case the group is made up of all members of a programme group including articulating students. It was found that the tutor had the largest score for betweenness (a connectedness metric) as illustrated in Figure 1 where circle size represents size of the score. The tutor is depicted in the top right hand corner of the social graph diagram.
Social Network Analysis of the interaction patterns of the group of eight articulating students who were interviewed was also carried out. The usage relates to a before condition of using the Facebook group through the Facebook interface and an after condition of using the Facebook group via the app. The results are shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Degree Before</th>
<th>Degree After</th>
<th>Betweenness Before</th>
<th>Betweenness After</th>
<th>Eigenvector Before</th>
<th>Eigenvector After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.25</td>
<td>66.390</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>96.88</td>
<td>210.694</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.194</td>
<td>197.452</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.054</td>
<td>44.345</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.194</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 SNA score before and after using the FB App

A statistical analysis of the data was carried out using a Mann-Whitney $u$-test. The results of the statistical analysis found that the changes in degree (a number of posts metric) before and after were significant at 5% ($P = 0.05$) with a critical value of $u=19$. It was also found that changes in the Betweenness score before and after were significant at 5% ($P = 0.05$) with critical value $u=12$. Finally it was found that the change in eigenvector centrality values (a popularity metric) before and after was not significant.

6. Discussion

The purpose of the Social Learning Space project is to support students articulating from Further Education to Higher Education using social networking software. One aspect of the
project was the development of an app intended to add ‘social tools’ to Facebook groups. In recent years there have been many studies into the deployment of public social networking tools into academic settings; however this project is innovative because it involved the creation of customised software. The next step in the project was to analyse what if any positive effects came about as a result of students using the app.

6.1 Facebook Usage

Because social networks such as Facebook are extremely popular with students it is though that the software has tremendous potential in education, (Ellison 2008). The findings from the SLS suggest that students use Facebook daily and check for updates more often than they check for new email. There are even indications in some reported studies that students ‘prefer’ Facebook to university Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) (Griffith & Liyanage. 2008; Fontana 2010). However positing Facebook and VLEs as options in a de-contextualised manner has suspect logic which may lead to misleading responses from students. The interview findings in this study indicated that students prefer Facebook as a means of communicating with others but not as a replacement for a VLE.

6.2 Students Participation

Selwyn (2007) reported that student participation in Facebook was high but that only a small proportion of the communication was academic. However the SLS project involved the creation of a Facebook group specifically for a single university programme, and in addition customised the function with an app. Unsurprisingly the results in the SLS project were different from those in the Selwyn study, with the vast majority of the posts being academically related and with high levels of student participation. The SLS results are broadly in keeping with findings in other studies such as Griffith. & Liyanage (2008) and Fontana A (2010).

6.3 Tutor participation

The role of the tutor in contributing to and nurturing the discussions on Facebook groups was described in Griffith & Liyange (2008). The findings in the Griffith & Liyange study were that the tutor did not contribute a great deal in terms of the volume of postings but that those contributions were valuable in terms of the group dynamics. In other words the result was that tutor input encouraged student input. There was a similar finding in the SLS study, with over seventy percent of students reporting that they valued the tutor input. The SLS study offers a further insight in terms of why tutor input might be regarded as useful. The results of the SNA study into tutor participation showed that the tutor had the highest betweenness score in the group. The betweenness score is a measure of connectedness. In the group as a whole there was a tendency to comment on the posts of friends, which is natural enough and is in fact an emerging property of social groups (Wasserman & Faust K 1994). The tutor’s relatively high betweenness score indicates that the tutor is performing a role of connecting the social graph and perhaps that is why the tutors are of value to the group. It is possible that this is a factor in other studies that have found tutor input to be valued in Facebook groups. On the other hand it is important to recognise the fact that tutors can provide answers to crucial academic questions and that service might also be a contributing factor to their value in the group.

6.4 Issues

As well as there being a number of potentially useful outcomes from adopting social networking software such as Facebook, there are of course a range of challenges and potential problems. One of the most contentious issues associated with Social Networks has been privacy. A number of studies have found that significant minority of students have concerns about the academic usefulness of Facebook due to the potential for privacy
intrusions from tutors and faculty more generally. In this study students did not report privacy as a concern, but this might well be due to the fact that the respondents were computing students who hopefully have a better than average understanding of how to control privacy in their own accounts.

6.5 Data mining

The use of surveys in the literature appears to be a primary research method for examining the usefulness of social network software. The usefulness of surveys in this area is self evident and has been used in the SLS study. However self-reporting data does not necessarily give a complete picture of user interactions. The SLS study in addition to a survey also involved the use of SNA techniques to mine the computer logged data. It was found that students increased the amount of posting after using the app and in addition increased their betweenness scores. The result is interesting as it suggests that articulating students may be gaining more social contacts during a period of using the Facebook Groups App. However it is worth noting that in the absence of a control group element to the study there is no way to exclude the possibility that the result would have been found had the non app Facebook interface been used. However despite this caveat to the finding of this study there does appear to have been an increase in the social capital of the articulating students.

7. Conclusions

The results of the SLS project suggest that Facebook groups can be recommended as a means of fostering academic objectives, and that tutor input to the group is important. However it is also recommended that there is a policy for protecting student privacy by restricting academic activities to the group and allowing students a clear demarcation line between the group and their user profiles. Perhaps the most significant finding in terms of the project goals was that students articulating from FE colleges found the ‘Facebook group app’ assisted them in increasing their social capital and in experiencing a greater sense of academic community.

In conclusion it is suggested that faculty in both Higher and Further education have an opportunity to support articulating students using Facebook, and other social networks, in ways that enhance student social capital, facilitate engagement and by extension improve their overall academic experience. Given the current level of popularity that Facebook enjoys, it is important for educators to gain a working understanding of the academic potential and limitations, in order to meet students where they are and to help them get to where they want to be.

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ABSTRACT: Mindfulness is a way of being, which involves two key components. The first is self-regulated attention focusing on the present moment. The second is the attitude towards present moment experience, characterised by a sense of openness, acceptance and curiosity. There are a variety of mindfulness based approaches which seek to help individuals become more mindful. There is a growing body of literature which suggests that mindfulness training provides a number of benefits for a wide range of populations. Mindfulness training for university students is gaining international interest, with research into the benefits being conducted in the USA, UK, Australia, and Singapore. This paper will use the existing literature and the author’s own doctoral research to introduce some of the benefits of mindfulness training for university students.

1 Mindfulness: A very short introduction

Psychologists have defined mindfulness as self-regulated attention which is focused on the present moment while maintaining an open curiosity and acceptance of one’s experience (Bishop et al., 2004) so from this perspective, we are all naturally more or less mindful. Mindfulness training aims to help individuals become more focused in the present moment, more open to new experiences and more accepting of where we find ourselves. In mindfulness meditation one chooses an anchor for one’s attention. For example, in the sitting meditation, this would be the breath. When the mind drifts off, as it invariably does, the first key moment is becoming aware that the mind has drifted off. So rather than being anchored to the breath, one’s attention may be anywhere in the past, present or future. When people start practising mindfulness many see this as failure, or as a sign that they can’t meditate. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than failure, noticing that one’s mind has wandered provides the opportunity for acceptance and compassion, and the chance to choose to let go of those thoughts or feelings and bring the attention back to the breath, back to the anchor. This does not mean ‘pushing away’ thoughts, or trying to ‘have an empty mind’, but rather to bring the mind back gently when it has wandered. Over time, the mind will wander less and the individual will notice the mind has wandered more quickly (Bishop et al., 2004).

It is understandable that mindfulness, and mindfulness training, may seem like ‘just another fad’, but when one takes a closer look it soon becomes clear that there is substance beneath the snappy headlines. For a start, mindfulness, while only becoming popular in the West in the last 20 years, has been practised by Buddhists for over 2500 years. Back in the late 1970s Jon Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues at the University of Massachusetts developed and implemented a training programme to help patients manage chronic pain, which has come to be known as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). MBSR is an 8-week group programme, with anywhere between 10-30 people meeting every week for around 2 hours to practise mindfulness meditation, explore how it can help them manage stress and reflect on how it can be brought into their daily lives. Regular practice is also a...
key part of the programme (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). There are now hundreds of published empirical studies suggesting that MBSR can lead to significant reductions in stress, anxiety and depression in clinical and healthy populations (Grossman et al., 2004; Fjorback et al., 2011).

In addition to being a useful programme in and of itself, MBSR has also become a template programme for more tailored mindfulness programmes (McCown, Reibel & Micozzi, 2010). The most well-known of these is the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy programme (MBCT) (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002) which has been found to help prevent depressive episodes (Ma & Teasdale, 2004). The success of MBCT has led to it being widely implemented in the British National Health System. It has also been used for a variety of populations and has an ever growing evidence base (Fjorback et al., 2011; Grossman et al., 2004). While MBCT is the most well known offshoot of MBSR, there are many others, such as the mindfulness-based eating programme (MB-EAT), developed by Jean Kristeller (1999). Most of these programmes follow the MBSR format but vary the didactic elements and length of the meditations and individual sessions (McCown, Reibel & Micozzi, 2010). As part of my PhD, I developed mindfulness-based coping with university life (MBCUL) to explore the benefits of a tailored mindfulness programme for university students.

2 Stress reduction

Recent evidence suggests that not only are a large number of students experiencing clinical levels of stress, anxiety and depression, but that this appears to be directly linked with becoming a student (Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Bewick et al., 2010). Students appear to experience more mental health issues than their non-university attending peers (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2003), while at the same time, many do not seek any sort of support (Blanco et al., 2008). MBCUL was developed as a supportive programme which might help students cope better with the stress of university life (Lynch et al., 2011). It follows the 8-week MBSR format. The first two weeks introduce students to mindfulness meditation and help them to establish their own practice. Week three focuses on mindful art and play, which introduces students to the idea that they can bring mindful awareness to any activity. Weeks four to seven focus on student-specific issues: stress at university, academic issues, managing their own health and communication and relationships. Week eight serves as a reflection on what has been discovered and how students can take things forward. Between weeks seven and eight there is a half day mini retreat. MBCUL was designed to serve as a template programme which could be used by educators with at least two years of personal experience in mindfulness meditation or those with an existing mindfulness teacher training qualification.

The MBCUL programme was evaluated between 2007 -2010 at the University of Northampton (UK). Attendance was optional and MBCUL was advertised to students on university computer screens, posters around campus and a few informal talks. Over a period of three years a general picture of who was attracted to MBCUL emerged. Generally, participants were female, experiencing mild to moderate stress and anxiety and in their mid 20s. There were four key reasons students gave for attending:

1. Final year stress
2. Coming with friends
3. Hope to meet new people
4. Curiosity

When compared to wait-list controls, those students who came to MBCUL showed significant reductions in measures of perceived stress and anxiety. What is particularly

9 Full details of the MBCUL programme are available free as an online supplement.
noteworthy is that while there were significant decreases in scores of stress and anxiety in those attending MBCUL, the scores of those in the control groups were actually increasing. This is in keeping with other research which suggests mindfulness training is a useful way to help students manage stress (Regehr, Glancy & Pitts, 2013).

3 Beyond stress reduction

While it is well accepted that mindfulness training can lead to reductions in stress, mindfulness training may also lead to more academically focused changes. Looking at Bishop et al.’s (2004) operational definition of mindfulness, where mindfulness is described as self-regulated attention which is focused on the present moment while maintaining an open curiosity and acceptance of one’s experience, it is easy to argue that mindfulness training may be just the education par excellence that William James sought over a hundred years ago.

There is evidence that brief mindfulness training may lead to changes in how students approach reading and their reading comprehension. A recent study randomised of a brief 2 week mindfulness training programme randomised students to either the mindfulness group or a control group. Measures were taken before and after the training programmes. Pre-test scores on the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) were comparable between the two groups at time one and were in keeping with participants’ pre-university Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores. However, after the training those who attended mindfulness training demonstrated significant improvements. This improvement was mediated by a reduction in mind wandering. Given that GRE scores are thought to be reasonably ‘fixed’, the finding that mindfulness training appears to be able to impact them is quite remarkable (Mrazeck, Franklin, Phillips, Baird & Schooler, 2013) These results also fit with qualitative data (Lynch 2011), in which university students who attended an 8-week MBCUL programme felt that they were able to pay more focused attention to what they were reading or listening to in lectures. There is initial evidence which suggests mindfulness training may lead to improved memory in university students. In addition to exploring reading comprehension, Mrazek et al. (2013) found changes in measures of working memory, also thought to be reasonably stable, only in those who attended the mindfulness training.

Students may also become more aware of the way they approach and complete, academic tasks. For example, in the qualitative results of a wait-list controlled trial of MBCUL, students didn’t just remember more, but many also reported changes in the way they approached their work. For example, many became aware that they needed to take breaks or plan their time more effectively (Lynch, 2011). These findings suggest that mindfulness training may lead students to pay greater attention to texts, change their approach to studying and possibly even remember more.

But the benefits of mindfulness training extend even further. There is a growing body of literature which suggests that mindfulness training leads to increased compassion, empathy and listening skills in professionals (Grepmair et al., 2007). It is easy to see how these skills may benefit students not just during their time at university, but may also help them in their future lives, both personally and professionally. Almost all the students who participated in a post MBCUL interview reported some change in the ways they communicated with others. The key way this manifested was by being aware when they were listening to someone properly and when they were just mindlessly nodding along but paying no real attention. They realised that the other people knew they weren’t really there and they could tell that the quality of their conversations changed when they were really present with them (Lynch, 2011). Following on from this, there are studies coming out which suggest that patients who are treated by clinicians or therapists who have undergone mindfulness training feel that they are listened to and are more satisfied with the support they receive (Grepmair et al., 2007).
Mindfulness in Higher Education really is a win-win situation. Students win by learning to manage their stress and anxiety better, by developing better communication skills, and possibly by improving their academic performance. It is also possible that students may have a better experience if staff experience mindfulness training, as they also learn to manage their stress better and develop greater compassion for themselves and their students. This may also benefit Higher Education institutions in terms of increased student satisfaction scores, less staff burnout and perhaps even greater academic success. While it is well established that mindfulness training will reduce stress, it has so much more to offer and, while not necessarily for everyone, may be just the education par excellence that James sought in the 19th century.

References


Mindfulness and retention: initial outcomes of a pilot project at Queen Margaret University, Scotland

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Abstract

This paper presents initial observations of a pilot that introduces mindfulness meditation into teaching and University life. Short meditations were offered at the start of Year 1 and 2 lectures, besides weekly drop-in sessions. The purpose was to enhance the student experience through the affective domain, identified by Thomas (2012) as a key factor in improving retention. Contemplative practices (CPs) consist of enhancing awareness of the ‘here’ and ‘now’, characterised by the foregrounding of ‘being’ and ‘living’, rather than ‘doing’ or ‘knowing’. Thus, it could be argued that CPs have the potential to enhance the affective dimensions of the student experience and thus, indirectly, impact positively on retention. Students and staff perceived benefits that applied to learning and teaching specifically, but also to broader dimensions of their personal life. Overall there was enthusiasm from both students and staff for the innovation and a request to continue and expand current provision.
1. Introduction

"Mindfulness meditation is humanizing the higher education environment by teaching to the whole student rather than just concentrating on the cognitive." (Eric McCollum quoted in Anonymous 2013).

Recent research on widening participation and retention (Thomas 2012) has indicated that up to 42% of students consider withdrawing from their course and that "interventions and approaches to improve student retention and success should as far as possible be embedded into the mainstream provision to ensure all students participate and benefit from them." (Thomas 2012, p.9). The underlying factors influencing students’ decisions to continue or withdraw are complex, but students’ social and academic integration are both thought to be important (e.g. Tinto 1993, in AlDossary 2008). Moreover, in Thomas’ recent summary of 22 studies examining retention in HE in the UK, she emphasised how affective dimensions of the student experience were found to be of key significance across most projects. In other words, students’ feelings about their study and about their experiences of HE are at least as important as their experiences of the cognitive dimensions of their courses.

Over the last 10 years, there has been a rapid increase in interest in the integration of Contemplative Practices (CPs) in HE to enhance learning and teaching (see Fig. 1 for an overview of such practices). Regular engagement with CPs enhances attention, information processing and academic achievement (Shapiro et al 2008). CPs seem to address specific cognitive dimensions as well as a general sense of well-being, thus to address both the affective and cognitive dimensions of the student experience. Additionally, CPs have (mental) health benefits (e.g. stress-reduction; Williams et al 2007, Kabat-Zin 2009). A recent meta-analysis of the psychological effects of meditation confirmed that meditation practices are more effective in enhancing a range of psychological variables than relaxation exercises by themselves (Sedlmeier et al 2012) and Ramsburg & Youmans (2013) showed that a short meditation before a lecture improved test scores, especially in first year students.

This paper reports on the initial observations emerging from the evaluation of a project that provided a range of opportunities for students and staff to engage with CPs, mostly using mindfulness approaches. Mindfulness is probably the best researched contemplative practice and has been implemented with great success in a variety of contexts (see for example London Transport example in Halliwell 2009 and case study in Anonymous 2012). The purpose of the project was to pilot an innovative, holistic approach to enhancing the experience of both students and staff and thereby indirectly improve retention. The purpose of this paper is to report on the self-reported experiences and perceptions of students and staff who engaged with the practices.

2. Methodology

2.1 Mindfulness Opportunities

The hard measures of student retention (e.g. percentages of student withdrawals) are unlikely to be affected in the short term by this intervention. Therefore, the project initially aims to make visible some aspects of its impact through a soft, qualitative approach, focusing on recording student and staff experiences of mindfulness.

This is a small practice-focused project that seeks to pilot various ways of implementing contemplative practices into the experience of both student and staff at Queen Margaret
University, with the underlying intention to help improve retention across the University. It does this by offering:

1. Generic classroom based contemplative practices led by academic staff and/or students as part of face to face classes (see Appendix 1 for a practice example).
2. Subject-embedded contemplative practices, led by academic staff and/or students as part of face to face classes or self-led groups.
3. Generic drop-in lunchtime mindfulness sessions, led by an external accredited mindfulness practitioner.
5. Two presentations providing a background introduction to mindfulness and a short practice session.

All, except (2) above were implemented in Semester 1, as follows:

(1) One tutor introduced five-minute contemplative practice sessions at the start of each lecture. The first session was facilitated by the project coordinator. Subsequent sessions were led by the lecturer, who later on encouraged students to lead these sessions themselves, which they did from week 6. Initially, the contemplation sessions involved the whole class sitting in quietness, eyes closed (optional), with the awareness being guided towards being in the present moment, through focusing on the breath (see Appendix 2). Other approaches were also used by the lecturer and the students, such as body scan, visualisations and memory recall (going back over the day). The second lecturer started practicing mindfulness at the start of each focus session in a Masters module.

(2) These were not implemented yet, as this requires more in-depth engagement with the practices and integration with subject-specific content.

(3) These were lunch-time drop-in mindfulness meditation sessions led by an external expert, lasting about 35 mins, with an opportunity for sharing experiences afterwards.

(4) These were lunch-time self-led drop-in sessions. If the coordinator was able to attend these he tended to guide the practice, using several approaches, including mindfulness, visualisation, memory recall, as well as contemplative observation.

(5) The presentations were given by external experts.

2.2 Recruitment and participation

Staff and students were invited to participate in the drop-in sessions and to attend the presentations through messages on the QMU moderator and through posters and leaflets distributed around the University. Lecturers using contemplative practices in their teaching were briefed on the process and handed a sheet with a short outline of a possible five minute meditation at the beginning of a lecture. Only staff comfortable with contemplative practices were encouraged to participate, whereas those interested but not currently themselves practicing any form of contemplative practice were asked to first attend the introductory and drop-in sessions.

Staff intending to take part in the pilot were also asked to make sure that students were given an explanation of the rationale and approach taken, on the voluntary nature of participation (those not willing to participate could simply do something else quietly during the five minute practice) and to ensure the practice was strictly secular.

The project coordinator was asked by one member of staff to lead the first practice session for each of two groups of students and this was done.

2.3 Evaluation

Evaluation took place as follows:
A survey to all who attended at least one of the Introduction or drop-in sessions. An email with the request to complete the online survey was sent out in December 2012 and January 2013. Students who experienced CPs through their classes were also asked about these through five questions inserted into the regular module evaluation questionnaires at the end of each semester (see Appendix 2).

3. Initial results

3.1 Evaluation of generic in-class sessions
These were evaluated through module evaluation forms (Y1 n=30, N=120; Y2 n=17, N=40), but there was also a small number (n=7) of responses to the online survey from students who indicated they had experienced these in-class practice sessions.

Table 1 shows the results of the module evaluation forms. Only the combined results for the two years will be discussed here, given the small numbers. About equal numbers of students reported to agree and disagree with the statement that they had experience of C/M (contemplation/mindfulness) prior to the semester. More students said they had engaged than not engaged (Q2). Slightly more students agreed than disagreed that C/M had helped them concentrate and focus during the class (Q3). Question four asked very explicitly about the perceived effect of C/M on academic practice and although more students indicated no effect, some indicated they had experienced an improvement in their academic practice, which is remarkable, given the very early phase of the project. Finally, there were about equal numbers of students indicating they wished to continue with the practice at the start of each class.

Table 1. Student evaluations from in-class contemplative sessions: Year1 n=30; Year2 n=17. ‘Agree’ column shows % responses in ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ categories. ‘Disagree’ column shows % responses in ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ categories. Therefore totals < 100%. %-ages rounded to the nearest integer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Agree % (Count)</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Prior to this semester, I had experience of contemplation/mindfulness.</td>
<td>40 (12)</td>
<td>35 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I regularly engaged with the mindfulness/contemplation programme this term.</td>
<td>43 (13)</td>
<td>47 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The mindfulness/contemplation practice was useful in helping me improve my concentration and focus during each class session.</td>
<td>27 (8)</td>
<td>41 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. As a result of practicing mindfulness/contemplation I believe my academic performance improved.</td>
<td>13 (4)</td>
<td>24 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I wish to continue practicing mindfulness/contemplation at the start of each class session.</td>
<td>27 (8)</td>
<td>47 (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Judging from the module evaluations Likert-scale questions alone, overall it can be observed that there was a mixed response to the introduction of C/M but that second year students seemed to indicate a more positive experience than first year students.
The on-line survey allowed a simple cross-tabulation that showed there were seven responses from students who had experienced the in-class sessions (these were all students of Lecturer A), six of whom were first year, two of whom were eligible for Lothian Equal Access Programme for Schools funding (see LEAPS 2011) funding. While none of these had been engaged in C/M practices before, five of the seven indicated they had found the in-class sessions helpful. Five (presumably the same students) also indicated they wished for the University to continue to provide C/M opportunities. Four of the seven indicated to have considered (“during the last three month”) leaving the University and three responded that the M/C sessions had helped them decide to stay at QMU. While these numbers are very small, it is nevertheless encouraging that even after one semester of practice, some students have found the sessions helped them decide to continue their studies, rather than withdraw.

