



The European First Year Experience Conference 2014 Conference Proceedings

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Introduction

*Dr Diane Nutt, Principal Lecturer Learning & Teaching,
Department for Learning Development, Teesside University*

The 2014 European First Year Experience Conference took place in Nottingham, hosted by Nottingham Trent University on their attractive city centre campus. Hosting the event on a University campus is one of the things the Conference Organising Committee value as it provides the opportunity to experience a campus almost in the same way new first year students experience their first taste of their new University. We get to see lecture theatres and seminar rooms from the students' viewpoint, as well as from the presenters (lecturers). Of course, we tend to experience the best parts and our visits are short, but it does provide a feel for the contemporary campus, which may be somewhat different from our own previous, sometimes distant, experiences.

The 2014 Conference was a busy, exciting, stimulating experience for delegates. There were three keynotes; five pre-conference workshops; 26 workshops; 51 papers; 32 show and tell presentations and 11 posters. The event was a truly international event, with 21 countries represented. It was a real chance to see the common experiences of staff and students in different countries, and to learn about the differences. There were a wide range of innovative, practical, dynamic ideas to take home and time to explore challenges and successes with colleagues from both different contexts within higher education, as well as different countries. We all shared a commitment to enhancing first year students' experiences of University life. This proceedings provides a small taste of some of this rich material, and papers included here come from five countries and eleven institutions. The institutions vary in more than country of origin: some are colleges, some are research-led universities, some are modern universities and some are technical institutes, but all are contexts in which the higher education first year experience is key.

Institutional change was the key theme of the first keynote from Nottingham Trent University's Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Chris Pole, 'Meeting Our First Years: institutional change to support the first year experience'. Managing institutional data, and in particular the notion of 'big data' was a significant topic that was highly debated at the conference and which provided the focus for the second keynote, from Professor Mark Stubbs, 'Enhancing the Student Experience at MMU: clearing a path and interpreting digital footprints'. However, while there are no papers included in this proceedings on this topic from the conference itself, it is worth a mention. The issue proved very timely and many delegates were passionately interested in what we could

do with big data to support our first year students more effectively. Part of this hot debate was about the contemporary challenge of not losing contact with the personal connections and learning community ethos, which many participants value in their day to day work with students. There were probably more coffee and lunch-time conversations about data at the conference than any other concern. While this topic felt very pertinent, it also seemed to be a debate which was only just beginning, and we would expect to see more presentations and papers at future EFYE events as we continue to grapple with the possibilities and problems of managing big data in our institutions and in our different countries.

There were two main themes of the conference, which were: the student lifecycle; and building a first year experience for European and international students and Mary Stuart Hunter's keynote provided the voices of students 'In Their Own Words: student reflections on transition issues' emphasising the important perspective of students themselves on the student lifecycle.

The papers in this collection relate primarily to the student lifecycle and beginning the student journey, although several papers incorporate some discussion about how international that journey can be. The role of the first year in grounding the whole student lifecycle effectively is an ongoing interest for those who work with first year students, and over the years this conference has been running we have explored a range of ways to help students begin their journey well, to make effective transitions and achieve success in their studies. The 2014 conference provided the opportunity to reflect on ideas that have worked over time as well as to explore new initiatives suited to current challenges. We now have growing evidence from research, evaluation and ongoing practice to begin to understand what does make a difference for first year students.

Several of the papers in this collection are about changes in curricula and are contextualised in particular disciplines (Dickson; Carter; Johnson and Boardman). We can only do so much to enhance student experience and student success from outside the curriculum and the work being done at the 'chalk-face' can have a transformative impact on learners. The stories from the front line in various disciplines included here provide examples of how academic staff, in particular are exploring this space. These examples provide a useful insight into strategies for curriculum change in other disciplines too. Creative approaches to assessment and feedback in particular seem to be important ways to impact on the student journey from the first year and a number of

papers explore changes in assessment and feedback practice (Carter; Johnson and Boardman; Rowlett).

Another important theme in some of these papers is the role students play in supporting each other to make the transitions (Alsford and Pazio; Dickson; Howley et al). Supporting first year students with university skills acquisition, for example academic writing, and language or maths skills, is also key to their success and a number of papers explore this challenge (Alsford and Pazio; Baratta; Bonne and Vridjers; Johnson and Boardman; Rowlett; Stapleford, Broadbent and Turner). Many of the papers are exploring approaches which will help non-traditional students succeed in higher education.

A concern shared by many European institutions is how we can effectively support international students in their first year, which led to the second key theme for the 2014 conference, and several of the papers in this collection include some exploration of how we might do this (Alsford and Pazio; Baratta; Bonne and Vridjers; Howley et al; and Long). The growing mix of experiences brought into the first year 'classroom' leads to creative approaches to supporting learning and success. Long's example of a service learning module for first year international students, actually takes the learning outside the classroom into various volunteering contexts within London.

A key group of participants at EFYE conferences are researchers: those whose main interest is researching first year experiences. Although all of the papers included in this collection are underpinned by research and evaluative evidence, a small number of them provide some further examination of the theoretical underpinning of both experience and the practices we bring to enhance those experiences. Key to research on first year experience is unpacking the importance of identity (Baratta) and belonging (Thomas) in the student lifecycle. Several of the papers in this collection are engaged with gaining a better understanding of how students integrate into university life and develop a sense of belonging.

There were many interesting and inspiring presentations¹ at the conference, and those of us who participated took back to our home institutions ideas to share, and strategies and approaches to try in our own situations. This collection only touches the surface of the wide range of ideas and research, but it does provide a useful taste of the creative ways EFYE conference participants support their first year students to engage and to succeed.

¹ The presentations can be found on the EFYE 2014 website at [http://www.ntu.ac.uk/apps/events/9/home.aspx/event/151843/default/european_first_year_experience_network_\(efye\)_2014_conference_#Multimedia](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/apps/events/9/home.aspx/event/151843/default/european_first_year_experience_network_(efye)_2014_conference_#Multimedia)

We hope this selection of papers inspires you to attend one of our conferences in the future, to tell us about your own initiatives, to discuss your interests with colleagues, or to learn from your peers across Europe. We look forward to meeting you then.



Diane
Dr Diane Nutt, Teesside University
Conference Chair

EFYE 2015

The next European First Year Experience Conference will take place from Monday 15th of June until Wednesday 17th of June 2015. It will be hosted by the University of Bergen, Norway.

Institutional development and the student lifecycle will be the two main themes.

For more information please visit:
http://www.uib.no/en/efye_2015

European First Year Experience 2015
University of Bergen,
Norway

EFYE
EUROPEAN
FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

Student-led English conversation groups – the Language Connect project

Sally Alford and Monika Pazio, University of Greenwich



LANGUAGE
Connect

- Improve your English skills
- Socialise and meet new people
- English conversation groups for all University of Greenwich students

To find out more, including how to book your place, see:

<http://wp.me/p42w1y-o7>



Introduction

The Language Connect project is a cross-institutional project setting up student-led English conversation groups. The project was conceived with the primary aims of social integration and cultural exchange, as well as additional English language skills support. While international students are included in our institutional transitional support and provision, including International Orientation events, there is evidence of the need for further support and welcome particularly, though not only, due to late arrivals which may impede the benefits of early interactions. Our university New Arrivals survey and recent International Barometer data show international students' desire for more friendship with host students. Scudamore (2013) notes this desire, but also points out that this integration needs assistance. Sector research shows the importance of a sense of belonging for progression and success (Thomas 2012) and these concerns are supported by wider HE research on the needs of new international students (for example, Rushton, Cook & Macintosh 2006; Montgomery 2010).

Our institutional data and a wealth of more anecdotal local opinions also evidence the need for increasing our English language development opportunities. While the university has Standard English language requirements for entry (IELTS 6.0) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) support is available to students, this is quite often not sufficient for students to feel comfortable in an educational and social environment.

Hence any additional exposure to the language, even if not related to academic experience, is beneficial. Interaction and communication not solely as an end goal of language learning but a means through which learning takes place is valued in both formal and informal language settings (Nunan, 1991). Hence language conversation classes with fluent speakers who do not have any teaching experience but greater language competence offer a valuable opportunity for acquisition (Krashen, 1982; Lightbrown and Spada, 2006).