The comments made by students reflected this picture, but gave a little bit more insight into the dynamics of situation:

“Practising mindfulness was great, it help[s] you get more focus in class as you feel more relax[ed] and therefore understand everything better”

“It hasn’t done any harm, it’s been a fun factor to the module, but it hasn’t directly improved my learning I feel”

“Because we were so many people and not all kept quiet it was hard to concentrate and not let the thoughts run off”

Again the picture is mixed, with some students disliking the practice, while others are very positive about the experience. It is interesting that many comments from the Y1 students refer to the difficulty of engaging with the C/M sessions in a large group, as a result of others not taking it seriously and breaking the silence. The Y2 student did not report the same problem, but their class was significantly smaller than the Y1 group, which probably helped reduce the number of distractions.

### 3.2 Evaluation of drop-in lunchtime mindfulness sessions

For this evaluation, responses from the student and tutor online surveys were combined. Fifteen people indicated to have had experience of the expert-led drop-in sessions, five had experience of the self-led drop-in sessions. A total of 14 people indicated they had attended the expert-led drop-in sessions and all agreed that these had been helpful.

### 3.3 Evaluation of presentations introducing mindfulness

These were attended by 18 people, all of whom agreed that these had been helpful.

### 3.4 Evaluation of C/M general engagement and perceived benefits

Tables 2 & 3 provide a summary of the responses to Q5 and Q7, combining the student and staff on-line surveys.

#### Table 2: overview of responses to Q5, staff and students combined. First sub-columns give percentages. Second sub-columns give counts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5.d. I was already familiar with mindfulness and contemplation practices</th>
<th>5.e. I have begun to use mindfulness and contemplation regularly as a result of the sessions at</th>
<th>5.f. I regularly engaged with the mindfulness and contemplation programme this semester</th>
<th>5.g. I was already engaged in mindfulness and contemplation</th>
<th>5.h. I would like QMU to continue to provide opportunities for staff and students to engage with</th>
</tr>
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</table>
Just over 42% of respondent indicated to have engaged regularly with the C/M sessions in Semester 1 (Q5f), but this question could be misleading, as the word ‘regularly’ is open to interpretation. It is interesting to note that while 85% of respondents indicated to be familiar with C/M (Q5d in Table 2), just 27% said they were engaged in actual practice (Q5g in Table 2). Just under 26% indicated they had started to practice C/M as a result of the sessions at QMU (Q5e in Table 2) and over 92% of respondents indicated they would like the University to continue to offer opportunities to engage with C/M (Q5h in Table 2). All these results, while based on small numbers, are encouraging and indicative of the positive perceptions held by those who responded to the surveys.

Table 3: Overview of responses to Q7: staff and student responses combined. First sub-columns give percentages. Second sub-columns give counts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.a.</strong> The mindfulness and contemplation practice was useful in helping me improve my concentration and focus</td>
<td>65.50%</td>
<td>6.80%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.b.</strong> As a result of practicing mindfulness and contemplation practice has helped me to cope with stress</td>
<td>62.10%</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
<td>34.50%</td>
<td>13.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.c.</strong> The mindfulness and contemplation practice has helped me to be more effective</td>
<td>34.50%</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
<td>51.70%</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.d.</strong> The mindfulness and contemplation practice has helped me to be more reflective</td>
<td>51.70%</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
<td>82.10%</td>
<td>23.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.f.</strong> I wish to continue practicing mindfulness and contemplation</td>
<td>82.10%</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
<td>23.00%</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 3 above, over 63% of respondents indicated that the C/M practice helped them concentrate and focus (Q7a in Table 3), 25% perceived an improvement in their academic practice (Q7b in Table 3), over 62% indicated being better able to cope with stress (Q7c in Table 3), over 34% indicated it helped them be more effective (Q7d in Table 3) and over 51% responded it helped them be more reflective (Q7f in Table 3). Finally, more than 82% agreed that they wished to continue practicing the C/M (Q7g in Table 3). These results, while based on small numbers and while possibly not representative, are nevertheless very encouraging. It is particularly interesting to observe that the responses to the questions about specific benefits were more strongly in agreement (e.g. coping with stress; Q7a, 7c, 7f) than to questions about more general (and less well-defined) benefits (e.g. effectiveness, Q7b&d). Moreover, the specific benefits of focus, concentration and reflection, all perceived by the majority of respondents to be improved by the C/M practice, can be assumed to be important to learning.
3.6 Evaluative comments of the mindfulness practices: students
The online surveys to students included open questions inviting respondents to comment on their experience with the C/M practices in general. The comments were overwhelmingly positive here, indicating that for most people who took the time to write in comments, the C/M provided opportunities to de-stress, take a step back and calm down:

“very calming before lesson and improved my concentration skills.”

There was, however, also a minority of less favourable comments, indicating that not everyone managed to engage with the practice or found it helpful when they did:

“I did not find that it worked for me, first 10 mins of class was wasted.”

As the number of lectures in the specific module had been reduced, very little time was spent on trying to explain to students why C/M was introduced. Instead, the focus was on the practices itself. Perhaps a more in-depth explanation of the rationale behind introducing C/M in the classroom would be useful to students and would alleviate the fear that C/M was taking time away from the lecture and show how time spent in C/M may enhance the quality of the experience of the rest of the lecture.

Another survey question asked students to comment on the perceived effect of C/M specifically on study, work and life. Given the very brief exposure to C/M, it was expected that most respondents would be positive though cautious about identifying any specific benefits. However, it was interesting that the majority of those who answered this question were quite articulate in what they had experienced as benefits, for example:

“it helps me to stay focused and balanced during the times of pressure”
“I felt less stress in the lead up to exams”

Thus these students expressed a direct link between their engagement with the C/M practices and a sense of calmness, of better coping under stress and of better focus and concentration, all of which are likely to contribute to better learning.

3.7 Evaluative comments of the mindfulness practices: staff

“These sessions had a transformative effect upon my students. Their concentration rapidly increased during the semester and their alertness and responsiveness to my questions was much stronger than in previous years and I have been lecturing for 30 years.” (informal email from lecturer)

The online surveys to staff included the same open questions as to student (see above) inviting respondents to comment on their experience with the C/M practices in general. Some commented on their experience of using C/M with their students (as above), while most reflected their personal experience of the practices:

“I totally loved it and was glad to see that the sessions continued”
“enjoyable but I found the times I most needed it were the times I was unable to go due to work or other commitments.”

When asked about the perceived effect specifically on study, work and life, staff commented on the general helpfulness, but also indicated that it would be hard to establish impact on other areas of work and life:

“I haven't experienced many concrete positive impacts yet but think I may have to do it more regularly!”
“It has all been very positive and has increased with increasing practice, particular useful in helping me pace my work, helped with concentration and well-being as well as reflection, which is very important for a practitioner.”

Despite the justifiable reservations, there was an openness to the possibilities of positive impact (to be expected from people who participated in the practice). The responses were positive, except that compared with the students there was more emphasis on the difficulties of fitting the practice into busy work and life schedules. Also, overall staff seemed more cautious than students in identifying any direct links between the practice and their work. Taken all together these responses present a positive picture of the experiences of students and staff, though clearly there were challenges to participation, such as time, and indications that it was too early to identify impact, which is realistic given the time frame.

4. Conclusion

This paper provides a summary of project implementation and evaluation during and after Semester 1 respectively. A range of Contemplation/Mindfulness opportunities were offered to students and tutors and two lecturers participated in implementing C/M in their classes. Furthermore drop-in sessions were open to all staff and students. Project evaluation was done through module evaluation forms and an online survey to students and staff.

Although the project is unable to provide direct measures of the impact of C/M on retention or any other aspect of the student experience, interim results overall seem highly positive, based on self-reporting by students and staff, with some indication that engagement in C/M practices could have a range of beneficial effects for the individual, some of which may impact on teaching, learning, assessment and retention, besides more general aspects of well-being. However, the fact that module evaluations by students were somewhat less positive than the online survey probably suggests that those who responded to the on-line survey were more likely to have had a positive experience, therefore the results should be treated with caution.

It is very encouraging and exciting that this project has gained funding from the University and the initial results suggest that this was justified. It is hoped that in the course of semester 2 more students and staff will engage with the project and the opportunities it offers so that C/M practices can become further integrated into teaching and learning. This may then lead to more detailed analysis of the responses and also a conceptualisation of the range of experiences reported in relation to learning and teaching.

5. References


Acknowledgements
The following people have made contributions to this project by offering their time, participation, ideas and critically constructive comments: Avinash Bansode, Carolyn Choudhary, Hillary Glendinning, Karen Goodall, Michele Hipwell, Judith Lane, Jane McKenzie, Wendy Stewart.

Appendix 1 Evaluation questions for in-class practice

The following questions were used with a Likert scale (Strongly Agree - Agree- Neither Agree or Disagree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree - Not Applicable) for the in-class practice. There was also one open question (Q.6) to provide students with an opportunity to comment freely on their experience

(1) Prior to this semester, I had experience of contemplation/mindfulness.
(2) I regularly engaged with the mindfulness/contemplation programme this term.
(3) The mindfulness/contemplation practice was useful in helping me improve my concentration and focus during each class session.
(4) As a result of practicing mindfulness/contemplation I believe my academic performance improved.
(5) I wish to continue practicing mindfulness/contemplation at the start of each class session.
(6) Please share any other thoughts and feelings regarding mindfulness contemplation practice this semester.

Appendix 2 Example practice
Meditation in 7 steps:

1. **Be comfortable in body & mind.** Sit in an upright chair, your back well supported. Feet flat on the floor (you could take off your shoes). Head easily balanced on top of your spine. Hands palms-up in your lap, one palm on top of the other, or palms down, on your knees. Arms relaxed by your sides.

2. **Deep breaths:** Take three deep breaths in and out, as deep as is comfortable, without straining. Do this in your own rhythm.

3. **Centre yourself mentally:** Become aware of the feelings of your body on the chair, your feet on the floor. Then become aware of the sounds around you, any smells, the feeling of the air on your skin, and of your clothes on your skin. Close your eyes if they are still open.

4. **Bring your attention to your breathing:** Focus on the feeling and sound of your breathing. Remain still and feel the gentle in- and outflow of your breath. Feel it in your ribcage/chest, your abdomen, shoulders, and nostrils.

5. **Return to the breath:** Usually, after some time, a sound or a memory, a feeling or emotion will carry your attention with it. You may be caught up into this flow for just a few seconds or much longer. At some point you will realise what has happened. When you do, just return your attention to your breathing as in step 4. Keep going through step 4 and 5 during the meditation as needed.

6. **Return to the here and now:** Once the time is up, bring your attention back to the sensations of your body on the chair and feet on the floor. Become aware of the sounds and the feeling of the air on your skin. Become aware of the people in the room and bring yourself solidly back to the here and the now.

7. **Resume regular activity:** Gently open your eyes. Take a few minutes to readjust to where you are. Smile. Drink a glass of water. If you want, write a journal entry. Then resume your activities as usual.
Curriculum-as-vehicle: a journey explored

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Abstract

This paper presents an account of curriculum development and change which is set in an institutional, national and international context. Parallels and divergences in principles and practices relating to curriculum development will be highlighted. Discussion is supported by both Scottish and international perspectives drawn from responses to the QAA Enhancement Theme activities, and from local and international responses to one of the Enhancement Theme Discussion Paper (Fotheringham, Strickland and Aitchison, 2012). Analysis and synthesis of the responses to the Discussion Paper and those gathered though Enhancement Theme activities were used to draw conclusions about the extent to which factors affect curriculum internationally and in a Scottish context.

The paper explores how a theoretical model was used as an organising principle in an institutional context to shape the development of curriculum. Given the range of influences that are brought to bear on the development of the curriculum, the concept of ‘curriculum-as-vehicle’ (Fotheringham, Strickland and Aitchison, 2012) is utilised to recognize the possibility of over-burdening the curriculum with competing priorities. An institutional context is used to identify the interplay between internal agendas and external influences at the interface with the student experience. Three institutional case studies are used to illustrate different aspects of curriculum change, which takes the discussion beyond traditional conceptions of curriculum as product (Fraser and Bosanquet, 2006), presenting employer involvement, student engagement and student support as key institutional and curricular considerations.

Introduction

The QAA’s current Enhancement Theme, Developing and Supporting the Curriculum (DSC) has provided opportunities for Scottish HEIs to identify, review, and compare curriculum developments not only in Scottish universities but also in the rest of the world. There is debate in the media and in the literature about influences upon curriculum developments as well as discussion about factors that should influence our curricular offerings to students in years to come. This paper presents an account of institutional curriculum development and change which is reviewed in light of conceptual tools developed in a QAA commissioned discussion paper, Developing and supporting the curriculum: Directions, decisions and debate (Fotheringham, Strickland and Aitchison, 2012), of international developments in curriculum, and of relevant literature.

Phase 1 of the Enhancement Theme

In phase 1 of the Enhancement Theme (March 2011-June 2012) the sector began to explore amongst regional academic communities key questions about how the student body is changing, how curriculum is shaped and delivered, and what development may be required to support staff in developing curricula which will meet our ambitions for students in higher education in the 21st century. A synopsis of the deliberations around those key questions (Gunn, 2012) indicates that although the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves vary widely in history, mission and objective, these events enabled the identification of important key themes relating to curriculum development. The Enhancement Theme itself provided a warrant to address these themes in local institutions. The degree of consensus found amongst the HEI community ensured that the local institutional teams could be reasonably confident that their plans and local initiatives could be usefully shared with others in the sector, the DSC theme serving as a real catalyst for action.
Discussion of the impact of the changing characteristics of future students on the curriculum soon indicated that students’ previous educational experience, their learning support needs, their differential degrees of digital literacy, their preferred modes of study and their geographical locations during study are some of the most important features likely to have significant impact not only upon present and future curriculum developments but also upon the development and support required for staff. In Mayes’ (2012) synthesis of institutional activity across the HE sector, he identifies ‘the changing student’ as one of the four key strands of current institutional activity, suggesting that these strands should be examined “in finer grain”. We shared Mayes’ interest in these themes and, firstly, we focussed on the extent to which our local perception of the changing student characteristics and the ways in which curriculum should be shaped and supported represented a distinctly Scottish conception of curriculum; secondly, we considered the extent to which international colleagues had different views and priorities from which we could learn and which we could apply to our own institutional activities and plans.

**International context**

In January 2013, Edinburgh Napier University hosted a workshop at the 11\(^{th}\) Hawaiian International Conference on Education, which was attended by 18 delegates from Australia, Canada, Korea, USA and England. Apart from one school teacher and one PhD student, all the delegates were in academic or professional support roles in Higher Education in a broad range of disciplines. We used similar activities and repurposed resources from the East of Scotland DSC Regional Road Show in order to generate comparable data between this workshop for an international audience and our own Scottish regional events held in 2012. The overall aims of both the Scottish and the international workshop were to gather views about the characteristics of the changing student body in delegates’ national and institutional contexts and to learn from their ideas about the development required for staff to support and deliver new models of curriculum. All of the delegates anticipated far greater student diversity than ever before, and, while there were very many similarities in the characteristics identified by colleagues in Hawaii and in Edinburgh, we noted some interesting differences. Distinctive amongst the international delegates was the need for relevant curricular provision and support for students studying in remote geographical locations and for students with established mental health conditions, and opportunities for language development amongst non-native English speakers and for language acquisition (such as Mandarin). Nevertheless, while the characteristics of the changing student body may vary according to discipline and to a certain extent to nationality, we conclude that the outcomes from each of the workshops in Hawaii and in Edinburgh were broadly similar, in particular government led educational reforms and the importance of working in partnership with employers.

Our conception of the curriculum as vehicle, in which the curriculum is recognized as being the pivotal point between local and national agendas and the students whom these policies are designed to serve, was offered in the discussion paper commissioned by the QAA as a way of conceptualising curriculum (Fotheringham, Strickland and Aitchison, 2012). We found this was a useful portrayal of curriculum which we could share during the early days of our institutional team’s work (Figure 1: Curriculum as vehicle). Our experience with colleagues in Hawaii suggests that the curricular vehicle as we portrayed it and the load it carries is not a uniquely Scottish one but one which may be recognized by an international audience.

Karset and Siveskin (2010) discuss the extent to which there is “public legitimacy for the cultivation of national cultures” as part of the overall purpose of curriculum and, correspondingly, ‘national culture’ was identified by several international colleagues as one item which was missing from our institutional agendas and priorities shown in the diagram below. Certainly it seems that the term ‘national culture’ is not an item with clear defining characteristics given priority in curriculum developments in Scotland at present. Indeed,
there is a question to be framed around what is meant by national culture and how that may impact on education in its broadest sense.

Figure 1: Curriculum as vehicle (From Fotheringham, Strickland and Aitchison, 2012)

**Factors affecting curriculum**

As the Theme’s work has developed, and as we have become more interested in analysing the factors affecting curriculum at a more fine grained level, we find that we agree with Mayes (2012) that conceptually the ‘curriculum as vehicle’ metaphor may be “too broad to be useful” in this regard; however, it provides a useful tool for dialogue. A related view of curriculum is offered by Barnett (2009), who also suggests a vehicle as a metaphor for students’ development, but one which is built around subject knowledge. Barnett’s portrayal enables a distinction to be made amongst knowing (discipline knowledge), a student’s development, and the role of the curricula and pedagogies in nurturing the development of the student’s qualities and dispositions. This conception of curriculum emphasises that discipline knowledge is only one element of the university experience that influences how well students are prepared for their future lives and careers. Discussions about how best to describe curriculum remain important, and we have found that developing our own conceptions and referring to other analytical frameworks has opened up new possibilities for discussion amongst our institutional team and has allowed us to see aspects of curriculum development and support in a new light. In Rorty’s first essay on the contingency of language (cited in Allan, J 2003, p20), he refers to the use of metaphor as a recontextualisation “where metaphorical redescription provides a jolt to the imagination” (cited in Allan, J 2003, p20). We have certainly found this to be the case.

Through both the national and international workshops, it is clear that higher educational professionals recognize the danger of overburdening the curriculum with competing global, national and institutional priorities, and of potentially marginalising disciplinary priorities and subject based criteria. Further, the discussions indicated that these priorities, and the complex interactions between them, have been the subject of debate internationally, and this is certainly the case within our own institution. Figure 2 (*Factors affecting curriculum*, from Fotheringham, Strickland and Aitchison, 2012) provides a representation of the factors affecting curriculum and their impact upon the student who is typically seen as being at the heart of the curriculum. The diagram, with its irregular concentric circles, attempts to illustrate the differential impact of the seven external factors upon the institution, on the professional discipline and on the academic subject. The student’s (changing) knowledge, skills and expectations exert pressure from the centre, impacting also upon the shape of the curriculum. We agree with Barnett’s observation (Barnett, 2000) that an analysis of curricula needs to be set within a social and global context, but even that may not sufficiently portray
the complexity of the social processes at work within the different disciplines. He concludes that there is no definite pattern to changes taking place in curricula. In pulling together the outcomes of both the Scottish and international workshops where some of these complex social processes were discussed, we have observed that, whilst it may not be a ‘pattern’ as defined by Barnett (2000), there is consistency of movement in the development of various aspects of curriculum. An example of this includes the alignment of curricula with national standards in Scotland, Australia, Canada and the USA amongst others.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2009) is summarised in its two goals: firstly for Australian schooling to promote excellence and equity, and secondly for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. In April 2008, the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada (CMEC) announced the release of *Learn Canada 2020*, which they described as “a new vision to address the education needs and aspirations of Canadians” (CMEC, 2008). The *Learn Canada 2020* framework addresses every aspect of lifelong learning, but the vision for elementary to high school systems is focussed on high national standards which will deliver “world-class skills in literacy, numeracy, and science”. In the USA in 2009, President Barack Obama announced the launch of *Race to the Top* which was intended to advance reforms initiated under The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001. The reforms attempt to ensure proficiency in language, arts and mathematics by the introduction of “adequate yearly progress” tests for all schools which are measured against “common core standards” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). The *Help Your Child* series of publications associated with the new curriculum encourages parents to help their children to become, “strong readers, good students and responsible citizens” (US Department of Education, 2003) and are typical of the “proselytizing rhetoric”, which Priestly (2010, p26) observes accompanies recent educational reform. In Scotland in 2010, the *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) which is for young people between the ages of 3 to 18 was introduced into schools with its overarching aim being, “to enable all children to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society” (Scottish Executive, 2004). Like each of the other national reforms described above, the ambitions for CfE are to be achieved by schools working to a national qualifications framework, emphasis upon learning outcomes and experiences and a shift from more subject specific to more generic criteria (Priestly, 2010). Whilst the Curriculum for Excellence appears to be a distinctively Scottish factor impacting upon curriculum, internationally, parallels suggest that school curriculum reform is widespread. The alignment of curriculum with nationally agreed high standards in literacy, maths and science plus the establishment of measurable goals are central to these developments, all of which are designed to improve individual educational outcomes.
Institutional case studies

Institutional case studies have been used as a means to identify the juxtaposition of internal agendas and external influences at the interface with the student experience. An examination of the three case studies presented here together with other institutional activities that we have undertaken during the course of phase 1 and 2 of this Enhancement Theme have led us to recognize that the external pressures have weighed very heavily on curriculum development and change, indeed far more so than we had initially thought to be the case.

In 2011/12, we carried out the Academic Portfolio Review (Edinburgh Napier University, 2012a) which was submitted as a case study for phase 1 of the Theme’s activities. The
Review examined the ‘health’ of our present portfolio of academic programmes, but it also opened important conversations with staff, employers and students about ways in which our future academic portfolio would be capable of meeting the future needs of students, employers, the economy, and society. The external environment, (represented by each of the block arrows in Figure 2), was discussed at a series of consultative events at which representative stakeholders were able to start to plan how the curriculum might be reconfigured to respond to these external pressures. At the same time as these high level discussions were taking place, our second case study known as Curriculum Design using Technology Enhanced Learning for the BA (Hons) Youth Work Programme (Edinburgh Napier University, 2012b) was taking shape. We understood this to be a response to a number of the external factors shown in Figure 2, including developments in industry and workplace, social expectations of higher education and developments in technology.