The Language Connect (LC) project is currently led by the Educational Development Unit (EDU) at the University of Greenwich, working in collaboration with colleagues from the Department of Literature, Language and Theatre (Faculty of Architecture, Computing and Humanities) and the Office of Student Affairs (which includes the International Students' Advice Service). Our aims were to enhance student experience and promote integration of home, international and UK students, fostering the Greenwich Graduate attributes, particularly (though not only) those of cross-cultural and international awareness. We sought to do this by offering opportunities for:

- additional, informal, student-led English language support
- student socialisation and cross-cultural exchange
- engagement and development of skills both for participants and for Language Connect leaders.

The project was piloted on a small scale during the Autumn term 2013 and extended for the Spring term 2014. During the pilot over 75 one hour conversation sessions were run, led by 23 Language Connect (LC) leaders, working as volunteers, with a total of 85 attendees participating on two campuses. The pilot was very successful overall with primarily positive feedback from participants and very positive response from Leaders. Because of that success the project is continuing through 2014-15.

This case study outlines the steps taken in getting the project off the ground, and presents our evaluation of the pilot project, identifying key outcomes for the students and making some recommendations. We offer the project here as a model which is relatively easy to pilot, scalable and suitable for tailoring for other contexts.

Project set up

The project was set up in cooperation with the English Language team to ensure support on both ends, *i.e.* supporting student engagement but also ensuring language gains. The project followed a pattern of: initial planning by the project team; recruitment of new leaders; advertising to potential international participants; and finally setting up of

conversational groups which ran over the two terms. Both terms ended with a celebration event as a form of thanking students for their time and involvement but also establishing good rapport between the leaders, the participants and the project team: (<http://blogs.gre.ac.uk/languageconnect/2014/03/21/the-party/>).

Additionally, a Facebook page was set up and managed by one of the students who had missed the deadline to become a leader in the first term, but was very keen to help in other ways, and a blog was developed to offer the leaders support in the form of online materials, with ready-made resources and ideas for sessions and activities. A more detailed description of the steps taken can be found in the table below (Table 1).

July-October 2013	Planning by project team Development of leaders' resources.
October 2013	Selection and training of students. 52 applications received, 19 leaders selected. LC Facebook page started.
From November	<i>Language Connect conversation groups running on 2 campuses</i>
December 2013	End of term celebration event . Evaluation and planning for Term 2.
January-March 2014	<i>Language Connect conversation groups running on 2 campuses</i>
February 2014	Training of new leaders, to join existing group teams
February 2014	Language Connect blog started, including resources for groups.
March 2014	End of year celebration event. Evaluation and planning for 2014-15
April-May 2014	Recruitment and initial training of leaders for 2014-15. 14 applications received, 7 leaders selected.
July-September 2014	Further development of LC Leaders' resources, planning for Stage 2 training in September.
Resourcing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staff time (uncosted) ● Training & Group resources (labels, paper, pens, post-its, printing etc.) – uncosted ● Refreshments for training and groups – approximately £100. 	

Table 1. Project timeline.

Although staff time remains uncosted, in other respects the cost of the project is very low and continuation of the project should take less time than initial set-up. The main on-going staff resource is for selection, training and support of/for leaders and administration for group timetabling and room booking.

Step 1: Student leaders' recruitment, training and support.

Recruitment

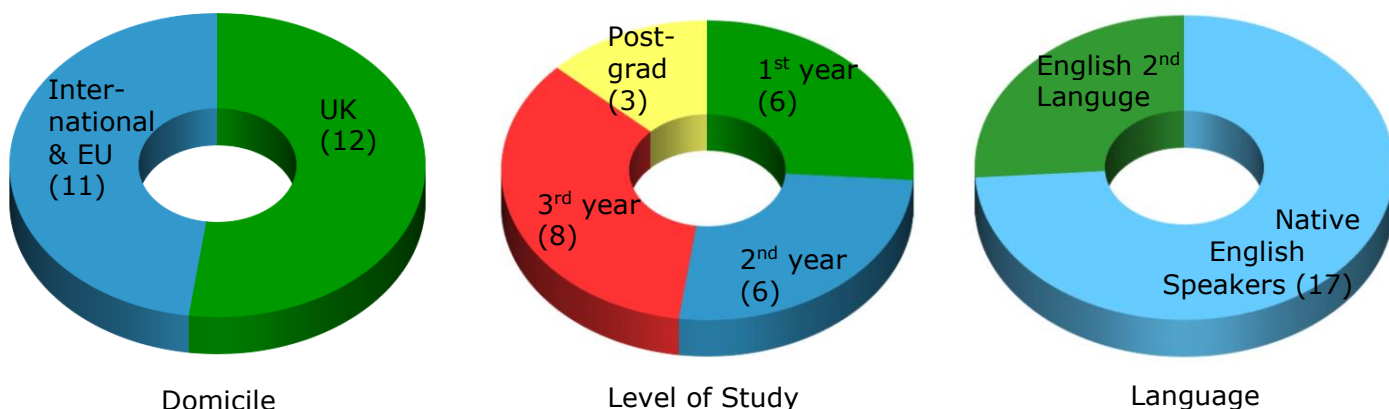
Initial selection was based on a fairly brief application form which gave students an opportunity to tell us why they wanted to be involved in the project, and about any relevant experience. Leaders' motivation for being involved, drawn from their application statements, included meeting people and building networks, interest in language learning and other cultures, developing confidence and skills, particularly in communication and leadership, and helping other students. Although most leaders were native speakers of English, almost half were international or EU students (*Fig 1*). Their applications spoke of their own experience gaining language skills and confidence in a different culture, and of wanting to help other students to do the same.

"I had my own experience when I came to England from xxx of not knowing anyone and needing support to get conversations started or make friends. I would like to offer this opportunity to other individuals."

"I enjoy meeting new people. I also get great pleasure out of helping others and would like to make a difference to the wider university community."

"All in all, this is an opportunity I am willing to try. It will give me a chance not to only meet other international students but also being able to help them improve their English at the same time improving mine. I hope this volunteering opportunity could help me build connections, gain a higher level of confidence as well as improving my communication skills. I look forward to it."

Fig 1. Leaders' demographics



For some students, Language Connect experience was closely related to their study, with

a number of them studying English, a few on the Language and English Language Teaching programme and/or TEFL trained. Others represented a range of subjects, some of them considered teaching as a career.

Training, resources and support

The training focussed on modelling effective practice in running an interactive and enjoyable group session, including different kinds of group work as well as dealing with group management issues; it also acted as a second, face-to-face, stage of selection. We sought to give students some idea of what the experience of being a leader might be like and at the end of the session they had the opportunity to gauge their level of confidence about being a leader. At the time of writing, we are repeating this pattern of second-stage selection combined with initial training, but providing additional and more focussed training with those selected, to support their preparation for their sessions and boost their confidence as leaders. Leaders' feedback confirmed that the hands-on and modelling activities were the most helpful element of the training. As new leaders were recruited and trained through the year some of them also helped with later training sessions, which was also very beneficial.

Student leaders received a resources pack including guidance on running groups, ideas and resources for activities, administrative guidance and information, details about support available for leaders, additional referral information about university support for International Students. A blog provided further ideas and resources, as well as up to date group and booking information. In response to leaders' feedback, a bank of resources is being developed including conversation and vocabulary games and other hands-on materials that will challenge the students but also give them a fun experience in a non-threatening atmosphere. Each leader had designated staff contacts and optional drop-in support sessions were offered, though this support was generally not taken up.

Step 2: Running the groups

A total of 23 students selected to be LC Leaders worked in pairs or threes running English conversation groups as below (see Table 2). Leaders were asked to make a commitment to run 4 groups in the first term, and 6 in the second, with the option of continuing for longer if they and their group wanted to – as some did. Two groups organised their own end of term social event with their participants.

Autumn Term

8 groups ran for between 4-6 weeks, one hour per week, on two campuses: 4 groups for 4 weeks, 3 groups for 5 weeks, 1 group for 6 weeks

Spring Term

5 groups ran for between 6-8 weeks, one hour per week: 2 groups for 6 weeks, 4 groups for 8 weeks

Table 2. Group details.

Over 75 sessions ran, with an average of 5-6 students per session in each group. Group size was limited to 12 students who booked directly with LC Leaders. Various online forms were available for the leaders to use as an opportunity to get to know the participants as early as possible and tailor the sessions to their needs. Participants were also sent a Code of Conduct, upon booking, with guidelines on making the most of the experience and understanding group etiquette.