A blended learning work-based degree in Youth Work was developed and delivered in partnership between Edinburgh Napier University supported by City of Edinburgh Council. The degree was delivered almost exclusively online with the support of online materials, synchronous tutorials and workplace supervisors. We presented this as an example of curriculum design which took account not only of external factors impacting on curriculum, but also of the changing student characteristics that had typified our discussions both in Scotland and with an international audience in respect of the need for flexible, online work based programmes. Despite universally positive feedback from students, from the City of Edinburgh Council, the accreditation of the programme by the Community Learning and Development Standards Councils, and despite its commended innovative curriculum design and mode of delivery, the programme has failed to recruit sufficient students for the year ahead. Although this is a tremendously disappointing outcome the lessons learned from this innovation and the development of practice amongst our own academics and our partners has provided invaluable experience. It reminds us that although models and frameworks can help us to shape thinking and discussion about curriculum development, they do not represent theories of curriculum demand nor any kind of forecasting mechanism. Parker (2003) explores the adverse consequences of ‘employment-based curriculum’ in terms of its inhibiting effect on higher education. Using Barnett’s distinction between traditional and emerging curricula (Barnett et al, 2001), Parker suggests that the emerging curriculum suppresses the subject as the primary focus. This forces a ‘commodified’ curriculum which in turn commodifies the student into one seeking a ‘knowledge-skill-work packet’ (Parker, 2003 p534) required for progression in the world of work. She laments the paucity of any hard data which supports the view that undergraduate students want such a ‘commodified’ curriculum. Our experience with the BA Youth Work suggests that while we should be cautious in anticipating student demand for innovative delivery models and modes of study in untried areas of curriculum, we should not overlook the enthusiasm of the first cohort of students for they way in which the programme allowed them to meet their need to combine paid employment and caring responsibilities with degree level study. We remain optimistic for this type of curriculum development and look forward to further research which may show whether or not this optimism to have been well-founded.

Figure 2 illustrates how various external factors exert pressure on the internal institutional environment. We can also see from the Enhancement Theme case study repository (http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resources/case-studies) that practice is already underway in several universities in the development and support of curriculum structures that are intended to more adaptable to the changing internal and external environment portrayed in the diagram. Mayes (2012) identifies six key aspects of curriculum flexibility and we present our E-Placement Scotland case study as an example of a development

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10 Flexible curriculum structures, flexible delivery methods, flexible forms of assessment, personalisation (flexibility for the individual learner), flexible learning methods, flexible curriculum boundaries (Mayes 2013)
which aligns well with our model of factors affecting curriculum and with several aspects of curriculum flexibility. E-placement Scotland, funded by Scottish Funding Council and with support from partners\(^{11}\), is designed to create opportunities for computing students to obtain paid work placements across Scotland. Edinburgh Napier University has created a matching service which helps students to connect with available work roles which match their skills, career aspirations and availability.

The flexibility of these placements is of particular interest to our discussion in this paper because they can allow all computing students to access work placements, including those who might otherwise have been excluded from more traditional student placement structures because of disability, part time working arrangements or caring responsibilities. These placements, which can be for short or long term, are valued highly by staff in the School of Computing, by participating employers and by the students themselves because of their potential to enhance graduate employability, to develop skills which can inform course work and classroom interaction and to promote engagement and networking opportunities with the profession prior to graduation (Edinburgh Napier University, 2013). These placements are undoubtedly sound educationally and highly valued, but they too indicate the drive from external factors on the institutional development of curriculum. The value which our students have placed on their placement experience is consistent with an Australian study in Griffith University (Crebert et al., 2004) where as part of a wider investigation into generic skills (Griffith Graduate Project), Crebert and colleagues attempted to determine the perceptions of employers and students of the potential for work placements to develop generic skills, abilities and capacities. Their findings supported the inclusion of work placements for undergraduates and highlighted the potential value of involving employers in other aspects of curriculum design and even assessment. We do not share Parker’s (2003) disdain for ‘emerging curriculum’ as our experience of E-placement Scotland indicates that it is be possible to work through the concentric circles in Figure 2 with disciplinary rigour.

**Conclusion**

At the outset of this Theme, we had assumed that student and discipline-led factors which feature heavily in our institutional commitments and communications to students would be the predominating influences on curriculum. However by applying the case studies and information from international accounts of curriculum development, it seems that external factors such as government-led educational reforms and funding packages which reflect both governmental and workplace priorities exert much more influence than we had previously accorded to them. We had held the belief that educational and student-based variables were paramount in driving curriculum. We have come to the conclusion that the external influences exert pressure not solely on curriculum development but also become part of the process of the curriculum and of the curriculum product itself. It is not surprising that curriculum development relies on the professional judgement of academics (Priestly, 2010) and on the active engagement of students, but our analysis of case studies has emphasised the importance of the involvement of employers and of the values, beliefs and expectations of the agencies which are associated with each ring of the concentric circles seen in Figure 2. It is also clear that although Figure 2 had offered each of the concentric circles as a discrete element of influence on the delivery of curriculum, this does not adequately represent the reality of how educational experiences for students are shaped and realised. On reflection, it seems that there is a permeability between these concentric circles which results in the dynamic nature of much of the curriculum development encountered in institutions.

The DSC Enhancement Theme has enabled the development of a diverse publicly available institutional database of practice, comprising programmes of work and case studies. On the basis of the analysis carried out as part of this paper and using the database, there is

\(^{11}\) Scottish Higher Education Employability Forum, Scotland IS and E-skills UK.
potential to refine Figure 2 to take into account the permeability of the membranes between the concentric circles which would result in a much more dynamic and less compartmentalised portrayal of the factors affecting curriculum. Such a model has potential value as a mechanism for framing institutional discussions which explicitly acknowledge the drivers for change in curriculum.

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Building the curriculum in higher education: a conceptual framework

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ABSTRACT In need for a common language and a tool stimulating a more holistic and long-term approach to curriculum development the Academic Development Unit of the KU Leuven developed a conceptual scheme to be used as a mindmap by all stakeholders working on curricula. Key concepts underpinning various views on curriculum development were identified from literature. Next different conceptions on curriculum design were evaluated against a set of usability characteristics resulting in the identification and visualisation of key elements describing the curriculum as a whole and the relationships between them. The scheme essentially emphasizes coherence and consistency between courses of a curriculum. Four quality circles represent several pathways to design, revise or evaluate the curriculum. The use of the scheme was evaluated in training sessions with program leaders and educational developers. The results indicate that the scheme is a useful tool to gain full insight in the complexity of the curriculum.

1 Introduction

Within higher education a curriculum or a program of study is a pivotal issue in the relationship between students, teaching staff and the university. However different stakeholders experience the curriculum (as a program of study consisting of several courses) from their point of view and are often only aware of a part of all important aspects building the curriculum. Therefore curriculum issues are complex to discuss with those different stakeholders. Clear and useful tools that describe all curriculum building blocks and their relationships can be helpful to stimulate all stakeholders to tackle educational issues taking into account the entire curriculum perspective.

Since 1977, the Academic Development Unit at the KU Leuven has a sustained effort to improve the quality of teaching in this research intensive university. During the first decades, academic development initiatives mainly focused on enhancing instructional design of individual courses to support student learning. For this purpose the unit developed a conceptual scheme (Elen 2002) which emphasizes the importance of coherence and consistency in instructional decision-making. This scheme is in line with worldwide practices used to support teachers in higher education (Wiggins and McTighe 1998; Biggs 1999; Fink 2003; Saroyan and Amundsen 2004). Throughout the Academic Development Unit’s own instructional development initiatives this scheme proved to be very useful (Elen 2002). It helps staff to develop a common ‘language’ and to focus on student learning, it offers them an ‘image’ to tackle course design issues. An important limitation of the scheme however was the lack of a curriculum perspective.

Around the millennium change, two governmental policy initiatives resulted in a shift towards more attention for curricula. Firstly, due to the Bologna declaration (1999) the KU Leuven curricula were reformed from a two - two or two - three years ‘Candidate - Licentiate’ structure to a three - one or three - two years ‘Bachelor - Master’ structure. Secondly, the higher education context in Europe provided universities with pre-determined learning outcomes, mainly to facilitate student mobility. Quality Assurance (QA) Agencies were established to recognize institutions and/or programs of study as having met these
standards (Seto and Wells 2007). In Belgium this QA system was introduced in 2003, resulting in the accreditation of programs since 2006. From then on the Academic Development Unit’s conceptual scheme on instructional design really met its limitations as there was no explicit link with the curriculum. The fact that each course is but one element in a learning process was not taken into account. However, it seems obvious that courses, being the ‘building blocks’ of a curriculum, need to be well-aligned in order to constitute a coherent curriculum, in order to meet the assumed learning outcomes.

The aim of this paper is to present a scheme that can be used as a mindmap by all stakeholders (teaching staff, students, managers, representatives of the discipline and labour market,...) involved in curriculum development. The starting point was the exploration of the literature on curriculum and its design. Firstly the key concepts that underpin various points of view on curriculum development were described. Then different conceptions on curriculum design were evaluated against a set of characteristics found to be essential to make the scheme easy to grasp and useful in a discussion on the curriculum with and between its different stakeholders. This exercise resulted in the identification of the key components describing the curriculum as a whole and the relationships between them. Through the introduction of four quality circles in the resulting conceptual scheme, several pathways to design, revise or evaluate the curriculum were proposed. The use of the scheme was evaluated in training sessions with program leaders and educational developers. The results of this evaluation will be presented. Finally the limitations of this proposal will be discussed and approaches for further research suggested.

2 Key concepts for curriculum development

The term ‘curriculum’ used within the higher education context can mean different things to different groups (Barnett and Coate 2005; Fraser and Bosanquet 2006). Sometimes the curriculum is reduced to the structure and content within one course. In this paper the description of course and program that is made by Biggs and Tang (2011,113) is retained. So the focus is on aspects of curriculum development that go beyond those of course design and include all courses within one program. In this paper curriculum and program (of study) are in fact synonyms.

The curriculum as it is conceptualized in this paper is not a static description. On the contrary, it is a dynamic environment that cannot be grasped within one snapshot. It develops continuously due to environmental demands and contextual changes. Therefore to make the conceptual scheme useful in different contexts (e.g. designing, revision, experiencing) and for different stakeholders (teachers, students, policy makers, alumni,...) the curriculum is approached from different points of view.

2.1 Development of understanding

A first perspective taken into account was the vision of the curriculum as a place to develop understanding. Kelly (2009, 91) argues that outcomes of a curriculum should be defined in terms of intellectual development and cognitive functioning rather than in terms of quantities of knowledge absorbed or in terms of behavioural changes. He emphasizes the consequences for curriculum planning (Kelly 2009, 94): (1) rejection of the knowledge base for curriculum planning, (2) clear statements of the underlying educational principles or processes, and (3) education as a process of development. Discussing the curriculum in higher education should be about discussing the students’ learning experience as is emphasized by other authors (Oliver et al. 2008; Letschert 2004; Davis 2011; Litzinger et al. 2011). By incorporating the process of intellectual development student learning becomes prevalent.
2.2 Product and process approach

A second perspective taken is the focus on a process approach additional to the product approach. The product approach is initiated by Tyler’s (1949) rather mechanistic conceptualization of planning quality curricula by posing four questions: (1) What is to be accomplished? (2) What learning experiences will help accomplish the purposes? (3) How can these learning experiences be effectively organized? (4) How can the effectiveness of the learning be evaluated?

Stenhouse (1975) advocated for a process approach. He proposed to select content, develop teaching strategies, sequence learning experiences, and assess students’ strengths and weaknesses with an emphasis on empiricism: a process curriculum was designed to be not an outline to be followed but a proposal to be tested. Peter Knight (2001) also argues for a process approach by stressing the necessity of coherence and progression in a curriculum. He returns to Jerome Bruner’s concept of the spiral curriculum (Bruner 1960), saying “Bruner depicted a good curriculum as a spiral of repeated engagements to improve and deepen skills, concepts, attitudes and values, and extend their reach. The spiral curriculum has coherence, progression and, I claim, value” (Knight 2001, 371).

2.3 Planned, delivered, experienced curriculum

The final perspective is recognition of the difference between the planned, delivered and experienced curriculum (Prideaux 2003). What is planned by staff members for the students may differ from what is delivered and from what students experience or actually learn (Posner 1995). Therefore a continuous process of aligning planned outcomes with the delivered program and its confrontation with the experience of graduated students and alumni is necessary. This approach also serves to uncover both the hidden curriculum (unconsciously transmitted and received messages by instructors and students) and the null curriculum (what is not taught) (Eisner 1979).

3 Elements for a conceptual scheme

As a first step in the process of establishing the scheme the literature describing curriculum design within higher education was searched. The resulting frameworks (Davis 2011; Diamond 2008; Herring and Bryan 2001; Hubball and Burt 2004; Morcke and Eika 2009; Oliver et al. 2008; Prideaux 2007; Stark and Lattuca 1997) were analysed on meeting the following characteristics:

- based on scientific literature concerning (adult) learning theories, curriculum development, academic or educational development, instructional design;
- clarifying both the distinction and relation between curriculum development as a whole and design of individual courses;
- generic in its description of the curriculum so that it is usable for every discipline within higher education;
- be useful in the design, revision and evaluation of a curriculum;
- giving opportunities to every stakeholder (teaching staff, students, managers, representatives of the discipline and labour market,…) to discuss the curriculum from his own point of view;
- easy to introduce via a short presentation, a metaphor or a clear schematic representation.
All frameworks met at least some of the characteristics and were taken to the next step in the analysis. Because of the impact of accreditation on curriculum development, the quality criteria used in several accreditation schemes were also included (Stensaker and Harvey, 2006).

Four members of the unit having experience in curriculum development and quality assurance compared all components of the different frameworks. Similar components were aggregated into meaningful clusters, which were discussed until consensus was reached about their content and meaning. This work resulted in the following eleven elements for curriculum development:

- **The educational philosophy**: the description of the educational purposes and instructional philosophy that underlie curriculum decisions, reflecting the vision and mission of the institution - e.g. which learning theories underpin teaching and learning (Diamond 2008; Stark and Lattuca 1997; Oliver et al. 2008; Morcke and Eika 2009).

- **The positioning of the curriculum**: encompasses the level (Undergraduate, Bachelor, Master,...), orientation (strategic choices about content) (Diamond 2008) and the strategic choices about the disciplines involved compared to similar curricula at other institutes. For this element ample description was found in literature, but our own experience and context told us that introducing the 'level' actually helps stakeholders to discuss if their proposed program is most suitable to result in a Bachelor, Master or other degree. Moreover positioning its own curriculum against similar curricula regarding the disciplinary content enables to substantiate the choices made by the program.

- **The learning outcomes** at the program level: selection and integration of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be acquired by the graduates (Diamond 2008; Stark and Lattuca 1997). In accreditation schemes curricular outcomes are mentioned in terms of 'results judged against targets' (Stensaker and Harvey 2006).

- **Structure and sequence**: all courses are sequenced and structured together to form a coherent program of study (Stark and Lattuca 1997; Stensaker and Harvey 2006) with specific attention to vertical and horizontal integration (Hubball and Burt, 2004).

- **Learning, teaching and assessment strategies** should be tuned to the educational philosophy, should enable students to obtain the learning outcomes and should be aligned between courses (Stark and Lattuca 1997; Oliver et al. 2008; Stensaker and Harvey 2006).

- **The discipline, the research community, the labor market (with alumni) and the society** are all closely related to and influencing curriculum choices. It’s important to take into account e.g. the needs of employers and recruiters, the expectations of society, new findings of the research communities, the accreditation requirements and those of the disciplinary associations (Diamond 2008; Stark and Lattuca 1997).

- **Institutional resources** include facilities for teaching, organisational infrastructure and technology, quality and quantity of teaching staff, their experience and expertise, staff/student ratio and financial resources (Diamond 2008; Stark and Lattuca 1997; Stensaker and Harvey 2006).

- **Policy** includes departmental, institutional, regional, (inter)national regulation, organization and legislation (Stark and Lattuca 1997; Oliver et al. 2008).

- **Student characteristics** that need to be considered are student selection, characteristics of incoming students, diverse background of students (previous knowledge, experience or degrees, ethnic diversity,...) (Diamond 2008; Stark and Lattuca 1997; Stensaker and Harvey 2006).

- **Resources for students** include student guidance, student mobility and facilities for students/learning (Stensaker and Harvey 2006)

- **The individual courses** that together form the program of study (Prosser and Trigwell 1999, Biggs 1999, Ramsden 2003, Biggs and Tang 2011, Elen 2002).
Next an analysis was made on how these different elements are interrelated or influence each other, starting from the schemes of the papers discussed. In order to make the relationships visible and easily discussable, the elements were organized in a schematic representation as was seen in some of the other frameworks. Initially this was done by the four members of the Academic Development Unit, resulting in a proposal for the scheme. Later this proposal was discussed with educational developers from within the faculties, a selection of program leaders and international experts on academic development in order to fine-tune the conceptual scheme (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual scheme for curriculum development

The educational philosophy (1), the positioning of the curriculum (2) and the learning outcomes (3) constitute the ‘planned curriculum’, represented by a triangle box in the scheme. The three metaconcepts within are in close relationship to each other. The educational philosophy describes which learning theories underpin the choices in teaching and learning strategies to help student reach the learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are determined by the positioning or the scope that is chosen for the curriculum. The main box in the center stands for ‘the aligned curriculum’. The conceptual scheme for course design (Elen 2002) is placed in the middle of this box and is visualised in different layers, indicating that all courses are sequenced ((4) structure and sequence) and aligned ((5) learning, teaching and assessment strategies). They represent the most visible part (for every stakeholder) of a curriculum, the so-called program of study. Moreover the arrow between the main box and the triangle box indicates the ‘planned curriculum’ which is

(6) discipline, research community, labour market, society

(1) educational philosophy

(2) positioning

(3) learning outcomes

(4) structure and sequence

(5) learning, teaching and assessment strategies

(8) policy

(7) institutional resources

(9) student characteristics

(10) resources for students

(11) courses
guiding how individual courses are designed and how the different courses are structured and sequenced and aligned to each other. These two boxes (top triangle box and main central box) are ‘owned’ by the department or the group of teachers that deliver the curriculum, meaning that they take decisions about the (re)design process. On top of the scheme, there is the block (6) representing the discipline, the research community, the labor market (with alumni) and the society as a kind of advisory board. All these stakeholders are influencing (and influenced by) the choices that departments make in defining their position/profile, learning outcomes and educational philosophy ((1), (2) and (3)). Besides the main box in the center, all organizational or managerial elements are represented that influence the way courses (11) are designed, sequenced (4) or aligned (5): institutional resources (7), policy (8), student characteristics (9) and resources for students (10). These components have to be taken into account by departments and program leaders in their curriculum decision-making.

4 Four circles for quality development of curricula

To cope with the complexity of working on curriculum related issues, four circles of quality development are proposed (A, B, C & D), which are closely interconnected. Going through all components connected by a circle enables their alignment. Changing one of the components will influence the other connected components. Going through the circles also means taking into account the perspectives and agendas of different stakeholders and searching for the best answer or compromise. This focus on change was partly inspired by the ‘paths’ described by Stark and Lattuca (1997), illustrating how evaluation and adjustment operate in their curriculum model.

A. The quality circle of the planned curriculum

By confronting the elements of the planned curriculum to the expectations of the influencing stakeholders, both new and renewed curricula can be planned or the plans can be evaluated. To plan or adjust a curriculum it is necessary to find out what the expectations from the labor market and society are for graduates in the discipline. Also the input from the associated research communities - being on top of the state-of-the-art knowledge - is essential. To position a program within the educational market it is necessary to compare the planned outcomes with equal or similar programs within the institute and abroad. The educational philosophy should be attuned to recent research on learning and teaching.

B. The implementation of a curriculum

This circle makes the link between the planned curriculum (A) and the aligned curriculum (C). It investigates the way the intentions are realized. In an empiric way the planned curriculum can be seen as a proposal that can be tested by gathering evidence on students’ learning experiences (Stenhouse 1975). Alumni can be asked if and in what way the planned learning outcomes were realized in the curriculum. In a similar way, faculty teaching in the Master program can appreciate the level of incoming graduated Bachelors. This circle focuses on the curriculum as a process (Stenhouse 1975). It is about how students experience the sequencing in the learning process and assess the (learning) strengths and weaknesses of the program of study. A curriculum map is a useful tool to demonstrate the link among learning outcomes and their realization in courses or course modules, learning opportunities and assessment. Curriculum maps allow identifying actual or potential deficiencies in the curriculum through consultation of different stakeholders.

C. The aligned curriculum
The aligned curriculum consists of all courses of the curriculum which are ordered in a certain sequence (in function of content and capacity building, in years or semesters or phases of time) and are structured in core courses (obligatory), in optional modules or as elective courses. This reflects a progressive curriculum (Knight 2001). Skills and attitudes need to be acquired through different courses with an ever increasing complexity. In a coherent curriculum learning trajectories indicate how students transfer learning and deepen their understanding going from one course to the next. Alignment between courses is necessary to balance teaching, learning and assessment strategies in such a way that the intended learning outcomes can be realized (Litzinger et al. 2011).

D. The aligned course

This quality circle is reflected in the scheme for instructional design, which was first described by Elen (2002). As he mentioned it “is a general concept that promotes if-then reasoning’s” focusing the instructional design process on the constructive alignment (Biggs 1999, Fink 2003) of the different components of a course (learning objectives, learning activities, student characteristics, evaluation strategies, the learning environment and context). In an effective educational setting these components are coherently and consistently implemented and aligned to each other.