Attendance

Attendance patterns varied significantly between groups in terms of group size and proportions of regular and occasional attenders. This seems to depend on a complex pattern of variables and it is difficult to draw conclusions at this stage about key 'success' factors for consistent attendance, however it seems that some drop-out is related to unmet expectations. The analysis of attendance data is based on the attendance lists returned to the Language Connect team. Although a complete data set was not provided to the team, a reasonable picture of participation can be drawn out of available registers.

Altogether over 85 international students participated in Language Connect over the two terms, approximately 70 in Autumn and over 40 in Spring (15 of these continuing from the Autumn). The average group size was 5-6; most leaders (58%) felt this was about right, though some (42%) would prefer a larger group. Over half of the students attended a session once or twice, and some attended regularly every week. The biggest number of participants was always in the first session with a drop in number later on. This tendency to non-attendance troubled the leaders as the planning and preparation for the sessions was done with larger numbers in mind and demanded quick thinking and flexibility on their part. The main reasons for non-attendance given by participants in an evaluation survey were coursework deadlines (66.7%), and other commitments (55.6%), with (22.2%) giving unmet expectations as a cause; this is discussed further below.

Evaluation

1. Language Connect Leaders' experience

In addition to informal face to face feedback, LC leaders completed an online evaluation survey at the end of both terms to give us feedback on their experience; this evaluation draws on both methods of feedback. The leaders felt very positive about participating in the project and felt that their time commitment was worthwhile, with 85% of the respondents saying they enjoyed it very much and most feeling that they received sufficient training and support.

Leaders' feedback on what worked

After providing (and modelling) examples and resources, we left the leaders free to design their own sessions, wanting to give them ownership of their groups. They experimented with a range of group activities and in our evaluation survey, shared what worked best. Most leaders found discussion activities, such as debates, very successful in their groups; this was followed by pair work and group work (Fig 2). The leaders were quite cautious about quizzes and role plays and tended not to incorporate them in their sessions, however, especially in the case of role plays though those who did try them thought of them as very good activities.

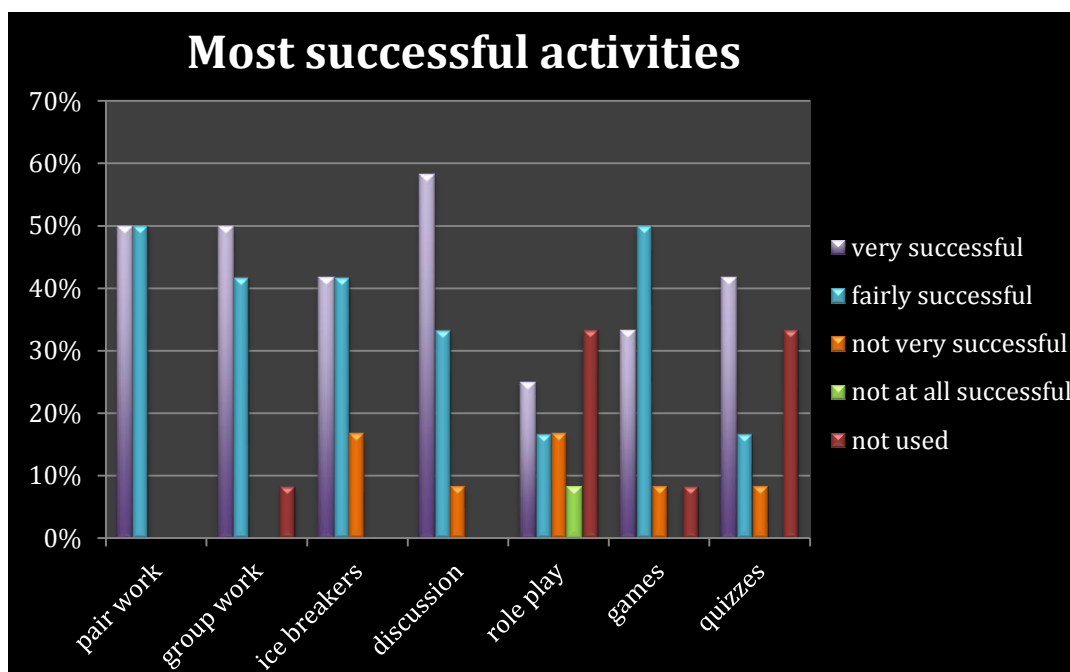


Figure 2. Activities included in the sessions.

Challenges leaders faced

The graph below (Fig 3) presents difficulties the leaders faced when running their groups. The most commonly mentioned issue was managing the students' expectations as expressed by over 41% of the participants, an issue which also arose during informal discussions with leaders. In addition, some leaders also mentioned poor attendance which impacted on the session plan, lack of participation from the students and problems arising from dealing with different levels of students placed in the same group. Responses from some leaders in the second term suggested that these were less problematic issues, perhaps because some of the group leaders had experience from the first term or as a result of additional training and resources provided.

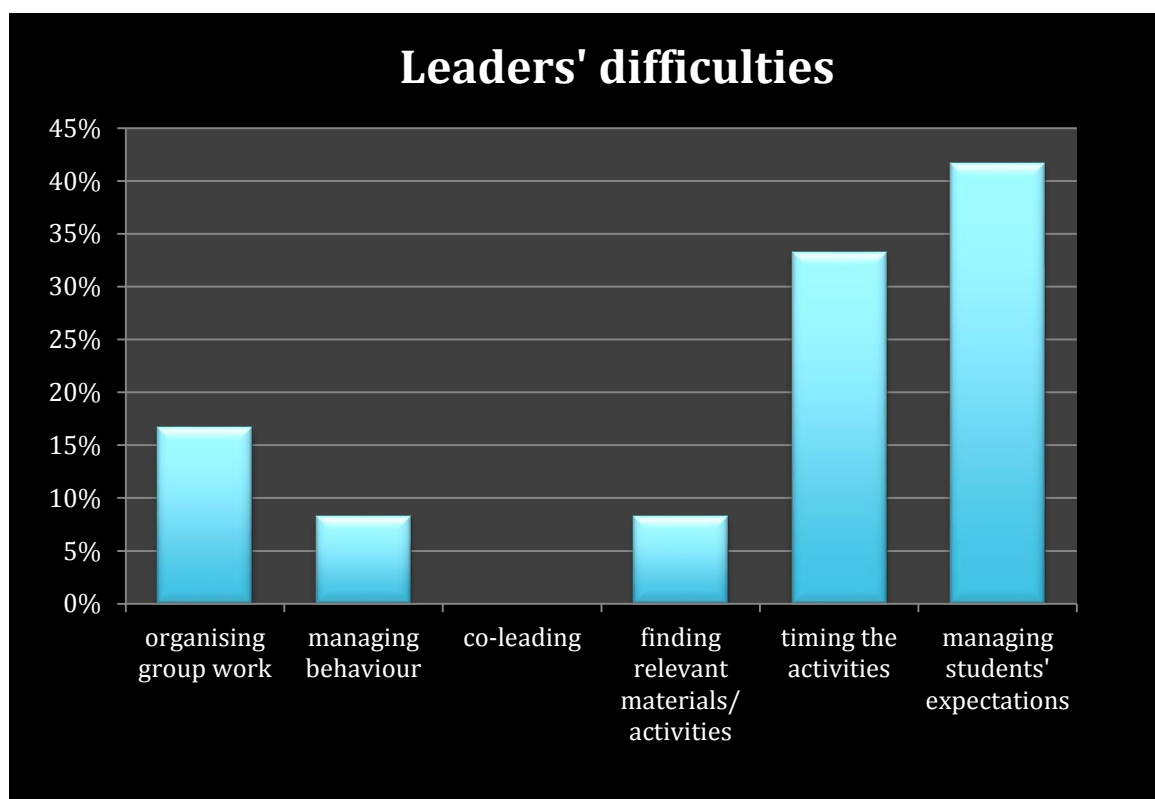


Fig 3. Leaders' difficulties with running the sessions.

What leaders gained

Most of the leaders said that they had gained or improved key skills through their involvement with the project. They felt that participation improved their presentation, time management and leadership skills; they became more confident when addressing a group and learnt how to work as part of a team. Additionally they felt they became more flexible and creative.

"To expect anything and to be prepared with various back-up plans!"

"thinking of engaging others in group, team work with co-leader, cooperation with Staff, positive attitude and the effect on others."

"My communication has improved... I've challenged myself in coming up with creative ideas and picking up quickly on things which I could use as a resources... Managing the team and arranging weekly meet-... enable me to become more organised and listen to people's needs even if they were unspoken."