5 Actors acting on the curriculum

Although the scheme itself does not focus on the actors involved, several stakeholders are connected to the curriculum and integrated in the scheme: researchers, alumni, employers and the society are represented on top of the scheme. These stakeholders will be consulted on their ideas, experiences and needs when the planned curriculum is discussed by teachers and students. On the other hand alumni will, when employed, further explore innovations developed by research which they studied during the curriculum, in this way enhancing the society. Furthermore, students, faculty, teaching assistants engage in learning experiences throughout the aligned curriculum. They draw upon these experiences to rethink and optimize the planned curriculum (Oliver et al. 2008, O'Neill 2010). In this process of optimization, the role of the students is crucial: as they are the key actors in experiencing the program, their feedback on the different components and their relations is essential. Furthermore, program leaders and policy makers on all levels (departmental, institutional, regional, national, international) influence the planned as well as the aligned curriculum. They envision the contextual factors influencing the curriculum, manage the curriculum and plan and coordinate quality development initiatives.

6 Evaluating the framework as a tool to discuss the curriculum

The Academic Development Unit is verifying the face validity and the usability of the conceptual scheme for different stakeholders by using it in different educational development settings during the last four years. We have recently tested the scheme during a workshop on quality development of curricula where five program leaders and five educational developers were present (all from different disciplines). We concisely introduced the scheme and circles in a similar way as in this paper through a short powerpoint presentation. The participants were asked to analyse a curriculum related specific case or problem they were facing using the framework and they discussed their analysis with their peers. The different cases comprised revision as well as design and evaluation of curricula. They also made a SWOT analysis of the program they are coordinating or supporting in order to plan future development initiatives. At the end of the workshop, the 10 participants completed a short questionnaire on the usability of the scheme. The results are presented in the table below. All of the participants find the scheme valuable and consider applying the scheme implicitly in their work. Most of the program leaders and educational developers agree that the
scheme represents how quality development of a program can proceed. However some of them disagreed and even most of them would not use the scheme explicitly in their work. The participants were asked to explain their answers when they scored ‘(strongly) disagree’. Three participants explained that the scheme lacked information on ‘how’ to implement it but they confirmed that it was a good framework for analysing the curriculum.

Table 1: Frequency table on the usability of the conceptual scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>disagree</th>
<th>agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The conceptual scheme is valuable.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The conceptual scheme represents how quality development of a program could proceed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider applying this conceptual scheme implicitly in my work?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider applying this conceptual scheme explicitly in my work?</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight participants also answered the question: 'Did the workshop help you to develop new insights that can help you solve the case or problem you were asked to discuss?' Three participants answered that the scheme is a useful framework to structurally analyse a problem, case or curriculum reform. One participant gained more insight in the challenges the program is facing. One participant indicated learning some new elements (alignment with educational philosophy, learning trajectories of research skills, teacher appointment as an institutional resource). Two participants answered they already had a good idea on how to solve the problem. One of them mentioned having received some additional tips on how to solve the problem. Two participants indicated they did not gain new insights because they were already familiar with the scheme from earlier development initiatives of the unit.

Despite the small sample of key stakeholders that were involved in this usability test, the results indicate that the scheme is a useful tool to gain full insight in the complexity of the curriculum. However some of the participants expressed the need for additional information on how to implement the scheme and asked for a roadmap guiding them through the scheme.

7 Scenarios for curriculum development

As an answer to this need the unit is currently developing scenarios and exercises as an operationalisation of certain components and circles. In this way tools will be provided for program leaders and educational developers working on the curriculum. For example, in the case of a curriculum revision the following steps will be proposed:

1. Revising the existing learning outcomes by consulting alumni, labour market, research community, students and faculty
2. Mapping the new learning outcomes against the existing courses of the program (learning outcomes, teaching strategies, assessment)
3. Defining the learning trajectories throughout the curriculum
4. Discussing the gaps and overlap within one learning trajectory by teams of involved faculty
5. Make the necessary adjustments in the structure, sequence of the program followed by adjusting the content, learning outcomes, teaching strategies or assessment of individual courses.

Each of the steps is translated in a scenario in which it is indicated which stakeholders should be involved, which specific steps need to be taken and which strategies can be used, what questions need to be answered and what the output of the exercise can be. These tools will be available to program leaders, educational developers, faculty and students. They will also be additionally introduced in future development initiatives with program leaders.

8 Conclusions

The Academic Development Unit of the KU Leuven developed a conceptual scheme that creates a common language and serves as a mindmap for all stakeholders working on curricula. The results indicate that the scheme is a useful tool to gain full insight in the complexity of the curriculum. However, although the scheme is confirmed as being valuable as a mindset for program leaders and academic developers, the usability of the scheme as a roadmap for curriculum development is limited. Therefore, the unit is currently developing additional scenarios and exercises as an operationalisation of certain components and circles. These tools will be provided to program leaders and academic developers. In future research the unit will investigate whether providing scenarios and exercises additional to the scheme leads to an improved appreciation of the scheme. Moreover the usability of the scheme will be validated by a larger number of program leaders and educational developers and by other stakeholders (faculty and students).

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Parallel Session 1.6: Collaboration in curriculum development

Developing Professional Practice in Partnership
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University of the West of Scotland

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the design and development, successes and challenges surrounding a partnership-led curriculum enhancement project undertaken by staff, students and alumni in the School of Creative and Cultural Industries of the University of the West of Scotland. The project, supported by Institutional ‘Developing and Supporting the Curriculum’ (DSC) Enhancement Theme funding, was designed to contribute to implementation of the ePortfolio element of a larger ‘Professional Practice’ project to encourage engagement with Personal Development Planning (PDP), e-Portfolio and Personal Tutoring. Some of the current thinking about the ‘Student as Producer’, which influenced the design of the project, is discussed along with the progress and findings of the project to date. The paper concludes by recognising that co-production in curriculum development is a valuable way forward in the subject area of creative and cultural industries and beyond.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the design and development, successes and challenges surrounding a student-led curriculum enhancement project undertaken in the School of Creative and Cultural Industries (herein CCI) at University of the West of Scotland (UWS). The project, supported by Institutional ‘Developing and Supporting the Curriculum’ (DSC) Enhancement Theme funding, was designed to contribute to implementation of the ePortfolio element of a larger ‘Professional Practice’ project to encourage engagement with Personal Development Planning (PDP), e-Portfolio and Personal Tutoring.

Engagement with PDP and e-Portfolio is patchy across the school. Similarly, the School’s Personal Tutor system is under-utilised. With a view to enhancement of engagement within these areas, as well as to continue the implementation of a new UWS Student Support and Guidance policy 2012, it was agreed that students would be asked to utilise an ePortfolio to inform and support the personal tutoring process. Clearly, to help progress this approach effectively, it was important to develop examples of good practice and what could/should be included in the ePortfolio.

In 2011 Bovill et al (2011) suggested that academic staff should be consulting students about teaching approaches, courses and curricula and exploring ways to involve them as full participants in the design process. This, along with on-going discussions around the concept of ‘Student as Producer’ (McCulloch 2009; Neary 2009, Taylor & Wilding 2009), helped inform the design and main aim of the project: to involve students, academic staff and alumni from across the School in the development of subject specific exemplars of ePortfolios using the Mahara e-Portfolio tool to support reflection and development.

Initially it was proposed that the funding would be used to employ 5 students during Trimester 2 2012 to create sample Mahara ePortfolios for their subject area (Music, Performance, Art, Broadcast, Screen, Journalism) that would be used to support students in the development of their own ePortfolios. It was envisaged that the work would include development of templates, instructions etc. to encourage autonomous learning and that the
use of the concept ‘for students, by students’ would enhance engagement with the tool and help ensure it was student friendly in content and design.

This approach, however, became impractical for a number of reasons which will be discussed later, and led to recruitment of two School of CCI Alumni to progress the project.

It is important to note that, as the project is currently on-going, with a deadline for completion of June 2013, this paper focuses on progress to date and an update will be presented at the conference in June and published as a revised paper in the post-conference proceedings.

The paper will begin by providing some key definitions and discussion of concepts that underpinned the Mahara project before providing some background to the wider ‘Professional Practice’ project to put it into context. The paper will then go on to discuss the implementation of the project, its challenges and successes and the key findings and conclusions reached to date.

1.1 Definitions

It has become increasingly clear that students in the School of CCI engage more readily with the term ‘Professional Practice’ than with ‘PDP’, ‘employability’ etc. so ‘Professional Practice’ has now been adopted across the School to mean ‘the process of transition through CCI that encompasses elements of Learning, Teaching and Assessment such as Employability, PDP, Graduate Attributes and Work Related Learning’.

The revised UWS PDP Policy (2012) defines PDP as ‘a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning and/or achievement and to plan for their personal education and career development’.

An integral part of the concept of Professional Practice is for a student to take a portfolio approach to chart and record personal and professional development during their time with CCI and beyond. As stated, the project centres around development of Mahara ePortfolio exemplars – ‘purposeful collections of information and digital artefacts that demonstrate development or evidence learning outcomes, skills or competencies, including synthesis of ideas, reflection on achievements, self-awareness and forward planning’ (Cotterill, .2007)

Reflection on development of their employability is a key element of every student’s journey in CCI. The definition used in the School, like many institutions, is based on the 2005 definition presented by Mantz Yorke: ‘a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations’.

The Mahara project centres on enhancement of the curriculum through engagement of students by students. The concept of the ‘curriculum as a vehicle’ which recognises the importance of the curriculum as the ‘fulcrum between high level policies and the students that these policies are intended to serve’ (Fotheringham et al 2012, p2) is a useful one in the context of this project which brings together the curriculum as both a product12 and a process13 to drive delivery of institutional agendas and priorities in collaboration with the students they are designed to serve.

12 The structure and content is dictated by industry and professional bodies (Fotheringham et al, 2012) – this is true of programmes in CCI, which are accredited by Creative Skillset; JAMES; BACSA; BJTC and Drama UK, all professional bodies which have certain requirements and expectations

13 Prioritises interaction and community over content and structure i.e. focuses on a wider learning and teaching environment and offer of a variety of student experiences, mediated by students (Fotheringham et al 2012)
2. Background to the Professional Practice Project

The rate of change in the higher education landscape requires institutions to regularly reflect and make changes to meet new and revised demands. Since 2011 UWS has launched new strategies addressing research and knowledge exchange; internationalisation and global citizenship and; learning, teaching and assessment (LTAS). These strategies, along with a number of other drivers for change discussed below, provided the perfect opportunity to develop a more flexible, coherent, efficient, effective and streamlined strategy for the support, development and recording of the professional practice of students in CCI.

2.1 Drivers for Change

As Fotheringham (2012) states, we make many assumptions about students: what they like, what they know, how they learn, how they interact and base decisions on this. Previous investigations and research in CCI have demonstrated that the assumptions made about students and the decisions made based on these assumptions do not always enhance the student experience. It was important, therefore, when developing the Professional Practice project that assumptions were tested with colleagues, students and industry professionals.

Review and consultation work carried out with colleagues from December 2010 around systematisation in the promotion and recording of Work Related Learning (WRL) and the mapping of employability, PDP, Graduate Attributes and WRL across all programmes and modules highlighted that many elements of professional practice are embedded into the curriculum, but they are not always particularly well articulated in module descriptors and handbooks so students are not always aware of them.

This was supported by research and evidence from Student-Staff Liaison groups, the Creative Skillset Reaccreditation Process 2011/12, the National Student Survey (NSS) 2012 and the 2011 Enhancement Led Institutional Review (ELIR) which all suggested that some of our students do not realise or understand their achievements and the competences and professional practice they have gained i.e. what, where and how they are developing.

Taking this into account, along with the fact that increased competition in the workplace requires a strong evidence base of skills and abilities to meet employer and industry expectations and clear articulation of them, provided proof that a strategy was required to enhance the transparency of development of professional practice and student’s recognition, reflection on and recording of that development.

2.2 Professional Practice on Moodle

A Moodle ‘Professional Practice’ site is being developed to bring together sources and resources to support students in their reflections and goal setting and provide opportunities to develop their professional practice. The key elements of the site, to which all students and staff from across the School will be signed up, are Work Related Learning opportunities; competitions; festivals; volunteering; employment; project briefs etc.; sources and resources to support networking; development of professional practice; and awareness of current issues, including the nature and landscape of the creative industries. The use of the site will be embedded into modules to enhance the transparency of development of professional practice. Colleagues will also be encouraged to use the site for directed learning to support class contact time and independent learning.

The site will also contain links to Mahara which will contain tailored materials to support reflection; self-assessment, including identifying employability skills and graduate attributes and how to develop them; goal setting; and the use of the Mahara ePortfolio system to
record, evidence and articulate development of professional practice. The subject specific ePortfolio exemplars developed by students for students will be an integral part of the site.

2.3 The ePortfolio Approach

Whilst variable approaches to learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) and Professional Practice are appropriate, there is scope for some systematisation in the School e.g. during the Skillset re-licensing process, it was clear that electronic versions of reflective logbooks/diaries or similar would have been easier to access than the hardcopies presented. They could also have provided more evidence of a holistic, dynamic approach, including creativity in design and content, developing in complexity during the student journey and continuing into Showcasing and beyond Graduation.

Reflection on learning is specific to the individual and support mechanisms for reflection, goal setting and discussion are needed beyond the module level. The new UWS Student Support and Guidance policy requires development of a coordinated approach to personal tutoring. Incorporation of support for development of personal and professional practice should be an integral part of that approach. The introduction of Mahara was timely for development of the CCI Personal Tutoring strategy as it clearly presented an opportunity to use it as a tool to meet the requirements of the policy and add value and structure to personal tutor meetings.

Figure 1 illustrates how the ePortfolio approach has been developed as part of the Professional Practice project to provide a template for discussions at Personal Tutor meetings.
3. The Project

In 2012, UWS transferred from Blackboard VLE and Campus Pack e-Portfolio tool to Moodle VLE and Mahara ePortfolio. From its inception, despite a rigorous implementation strategy of the UWS PDP Policy, students in CCI did not engage with the Blackboard ePortfolio tool, preferring to use Facebook (or similar) sites to communicate and promote their professional and creative identity. Although this was effective in some respects, it meant that key elements of the PDP process e.g. reflection and goal setting, were not transparent. It appears that the similarity between Mahara and Facebook, with the additional benefit of privacy, is beginning to increase engagement with ePortfolio across UWS. As stated previously, assumptions are risky so it was decided to find out from students if engagement had improved and how use of ePortfolio could be enhanced in CCI.

The past few years have seen increased criticism of the ‘student as consumer’ approach to the relationship between the student and the university. McCulloch (2009, p172) argues it is inappropriate and an incorrect reflection of contemporary higher education. Taylor and Wilding (2009) suggest that if students are viewed as consumers, this could lead to diminishing of learning as students tend to act in a passive manner. This would seem to be the case with some of the reflective and goal setting elements of professional practice in CCI, where even normally motivated, proactive students tend to adopt a more negative, passive attitude unless they are involved in developments and change.

To begin to overcome some of the issues above and build on students feelings that the curriculum changes are being done with them, rather than to them, the ‘Student as Producer’ approach (Neary, 2009) was preferred for the Mahara project i.e. curriculum design and development was planned as a co-production, where students, lecturers and others would work together to apply their knowledge for successful completion of the project. It was envisaged that this would lead to participants understanding the benefits of the curriculum developments, feel an increased sense of ownership of their higher education experience and encourage others to proactively engage with the outcomes of the project.