Individual face-to-face and email feedback strongly reinforced how positive LC Leaders felt about the project and about their experience. It also underlined the need for more suitable 'hands-on' resources, for more guidance about dealing with different levels of language ability and for a more direct language-practice focus for sessions.

Leaders' recognition.

The project's success relied heavily on sustained student motivation. While leaders' participation quite often stemmed from intrinsic motivation and need to help, support and encourage, it was important to ensure that mechanisms are put in place for formal recognition of their work and dedication. LC Leaders were therefore encouraged to log their LC work through the Guidance and Employability Team or Students' Union volunteering schemes, to receive recognition in the form of a volunteering certificate. Where this was not appropriate, students were offered a Certificate of Achievement from the EDU. We are also in the process of ensuring that this work is included in students' HEAR.

2. Language Connect participants' experience

Participants' feedback was elicited through an online survey. The most common reason for joining Language Connect sessions was the need to improve language skills (84.2%), followed by meeting new people (73.7%) and expanding cultural knowledge (63.2%). Participants mentioned that by coming to the sessions they wanted to increase their English speaking time, interact with others and work on their confidence to speak in public (Fig 4).

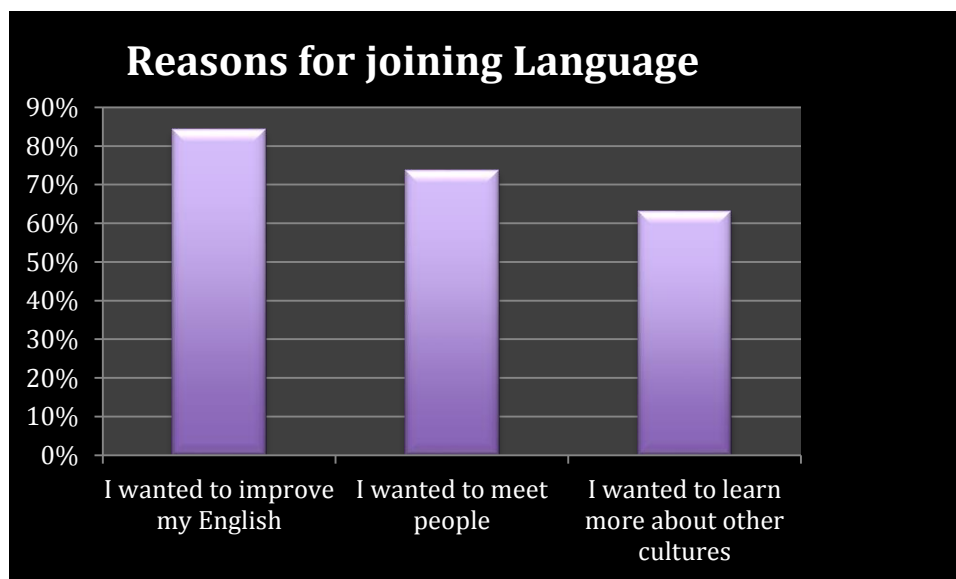


Figure 4. Reasons for joining Language Connect.

Most respondents were positive or very positive about the project, appreciating the opportunity to meet new people, learn about other cultures and to practice English skills. While the fun and entertainment was appreciated by the participants and they thoroughly enjoyed coming to the session, they reported that in several cases there was a mismatch between their expectations and the reality of the sessions (Fig 5). This was quite often the case when the main reason for participation was improvement in language skills. Especially students who already had good command of English found the sessions not useful for further development of their linguistic skills. This was a contributing factor to drop outs, poor attendance and dissatisfaction.

"This is a language conversation for university students. To get to uni foreign students need to get a high score on IELTS test which is on a high level. Everyone who is in the university is on advanced level with only small problems they want to improve, like fluency of speaking, vocabulary or accent. We do not need to learn how to describe how we feel today, what's the weather like or learn names of animals. Waste of time for me. I did not learn a single new thing. I only had a chance to ask another people about their cultures, which was good. We could discuss some more serious topics in order to widen vocabulary. Although, I have to say group leaders put a lot of effort in these classes."

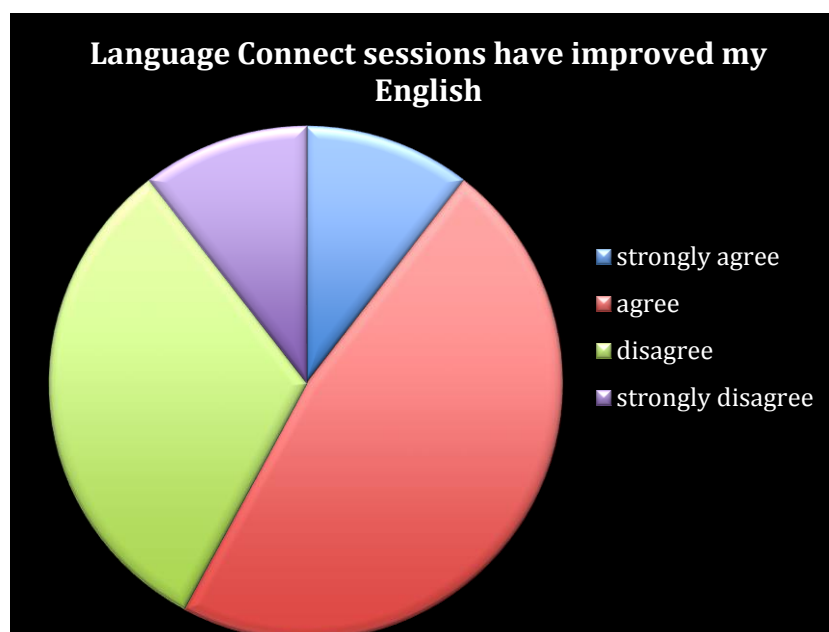


Figure 5. Satisfaction with Language Connect - improved language skills.

The activities that students enjoyed the most were heavily based on free speaking, *i.e.* free expression of opinions, hence the most popular tasks were participation in debates and discussions, as expressed by one of the participants:

"We did some discussion sessions, I enjoy it! Because you can express your thought, and practice how to do it."

Some students also mentioned playing games and activities related to expanding their vocabulary as their favourite activities, the former however were also mentioned quite often by the participants as unsuitable for the setting or the age group or not challenging enough.

"I found something really odd in this session. At university we are expected to be able to read and understand academic literature and write 1-2-3K word reports and essays, and also there was a minimum level of IELTS required for admission.... and yet, in Language Connect we were asked to make up sentences by pictures that my six-year-old sister uses in kindergarten..."

Despite some unmet expectations and inability to see potential improvement, the majority of participants would recommend LC to their friends. There were some suggestions made to try to eliminate the current issues, namely creating classes of different levels, placing greater emphasis on linguistic gains rather than the fun factor as well as extending the sessions outside of those officially timetabled slots to include smaller interest groups.

Ongoing work

New leaders for 2014-15 were recruited in May 2014, to join continuing leaders in September/October. It is anticipated that further recruitment in the Autumn term will add new leaders to the team for Spring 2015, establishing a rolling cycle of recruitment and training throughout the year, including new students and allowing for final year students to step down. Following discussion with colleagues in the Department of Literature, Language and Theatre, it is anticipated that the project will be handed over to our new Language Centre to become fully embedded from 2014-15.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall the pilot project was very successful, with positive responses and outcomes for student leaders as well as for participants. Two key issues emerge: attendance and students' expectations, and there are clearly some links between these. Reasons for drop-off were commonly linked to unmet expectations, particularly related to the level of linguistic complexity and language focus in sessions being seen as insufficient. Based on this, the following changes have been built into 2014/2015 planning:

- Increase focus on group activities which provide language-practice as well as social and cultural exchange, including some practical correction and vocabulary strategies and guidance on dealing with different levels through organisation of group activity.
- Ensure clear communication to LC participants that provision is conversation and fluency practice, rather than formal language tuition.
- Build in further training for those selected, focusing on specific preparation and hands-on practice for sessions.
- Provide more resources on the blog, and through a resource-bank (including, e.g., Taboo and other suitable games). Clearer guidance for participants about the nature and purpose of the groups; amend the Code of Conduct to include this.
- Build feedback on students' expectations into a standardised booking form, and into a short feedback form for use in early sessions.
- Timetable a progress/feedback session mid-term for leaders and staff to meet.