Bovill and Bulley’s 2011 ‘Ladder of student participation in curriculum design’ (figure 2) which divides levels of participation into 8 ‘rungs’ of increasing participation was a useful starting point for the Mahara project.

```
Students control decision-making and have substantial influence
  - Students in control
  - Partnership - a negotiated curriculum

Students have some choice and influence
  - Student control of some areas of choice
  - Students control of prescribed areas

Tutors control decision-making informed by student feedback
  - Wide choice from prescribed choices
  - Limited choice from prescribed choices

Tutors control decision-making
  - Participation claimed, tutor in control
  - Dictated curriculum – no interaction
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Figure 2: Ladder of student participation in curriculum design
Research with students from across the School, Programmes and levels was included in the remit for the project, which aimed to sit at the top of the ladder in terms of student participation i.e. ‘students control decision-making and have substantial influence’. Due to the nature of the project, however, in actuality it probably sits on the 7th/8th rung ‘students control some areas of choice’, as there has to be some guidance from subject specific academic and curriculum development staff.

As stated, it was proposed that the funding would be used to employ 5 students during Trimester 2 2012 to create sample Mahara ePortfolios for their subject area that would be used to support students in the development of their own portfolios. It was envisaged that the work would include discussions with students to inform development of templates, instructions etc. to encourage autonomous learning and that the use of the concept ‘for students, by students’ would enhance engagement with the tool and help ensure it was student friendly in content and design. The full remit provided to the producers was tied into the overall Professional Practice proposal.

3.1 The Remit

Overall, the Mahara project remit was – ‘In consultation with staff, students and industry practitioners, create step by step instructions and learning materials to enhance engagement with Mahara, including building exemplar ePortfolios and provision of examples of how to use Mahara’s built in social networking tools to develop communities of practice.

Key outcomes

It was suggested that key actions and outcomes would include:

- Creation of exemplar Mahara portfolios which chart development, reflection and goal setting over the course of the student journey for the 6 subject areas in the School
  - Music (Level 7-L10; MA Songwriting; MA Music Innovation & Entrepreneurship)
  - Art (Digital Art Levels 9 and 10)
  - Performance (Contemporary Screen Acting; Performance Levels 9 and 10)
  - Screen (Filmmaking & Screenwriting Levels 7-10)
  - Broadcast (Broadcast Production Levels 7-10; MA Creative Media Practice)
  - Journalism (Sports Journalism Levels 7-10; MA Broadcast Journalism)
- Research, design and development of a series of subject and level specific templates to support reflection and goal setting. Templates should include examples of methods to record and evidence reflection on learning and teaching; feedback; WRL; employability; graduate attributes and other aspects of development of the students creative identity
- Examples and guidance on the building of a repository of materials, links, templates, reflections etc. to contribute to showcasing of work, goal setting and development of personal and professional practice during the student journey at UWS and beyond
- Emphasis and demonstration that links from Mahara can be made to existing platforms rather than having to start from scratch. This should include examples and instructions for linking to/use of a range of tools used by the students e.g. SoundCloud; BandCamp; YouTube
- Design of the exemplar in a way that will encourage the student to use their personal, private space for goal setting and career planning and emphasise the content is under their control and it is up to them if they share, what they share and who with
- Guidance and examples of selection of materials for creation of portfolios for a range of different audiences
- Guidance and examples of materials for informing and supporting personal tutorial meetings, including goal setting and progress towards goals
The project team were also asked to note issues, challenges, hurdles and overall reflections on the project.

3.2 Implementation

Recruitment of current students became impractical for a number of reasons. The first issue was that the implementation and availability of Mahara was delayed until mid-summer so students had finished. Once recruitment in Trimester 1 2012/13 commenced, it became clear that the applicants, although familiar with the use of social media, were not engaged enough with the concepts of personal development planning to be able to undertake the complexity of the work required. This was disappointing but also evidenced the importance of the project.

In hindsight, it is also clear that it was over ambitious to expect current students to be able to develop teaching materials and reflective templates that would suit the range of users and diversity of the student population in the school, from Level 7 to Level 11.

A revised approach was agreed by the Institutional Enhancement Themes Steering Committee that involved employment of two CCI Graduates to undertake the project to develop the materials in the remit but only 2 exemplars. The decrease from six to two exemplars was based on the rationale that students in CCI are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary and convergence is being encouraged. It was felt that two exemplars, supported by subject specific reflective materials, would encourage students to consider the range and overlap of their professional practice i.e. reflection on the bigger picture. The option to extend the project to include more exemplars was available if required.

The change to the ePortfolio element of the remit meant that the effective recruitment was crucial. One Alumnus was a student who entered CCI in Level 9 and completed a BA (Hons) and an MA in the School. She is currently an Associate Lecturer in CCI so has regular contact with the students and is studying for her PgCert Higher Education Teaching and Learning. Her particular focus on learning, teaching and assessment is around social media which made her an ideal candidate for the project. The other Alumnus commenced his studies at UWS in Level 7 and graduated with a 1st Class Honours so has four years experience and knowledge about the institution and the student journey, including where and how professional practice is developed. He is now a freelance filmmaker and producer with his own production company and a music, technology and filmmaking background. The two individuals complement each other in terms of background and experience and between them can cover most of the elements of professional practice offered in the School.

3.3 Progress and Outcomes to Date

To date, development of the ePortfolio exemplars is well underway. Instructions on the use of various tools and platforms have been integrated into the exemplars so the student does not have to switch between instructions and practical examples and use of Mahara. Use of highly technical, academic language has been avoided to help engagement. Similarly, examples relate to the subjects being studied by the students and provide illustrations of the types of evidence looked for by employers in the creative and cultural industries.

There have been a few teething problems e.g. overcoming bugs in the functionality of Mahara e.g. embedding of SoundCloud; only being able to use Mahara effectively in IE5 and Firefox but these have been overcome by the project team collaborating with the Universities Educational Technologists and staff and students in CCI.

14 Examples of the materials and the ePortfolios will be provided at the conference presentation
Work has now started on development of the reflective templates with students. These will be tailored to meet the subject and level of study of the student as appropriate.

A current concern is how to raise the awareness of students about Mahara and encourage engagement with the project. To date, class representatives have fed into the project and back to their cohort. It is likely they will continue to be one of the main vehicles to encourage two way communication and engagement.

Additionally, focus groups will be developed in September 2013 to test the outcomes of the project, suggest enhancements, discuss how to effectively progress implementation of the professional practice project across CCI and help devise an engagement strategy.

It has become clear that one of the biggest concerns the students have is how they will access their ePortfolio after Graduation – they see little point in engaging with the tool if they cannot use it for continuous professional development. This has led to key messages that the UWS system can be accessed for a year after graduation then they can transfer to a free or paid for hosting service, e.g. http://www.foliospaces.com.

Institutional support has been an important element of this project. It would have been demotivating for the project team and the students and detrimental to the whole philosophy of the project to be told what they wanted to do was not possible. The Educational Technologists are continuously enhancing the Mahara system and are open to suggestions for improvements, especially from subject specific social media experts and students/Graduates from the schools.

Engagement of staff is also on-going. To encourage student engagement, staff must be seen to support the project and the use of Mahara, which has not always been the case. Timetable and curricular changes are underway to increase directed learning and further develop autonomous learning and some of this time could be used to embed elements of the professional practice model. It is vital that development of the reflective elements of professional practice are not viewed as an add-on, which goes back to the involvement of both staff and students in design of the strategy.

4. Conclusion

After a slow start the Mahara Project, as part of the larger Professional Practice project, has been successful to date and an update will be provided at the conference.

The knowledge and background experience of the two alumni enabled establishment of trust and credibility with students and staff in CCI and a network of industry contacts. This enabled effective partnership working to develop outputs that should meet expectations and encourage engagement with Mahara.

The project has also been a useful way to investigate some concepts of Student as Producer. Student involvement in curriculum design is a practice that will only be increased in CCI. It is proving to be a valuable method to enhance student engagement with learning, teaching and assessment and reassure staff that improvement of the student experience is based on facts not assumptions.

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Social media guidance, designed by students for students, is well-received and may prompt changes in online behaviour

Howden, S., Cowan, H., Green, B., Reynolds, D. and Smith, S.
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh

ABSTRACT: Social media offers opportunities to network and build a positive online profile; however, there is growing evidence that used unwisely, such sites can blur the lines between the personal and professional (Devi 2011) resulting in unanticipated negative consequences. In response to this, a number of health professional bodies have generated social media guidance for their members. Examination of this guidance reveals a range of content and formats. There is currently a paucity of research into healthcare students’ views on available guidance. The paper reports on an investigation of healthcare students’ views regarding currently existing social media guidance, the development of a new guide, that can be used by any healthcare student group (uni or multi professional) and commentary on the value of a student lead research project which results in a learning resource, developed by students, for students.

1. Introduction

Social media is characterised by user generated content associated with internet based publishing technologies (Terry 2009) and is a growing global phenomenon. Common forms include chat rooms, blogs and social networking sites (SNSs) e.g. Facebook, Twitter. Social media enables users to construct and share materials which could demonstrate an individual’s interests and skills whilst extending networks.

In the UK approximately half the population are Facebook members, accounting for over 30 million UK profiles (Socialbakers 2012). Although the use of social media transcends population demographics, a large proportion are students and new graduates between the ages of 18-24 (Quale and Taylor 2011). The positive uses of social media have been tempered by well publicised cases of online misconduct and negative media coverage (CSP 2010, MPS 2012).

1.1 Social media use: healthcare students and professionals

Inappropriate use of social media has led to increasing incidence of disciplinary action against staff in many healthcare establishments (Laja 2011). The majority of nursing boards in the USA have taken disciplinary action in response to complaints about nurses and student nurses violating patient privacy by posting confidential material on SNS (NCSBN 2010). In most cases social media misconduct is unintentional; however, consequences have led to employee dismissal and legal action (Aylott 2011, BMA 2011). Such instances of misconduct threaten the reputation of individuals, healthcare professions in general and the trust that the public has in them (Devi 2011).

There is a growing body of research into the underlying reasons for social media misconduct and more generally students understanding of the uses of social media (e.g. Heil 2011, Camacho et al. 2012), however, research involving healthcare studies is still relatively limited (with exception of: Garner and O’Sullivan 2010; Macdonald et al 2010; Fox 2012). Macdonald et al (2010) conducted a cross-sectional survey of 220 newly graduated doctors’ use of social-networking via Facebook. Thirty seven percent of students were found to be at risk of bringing their profession into disrepute through highly personal and sensitive online
content. This included membership of offensive groups and photographs depicting professionals drinking alcohol to excess. Many participants had not activated privacy settings (SNS features that restrict online visibility), such that all content was publicly accessible. The culmination of student/professional uncertainty in relation to issues of privacy, what comprises e-professionalism and expectations of conduct online there emerges the need for guidance (Cain et al 2009, Finn et al 2010, Aylott 2011).

1.2 Social media guidance for healthcare students/professionals

Social media guidance has been produced by a number of professional and regulatory bodies for healthcare students and professionals to support understanding about social media use and online behaviour (BDA 2008, BAOTCOT 2010, BMA 2011, CSP 2011, HCPC 2011, NMC 2011). The content of the guidance ranges from simple recommendations (HCPC 2011) to evidence-based information, explanations and advice (BMA 2011). Layout and writing style also vary from concisely written text paragraphs (BDA 2008, HCPC 2011) to more formal language (BMA 2011) and screen shots of social networking sites (BAOTCOT 2010).

As four of these documents are directed at both students and qualified professionals (BDA 2008, BMA 2011, HCPC 2011, NMC 2011) this guidance may fail to sufficiently explore key issues of specific relevance for healthcare students. Chandra and Chatterjee (2011) noted that guidance varied in quality and content, ranging from brief and lenient to the relatively overbearing. The variety of guidance and the branding by specific professions may mean that it is not perceived to be relevant to different groups e.g. would a student of physiotherapy appreciate the relevance of many of the messages in guidance written for doctors?

This raises concerns to whether current guidance is relevant, evidence-based and accessible to all healthcare students. The literature search identified a gap in research exploring students’ opinions of current social media guidance and its impact on their online conduct.

The aims of the study were: to explore healthcare students’ perspectives of current health professional social media guidance; to construct new social media guidance shaped by the views of those students, current guidance and the wider literature; and to evaluate the self reported impact or lack of impact of the new guidance following its dissemination to healthcare students.

2. Method

There were two elements of data collection: 1. two semi-structured focus groups which explored healthcare students’ views on currently available social media guidance were conducted. 2. new social media guidance (crafted by the four student researchers/authors and informed by the focus group findings) using a short questionnaire was piloted.

Ethical approval was granted by the Queen Margaret University (QMU) Research Ethics Committee. Written, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were stored securely with identifying features removed to protect the identity of participants.

Recruitment was conducted via an internal university email. Participants were third or fourth year healthcare students at QMU and deemed to be active users of social media i.e. they self-reported using social media at least once per month. All participants completed a questionnaire capturing information about age, gender and healthcare discipline as well as information on the nature and frequency of their social media use. These data facilitated sampling of participants into one of the two phases within the study, ensuring that each
phase had representation from a number of healthcare professional programmes and a mix of males and females.

2.1 Focus groups

Focus group participants were tasked with reading two social media guides (BMA 2011, HCPC 2011) alongside guidance available from their own professional body (BDA 2008; CSP 2010; NMC 2011; BAOTCOT 2010) prior to attending the focus group. The student researchers/authors had selected the BMA and HCPC guidance as examples of the best available at the time of the study. Focus group questions elicited students' views on the usefulness of the guides, format/style and any particular strengths/weaknesses. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour. Digital recordings of the focus groups were transcribed within 24 hours of completion.

2.2 Data analysis and creation of the new social media guide

Transcripts were thematically analysed (Boyatzis 1998) to inform the development of a new, student informed social media guide, reflecting focus group participants' preferences for content, layout etc. These findings were then integrated with the researchers' analysis and understanding of currently available social media guidance to produce text-based guidance specific to the needs of a mixed professional group of healthcare students.

2.3 Piloting the new guide

The newly created Social Media: A Practical Guide for Healthcare Students was subjected to individual feedback from two volunteer healthcare students regarding readability and comprehension and modified accordingly prior to piloting.

The new guidance was disseminated to participants either via email or through participant attendance at a drop-in session, were the researchers distributed hard copies of the guide. Participants were asked to read the new guidance before completing a short questionnaire designed to ascertain students' views on the guide and its possible impact or lack of impact on social media behaviours.

Questions included in the questionnaire: 1. Thinking about the guidance, can you briefly explain whether you found it useful or not? 2. Do you think that the guidelines have altered your view of social media in any way? If so please explain how. 3. Having read the guidelines – would you now consider taking any action regarding your online activity? Can you explain what you intend to do? Questionnaire responses were subject to simple descriptive analysis of content.

3. Findings

Twenty seven healthcare students entered the study; 24 (89%) female and three (11%) male. Two participants were third year students, the remaining 25 were in fourth year. Mean age was 22.7 years (SD 2.9). Students from five different healthcare programmes participated: 13 (48%) from physiotherapy, five (19%) from occupational therapy, three (11%) from speech and language therapy, three (11%) from dietetics and three (11%) from nursing.

All participants were active users of social-media; 26 (96%) used social-media at least once per day. Eight (30%) participants had previously received guidance regarding social media conduct; this mainly consisted of informal guidance from tutors. Two students had seen guidance from health profession bodies prior to this study. All participants stated that healthcare students needed guidance regarding the use of social media.
3.1 Focus group findings

Each of the two focus groups had six participants and were mixed in relation to healthcare programme membership. The following headings convey the key themes from the focus group phase of data collection.

3.1.1 A need for healthcare student guidance that is balanced and supportive

All participants stated that there was a definite need for social media guidance which was specific to their needs as developing healthcare professionals. Awareness of current guidance was poor and participants' appraisal of that guidance was that none of the guides presented an ideal balance of relevant and comprehensive information.

'It's [social media] is just a massive grey area.'

'I don’t know where the boundaries are at all.'

The majority opinion was that guidance provided by the BMA (2011) was preferable to the other resources reviewed. Participants were positive about the BMA guide’s depth of reasoning and the accessibility of its structured sections. Participants highlighted that the inclusion of case examples made the guidance engaging. Participants also liked the practical nature of the solutions for common problems encountered by social media users. Nonetheless, participants stated that the vocabulary employed by the BMA was overly formal and tiresome to read. It was reported that because the BMA guidance was written for medical professionals and trainees, it lacked a sense of connection with the non-medical readership.

The majority of focus group participants were critical of the remaining guidance documents for either being too brief and/or vague in content (BDA 2008, BAOTCOT 2010, HCPC 2011). Participants stated that these resources failed to provide adequate depth of explanation associated with the advice they offered.

'This one’s [gestures to the HCPC guidance] just like basic bullet points and it doesn’t… kinda give you the whole reasoning.'

However, participants expressed a preference for the writing style of these documents, perceiving that they were easier to understand than the BMA (2011) guidance. The majority stated the need to establish a ‘happy medium’ between all resources reviewed.

3.1.2 Guidance should be practical and engaging

Participants reported that future guidance should provide clear, reasoned suggestions for professional social media conduct along with engaging case examples and practical solutions. Participants also commented that the tone of the guidance should be relatively informal or at least presented in an easy to read manner. Participants outlined a number of key issues that the guidance should address:

- Direction about what constitutes inappropriate social media content.
- The (relatively) permanent nature of some social media content.
- The issue of patients/clients seeking to befriend a healthcare student online.
- How to best use privacy settings.

3.2 The researchers/authors development of the new guidance
Following focus group sessions, the four student researchers/authors reviewed the current body of healthcare social-media guidance. Researchers felt that a visually appealing layout such as that exemplified by the BMA (2011) would facilitate student engagement with guidance content. It was decided that a social media page ‘screen shot’ image, as used by BAOTCOT (2010) guidance, could illustrate an online scenario. Researchers decided that new social-media guidance should include a reference list linked to further information.

The newly constructed guidance took the form of a five page, written guide, covering topics including: standards expected of healthcare students; potential risks/consequences of using social media; permanence of online content; social media privacy settings and managing friend requests. The document made use of relevant and recognizable case studies to illustrate important points. The content was specific to healthcare students and adopted an informal tone communicating practical social media advice.

3.3 Piloting the new guidance: questionnaire findings

Fourteen (52%) participants took part in the second phase of the study. These students reviewed the new guidance and completed a short questionnaire.

Questionnaire responses indicated that all participants found the new guidance useful and felt it was necessary for healthcare students to receive this kind of guidance. Twelve (86%) participants stated that they would now take action to change their online activity. Nine (64%) participants stated that the new guidance had altered their overall view of social media.

The following sections convey the key themes representing majority opinions from the written questionnaires responses.

3.3.1 Increased awareness and motivation to change behaviour

Most participants felt they had some previous understanding of the risks associated with social media. However, they stated that the guidance had enabled them to develop this understanding and encouraged reflection on social media use. The majority also reported that the guidance made them consider modifying aspects of their personal behavior related to social media. These changes included activating more stringent privacy settings, screening personal content for appropriateness and adopting a more thoughtful approach to managing patient/client friend requests. Participants also stated that this guidance made them aware of the permanence of some social media content and that participants would be mindful of this issue when posting in future.

‘They (the new guidance) highlight some points which I would never have thought of, one being that if you delete something it doesn’t necessarily mean it has gone completely – this is definitely something I am going to think about the next time I log on’.

Participants noted that the new guidance could play an important role in informing healthcare students of potential consequences of social media misconduct. It was also noted that the guide appeared to be balanced, presenting some of the benefits of social media use.

‘I’m glad that the guideline didn’t completely focus on the potential pitfalls of using social media but also highlighted some of the benefits it may offer, giving a balanced view.’

Participants stated that the guidance would benefit healthcare students attending practice placement who might not have thought through the real life consequences of breaching professional boundaries through communication via social media. Participants reported that the guidance conveyed how the careless or thoughtless use of social media can also cause
problems regarding future employment.

3.3.2 Having guidance sooner rather than later

The majority of participants emphasised that students should receive this kind of guidance as soon as possible. Participants commented that early guidance might encourage incoming healthcare students to avoid posting inappropriate content that could have a negative impact in later years. They proposed that the impact of the guidance may be greater if it were used periodically throughout the duration of their programmes; thus helping to, 'get students into a habit of ensuring professionalism at all times'. Participants also suggested that the guidance must be regularly revised in order to remain up to date with the ever evolving nature of social media.

4. Discussion

The student participants demonstrated high levels of social media usage with 96% engaging with social media at least once per day. It is interesting to note this frequent use coupled with a consensus statement on the need for social media guidance and the finding that only two had previously accessed published guidance prior participation in the study. Although a number of social media guides are available for health professions/students they tend to be profession specific and are disseminated through professional bodies, which may only reach those students who have professional body membership. Guides tend to be written for particular professional groups, potentially alienating or failing to appeal to other health profession members, health professionals who often share a common set of standards of conduct and ethics.

Bringing student scrutiny to the fore in the focus groups and by mixing the health profession groups demonstrated that the common ground of being a student and an emerging health professional were uniting features. Students found value in all elements of all of the existing guides, irrespective of their intended audience, but did not perceive that any had the right balance between content, tone and format. The development of a guide that is deemed relevant by a mixed group of healthcare students supports the possibilities of integrating the material in inter-professional education modules or those accessed by different student groups.

The new Social Media: A Practical Guide for Healthcare Students elicited a positive response, with all participants commenting that the new guide was useful, readable and needed. Eighty five percent stated that they intended to change aspects of their behavior related to their use of social media. This outcome was more pronounced than that reported by Cain et al (2009), one of the few, relatively comparable studies, who reported that 52% of 244 pharmacy students stated an intention to change online behaviour following a lecture on social media guidance. It is notable that the sample size in the current study is significantly smaller than that of Cain and the relationship between student-project / student-participants (in the current study) may have introduced bias. However, it may be that the product, produced by students, for students did indeed engage them in a way that would not occur without their central role. The wider issue of what the student-researchers brought to the process and ultimately the outcome (the guide), this is worth considering further.

Reflections of the supervisor

The supervision process for the group was no different from other final year projects, however, it was notable how engaged the student-researchers were in all elements of the process. Having initially been concerned that the topic was not linked to physiotherapy management or assessment issues; appearing to more associated with issues of professionalism, there was a degree of concern, at most disappointment from some
members (this type of topic never scores highly on students rating of most wanted project title). However, having read the literature in the area and understood the ‘gap’ which their project could fill set the group on a trajectory of excited enthusiasm for the task in hand.

The most striking element of the project is the product or the new guidance document. It does not resemble something which I, or perhaps my colleagues, would have generated. It is characterised by being a degree humorous, light on text, pages punctuated by images and icons, and examples of experiences from other students, all presented in an informal but supportive tone. The next question was, how would this be received by other cohorts of students, would it make an impact?

Six months after the study concluded the guide was used to support a session for third year students on professionalism and issues related to practice placement. Materials were also used to help illustrate a session linked to employability and the benefits of social media in enhancing profile. Anecdotal evidence from the events, from tutors and staff indicated the guide material was well received, however, longer term follow up, in forth year indicated that less than half of students were confident in their knowledge and understanding related to the use of social media.

There are multiple reasons for students not being able to recall past learning events and demonstrate the knowledge they had, superficial engagement with the materials, lack of opportunity to apply the new knowledge, lack of ongoing feedback and integration of the materials at future dates and in new, applied settings. In response to this, in September 2013 the physiotherapy programme will see the introduction of social media guidance into multiple levels of the programme, including modules on professional development and conduct, employability, practice placement communication and interaction. The guide will be used as trigger material for tutorials and student centered learning activities.

In a wider context a small team from health, drama and performance and sociology are meeting to develop the guide into a resource that all students (not only healthcare students) would find engaging and useful. The most important element being to involve students from the beginning to ensure the guide does not move to being shaped by academic staff, diluting the elements which the students found to be most vital.

**Reflections of the student researchers**

All students noted a significant impact related to the study on their own awareness of the positive and negative influences of social media, potentially shaping their careers and employability, how they were perceived by others and how their new knowledge influenced everyday interaction with social media. Two of the students, now graduates have provided their own written accounts on the lasting impact of the project work. These are presented in their own words.

**Account One**

‘The relevance of the project became surprisingly apparent at my first graduate job. I was working as an intern at the office of one of the physiotherapy special interest groups, when I was tasked with developing a guidance document to assist members with using social media safely and professionally. This demonstrated to me the significance of this issue to working professionals as well as a student population – many of the members were contacting the head office feeling unsure about whether they should even be using social media, and if so, how could they do so safely and even take advantage of the many benefits that are possible through the use of social media. This project differed in its intended audience and overall tone of the document and aimed to encourage professionals to promote themselves and their practice using social media; however, the underlying theme of uncertainty when using