The organisation and piloting of the project has also been a valuable learning experience for the project team. We have learned the importance of:

- trusting students, once given the opportunity, to 'run with it', offering support when needed rather than supervising
- balancing the teaching aspects without expecting students to be teachers
- sufficient and suitably focussed training

- preparing students for students' absence and quick thinking in difficult situations

All of these are valuable lessons for anybody who wishes to replicate the existing project.

Language Connect blog (over 2000 views since February):

<http://blogs.gre.ac.uk/languageconnect/>

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Who will I be today? A pedagogical approach to identity in academic writing

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Undergraduate students have many challenges ahead of them when they begin university, one of which can be academic writing. Students are expected to produce essays as part of their assessments, often including a final-year dissertation of up to 12,000 words. This can be challenging, especially for those who are not particularly interested in writing or simply have difficulties with the production of essays. However, inherent in this challenge is the fact that an undergraduate degree usually spans three years, which implies that students have time over which their writing skills will hopefully develop, as they learn from initial mistakes and also capitalise on their writing strengths.

In order to develop writing skills, students can be helped with the provision of writing instruction, undeniably best served as a practical, 'how to write' approach. This does not suggest a theoretical approach is irrelevant, but instruction in writing theory arguably needs to play a background role amidst otherwise practical instruction. This paper discusses the pedagogical approach taken within my own academic writing class, which combines both practical and theoretical instruction, with the latter approach largely centred on identity in writing. Ultimately, my approach to teaching academic writing seeks to accomplish the following:

- Encourage students to consider the ways in which their personal identity is manifest in their essays
- Encourage students to consider how an academic identity can be seen within their essays
- Ultimately, encourage students to find ways to ideally enable both identities to peacefully co-exist within their essay writing, as a means to essentially please both themselves and the academy

Much has been said regarding the link between language and identity (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985; Mugglestone, 2003; Joseph, 2004; Becker, 2009; Edwards, 2009), often, however, from the perspective of spoken language. Regarding the ways in which academic writing signifies and reveals one's identity, several notable theorists include Fairclough (1995), Neman (1995), Schleppegrell (2001), Hyland (2002) and Hyland and Tse (2004), to name but a few. However, the work of Ivanic (1998) is largely focused on within my writing class, given that her work discusses identity in

writing from three very relevant perspectives regarding first-year undergraduates entering the academy.

First, Ivanic reveals the potential struggle some students encounter in their early writing. This goes beyond the basics of simply 'not writing well', but focuses on the broader issues of how students' early writing does not always benefit the discipline in which they are writing. Simply put, students might often write in a manner that reveals their personal beliefs, likes and background, all of which are tied to personal identity, but it is not appropriate for their discipline. Second, Ivanic indeed references the implications for 'appropriate' writing based on the discipline in which one is writing. Clearly, Literature undergraduate students must write in a style very different from that of Chemistry undergraduate students. Finally, Ivanic offers ample discussion, and more importantly illustration, in terms of the ways in which students' writing can exhibit aspects of both the personal and the academic identities, thus achieving 'possibilities for self-hood'.

Fairclough (1995, p. 227) calls the transition from a personal self to an academic one "an uncomfortable and alienating experience". Schleppegrell (2001, p. 435) further states that students must present themselves as "detached" within their writing, whereas Hyland (2002, p. 1091) states that academic writing "is not completely impersonal". Regarding the potential confusion of how much students' writing should be impersonal versus how much, if at all, they are allowed to be personal, it very often comes down to one word: *I*. Indeed, students often question whether or not they can use the first person, singular or plural. Within my own programme, however, students' personal experiences are valued as a means to offer illustration within their essays and therefore, first person is not proscribed. The key, however, is for students to know how to balance personal experience with more objective theoretical discussion in their essays and this points to the larger issue across disciplines – how can students, if at all, reveal both identities in their writing?

I anticipate potential arguments against my practical-theoretical approach to writing instruction, in particular why should we focus on theory at all and why is identity so important a concept to students, many of whom need to simply know how to write instead. Indeed, might a focus on theory be quite abstract and difficult to relate to, whereas learning how to structure an essay, cite sources accurately and provide a central focus are not only more concrete, but ultimately the more relevant aspects of a writing class?

First, the students are provided with several weeks of writing instruction before theory is taught. Therefore, by the time we discuss, for example, identity in writing, students already know about the fundamental aspects of writing, such as how to write an introduction, body and conclusion, how to hedge and so on. Second, the theory is, therefore, a background focus, as it should be, carefully interwoven within the practical aspects of writing pedagogy. Third, though discussing personal and academic identities might be somewhat abstract initially, its application in the class is entirely concrete, as analysing essay samples (a common practice in writing classes) allows the students to not only decide if the samples are appropriate or not, but they are encouraged to go beyond this initial analysis and then decide if various writing samples exhibit aspects of both identities, and if indeed the two can co-exist. This analytical approach can help encourage critical thinking, a skill that is hard to teach and yet, many students' assessments are largely scored based on the ways in which they demonstrate analysis within their writing. Finally, Elbow (1973) encourages the use of metaphors as a means to help students approach their writing, using terms such as 'editor' and 'director'.

While identity is not a metaphor per se, the use of such a term nonetheless allows students to approach their writing from a more systematic perspective by creating a relevant schema from which to consider their future writing. Therefore, starting with the basic question of 'is this good writing' and then progressing to 'what identities can be seen in this writing', allows for students to further their analytical abilities and approach their own writing from a deeper perspective. As Neman (1995, p. 217) asks, "how can our students find their own voice and become comfortable with it?" The approach taken in my class arguably helps students to be comfortable with their own voice – and identity – and in time, learn to write in a manner befitting their particular discipline. This is relevant to the work of Swales (1990), as he argues that novice writers (perhaps 'apprentices' is a more apt term) need to learn to produce texts that reveal membership within their particular academic community; writing that meets an academic community's standards for 'good' writing and is indicative of an academic identity in this context help to signal such membership.

I offer a brief example of the ways in which a sample of writing, albeit one sentence, can be analysed from both the perspective of whether it is appropriate or not and then, in terms of identity issues (I need point out that students are given more lengthy texts to analyse rather than solely individual sentences; however, individual sentences are provided here for brevity's sake):

All literate societies read newspapers.

Initially, the sentence can be seen as inappropriate as it is a rather strong statement and without the benefit of support. It may in fact be difficult to find support for such an assertion in the first instance. However, in terms of identity, such hyperbolic statements are very often seen in my students' writing, in that students often present bold opinions based on rather naïve and intuitive statement. This, therefore, could reveal one's personal identity – an identity at home perhaps in informal discussions with family and friends (a situation in which exaggerations and hyperbole might be more frequent). In terms of an academic identity, however, it is inappropriate because academic writers know to hedge their claims and opinions, as a means to show a healthy doubt and even academic modesty. From an academic identity perspective, then, hedging (which we cover in the practical session of class) reveals an academic identity in that it signifies qualities which we arguably associate with an academic: caution, reasoning and modesty for one's claims. To put it another way, a lack of hedging in one's writing can create the impression that the writer is naïve or overreaching, two attributes we would not associate with an academic. Therefore, this brief example hopefully illustrates the classroom discussion that can be generated when we move beyond a more basic (though undoubtedly useful) approach to essay analysis and combine it with a more theoretical approach.

I now discuss two relevant identities based on the work of Ivanic (1998), which I apply within my writing class.

The Autobiographical Self

This self is based on one's roots and forged from personal experience, roles, opinions, beliefs and interests – perhaps the most authentic self, albeit one made up of numerous voices. Ivanic references the identity inherent with a tall, deaf woman from a wealthy Nigerian family who lives in the northwest and who will have a core identity forged from all these various aspects of who she is. Her belief systems will be varied, but largely reflective of "people like her" (Ivanic, 1998, p. 182)

It should be pointed out, however, that there may indeed be instances when students may need, or feel a need, to withhold a more personal voice in their writing as it is believed to be at odds with the academic identity. I concede that at times there may be an identity clash, when one's personal voice does not 'fit' within the context of academic writing. In instances such as these, students may have to withdraw a personal identity in their writing in order to signal a more academic identity. While this might be a reality at

times, it can have implications for the student in terms of anger at believing there is a need to 'extinguish' their personal voice.

I reference an example of this in my class, which concerns a black British woman in the study of Ivanic. She was writing an essay on the role of black women in Europe for the sociology department and as such, her personal identity as a black European woman demanded to be heard. Specifically, she wanted to write from a voice of authority and personal experience by using the first person pronoun (singular). However, believing this to be inappropriate for her discipline, she used *they* instead. We need to remember that identities are not just those that the student writer is aware of as he/she writes; as Joseph (2004) states, identities are also ascribed to us by others, in this case, the markers of students' essays will make a judgement on the quality of the writing, based in part on their perception of the students in terms of how they present themselves. In this case, it could be argued that the marker would regard the pronoun *they* to be a symbol of an appropriate academic identity – namely, one that is detached and objective.

From the student's perspective, however, her personal voice, and identity, is not being allowed to be heard, an identity, however, that has a great deal to say on the matter. This can be frustrating for students, but it need not always be the case that the personal identity needs to 'get out of the way' to allow for the academic identity to take the spotlight. This in turn reveals the possibilities for self-hood that Ivanic references – namely, the ways in which students produce quality academic texts based on writing that is appropriate for their discipline and yet a writing style that also allows them to 'be themselves'. At this stage of writing, a student has adopted an academic identity within his/her essays, yet has not had to withdraw their personal voice in the process. Below are further examples of the ways in which students within my programme have revealed this particular self-hood.

Each of us has his or her own unique 'linguistic fingerprints'.

This sentence served as the opening to a student's essay. On a basic level, it acts as a good opening 'hook' (Wyrick, 2002), a way to engage the reader from the start. In this case, the student uses an interesting metaphor, one that I certainly had not come across before. From the perspective of identity, however, how might it be analysed?

As mentioned, the programme I teach on allows for a degree of more personal discussion, to include personal expression, so this already goes some way to allow for a more personal style of writing (when compared, say, with the hard sciences). Metaphors

are arguably more common in the Humanities, and perhaps less so the Social Sciences, as they help to create a mental picture of an otherwise abstract concept. It would appear, then, that this metaphor is not transgressing the programme's norms. From a personal perspective, however, the student's use of a metaphor (and figures of speech in general) may be a preferred way of writing. Regardless, the use of the quotation marks around the metaphor can be an orthographical means to signal personal identity. Ivanic (1998, p. 151) mentions this as she asserts that the use of quotation marks in this instance signals "this is mine, and it's partly me", thus a link to the autobiographical self.

The next example reveals how personal expression, and inherent identity, need not always be signalled in an overt manner in the first instance (e.g. *I believe that...*). The writing below is from a student who I interviewed, and who admitted that she had been told from a young age that her accent (West Midlands) and dialectal use (e.g. *I aren't*) were incompatible with being a university student. Despite such parental influence, she shows disagreement by using quotation marks:

During my childhood, and even to this day, there has always been a strong emphasis placed on how I 'should' speak by my immediate family.

Disagreeing with theory and the theorists themselves is a large part of the Social Sciences, to which my programme belongs. This specifically ties in with the self as author, which Ivanic references as the self which shows that the student is taking a stand on a particular issue. Indeed, writer stance is a relevant concept within academia (Hunston and Thompson, 2000; Hyland, 2002; Charles, 2003) and therefore, a valuable aspect of a student's writing identity. We might then ask, however, is the manner in which the student reveals her opinion appropriate? Considering that her opinion derives from such a personal (and potentially upsetting) perspective, it is entirely appropriate in that the student has withheld a more personal and emotional response (e.g. *I completely disagree...*) and instead, has offered a more subtle, though no less felt, opinion. The use of quotation marks has the rhetorical effect of revealing disagreement with the idea that there should only be one appropriate way to speak (in this case, Standard English delivered without a strong regional accent); the quotation marks signal irony. Therefore, the personal identity (a woman angered and upset at being told how to communicate) can peacefully co-exist with the academic identity (the need to engage with the literature partly by showing disagreement with it).

A final example concerns an American woman of Mexican descent, who discussed the issue of being raised by Mexican immigrant farm labourers and the hardships this caused.

Her use of italics serves to reinforce her personal identity – and opinion – one forged from growing up in poverty as a member of a minority who knows poverty in a way that others perhaps do not. Her means of revealing stance by using italics is a common method within academic writing to bring emphasis to one's point, even to the extent that authors feel free to add italics to a quotation (and thus signifying this emphatic addition with the term 'author's emphasis').

Unlike their Anglo-American counterparts, Mexican-American immigrant children *are* poor.

I concede that a personal identity need not be inherently personal in terms of the writing produced, such as writing which exhibits the use of first person pronouns, figures of speech perhaps and writing that incorporates (assuming it is not proscribed) personal experiences and viewpoints. Likewise, using first person need not always be tied to personal expression in the first instance, such as *I have divided the results into three sections*. However, we cannot discount the influence of upbringing and the myriad other socio-cultural factors in terms of their contributions to our sense of who we are. These multiple factors lead to one's *habitus* (see Bourdieu, 1977b), seen essentially by an individual's dispositions and belief systems. Indeed, how our personal identity contributes to how we write and how the way we write reveals our personal identity may very often be below the level of our cognitive radar, as it were. Nonetheless, by introducing students to the concept of identity within the writing they produce and encouraging them to analyse essays based on this construct means that students can consider academic writing from a whole new perspective.

As mentioned, the approach I take is not focused merely on analysing students' texts as a guide to how to write – this is indeed nothing new perhaps. Rather, by starting with the concept of identity, both personal and academic, as well as the background knowledge of the discipline, students are enabled to analyse texts from a more concrete perspective. Furthermore, analysing text samples based on identity issues allows for much more critical thinking; this is a skill which students must develop, but one that is arguably difficult to teach. Though I know of no other university, or department, which takes this essentially hybrid approach within academic writing courses, it would perhaps be presumptuous to assume I am the only teacher who uses this method. Arguably, this might be an approach that can be applied across disciplines and across universities, to allow not only for academic writing instruction, but discipline-specific academic writing instruction, using identity as a common factor in university writing, from Chemistry to Literature.

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The Flamingo-model: a twin-track approach on language policy for native speakers to enhance first year students' academic success

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Abstract

Artevelde University College Ghent started with language coaching for native speakers in 2006. After a language screening of all first-year students, a relationship between their language proficiency and academic success became apparent. In an effort to raise retention rates and academic success, Artevelde University College Ghent started to focus on language policy. Eight years later, this language policy focusses on both screening and remedial teaching as well as on continuing professional development and prevention, on both students and staff, on both productive (speaking/writing) and receptive language skills (reading/listening) and on both a college-wide and a degree programme-specific approach. Part of its sustainable character is the cooperation with student-teachers and a strong form of continual professional development.

Article

In the first section of this article we look at the relationship between (native) language proficiency and study success. Second, we focus on the language policy model of Artevelde University College, Ghent. With this model the college aims to raise teaching levels, retention rates, academic success and language skills. We will zoom in on four shifts that have occurred over the last eight years. Two of those shifts will be discussed more in depth. We end with an overall conclusion.

In Flanders, language policy for Dutch native speakers is not unusual in higher education. Language is seen as both a lever and a threshold for students. Language skills are a vehicle for students to acquire knowledge (reading course texts, listening to lectures, reading slides, asking questions...) and prove they have done so (by giving oral presentations, writing down answers, reading and listening to questions...). By enhancing their language skills, degree programmes aim to raise retention rates and to deliver more and better skilled professionals.