social media was clear. My previous experience and involvement in researching forms of
guidance as well as my knowledge regarding social media greatly contributed to my creation
of this guidance for the company to adapt as they saw fit. The need for such a document in
my opinion demonstrates that not only is this an issue for younger generations and students
but also working professionals. Additionally this project has undeniably had a lasting effect
on my personal behaviour. I question what I post online to ensure it does not appear
inappropriate or reflect badly on myself. I do this automatically and habitually; I believe this
is proof that my behaviour and opinions have been irrevocably altered through this project.’

**Account Two**

‘Before taking part in this study, I believed that I had a good knowledge of social media and
was always conscious of my online activity. In many cases, I would notice the activity of
friends’, especially if I felt it was inappropriate content to be displaying so publicly and
strongly believed that it was purely “common sense” to behave appropriately online. In my
opinion, my online content was perfectly acceptable and didn’t worry about the negative
consequences recently been reported in media. However, the whole process of the study
has taught me a great deal about social media and people’s perceptions of one another.

During the focus groups, it became clear that although most students shared my belief that
this was purely a matter of common sense, everybody appeared to have very different views
on what exactly would be appropriate content. Some people’s idea of appropriate content
was viewed to be unacceptable by others, especially when this content (pictures, status
updates etc) were being viewed out of context. This made me question my own activity
more and I now question whether others could misjudge my online activity as inappropriate
when viewed out of context. .. I have modified my security settings .. I now make sure I
never discuss anything work related as I think this makes it easier to control the “blurring”
between the professional and personal, an area which I have learned to be the key factor in
contributing to negative consequences. .. In addition to changes in my online activity, I also
am now very aware of things I discuss when out in public as I have learned that blurring the
lines between professionalism and personal life in a public environment can also result in
very similar consequences.

Conducting the study not only taught me about social media but the process as a whole also
has developed skills such as organisation, communication, listening and analysing
information. As social media sites are growing in popularity, most participants had lots to
say about their own experiences and often the focus group discussion would fall off track.
As there was only limited time, we had to listen closely to what participants were saying
whilst ensuring that the discussion was brought back to the key points of focus so that the
information required for developing new social media guidance could be gathered. Two
hours of focus groups provided us with a mass of information, however, our aim was to
make the new guidelines as short and as concise as possible. Because of this I feel I have
really developed my skills in analysing information as we spent lots of time abstracting only
the points that conveyed a strong message, making our guidelines more engaging. Having
four members in our study group was often challenging as many of us would have differing
views on how information should be generated or what points should be included in the
guidelines. Through this I feel I developed my team working skills by listening to others ideas
and often negotiating and rearranging our plan in order to come up with a set of guidelines
that we were all happy with.

Revisiting this study after a period of time and reflecting on the whole process has been very
worthwhile and has made me realise how much I have learned about social media,
perceptions of others, inappropriate online behaviour and what is required to minimise this in
the future. Since graduating and beginning work as a physiotherapist, I feel fortunate to
have had the chance to explore this topic more and realise that this is a massive issue, not
only for healthcare students/professionals, but for all individuals who have online profiles.’

5. Conclusion

This study has achieved its aims and despite a relatively small sample size the development of guide for healthcare students who use social media or would like to start using social media is a positive step towards evaluation of the most effective way to use the guide and/or develop related, student focused learning materials. Previous research has established that students and professionals require social media guidance; however no literature was found concerning healthcare students views on such guidance. This study attempted to fill this gap, to a small degree. The findings demonstrated that no single, pre-existing social media guide had content and format that matched students’ needs. The development of the new Social Media: A Practical Guide for Healthcare Students elicited encouraging responses from students, suggesting the guide may be influential in directing students’ online behaviours, in a way that promotes a positive image of self, as a student and an emerging healthcare professional.

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Extracurricular Strategies to Teach Innovation

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ABSTRACT: Within the ALFA program framework, supported by the European Commission, The KickStart project, coordinated by the Glasgow Caledonian University has focused on the study of Latin American environmental characteristics regarding innovation. Therefore, Tecnológico de Monterrey’s Centre for Research in Education proposed to carry out the study about experiences, strategies, and actions to enable the consolidation of both academic and extracurricular training activities for professors with an innovation approach. A quantitative approach was adopted; the sample included the nine Research Chairs with the term "innovation" in their name. Through the questionnaire designed for this study and the members of the Research Chairs, results show that the extracurricular strategies were: Communication generated through the contact with the students; Feedback of the researching lecturers that are part of a Chair; and Active teaching and learning methods and the participation of the students in the laboratories and research projects.

1. Introduction

Science, technology, and innovation are essential ingredients to boost sustainable development processes in all nations. The active search for new opportunity areas has created an urgent need for scientific, technological, and educational innovations that can be adjusted to both business and governmental policies and practices (UNCTAD, 1999). Several studies show that innovation plays a leading role in the social and economic processes in the knowledge-based economy. Within an "innovative context", if the countries wish to face the challenges globalization sets, they are obligated to encourage new skills and to train its citizens. Also, the participation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is essential. Innovation is the fulfillment of a series of steps related to training, qualification, motivation and encouragement, since it establishes the conjunction of the conceived idea and the finished product; it transforms knowledge into individual, collective, regional and national economic benefits.

In Mexico, the Science and Technology Law explicitly introduces the concept of innovation as: "To generate a new product, design, process, service, method or organization or adding value to those already in existence". Nevertheless, this concept might seem easy; it is very complex, since it must consider many social and educational factors. According to Edgar and Grant (2009), the conceptual theorists categorize innovation into innovation of products and innovation of processes. They conclude that the architecture of innovation is the knowledge of the elements in the environment, and how these can be adapted together. Indeed, administration of innovation represents a challenge to organizations. Despite the topic’s recent boom, there is still no solid theoretical base to study the administration of innovation. During the closing ceremony of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE), it was said: "At no time in history has it been more important to invest in higher education as a major force in building an inclusive and diverse knowledge society and to advance in research, innovation and creativity". Regional and international cooperation in research and innovation emphasizes and intensifies lecturers’ professional development through initial and permanent training to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills they need in the 21st century. It is fundamental that learning, research, and innovation are closely linked to educational systems, specially the higher education systems, to achieve innovation sustainability and to meet the knowledge based society’s demands (WCHE, 2009).
Within the ALFA program framework, supported by the European Commission, the KickStart project has focused on the study of Latin American environmental characteristics regarding innovation. It has generated information that highlights the need to strengthen professional development training to face social, political, and economic problems in this region. The KickStart network consists of 9 HEIs of several Latin American and European countries; the Centre for Research in Education (CRE) actively participates on behalf of Tecnológico de Monterrey. Through educational research activities, KickStart wanted to consolidate a cooperative network to exchange good practices that would contribute to the development of professionals able to manage innovation. To deeply analyze the results obtained with KickStart, CRE proposed to carry out the study: Innovation in Practice and on Innovation. Its purpose was to generate awareness of the nature of innovation in order to strengthen its teaching-learning processes. Research intended to create collaboration among the partner institutions so Higher Education quality could be improved with tools, strategies, and actions that will enable the consolidation of both academic and extracurricular training activities for professors with an innovation approach.

2. Theoretical framework

Educational institutions tend to be static by nature; keep accepted practices; resistant to changes (Miranda, 2002). HEIs have still not achieved significant progress in relation to teaching-learning innovation strategies. Usually, there have only been adjustments in the curricula (Alemán, 2010). While “teaching innovation”, it is necessary to transcend the cognitive domain of academic subjects; this implies promoting new pedagogical and didactic methods to enable the acquisition of: techniques, communication abilities and skills, creativity and critical analysis, independent thinking and teamwork in multicultural contexts. The UNESCO (2009) emphasizes that Higher Education Institutions have become the major figures in global change processes, widely contributing to economic and technological growth. Organizations must rely on competent staff with an innovative vision and who therefore has the minimum knowledge and skills to come up with new methods or technologies. Amidon (1997) reiterates that innovation, being part of the strategy to transform organizations and to compete in a knowledge-based society, is a dominant factor in competitiveness by making the most out of new knowledge. Then, understand the nature of innovation better, would make its teaching-learning processes easier. Our “global society” demands from universities a more proactive role that includes the enhancement of curricula based on knowledge competences and labor skills (Alemán, 2010). Today’s world is characterized by ceaseless and unexpected changes where traditional universities do not fit. Transformation and modernization of societies, urge universities to add innovation tools and processes to achieve substantial and integrated changes (Casas, 2005).

2.1. Extracurricular strategies for teaching innovation at Tecnológico de Monterrey

Since its foundation, the Mexican university Tecnológico de Monterrey has implemented a continuous innovation process intended to meet the educational demands that arise from social, economic, labor, scientific, and technological changes as well as the country’s development challenges. In its organizational vision 2015, states to be the most recognized Higher Education institution of Latin America due to the leadership of its graduates in the private, public, and social sectors; and the research and technological development carried out to encourage a knowledge-based economy, generate management models and business incubators, and create models and innovative systems for the community sustainable development. The mission of Tecnológico de Monterrey is to educate upright and ethical individuals, with a humanistic sense; internationally competitive individuals in their professional field, also committed to the economic, political, social and cultural development of their community and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Through its educational programs and activities regarding research and development, Tecnológico de Monterrey educates people and transfers knowledge to: a) Promote
international competitiveness of companies based on knowledge, innovation, technological and sustainable development; b) Develop management models for companies to compete in a globalized economy; c) Create, introduce, and transfer models and incubator networks to generate new enterprises; d) Collaborate in the professionalization of the public administration; e) Analyze and suggest public policies for the country’s development; f) Contribute to the sustainable development of the community with innovative models and systems to improve its educational, social, economic, and political aspects. To achieve such goals and contribute to the country competitiveness, Tecnológico de Monterrey has created research centers, like the ones in the fields of biotechnology and health studies, manufacture, and information technologies. Also, it has promoted among its researchers to become members of the National Researchers System; the patenting of most of new knowledge; and the creation of new enterprises and labor sources. As well, taking as a reference research teams who work on a specific line of investigation in the most important universities of the world, Tecnológico de Monterrey started in 2002 its own research model, which it called Research Chairs.

Figure 1. Research Chairs model

Research Chairs are groups of researchers set up with a senior lecturer, appointed lecturers, PhD, master and degree students, and post-PhD researchers; they aim to: a) Contribute to the positioning of Tecnológico de Monterrey as a university of education and research; b) Develop research in the strategic areas stated on the organizational vision 2015; c) Encourage the growth of the PhD programs; d) Promote the training of researchers at PhD, Master, and Degree levels; e) Increase the publication of books, articles in indexed journals, and scientific articles to be presented at conferences; f) Strengthen the educational model of Tecnológico de Monterrey and its impact on the education offered to its degree and higher education students, in addition to the postgraduate students; g) Develop a culture of invention and use of scientific knowledge through patents, development of products and methodologies, and the provision of scientific and technological services; h) Impact on the economic development of the institutions through patent licenses and the provision of research services to companies and institutions; i) Encourage the creation of technology-based companies; Reach the sustainability of research.

Another important feature of this model is the focus of research, which involves shaping and providing content to each of the strategic lines of investigation by identifying the disciplines within them. Therefore, scientific topics are selected for the corresponding subjects in order
to develop them through research lines and projects (Cantú, 2009). This way, human, physical and financial resources are better administrated resulting on greater continuity and benefit for the community.

Research Chairs must work on lines of investigation aligned with the strategic areas of research (ITESM, 2008). In order to select one of them, the following contextual elements must be taken into consideration: International tendencies of the study field; Pertinent research areas for the development of the host campus region; Institutional strengths in the field of study, including availability of researchers. The Office of Research and Technological Development (ORTD) is responsible of outlining the strategic research areas. These can be modified according to the periodical review of the Tecnológico de Monterrey mission (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Strategic research areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic areas of the mission</th>
<th>Number of research Chairs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biotechnology and food</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture and Design</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechatronics</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nanotechnology</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Information and communication technologies</td>
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<td>Sustainable development</td>
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<td>Business</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
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<td>Governance</td>
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<td>Social Sciences</td>
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<td>Humanities</td>
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<td>Regional development</td>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>123</td>
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The performance of the Research Chairs is evaluated periodically. It is the ORTD who issues the evaluation policies (ITESM, 2008). The elements to be evaluated are: a) Peer reviewed publications; b) External acknowledgements; c) Professional development; d) Obtaining of external resources; e) Professional relationships on campus; f) Professional relationships with lecturers form other campuses; g) Contribution to the creation of new business and entrepreneurial activities; h) Participation in institutional projects; and Others. The Research Chair evaluation combines qualitative
and quantitative elements. The ORTD publishes the quantitative elements. Qualitative elements consider: Academic quality of research; Intellectual production; Academic, economic, or social impact; Coherence with the institutional research strategy. Regional committees would carry out the Research Chairs evaluation. A member appointed by the ORTD must participate in each evaluation committee (ITESM, 2008). Thus, the Research Chairs should relate to the institution’s educational programs and influence their academic quality and assessment processes.

3. Methodology

A quantitative approach was adopted to generate information about the Research Chairs that promote innovation. For Gomez Zermeño, (2009), quantitative approach follows a logical criterion that guides the process. It is a closed design, which pretends to be reproduced in all its dimensions. Its model is algorithmic, where all can be controllable. It uses techniques like counting, measuring, and using abstract reasoning. It is also of greater use for social systems and global mediums, since it has a positivist approach. It looks for the causes of social phenomena, hardly paying any attention to the subjective states of the individual, by using a closed model of logical deductive reasoning.

3.1. Design of research

Non-experimental research was proposed when considering the characteristics of the study, since the independent variables are not able to be manipulated; there is no direct control or influence over them because they already took place, and so their effects. Non-experimental research is a watershed for a great number of ex post facto studies, which is used as a strategy to obtain the required information, without having to build any other situation (Mertens, 2005). It was also proposed to compile all the data in a single moment; therefore, a cross-sectional, exploratory, descriptive design was selected. Exploratory studies try to know more of an unknown topic, providing information to carry out descriptive studies where a phenomenon and its various components are analyzed in depth. Point out that cross-sectional/exploratory designs are applied to new or hardly known research studies.

3.2. Social-demographic context

In average, the population above the age of 15 in Nuevo León (Figure 2) has a superior schooling average of 9.8 years while in the rest of the country is 8.6 (INEGI, National Statistics Institute, 2010). The state also has one of the higher levels of literacy. It’s government wants to achieve a life-long learning education of quality; equitable, comprehensive, pertinent, inclusive, and innovative, which would train citizens committed with a knowledge-based society and the sustainable development of the community (Nuevo León Department of Education, 2010).

![Figure 2. Nuevo León’s location](image-url)
3.3. Monterrey, International City of Knowledge (MTYCIC)

In compliance with the Law for the promotion of knowledge-based development, the Innovation and Technology Transfer Institute (I2T2) was created in 2005. I2T2 is a public decentralized organism with its own legal personality, budget and resources, responsible of organizing, managing, and carrying out the MTYCIC governmental initiative.

![Figure 3. "Monterrey, International City of Knowledge" 25 years plan](image)

Its mission is to promote and apply research and technological development into markets to generate economic growth in the state (MTYCIC, 2010). I2T2 seeks to encourage the transfer and generation of new products, processes, and services as well to promote and strengthen research networks and boosts an innovation culture. Its purpose is to turn science and technology into wealth and wellbeing that would rely upon the construction of an infrastructure, networks, and alliances to detonate a knowledge-based economy (Figure 3).

3.4. Population and sample

Currently, Tecnológico de Monterrey Research Chairs model consists of 123 research groups that work on 15 strategic areas. The Research Chairs with the term "innovation" in their name were included in the study: a) Engineering Design and Innovation; b) Design and Manufacture Innovation; c) Innovation in optical communication systems; d) Research and innovation on computational security; e) Bioinformatics research and innovation; f) Development and innovation of housing processes and technology; g) Technology Innovation; h) Educational and Technology Innovation; and e) Wealth Creation through innovation, technology and knowledge.

3.5. Research tools

The use of questionnaires provides certain advantages, since a wider image of the studied phenomenon can be obtained. They may be the most used tool to gather information and consists of a group of questions regarding one or more variables to be measured (Hernández et al., 2006). For Giroux and Tremblay (2008), the interview helps the researcher understand the reference framework of the interviewees. Therefore, in order to study in depth the understanding of the ideas associated with the concept of innovation, a semi-directed interview was applied to the leading lecturers of the Research Chairs.
Based on the "Management model of and for the innovation process" (Figure 4) proposed by Edgar and Grant (2009), the questionnaire designed for this study comprises the following sections: **Section 1) "Management for and of the innovation processes"**, explored 14 variables through 50 closed questions that provided information on: Knowledge of the market, Conscience of the environment, Sensitivity, Discernment, Interaction of innovation, Learning and development, Knowledge transfer, Infrastructure, Commercialization-Entrepreneurship, Groups-Networks, Professionalization, Impact and metrics, Impact and standards, Feedback-Monitoring. **Section 2) “Management of and for the innovative talent”**, explored 8 variables through 35 closed questions, which provide information on: Creative talent, Tools, Context, Citizen sense of belonging, Innovation ability, Benefit of the innovation, Innovation capacity and innovation leadership.

**Figure 4. Management model of and for the innovation process (Edgar and Grant, 2009)**

### 4. Analysis of results

All quantitative tools were electronic self-managed questionnaires developed with SurveyMonkey. The qualitative interviews to the leading lecturers were done in person and through videoconference. The extra-curricular strategies applied in the Research Chairs were also questioned during the interviews carried out with the leading lecturers.

#### 4.1. Management for and of the innovation process

It was found that the Research Chairs react, both in the short and medium term to the opportunities and needs that arise from the environment; only a minority admitted to react in the long term. Interviewees considered that they are well informed and recognize the leadership of the senior lecturer. The Chairs Members (CM) mentioned that have available mechanisms for learning, development and management of innovation projects; the successful experiences in innovation are shared within the research groups. Although there are mechanisms for knowledge-management that allow to share, polish, develop, and adapt ideas, knowledge, and learning; most of the members of the Chairs mentioned that they do not know if there are mechanisms to enable the transfer. In relation with the physical resources, enabling processes, and policies adopted by the chairs; the majority stated that human resources, technology, and mechanisms are the most important infrastructure elements for the transfer of knowledge. Referring to the activities that enable the transfer of the innovation into the market for commercial gain or a common good, it was stated that there are institutional, state funds, and other funds or foundations that finance innovation.

- **Knowledge of the market**: Concerning the monitoring of the market, 46.6% state there is one person in charge of monitoring the markets and 12.6% that there is a department
responsible for doing so. Nevertheless, 34.0% mention that the markets were not measured. It was also noticed in the results that the members of the Research Chairs considered that by priority, the international markets were monitored first, followed by the national, regional and institutional. It is interesting to observe how the local markets are mentioned the last.

- **Conscience of the environment**: As for the perception of the market's interconnections and the potential impacts of change, the CM declared to be very well informed on the research activities and consider that the leading lecturer is in charge of providing information on the opportunities and needs that emerge from the environment.

- **Sensitivity**: Regarding the degree in which the changes can be noticed and the temporality of perception, the majority declared that the Chairs reacted both in the short and medium term, thanks to some factors for prompt reaction, to the opportunities and needs that emerged from the environment; only a minority pointed out that they reacted in the long term. About 7% of CM considered that it is innovation capacity which allows a prompt reaction, followed by 6% who consider that it is the knowledge of the market and 5%, leadership. Only 3% think it is the training of professionals to adapt to changes.

- **Discernment**: In relation to the acquisition of changes in the market and the perception of the potential impacts and opportunities, the Chairs essentially look for and use technologies to monitor the markets, in addition to the analysis of patents. They admit not to use tools to monitor client relationships due to a lack of knowledge.

- **Interaction of innovation**: Interaction boost innovation processes, but it involves the recognition of the relevance of available tools and techniques and how to use them. Chairs admit that the leading lecturer guides the interaction and feedback on the processes. Members declared there is not enough encouragement or acknowledgement for innovators.

- **Learning and development**: Learning is a part of the innovation process that supports, develops and fuels innovative talent through a reflective activity. It was found out that Chairs have mechanisms for learning, and the development and management of projects. They declare that successful experiences in innovation are shared among research groups, but 50% is not aware if there are indicators to measure the effectiveness of teaching innovation.

- **Knowledge transfer**: Although there are knowledge-management mechanisms for ideas, knowledge, and learning, almost nobody knows if research results are actually transferred in a local, regional, national or international level, yet, the local transference was listed last.

- **Infrastructure**: Concerning the physical resources, enabling processes and policies taken by the Chairs, the CM state that the human resources and technology are the most important infrastructure elements for the transfer of knowledge. The institution manages the tools and infrastructure to teach innovation for its promotion and the training to develop innovation abilities.

- **Commercialization/ Entrepreneurship**: When referring to the activities that enable the transfer of innovation towards the market for commercial gain or a common good, most members state that there are institutional, state, and other funds or foundations that finance innovation. Chairs provide support to promote the commercialization of innovation and that these processes are essentially supported by incubators' networks.

- **Groups-Networks**: The relationships between networks boost the sustainability of innovation through the operation and development of complementary groups of innovators and/or implementers. Most members of Chairs know the internal networks, but few know the innovation networks there are in their area/region, either governmental or private. They consider that the most valuable aspect of a network is the integration in multidisciplinary groups, the establishment of alliances, and the development of strategies and products.
- **Professionalization:** Although Chairs do support innovation institutionally, 61% of members do not know if there are indicators to measure the knowledge and professional and managerial abilities required to support commercialization, development and expansion of ideas.

- **Impact and metrics:** About the actions to measure the impact and contribution of the innovations, most of the Chairs members declared it should be measured at an international, national, institutional and regional level.

- **Impact and standards:** To establish impact indicators in the innovation processes implicates considering the level to be achieved and establishing maximum standards. Most Chairs’ members declared that they do not know the indicators used to measure the impact of innovation on the chairs and some even state that they do not exist.

- **Feedback-Monitoring:** For the CM, the feedback reflects the dynamic nature of innovation and learning, allowing the continuous improvement of the value provided by the enabling agents, which in the end is translated in an improvement of the results in their different spheres and in relation to the different interest groups.

4.2. **Management of and for the innovative talent**

The Management of and for the innovative talent model, shows the need to establish feedback and assessment points among its elements. When questioned on feedback within the Chairs, it was mentioned that it must be aimed at the members, the institution, and organizations. It is important to point out that again, the local level was left behind. The need to extend innovation to how it is taught, beyond the traditional curricular techniques and tools was emphasized. It was recognized that to manage innovation processes, a leader lecturer has to be creative and should have talent, vision, and clear goals; everyone expects support and advice, to receive technological and financial resources, or just openness and acknowledgement.

- **Creative talent:** The CM had different believes regarding creative talent, some considered it might be originated by the context, at school, within the family environment, during childhood, or that it is a talent you are born with. They also mentioned that creative talent can be strengthened through knowledge, extracurricular strategies, academic strategies, and inter-institutional strategies. They expressed that an innovator must develop some abilities such as: identify opportunities, detect needs, generate and implement ideas.

- **Context:** Context is described as the diverse situations that provide a group of differentiating characteristics. Chairs mention the context is very important to promote innovation and that it is easy to transfer innovations between different contexts.

- **Sense of belonging:** The sense of belonging is associated with the collective sphere, the identity, and feeling that bring them together. Most of the CM declared to be aware of belonging to a research group, and also to know the innovation expectations of their colleagues.

- **Innovation capacity:** When questioned on the way in which the competences for innovation can be developed, most of the members preferred the participation in projects, activities within networks, communities and groups, together with curricular strategies. A smaller number of members mentioned extracurricular strategies or other means.

- **Benefit of the innovation:** In relation with the techniques or tools used to measure the benefits of the innovations that are created within the Chair, most of the members say they do not know if they exist. But out from those who are aware of them, they select them according to the situation, the institution´s recommendation, because they are familiar, or