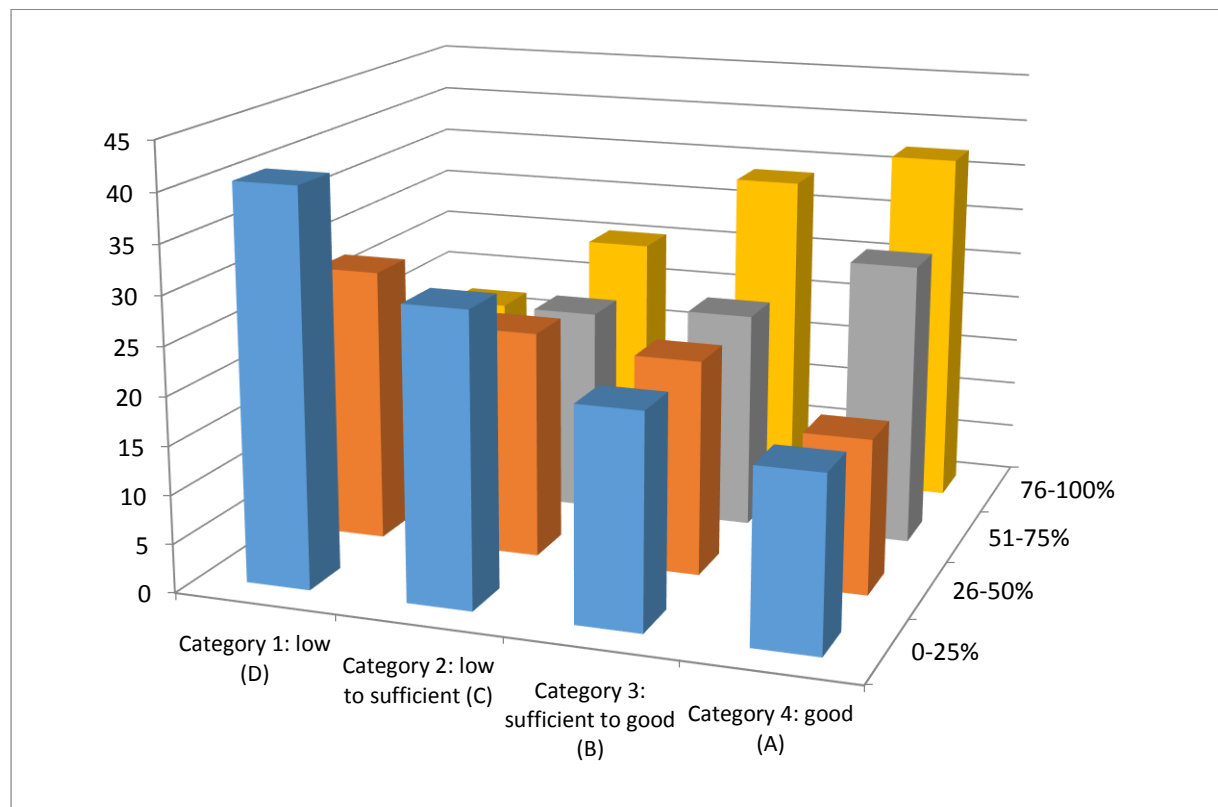
Are academic success and language proficiency related?

Artevelde University College Ghent first focused on language coaching in 2006. The college has about 13,000 students in diverse bachelor degree programmes, ranging from Midwifery to Journalism to Graphic design and teaches predominantly in Dutch, barring one bachelor programme that started in 2014 and some courses for Erasmus students. By screening all incoming students (around 3,000 a year) with a validated test, the level of their language skills was determined. In 2011 the results of the language test were compared with the academic success of the first semester of the first year. The graph below illustrates the results (Spittaels and Vrijders 2011).

Legend: X-axis: score on the language test (D (low) to A (good))

Y-axis: number of students in percentages

Z-axis: number of credits attained in percentages



	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
Category 1: low (D)	40,5	28,3	14,1	17
Category 2: low to sufficient (C)	29,9	23,4	21,4	25,3
Category 3: sufficient to good (B)	21,8	22,1	22,6	33,6
Category 4: good (A)	17,7	15,9	29,2	37,2

Graph and Table 1: Relationship between academic success and language screening Test je Taal

Out of the students who scored the lowest grade on the language test (D), nearly 70 percent did not pass for half of the subjects (0-25% + 26-50%). More than 40 percent failed at least three quarters of their subjects (0-25%). Students who did well on the language test (A), on the other hand, did a lot better. 37 percent succeeded for more than 75% of the courses taken. Nearly 70 percent obtained half of all the credits enlisted. A similar study (De Wachter et al. 2013) confirmed these findings. They found a significant correlation ($p < 0.0001$) of 0.37. Although the correlation is significant, it is not that strong, let alone predominant. They conclude that language is a necessary but not an exclusive criterion for academic success.

The correlation found works best for students with weak language proficiency. This implies that a language test can be used to select language-weak students and help them attain the necessary success, whereas a good score is no guarantee for successful exams. By raising the language level of this lower group, therefore not the lowest group, a real difference in academic success can be made. The predictive value for academic success does not only apply to language-oriented study programmes (e.g. bachelor of speech therapy, office management, journalism etc.) but also to non-language bachelor programmes (e.g. bachelor of midwifery, social work, nursing etc.). This suggests that focusing on the language policy is useful regardless of the nature of the study programme, promoting language as an overall important lever for academic success.

The Flamingo Model: language policy with two feet on the ground

The approach of Artevelde University College Ghent on language policy has strongly evolved over the past eight years. At first the approach was uniform for the entire college, it was student-centered, and focused in particular on screening and extra-curricular remediation of speaking and writing skills. In the meantime, language policy

has shifted towards a **twin-track approach** along four strategic lines. The shifts are the following:

1. Focus on both screening/remedial teaching and continuing professional development/prevention.
2. Focus on both students and staff.
3. Focus on both productive (speaking/writing) and receptive language skills (reading/listening).
4. Focus on both college-wide and programme-specific approach.

Each of these shifts was important and helped to broaden the language policy model. Due to these shifts, language coaching evolved to a more sustainable form with both feet firmly on the ground. Hence, the Flamingo-model. Each shift is presented in more detail below.

1. Focus on both screening/remedial teaching and continuing professional development/prevention.

First, students were screened to determine their language proficiency. Language-weak students could enlist for one or more remedial sessions to improve these skills.

Increasingly, the college moved towards prevention of poor language production and continuing professional development and now offers both. Students receive tools at the beginning of each year with criteria for good papers and emails. Workshops and training for teaching staff help them improve their teaching methods by paying attention to how they teach and the language they use.

2. Students & staff

The second shift is the involvement of (academic) staff, whereas language policy used to be only student-centered. To cope with the diversity in class and improve their own teaching, teaching staff got increasingly involved. Artevelde University College Ghent started with Language Developmental Teaching (*Taalontwikkelen Lesgeven* – see also Alladin and Van der Westen 2009, Bonne, de Moor, Van Hoyweghen and Vrijders 2014 and Van den Branden 2006). The didactic method is related to content and language integrated learning but focuses on native speakers in their native tongue, in this case Dutch. The method looks at how teaching staff use language while teaching, in order to improve the transfer of both knowledge and language skills.

3. Productive & receptive language skills

The third shift encompassed receptive skills in language policy. As problems with writing and speaking are easily detected, Artevelde University College Ghent started with

offering remedial teaching for these productive skills. More recently, reading and listening received proper attention. The language test has been adapted to test reading more proficiently. Next to that, research conducted on listening focused on teaching tips and a quick-chart for students on how to improve and prolong attention.

4. College-wide & programme-specific approach

A final shift is from a college-wide approach to a degree programme-specific approach. A central policy can be translated to fit the degree programme's needs: e.g. a degree programme like Nursing will focus more on speaking, whereas Communication Management would want to focus more on writing.

The figure below is made up of these shifts. It includes both elements of each shift and serves as a compass for the degree programmes. A fifth shift – Dutch to English – was left out of this presentation. As more degree programmes offer parts of their curriculum or the entire curriculum in English, a focus on English has been added to the language policy of Artevelde University College Ghent.



Graph 2: Language policy compass (Vrijders and Bonne 2013)

In (good) practice

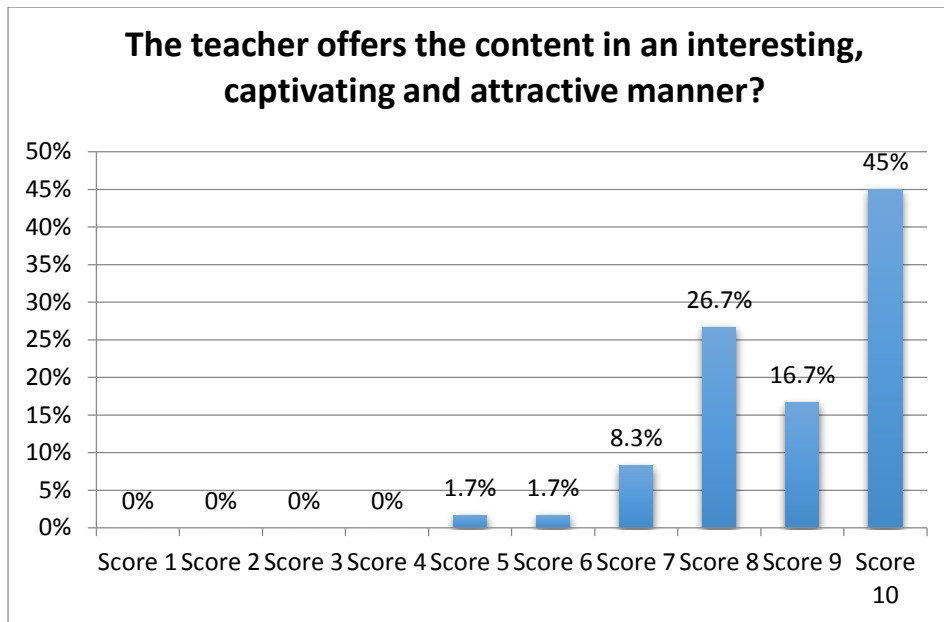
In order to illustrate the language policy of Artevelde University College, two good practices are described below.