according to the team’s choice. Decisions are generally made upon the benefits to be achieved, the set goals, the activities to be developed, or the team’s choice.

- **Innovation capacity:** Regarding the capacity to correctly select tools and techniques that align with their talent, abilities, and expected results, the CM considered that it is necessary to develop a specific culture to improve their innovating effectiveness. They considered that an innovation culture could be developed through participation in projects; activities within networks, communities and varied groups; through curricular strategies; and by teaching innovation beyond the traditional curricular techniques and tools.

- **Innovation leadership:** Although there are many varied styles and profiles of leadership, Research Chairs model recognizes that a leading lecturer is key to boost research and innovation processes. All members of Chairs believe innovation can be led by creative and inventive individuals whom should have talent, vision, mission and goals.

5. Conclusions

When teaching innovation, it is necessary to go beyond the cognitive domain of the disciplines. This involves promoting the use of new pedagogical and didactic methods by the lecturers, enabling the acquisition of techniques, abilities and capacities for communication, creativity and critical analysis, independent thinking and teamwork in multicultural contexts. Creativity is developed to be combined with knowledge, traditional wisdom, science, and advanced technologies. Among the ideas that emerged from the interviews with the leading lecturers, it was corroborated that innovation is composed by a series of elements like: the needs from the environment, openness to change, research, creativity, knowledge, problem solving, observation capacity, systemic thinking, competitive intelligence, and technological prediction. The elements for innovation that support the Chairs are communication and teamwork, being able to apply innovation, and design of methodologies. Results corroborate Edgar and Grant (2009) ideas such that innovation concepts refer to "new" products or processes, usually adding an advanced dimension of innovation speed; that categorizing innovation has created a considerable debate in order to distinguish between innovation of products and innovation of processes; and that in essence, the architecture of innovation is the knowledge of the elements of the environment and how the elements can blend together.

5.1. Management of and for the innovation process

In the knowledge-based economy, recognizing the market opportunities entails identifying the changes. Yet, the study of innovation is still incipient and therefore the creation of models that manage its processes and adapt to the new changing environments is a big challenge. The Monterrey, International City of Knowledge represents a great alliance that looks forward the promotion of Nuevo León’s economic and social development though innovation. It is interesting to observe how the members of the Research Chairs monitor with priority the international markets, the national, regional and institutional, leave the local markets at last.

Nevertheless, some also pointed out that there are no funds available. In the Research Chairs model, the groups or networks are organized according to their areas of knowledge, specialization to realize collaborative work. Only few members of the Chairs admitted not to know how they are organized. Although institutional support is provided to boost innovation, it is also reported that most Chair participants are not aware if there are indicators to measure the support to innovation. When questioned on the use of the indicators to measure the impact of innovation, the majority admitted not to be aware of them. They pointed out that the measurement of the innovation must impact at an international, national, institutional and regional level, mentioning the local level at last.

5.2. Management of and for the innovative talent
The members of the Research Chairs declared that it is possible to identify and develop creative talent within a context, at school, in the family, or during childhood. Only a small group asserts that one is born with the creative talent. Although the use of tools and techniques to strengthen the teaching of innovation are mentioned, there are also some Chairs that declared not to use them in their didactic activities. Context is key for innovation, the chairs members stated to be aware of belonging to a research group, and also, to know the innovation expectations of their colleagues. When questioned on the way in which the competences for innovation can be developed, most of the members preferred participation in projects, activities within networks, communities and groups. In relation with the techniques or tools used to measure the benefits of the innovations that are created within the Chair, most of the members expressed not to be aware of them. Regarding the capacity to correctly select tools and techniques that match their talent, abilities, and expected results, members of the Chairs considered that it is necessary to develop an innovation culture to improve their effectiveness while innovating.

6. References


Staff/Student Enhancement and Innovation within Cross Media Erasmus Intensive Projects

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ABSTRACT: The Intercultural Design Camp is a collaboration between the Schools of Creative Practice of four European higher education institutions. The basic concept of this Intensive Programme is to bring together students and teachers from the different nations to work together on a given theme, using creative collaborative briefs, set by external cultural and industry partners, to develop and produce multimedia solutions and artefacts. In this paper we will examine enhancement opportunities and subsequent approaches to Learning and Teaching, Assessment, Feedback and Dissemination within an Erasmus Intensive Project utilising collaborative cross-media interdisciplinary practice; this will especially cover the following key points:

- The use of Virtual Learning Environments in International communication
- External collaborative partnerships and cross-cultural opportunities
- Cross-media synergies and pedagogical partnerships
- Products, outputs and dissemination
- The impact of the Intensive Programme on curriculum development.
- Future staff and student exchange opportunities.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE ICDC PROJECT

1.1 Introduction

The Intercultural Design Camp (ICDC) is a collaboration between the Schools of Creative Practice of four European higher education institutions: The University of the West of Scotland; Linköping University, Sweden; Stuttgart Media University, Germany and Artevelde University College Ghent, Belgium. The ICDC was piloted in 2009 in Munsingen, Germany as a one-week summer school. Working to a given theme, using creative collaborative briefs, set by external cultural and industry partners, student participants develop and produce multimedia solutions and artefacts. A second, self-funded pilot was held in Dumfries, Scotland in 2010. The thematic focus of this delivery was again to strengthen internationalization by increasing student and staff mobility through the participation in cross national project teams.

The success of these two pilots led to an application for funding within the EU ERASMUS Intensive Programme. As a result of the successful bid a third, two-week Design Camp, took place in Grebbestad, Sweden in August 2011. Further ERASMUS funding allowed for a fourth ICDC in Kemmel, Belgium in August 2012 and a fifth is planned for Pforzheim, Germany in 2013.
The overarching theme of the three year funded project has been the interrogation of cross-cultural identities. As well as staff and student enhancement through international activities, the ICDC project has encouraged curriculum development at undergraduate and postgraduate level and has informed module development in International and Collaborative projects at each partner university. For further information and examples of student project work please refer to the ICDC website www.designcamp.eu.

Background

One of the primary motives of the Summer School was to enhance student and staff mobility; therefore the composition of student and staff has been a crucial issue. This holds especially true for the ICDC, because of its' project based approach. Core and visiting lecturing staff represented disciplines as diverse as Information Design, Graphic Design, Fine Art, Web Design, Film Making, Photography, Application Design, Communications, Languages, Computer Science and Engineering, Environment and Tourism studies. All possible fields of cross-media productions could be covered by at least one staff member. The four partner universities cover a wide area of study programmes. Each university has a different thematic focus and the students have represented as diverse programmes as Art & Design, Multimedia and Digital Design, Graphic Design and Visual Communication, Information Design, Photography and the Moving Image, Film making, Screen writing, Script writing, and Journalism. The challenge was to compose teams that represented as much variety as possible and ensure that opportunities for collaboration and joint working across such specialisms were given.

The selected students from the different partner universities are from first cycle programmes. All applicants had to be at least in the second year of their programmes to ensure that they held basic skills, which could then be developed and intensified throughout the Design Camp. In order to be able to realize a selection process that met the above-mentioned criteria, the students had to write a letter of motivation and had to fill in an application form. Each partner university formed a jury that selected the participants from their institution. By this procedure a balanced representation from the four partner universities was assured and prior knowledge and understanding of student's media background and skills was utilised.

2 The Use of Virtual Learning Environments in International Communication

One important aspect of the project work during the Design Camp is that it covers a rich spectrum of production processes. Since two weeks are a rather short period of time for that, it is crucial that the students could start with their project work from the beginning of the camp. This implies that every student team has to deal with the given briefs and had to choose one of them before the teams first met at the camp. Hence there was a need of communication prior to the camp. A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE, Moodle) was used to facilitate communication between staff and students prior to arrival at the camp. The VLE was used to exchange documents, but it also encouraged communication between international participants and empowered the students not only to negotiate about the selection of the brief, but also to start to bond to each other. While the students accepted the ‘monitored’ communication within Moodle when being in touch with the teachers, we experienced that they avoided the VLE when informally communicating amongst each other or within their international student teams. For these purposes the students seem to prefer to use social media sites as a communication tool.

Since a brief has to be selected prior to the camp, the composition of the international student teams has to be concluded prior to this. All successful student applicants were formed into multi-national and cross discipline teams. These were posted on Moodle in order that the students could start to communicate with each other and discuss possible strategies in response to briefs set by external partner organisations. There were three different criteria used for these groupings. The most important was to ensure an as wide as possible mix of
nationalities. Secondly, was the student’s skills and their desire to have specific roles within their project teams. Regarding skills, all students sent in their CV to facilitate the grouping process. The third criterion was the communication profiles of the students. This criterion has, at its foundation, the concept that people prefer to interpret what is most beneficial for them. Sometimes one can be absolutely sure that something is correct while another person can be equally sure that s/he is correct. Therefore, one needs to learn how to interpret and understand others better, to be more efficient and skilful at presenting oneself. According to Ohlsson (1996) this is known as adapting to ‘Communication Profiles’. From this perspective, student communication profiles were developed. An equitable mix and distribution of practice and communication skills, within the student cohort was therefore attempted.

3 External Collaborative Partnerships and Cross-Cultural Opportunities

The staff team in co-operation with national, regional and local partner organisations wrote project briefs. In Grebbestad, Sweden in 2011 the West Sweden Tourist Board, Grebbestad Tourist Office and the local (fishing) industry of Grebbestad were included. The following year in Kemmel, Belgium Steunpunt Natuur- en Milieueducatie, Regionaal Landschap West-Vlaamse Heuvels, Madoc, Steunpunt Cultuur Westhoek Provincie West-Vlaanderen, and the Tourism Westhoek and Folk Museum Dranouter were involved in the setting of the briefs. The topics of the project briefs were derived from the overall topic of the ICDC project ‘To see ourselves as others see us’ incorporating ecological issues and sustainable futures, national/regional identities, tourism and regional development and cultural expressions. These topics, which have remained unchanged over the three-year project period, had to be adapted to the specialities of the given local situation. In Grebbestad the students could choose from four different briefs:

- Cultural expressions, where students could work with the local Tourist Office
- Ecological issues, where students could work with the local (fishing) industry
- Regional identity and tourism, where students could work with the West Sweden Tourist Board.

In Kemmel, Belgium the number of briefs set up for the student groups was extended to eight. The groups could choose from:

- Marketing of tourism in the Westhoek for families with children younger than twelve
- World War I
- The border between France and the Westhoek
- Couleur Locale of the Westhoek
- Hiking network nodes in Kemmel (local level)
- Exposition De Bergen Underground
- Haute Cuisine
- Stimulating environmental awareness in the Heuvelland region

Background research into each of the topics of the briefs was encouraged and focus points were presented in the first week by members of staff and regional partners to give the students first insights into the topic of the briefs. In addition, study visits to appropriate partners, organisations, exhibitions, events and venues were organised during the first week of the camp and two study tours to Ghent and Nieuwpoort were organised for the interim weekend. These study visits allowed students the opportunity to gain valuable research opportunities to bring to their chosen projects.

4 Cross-Media Synergies and Pedagogical Partnerships
A variety of Learning and Teaching strategies were employed before and during the Camp: Lectures, seminars, workshops, practice based collaborative studio activities, study visits, research tours to exhibitions and events, formative and summative assessment and opportunities for feedback.

Students, in response to given briefs, repackaged the host nation using cross-media production technologies. They critically re-appraised, through a series of group and individual activities, pre-conceived images of the host nation using convergent-media production technologies.

Through the eyes of the host nation and the other nationalities involved in the Intensive Programme, students critically reflected upon current images and representations of the host nation and local regional environments. Notions of national, group and personal identity were explored in both individual and group activities. From these analyses, various opportunities in media production were explored and students worked together in International teams to develop and present alternative images of the host nations’ national and regional identities. These reflected more accurately all forms of recent cultural and societal change.

Product evidence in the form of group prototypes in response to given briefs were developed and shared ideas were produced. These were presented at the end of the IP to a collaborative forum of International staff teams and regional and national cultural partners for feedback.

Appropriate digital, (and analogue) media formats were used by participants. Innovative project development and new collaborative pedagogical practices were employed, allowing participants the opportunity for team working with differing media types and for the synthesis of these in the production of new and innovative media products.

The varying skillsets of the students were encouraged and optimised within each group’s activities.

The requirement to work with International staff and students, different levels of technical and creative expertise, differing expectations of working and developing projects, was one of the most important aspects of the collaboration.

4.1. Organisational and Pedagogical Approaches

All partners actively participated in the Intensive Programme. Linköping University (LiU) contributed as the lead partner with overall organizational and management responsibilities. Stuttgart Media University (HdM) was, in partnership with Artevelde University College Ghent (AHS), responsible for much of the pre-camp organisational aspects and also introductory role-play, ice-breaking/bonding, inter-cultural communication and teambuilding exercises. All partner institutions were involved in these activities on camp. Prior to the camp a Moodle site was designed by HdM to introduce participants and allow students to engage in pre-camp activities.

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) provided teaching relating to the design process. UWS was also involved in matters of contextualization, graphic design & visual communication in relation to cultural and social identities. All other partners were also involved in the activities stated above, as well as in:

- The selection and preparation of participating students from the own partner universities.
- Planning the curriculum and structure of the IP.
- Lectures, seminars and input to group projects, staff meetings during the IP, and mentoring and tutorial support.

The figures 1 and 2 show the academic, (and social) structure of the Belgian camp, 2012.
### 4.2 ASSESSMENT

The very nature of collaborative working in the Visual Arts and Design subject area creates challenges in the assessment of project work. This however is becoming an increasingly widespread working strategy within the Creative Industries. Projects are content-oriented and very often disseminated using a multi-platform approach. This can be even more challenging when working within an International dimension and could involve differing national and regional identities and communication strategies.
These were some of the challenges facing the staff team when designing a strategy for collaborative assessment while working in Visual Art & Design disciplines. This also became one of the major considerations surrounding the choice of topic for the camp, (Intercultural Identity). One of the major challenges faced by the staff team was creating opportunities for the evidencing of individual input to project work, and also evidencing partnership and collaborative team working. Therefore a range of formative and summative assessment strategies were employed. Formative assessment took place at four key points during the working process of the camp. This strategy was shared with the students at the beginning of the camp.

Formative assessment in Belgium took the form of group presentations as follows:

- Presentation 1: »Ideas« (Day 5)
- Presentation 2: »Problem(s) and Possible Solutions« (Day 7)
- Presentation 3: »Concept« (Day 11)
- Presentation 4: »Final Presentation and Exhibition« (Day 14)

These group presentations were equivalent to 20% of the final mark.

The summative assessment took two forms:

1. The submission of an evaluation of individual and collaborative roles and responsibilities within the collaborative project. This could be in the form of a sketchbook, diary or blog. A template was provided outlining the possible structure and content for this report. (800 words for the collaborative evaluation and 400 words for individual reflection.)

2. An Exhibition and final presentation of group output. Each group had the opportunity of mounting and presenting a final exhibition of their process and final media prototypes.

The evaluation of individual and collaborative roles and responsibilities counted for 30% of the final mark, while the exhibition and final presentation accounted for 50% of the final mark. The combination of formative and summative assessments with personal and team performance facilitated an appropriate appraise of the students performance.

In order to ensure an assessment as objective as possible, each staff member used grade related criteria, and made evaluative comments during the presentations using a prepared evaluation form. A short debate took place at the end of each presentation where staff members discussed their evaluation. At the end of the camp, following the final presentations and exhibition, a grading conference took place, where the staff members decided upon the final marks based assessment made at the various presentations.

As the Intercultural Design Camp brings together students from various European nations, and each of the nations has a different grading system, the European ECTS grading system was used, described in the ECTS Users’ Guide (European Communities (2009)). Each student received an ECTS grade; A, B, C, D, E or F (ail) and each university provided tables to convert these ECTS grades into their national grading system. Altogether four ECTS points were awarded to successful participants certificated by an ICDC certificate.

### 4.3 STRATEGIES FOR FEEDBACK

Feedback to the students was a very important aspect of the camp. This led the staff team to discuss and engage with a variety of feedback opportunities for students including:

- Preparation and pitching ideas to staff and external partners created opportunities for future work activities.
- Interaction with local and regional agencies in order to develop creative entrepreneurial skills.
- Create creative design solutions in response to professionally set briefs which further enhanced team working and spotlighted future career opportunities.
To engage with the design process involving negotiation and development of creative ideas to prototype stage, which created a valuable set of transferrable skills and experiences, leading to a marketable product, and future business developments.

The key role in the concept for providing on-going feedback to the individual student and to the project groups was the mentor. One staff member was responsible for mentoring a group of students for the duration of the camp, and one of the remits of this role was to formally feedback staff responses to the student teams. This was done with the aid of a feedback form, which was designed around the Learning Outcomes for each presentation. Each group received feedback to their presentations (Ideas / Problem(s) and Possible Solutions / Concept / Final Presentation). Since the mentors were responsible to collect and condense the results of the staff debate at the end of each student presentation, the project groups received feedback to their project work not only from their mentor but also from all staff members.

In addition to the allocation of a mentor to each group, each staff member filled in a CV describing his/her skills and expertise prior to the camp. These CVs were uploaded on the Moodle platform prior to the camp. At the beginning of the camp each staff member introduced him/herself to students. Every student was informed about the expertise of each staff member and had the chance to discuss his project work with an expert in the corresponding field. As a consequence the main aspect of the selection of the staff members for the Design Camp was to cover the wide variety of expertise needed for realizing a visual art and design project (cf. 1.2 Background).

Due to the fact that most of the briefs were set in cooperation with local organizations or companies the students were able to contact the expert from these institutions in order to get background information for their projects or to discuss their concept. Most of the external partners were also present at the final presentation and exhibition and provide the students with additional feedback to the projects.

5. Products, Outputs and Dissemination

5.1 Products

Each collaborative team presented prototypes of their project at various stages of the camp to a mixed cohort of students, staff and external partners. This allowed for formative peer and mentor feedback throughout the project.

A final, summative presentation was staged at the end of the camp and students also mounted an exhibition of their work. A wide range of innovative cross media products were developed including:

- Advertising and Marketing campaigns
- Graphic Design and Communication projects (print and web)
- Film-making and Photography products
- Art and concept led installation
- Environmental Web based media
- Print and virtual publications
- Tourist based web and mobile applications
Further examples of the developed prototypes may be viewed on the ICDC website www.designcamp.eu.

5.2 Outputs

From the start of the IP, a review of the results of the Design Camp has been applied. The evaluation process employed has focussed on six different aspects: Purpose, location, engagement, and appropriateness of teacher/staff, structure and teamwork. At the end of the Camp the students complete an evaluation form, which consists of three questions for each of the above-mentioned categories. The results from all evaluation forms were reviewed to find possible improvements. In average on a measuring scale from 0 (negative) to 4 (positive) the students evaluated the Kemmel Camp with 2.98, which is a little bit below the score from the Grebbestad Camp, but still a remarkable result. Having a differentiated view on each individual question it has become obvious that the students assessed the Design Camp to be of a high value for their future studies and professional lives. Most of the students surveyed report that the Design Camp was ‘good for my future development’ and ‘developed me as a person through my participation in the Design Camp’. For example the students assessed the usefulness of the Design Camp for their future careers with 2.79. Their participation within the project scored with 3.31. These figures prove that the IP has a particularly important influence on the academic development of the participating students and that the basic approach of the Intercultural Design Camp has been a success. (Westbomke et al. (2011)). In addition to the internal project evaluation the students filled in the official EU student evaluation form. This review considers among other things questions concerning the location, motivation, and financial issues.

As intended, the Intercultural Design Camp supports student exchange by enabling increased mobility between students and teachers from a range of European Universities. While working on creative design projects the students develop their intercultural and
interdisciplinary competencies and often, the Design Camp is the starting point for spending a semester abroad at one of the partner universities. The Intensive Programme has had a positive effect not only on the students but also on the staff. While preparing the IP the teachers gained a deeper insight into the structure and the working methodologies of each of the partner universities. This has lead to an enhanced exchange between teachers and support staff. For example, two teachers from Linköping University presented guest lectures at the Stuttgart Media University, one from UWS will spend a week at Linköping University, (2013/14), and a teacher from Stuttgart Media University will be on Erasmus exchange at Artevelde University College Ghent.

The IP has not only impact on the participating students and staff; it has also influenced the teaching at the different partner universities, especially the conception of new modules and the deployment of new methodologies in learning and teaching. For example, at UWS there has been a level 9 module created entitled ‘International Project’. Students can carry over ECTS points achieved through the ICDC and complete the module with additional work in the UK or a partner nation. In the academic year 2012/13, HdM has expanded the academic courses offered in English to facilitate incoming students from non-German speaking countries. And it introduced a module called ‘International Studies’ which allowed HdM students spending a semester abroad and to get credits for the courses taken at the foreign university. At Masters level in UWS, pedagogical methodologies learned at the ICDC, have been introduced to the module, Collaborative Project.

5.3 Dissemination

The results of the Intercultural Design Camp will be disseminated in different ways. First of all there is the website www.designcamp.eu. The website gives an insight to the concept of the Design Camp and its development since its first cycle in Muensingen 2009 (Nyström et al (2010)).

Since the Design Camp 2011 the presentations of the results of the project work have become an integral part of the project dissemination and the results of all project groups will be published on the website. That gives a broad public the opportunity to access the outcomes of the Design Camp. In addition during the Kemmel Camp the IP got some coverage in the local press. ‘Het laatste Nieuws’ and ‘De Krant van West-Vlaanderen’ published articles about the Design Camp and the work the students had performed there. This raises the attention of local authorities and also of the local population of the region.

The links with external partners like the local tourist office and local creative industries not only played an important part in the progress of the Design Camp itself but also helped to provide a wider profile for the IP.

Since the inception of the project there is a consensus between all partners to continue the partnership. The IP has been a useful focus for the development of international strategy at each partner institution. Therefore there are on-going consultations about collaboration beyond the IP. First meetings have taken place how the network could continue after the camp 2013 in Germany. A Scottish-led, (UWS) application on behalf of the partnership has now been submitted to the EU Erasmus Programme for funding to continue this project to the next stage; entitled ‘Future Legacies and Opportunity Workshops’, (FLOW 2014) This is based on cultural legacy opportunities following a large-scale global cultural event in Glasgow; The Commonwealth Games, 2014.

6 Future Staff and Student Exchange Opportunities

Benefits to the student cohort include:

- Student collaboration and future networking opportunities have been obvious benefits of the camps.
- Increased staff knowledge exchange, research and mobility opportunities.
International collaborations have been formed and future group and Social Media networks, (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr), have been set up in order to progress future collaborative working. There are also opportunities for some of the groups to progress their prototype ideas to finished products in collaboration with local partner institutions such as the Swedish national and Heuvelland Tourist Boards.

Curriculum Development:
The camp also provided a model of good practice in collaborative working and future Curriculum development of modules in Collaborative and International practice are planned in each institution.

Staff are also discussing the possibility of an International Exchange Masters in the area of Creative Industries Practice.

7 CONCLUSION
Reviewing the last four Intercultural Design Camps the project has developed tremendously. Starting with a low-budget one-week camp accommodated in former military barracks, the Intensive Programme has now reached a higher standard, organizationally and pedagogically, prior to its inception in 2009. One of the reasons for this development, beside the high personal dedication of the members of the ICDC consortium, is that there is a commitment to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of every Design Camp and constantly develop the concept to improve for the next project.

The conceptual focus for the Design Camp 2012 in Kemmel, Belgium was to develop and apply methods for assessing students’ collaborative digital media project work and even more importantly to provide on-going feedback to the students about the project work itself and about their personal participation. From the evaluation and from student feedback it is evident that improvements have been made, but there are still some problems to resolve, some of which include pre- and on-camp discussion surrounding collaborative mentoring, student self evaluation, (collaborative roles and responsibilities)

Since there are on-going discussions between partner universities in preparation for the next delivery of the Intercultural Design Camp in Pforzheim, Germany 2013, (already in preparation), it is anticipated that solutions to problems will be found. It is hoped that future participants of the Intercultural Design Camp will gain the full benefit from the enhancement opportunities created by the research gathered from previous year’s projects.

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Website Intercultural Design Camp (2013), available at: www.designcamp.eu

Abstract
This paper describes the interdisciplinary and international collaborative curriculum reform process followed to develop a competency-based Masters in Public Health (MPH) programme for Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in Nigeria with the support of the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. The process involved a Departmental retreat, two workshops held in Nigeria, an independent review process as well as capacity-building visits to enable sharing of best practice. The outcomes thus far are a final draft of the competencies required from an ABU MPH graduate with initial mapping of learning outcomes and teaching and assessment methods. The process has been advantageous, but slow and challenging at the same time. Challenges include openness to change, bureaucracy and internal politics, infrastructure availability and staff changes. Positive aspects include the improvement in the quality of teaching and research within the MPH programme, team-building within the Department of Community Medicine, research collaboration opportunities and globalisation of the curriculum.

INTRODUCTION
This paper will describe the interdisciplinary and international collaborative curriculum reform process which underlies the overarching project of Establishing a Centre of Excellence in Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) in Ahmadu Bello University.

Rationale for curriculum reform
In November 2007, the first Northern Nigerian Governors’ Health Summit was held, with the Theme ‘Alarming Death Among Mothers and Children: The Time to Act is Now.’ (UNICEF, 2007). Stakeholders, including academics, from Northern Nigeria met to discuss why the North-West zone of Nigeria, where Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) is situated, and the North-East zone have the worst health and social indices in the country. They are the zones where poverty levels are highest, social development indicators are the worst, the status of women is lowest, health services are the least developed, the human resources for health crisis is the worst and where maternal and child mortality figures are disproportionately poor, distorting national aggregates. Human resource gaps in terms of quantity, quality, mix and distribution for both policy-making and service provision were identified as a major issue as was the lack of health leadership at both local government area (LGA) and state levels. One of the resolutions from the Summit was a call for the northern states to develop a plan for meeting this human resource challenge. The Association of Public Health Physicians of Nigeria advocates that health departments of each LGA in the country should have a Medical Officer of Health, who should be a public health physician with at least a Master of Public Health (MPH) to provide public health leadership. Although, eight universities offer MPH programmes in Nigeria (three in the northern zones, where more than half of Nigeria’s population reside), it is clear that the number of MPH graduates currently being trained, nationally, but especially in the north is inadequate to meet needs. Except for six area councils in the Federal Capital Territory, none of the 419 LGAs in the northern zones have a Medical Officer of Health. Additionally, less than 30% of the needs for MPH graduates in the northern zones of the country are met.

The Department of Community Medicine at ABU in Zaria developed a MPH programme in 1999. It was developed to accelerate the response to the national human resource
challenges in public health leadership, service provision, training and research at all levels of the health care delivery system, and to evolve a programme seen to respond to the health needs of the country. It is a one-year (full time) or two-year (part-time) postgraduate programme, which trains middle level public health practitioners and is considered to be a minimum postgraduate public health qualification in the country. MPH graduates are required to provide leadership in public health departments and programmes at local, state and federal level. The emphasis of the current curriculum though is on instructional processes and knowledge acquisition, rather than abilities needed to respond to the needs of those to be served by the graduates.

The past decade has seen reform in education, training and professional development of the health professions in relation to curricula content, outcomes and processes to ensure that curricula are tied to the needs of those to be served and graduates are prepared to practice (Calhoun (a) et al, 2008). This has led to a renewed approach that focuses on accountability and curricular outcomes organised around competencies (Calhoun et al, 2002). Competency, in this context, can be defined as the blend of skills, abilities and knowledge needed to perform specific tasks in order to solve identified problems or perform a role in an organisation (Albanse et al, 2008). Consequently, in competency-based training, competencies are used as the basis of training by converting them to learning objectives (ASPHER, 2007). Outcomes or competency-based education has a number of advantages, including provision of greater specification regarding expected standards of the profession, fostering accountability, enhancing quality of educational programs, and ultimately, better preparation of the graduates for their roles upon graduation (Calhoun et al, 2002). Those in favour of competency-based education argue that in an era of greater accountability, curricula must not only define outcomes and abilities needed by graduates to practice, but also how they are to be taught and assessed (Frank et al, 2010). Also, competency-based training improves the performance of the students as it helps them acquire skills relevant for successful practice (Clark and Weist, 2000). The development of a competency-based curriculum is described as a systematic process, informed by available evidence from literature and stakeholders with a wide experience base who anchor the development of the curriculum on national/local realities (ASPHER, 2007). Several initiatives, especially in Europe and America have been launched to specify competencies for graduates of educational programs in the health professions. Competencies have also begun to redefine accreditation and certification activities (Calhoun (b) et al., 2008). In the area of Public Health, the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH), made up of 40 Schools of Public Health in North America initiated a core competency project for MPH programmes in 2004. This led to the definition of core MPH competencies and sub-competencies (ASPH, 2006). A similar effort was undertaken by the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) resulting in the publication of their draft MPH competencies in 2006 (ASPHER, 2007). Together, these competencies provide guidance for the development of curricula of different schools of public health.

It was therefore felt that revision of the MPH curriculum at ABU, to a competency-based programme, would align with this global best practice and contribute to the national public health infrastructural development. Although American and European institutions and associations have developed core competencies for MPH programmes, these cannot merely be duplicated for use at ABU. MPH competencies should of necessity reflect the realities of population health and health systems serving the population needs and also, the philosophy of the academia and stakeholders (ASPHER, 2007).

It was recognised that for the ABU MPH programme to be able to make the needed contributions to health development in the country, the training and research must be seen to be responsive to changing societal needs and developmental goals. It must translate to graduating public health leaders who have acquired the necessary competencies required to
develop strong responsive public health systems that address public health needs. While ABU policy stipulates curricular review every five years, no mechanisms are in place to operationalise the review process. The curriculum has therefore not undergone any major reviews since its development, although there have been incremental reviews by individual lecturers for courses. Consequently, there are gaps in the MPH training, which over time has compromised the adequacy of the graduates for practice. A further challenge to curricular reform is that ABU has become insular, looking inwards, instead of outwards for new ideas. This has tended to worsen over time as opportunities for overseas training, collaboration and staff exchanges etc. declined, resulting in diminished quality of training and research. An interdisciplinary and cross-institutional approach was believed to be critical to cross-fertilize ideas, leverage resources, arrest decline and improve on capacities for teaching, service and research. There is an increasing paradigm shift recognizing that the current approach of provision of sponsorships for academics from developing countries to go to institutions in developed countries for post-graduate training is unlikely to have the desired impact because of the high cost and the limited number of persons that can benefit from such training. Development partners are increasingly forging collaborations and partnerships and support that offer local opportunities for professional training and institutional capacity-building to strengthen local post-graduate programmes. In response to this paradigm shift, ABU identified the University of Aberdeen (UoA) in Scotland as a collaborative partner in the development of a grant application to fund the project. The UoA was selected as it has a reputation as a premier global research and training centre, which has provided leadership and technical support in multi-country studies. It also conducts international training courses in association with other universities in Africa and Asia. The Division of Applied Health Sciences has expertise in public health and in the areas of curriculum development and e-learning.

There is general consensus that competency-based education enhances communication and coordination across courses and programmes and provides an impetus for faculty development, curricular reform and leadership in educational innovation (Davis and Harden, 2003). The overall project thus aimed to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Department of Community Medicine, ABU to transform its MPH curriculum to a competency-based curriculum; to develop a centre of excellence for the conduct of collaborative multidisciplinary and trans-institutional MNCH research that will inform teaching, service and policy articulation, implementation and evaluation at all levels of the health care system; and to adopt policies and practices to promote and sustain female participation in the post-graduate programmes. The process for achieving the first objective only will be discussed in further detail in this paper.

**METHODOLOGY**

The first step in this process was a collaborative workshop held at ABU in Zaria, Nigeria in December 2011. The aim of this workshop was to initiate the collaboration between academics from the two Universities and to develop the MacArthur Foundation – Higher Education in Africa proposal. A preliminary list of proposed competencies for an ABU MPH graduate was drafted at this workshop. The application was successful and the project was initiated with a 2-day Departmental retreat mid 2012. This was followed by a one-week Teaching and Learning workshop facilitated by the UoA in Zaria in December 2012. This workshop aimed to provide training in innovative teaching and assessment methods; draft a revised curriculum and assess the learning environment at ABU. Capacity-building visits of five senior academics from ABU to UoA followed in March 2013.

**Drafting competencies and introduction of competency-based curricula**

During the initial workshop, UoA academics (3) presented aspects of what a competency-based curriculum involves and identified common public health competencies developed in Europe (ASPHER) and North America (ASPH). The identified domains of the ABU
curriculum included Environmental Health; Biostatistics; Epidemiology; Behavioural science; Health policy and Management with cross-cutting competency domains of Communication and informatics; Leadership; Diversity and culture; Programme planning; Public health biology and Systems thinking. A decision was made to use an adaptation of the steps proposed by Frank et al (2010) for the curriculum review process (Table 1). ABU academics provided background information on the current MPH programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Steps to a competency-based curriculum</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 Identify abilities and skill needs of MPH graduates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 2 Define the required competencies and their components</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 3 Develop objectives for each sub-competency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 4 Define milestones of competency development path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5 Select activities and instructional methods for all learning objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6 Select assessment techniques to measure progress being made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 7 Design an outcome evaluation for the program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The workshop culminated in a discussion to define the abilities and skills that ABU MPH graduates are expected to demonstrate, taking the health and developmental needs of the country, especially in the northern zones of the country, into consideration. Key competency domains were generated (Figure 1) and a preliminary draft of competencies was developed.

![Figure 1: Key competencies that ABU MPH graduates should demonstrate](image)

**Department of Community Medicine retreat**
The departmental retreat was facilitated by an independent facilitator and aimed to begin to build consensus and a shared vision about the need to transform the MPH curriculum; to conduct a SWOT analysis of the department; and to define the mission, vision, goals and strategic directions of the Department. The SWOT analysis identified specific aspects related to the curriculum reform process and enhancement of the learning environment including the lack of teaching resources (finances, hardware, software and human), possibility of introducing blended or online learning and advanced short courses as well as capacity-building of staff. The preliminary draft of competencies was reviewed by all involved in teaching on the MPH programme and initial outcomes linked to these competencies were drafted.

**Independent Review**
Two experts in the field of Public Health (Emeritus Professor of Public Health, UoA with extensive experience in developing country-contexts and a consultant in Public Health with the National Health Service in Scotland and a MPH alumni of ABU) were requested to independently review the proposed competencies and outcomes derived during the Departmental retreat. The reviewers were provided with background information on the current MPH curriculum and examples of assessments.

The report from the independent reviewers indicated that they saw this as an iterative process to provide peer support and guidance in the development of the programme. They endorsed the decision to reform to a competency-based approach, indicating that the ‘competencies need to be broad as graduates from public health training may work in a variety of fields including disease control, health education, environmental health, occupational settings, mother and child health, management, policy making and research’. They reported that the underpinning ethos of professionalism, continuous professional development, and contribution to national, regional and global development was commendable and that the commitment to being evidence-based was important. The external reviewers reported that they felt that the six domains suggested provide a helpful framework for grouping competencies. Additional learning outcomes were suggested for most of the overarching competencies. Some general comments regarding the balance between compulsory and elective/optional topics; access to online resources being essential and further development and assessment of competencies in practice through secondment opportunities after graduating were suggested as needs to be considered.

Teaching and Learning workshop
The one-week workshop started with an overview of the previously circulated reports from the Departmental retreat and Independent review. Suggestions from the independent reviewers were discussed and an updated list of competencies and learning outcomes was developed. Seminars of innovative teaching and assessment methods were presented by the UoA facilitator. These were followed by interactive sessions with the ABU teaching staff mapping the learning outcomes onto subjects/courses and a teaching and assessment matrix aligned to the six broad competencies. This involved aligning the preliminary competencies identified to the current MPH course content and assessments at ABU. The workshop culminated in a session where new courses were proposed according to the agreed competencies (Table 2). A draft matrix in the form of an Excel spreadsheet of learning outcomes and teaching and assessment methods was compiled from information provided by participants during the workshops.

Table 2: Current and proposed course names for the competency-based MPH curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Course Name</th>
<th>Proposal for change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health services organisation and management</td>
<td>Health Services Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidemiology principles and methods</td>
<td>Disease Surveillance and prevention, treatment and control of diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health statistics and demography</td>
<td>Health Interventions &amp; Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental health</td>
<td>Effective communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural sciences</td>
<td>Partnerships and Community Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupational health</td>
<td>Research Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive health</td>
<td>Research Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidemiology of communicable diseases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health education and community mobilisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary health care</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Research methodology</td>
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</table>
During the teaching and learning workshop, an independent consultant from the UoA was requested to explore the opportunity of using e-learning at ABU. The proposal is to provide flexibility and improve the geographical spread of students by providing an online version of the programme/selected courses in the future as well as the use of blended learning aspects within the MPH. This required an objective evaluation of the viability of using a virtual learning environment (VLE) at ABU. The MacArthur Foundation had previously provided additional funding to ABU to improve the IT situation at the University. The advantages found during this evaluation were that there is a new fibre-optic rollout providing a higher capacity data transfer and network rollout to Departments and hostels. Data is available via WiFi and a university-wide VLE is possible especially with the mobile technology available. The major constraints though are on a national level and revolve around a constant, stable source of power. There is a huge disparity in the age of computers in labs and massive costs for data packages are a further challenge. Resources within ABU are scattered at this stage with small pockets of expertise and interest but poor project management and limited sharing of resources or expertise in terms of e-learning. It seems there is a resistance to change generally and the underlying politics are a further challenge. It was suggested that Departments that share an interest in developing blended, online or distance learning should work together and share best practice and resources. The current project funding provides for some resource provision to improve the teaching environment (data projectors and computers, updated and relevant software and online library resources) for the MPH and these should be implemented.

**Capacity-building visits to Scotland**

Five senior members of staff from ABU spent two weeks in Scotland. The first week involved mostly aspects of developing research proposals, whereas the second week involved UoA staff sharing best practice and showcasing innovative practice of relevant courses and programmes. A further discussion regarding the proposed capacities, learning outcomes and courses was held with the two independent reviewers.

**DISCUSSION**

The collaborative process has had many advantages as well as challenges. The partnership forged has, and will continue, to expand the visibility of the Department of Community Medicine while resulting in an improvement in the quality of teaching and research within the MPH programme. The curriculum reform process has initiated team-building within the Department of Community Medicine and has impacted on the overall morale of the Department. Although there is a positive attitude and openness to change within the Department, internal politics and University-wide bureaucracy tend to negatively impact on the rate of progress. This has led to delays in the progress of the curriculum reform process. It would seem though that this is not unique to this collaborative work and is a common feature when working from a distance. One aspect that seems to be more common with African University structures is the lack of collaboration and sharing of best practice with other Departments. This is seen as an obstacle to the process and strategies to encourage this in the future need to be planned.

Although participation during workshop sessions in Nigeria was good (10-15 Departmental members attending most sessions), full engagement and buy-in of all departmental staff is essential for planning of a new curriculum. Once again, this challenge is not unique to this collaboration. It was suggested that the next workshop be held away from the University so
that all would be engaged with the process all of the time. There is still some resistance to change especially in terms of understanding that full curriculum reform to a competency-based (not content-based) curriculum is at the core of this process. Another challenge, shared with the University and country as a whole, is that of gender inequality. This challenges the process of curriculum reform throughout the process including strategies for student recruitment.

A challenge for the University of Aberdeen has been the movement of staff resulting in academic staff initially involved in the collaboration not being available to provide continuity. This is also not unique to this collaboration. Advantages to the University of Aberdeen include research collaboration and exposure to other curricula especially within a developing country context which supports globalisation of the curriculum.

**THE WAY FORWARD**

It was agreed that a variety of tasks need to be completed by ABU before the next workshop could be held. Teaching methods would need to be mapped onto the learning outcomes for each course. It is also very important that variety and innovation are considered in this step. The assessment methods, including the percentage contribution and notional hours must also be mapped onto the learning outcomes and once again include a variety in terms of method and type (Formative and Summative). The last step would be to calculate the notional hours (contact hours and hours students are expected to be engaged) for each course and then calculate the credits. The capacity-building visits to the UoA will continue and occur on an annual basis. Further visits to share best practice and investigate VLE usage are proposed for other African countries (Makerere University, Uganda; Moi University, Kenya and Stellenbosch University, South Africa). In the longer term, the implementation of the new outcomes-based curriculum will need to be evaluated.

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Employability Plus
Enhancing Graduate Level Employability Skills

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Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen

ABSTRACT: Robert Gordon University’s vision for employability is for its graduates to be recognised as the most fit-for-work, innovative, creative and engaged participants in the labour force and the economy and for the University to be recognised for its close engagement with employers. In 2013 the graduate labour market is increasingly competitive with an average of 52 applications for every graduate job (High Fliers Research, 2012). To ensure the continued employability success of its graduates, the University undertook a comprehensive engagement with key stakeholders and review of further enhancements which could be incorporated within the student learning experience at RGU. Employability Plus is a series of strategic enhancements to the core teaching and learning provision already recognised by both leading industry professionals and professional bodies as delivering a highly employable graduate for the 21st century.

1 Introduction

This paper gives an overview of the Employability Plus research informed by the Enhancement Theme: Graduates for the 21st Century. It focuses on 4 topic areas:

• SME Engagement
• RGU Global Graduate
• RGU Employability Skill set
• RGU Graduate Skill set

2 Background

Robert Gordon University (RGU), Aberdeen has a strong reputation in Scotland and beyond, as a distinctive university leading and shaping the debate on the future of higher education and placing students at the centre of the education it offers. It is a modern University with key teaching and research interests positioned in vocational areas of Business, Health and Design & Technology. The University has an enviable graduate employability record, ranking within the top 5 UK Universities for graduate employability and recently noted Best UK University for Employment (HESA, 2012).

However the University is not complacent about the success of its graduates. Graduate employability is a topical subject in Higher Education as all University’s seek to produce highly economically active graduates. Research suggests that global uncertainty in the economy has led to graduates entering a crowded environment where there is fierce competition, with an average of 52 applications for every graduate job (High Fliers Research, 2012). Despite RGU’s strong track record of educating highly employable graduates there was mounting evidence to suggest that employers were becoming more selective of candidates both at application and throughout the recruitment cycle.

The University’s senior management team instructed a five month analysis of stakeholder opinion to critically review its employability provision to inform future strategic enhancements. The Employability Plus project was conducted in three phases; research, development of enhancements and pilot implementation of enhancements.

The research phase sought to gather data on current graduate recruitment practice through
the use of a targeted online survey. This analysed key stakeholder opinions on recruitment and selection procedures and the core skills and graduate level competencies recruiters were assessing in the 21st Century.

A series of follow up face to face interviews was conducted with recruiters and University staff which provided a background to the data gathered in the survey.

The following key findings from the research were identified:

- RGU should further enhance business relationships with local SMEs to share and impart students' knowledge and skills through project and placement work experience
- In an increasingly global economy graduates must be able to demonstrate their global and cultural awareness in relation to work
- Graduates must demonstrate a range of employability skills in addition to their technical knowledge to be successful and thrive in the labour market
- In a highly competitive job market graduates must also understand what they are offering to an employer and demonstrate the confidence to articulate it throughout the recruitment process.

3 Research

3.1 SME Engagement

The research from both stakeholders and the literature review indicated that there was a new era of university and business collaboration that could be explored. In this challenging economy the aspiration is an environment where both universities and employers work together to provide a seamless skills and education pipeline to meet their employment needs. Placements were highlighted as a specific example of how business, public sector, voluntary organisations could collaborate with higher education to could gain a wealth of expertise from students across a wide range of subjects.

Robert Gordon University has established links with a range of businesses delivering placements, scholarships and translational research across all faculties. Placements are currently arranged for over 90% of undergraduate courses with a variety of employers. It was identified that existing practices relating to work placements could be enhanced through engaging directly with small and medium sized enterprises (SME).

SMEs can find it difficult to recruit and retain the skilled staff they require and can often be the down to one individual to run the business and recruit new staff. Connecting small business to talented students could positively impact on the small business and provide the student the opportunity to contribute to a small business through project work, placement and research opportunities.

Given the success of the UG placement model the University is investigating how this could be replicated across its PG portfolio to enhance its students' employability.

3.2 RGU Global Graduate

In today's fast paced and globalised society graduates are working in both small and large organisations on an international context, in international locations, on global projects and within diverse international teams. This theme of internationalisation has already been recognised across the three faculties with enhancements to the international experience delivered through teaching, learning and assessments.

In terms of employability this means that graduates are required to be mobile, be culturally aware and consider the wider global influences. In order to support its graduates to develop
global competencies the University will encourage all students to be geographically mobile and to take advantage of opportunities to enhance their employability. The University aims to significantly expand the formal and optional study abroad opportunities through developing strategic links with new partner institutions.

Recognising that some students will choose to return to their home country or choose to work outside of the UK after graduation, the University will continue to develop relationships with international employers and explore the international graduate labour market to support students.

Through enhancing students awareness of the global opportunities that exist both for international and home and eu students RGU will equip students to be confident to compete in the global graduate labour market.

3.3 RGU Employability Skill set

It is widely regarded by employers that having a degree secures you the opportunity to interview, but demonstrating your employability skills gets you the job. In a recent survey CBI members ranked the employability skills of graduates as the single most important factor when recruiting graduates (CBI, 2012).

Employability remains at the core of the student experience at Robert Gordon University. The provision aims to ensure that students take advantage of these opportunities to develop whilst in Higher Education. There are a number of challenges faced in engaging students with employability that we seek to address in stimulating and motivating them to evidence and articulate their employability.

To better prepare graduates and enhance their employability skills, the Robert Gordon University will expand the range and provision of careers education and support to better equip students with the skills to perform effectively in contemporary recruitment and selection procedures. The University will also increase students' awareness of self-employment, voluntary and the third sector opportunities and continue to provide students with a diverse range of opportunities to connect and network with Careers & Employability staff, Alumni and Employers.

3.4 RGU Graduate Skill set

In order to be successful in the recruitment market students must be able to differentiate themselves from their peers. To be able to do this students need to have an understanding of their skills, motivators and attitudes in relation to work. Therefore the student’s ability to articulate this throughout the recruitment cycle will be their differentiating factor.

Research suggests that this can be a challenging area for a student or indeed a graduate. To better support students to succeed in understanding their self-awareness, the University will provide a range of opportunities for students to explore and discuss their attitudes, skills and motivators to work.

Additionally the University will inspire, motivate and support all students with their student experience at RGU to engage in enterprise, leadership, volunteering or cultural and sporting engagement, and to reflect on and record their associated personal development acquired.

Through evidencing their personal development Robert Gordon University will develop all students’ ability to understand their individual skill set and how they can articulate these to employers throughout the recruitment and selection processes.
4. Enhancements

Actions for RGU in Session 2013-14:
• Through engagement with SME sector RGU will increase the number and range of work-related opportunities available, particularly within the taught postgraduate courses.
• Through new partnerships RGU will significantly expand the formal and optional study abroad opportunities
• Through enhancing and expanding the range and provision of careers education and support to all students RGU will develop students’ confidence in the recruitment cycle.
• Through offering new opportunities and providing support for students to assess their self-awareness and act on the results of this information RGU will develop confident and articulate graduates.

5. Conclusion

The graduate employment market has become increasingly competitive and is a situation that is likely to prevail for some time. Employers are now more demanding in what they seek from applicants. Robert Gordon University is in a strong position for employability but recognises that strategic enhancements are required to its current practices to enable all graduates to demonstrate the key knowledge, skills and attributes required for their profession / career.

Through providing students with additional opportunities to engage with these enhancements RGU will continue to enhance its graduates to have the Employability Plus.

References


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