1. Remedial teaching by third year students of teacher training

Artevelde University College Ghent still offers language workshops as remedial teaching. These workshops take place each semester and consist of four one-and-a-half-hour sessions. There are four workshops on offer: summarizing, spelling, pronunciation and academic writing. They are taught by student-teachers.

All of the workshops are content-based. The students participating are asked to provide and work with personal material in order to work on their own personal learning points. Students taking the workshop academic writing for example are asked to bring a new or improved text (email, paper, assignment...) every week. A session normally consists of two parts. In the first part the student-teacher lists errors and approaches to improve based on the texts of the students. In the second part students get time and a computer to edit their text. During the editing there is room for questions and to receive advice from the student-teacher.

All of these remedial sessions are taught by student-teachers of teacher training programmes. This is a conscious, albeit not obvious choice. Critics of this approach say working with students provides too little continuity and quality in the teaching. It is too intense to coach the students, screen their material, make a schedule, etcetera. Nevertheless, the student-teachers got an average satisfaction score of students (8.9/10) higher than the average overall score of 8.4/10 (Vrijders, J., 2009, Goethals, D. & Vrijders, J., 2010). Students appreciate their approach, feel more understood, ask more questions and have more interaction. Provided a good organization, the methodology is positive and essential for the success of these remedial teaching workshops.

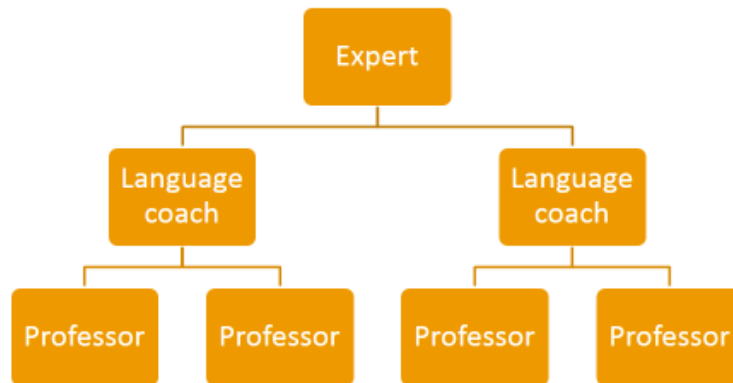


Graph 3: The teacher offers the content in an interesting, captivating and attractive manner (Goethals and Vrijders 2010), percentage of students that agreed with this statement (10=fully, 1= not at all).

2. Sustainable continual professional development

In 2012 Artevelde University College Ghent started a cooperation on Language Developmental Teaching. The cooperation involved the teacher training programmes and language policy officers of two university colleges. They created a didactic tool explaining the principles of the didactic method and exemplifying them with original class footage. In 2013 these principles were fitted to higher education and a new didactic tool was made. To put these principles to the test, the language policy officers of Artevelde University College Ghent started a programme of continuous professional development in the degree programmes Bachelor in Nursing. During one semester a language expert coached two 'language coaches' who each coached two professors (teaching staff).

Program stucture



Graph 4: Structure of continual professional development programme

The professors were introduced to the didactic method and helped to implement it in their lessons. The programme was quite intensive with at least two and often more contact hours per week: helping to prepare lessons, lesson observations, feedback...

This programme of continual professional development illustrates the evolution towards a more sustainable form of language coaching. Van den Branden (2013) works with a collection of six criteria for sustainable professional development. All six criteria were met in this programme.

1. **Address a real problem:** the programme was first rolled out in the Bachelor of Nursing. The programme has the most language-weak students. Professors were increasingly noticing language-related problems, but did not know how to address these issues. They also felt the level of education was declining.
2. **Have multiple moments:** the programme was not limited to a single session of two hours. Instead, professors met on a weekly basis with their coaches who either helped to prepare a lesson, observed a lesson or provided feedback. Sometimes special feedback moments were planned, sometimes this happened via email. During the entire programme more than 15 hours were one-on-one contact moments.
3. **Contain these three components**
 - a. **Raising awareness:** during the semester before the programme, the language policy officer met the entire team of the degree programme two times. First, the entire team of professors was given a one-hour lecture on Language Developmental Teaching. Second, the team were walked

through the programme and there was room for Q&A. In the end, five volunteers came forward.

- b. **Theoretical framework:** the entire programme was based on the didactic principles of Language Developmental Teaching. These principles were fitted to higher education. For future programmes, a new didactic tool will be presented in October 2014. During the programme, the coaches could refer to different checklists and a small theory booklet.
 - c. **Support during implementation and integration:** The support during implementation and integration most contributed to the success of the programme. Professors got feedback on what they tried, what made them successful, why they failed and how they could improve. It not only raised the quality of their teaching, but also their motivation and their pleasure when teaching.
4. **Organise intervision/peer feedback:** working with a group of professors created a special dynamic. They went to see each other to share experiences (good and bad), help one another... It triggered other, non-participating colleagues to pay attention to and experiment with the didactic method. Participants said it created a new dynamic in the degree programme.
 5. **Support of colleagues and superiors:** in order to fully engage in a programme as intensive as this, you need the understanding (at least) and support of your colleagues and superiors. It motivates participants and their extra effort is not perceived as useless by colleagues. Thanks to the Dean we were able to brief the entire team before, during and after the programme. This kept them informed and involved. The Dean even granted some free hours to the professors involved in the programme. This validated their efforts and showed appreciation.
 6. **Make the expert obsolete:** The programme should render the expert obsolete. The structure flowchart above illustrates our stepped approach with an expert coaching two language coaches coaching two professors. The expert taught our coaches how to fill her position. The language coaches are now experts and can move to other degree programmes.

Conclusion

After eight years of evolution and evaluation, language policy has changed a lot at a policy level and in practice. By starting with screening students, Artevelde University College Ghent was able to check entry levels of language proficiency and relate these with academic success. The results triggered 'first aid' solutions like remedial teaching, which are still being offered. Yet, a more in-depth approach evolved over the past eight years focusing more on preventing problems and integrating language coaching and

development in the curriculum. Working with a new didactic method offered in an accessible tool, Artevelde University College Ghent aims to involve more degree programmes to lift teaching levels, retention rates, academic success and language skills.

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Students as Peer Mentors: The Value of Mentors and Mentees in Year Zero, Art and Design

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“Social Integration and Social Support are closely linked and are vital to the University experience. Successful integration in both social and academic areas reduces the likelihood of student withdrawal” (Tinto, 1975).

Therefore, a formalised approach to social interaction could be seen to be required at course level. Peer support groups, mentors, icebreakers and staff guidance are all essential approaches. The institution must also recognise its responsibility to provide additional and specialised support to students, and this can be enhanced with the involvement of students as peer mentors.

For the purposes of this case study, the mentor and mentee roles are both taken on by students at Belfast School of Art. It may be worth noting the role of mentoring of year One and year Zero students within the art and design context, where learning and teaching can differ from that of the traditional lecture/ seminar structure. Art and design courses are historically delivered within studios and workshops, alongside lectures and seminars. Students may work in the same spaces as other year groups and spend much of their time within the studio environment. This study will discuss the definitions of peer mentor in the context of student to student, with particular emphasis on the peer mentor program which ran in 2009, 2011 and for the year 2013/14.

The project was initiated in response to attendance at the International Conference on the First Year Experience, organised by the University of South Carolina, and held at University College Dublin, through the award of a STAR bursary. The following year, mentors were recruited from BDes Art & Design (Foundation Year for Specialist Degrees), for the introduction of a peer mentor program in the following academic year of the course. The project was piloted with the aim of providing non-academic support to all students in the Year Zero cohort. This was in contrast to other mentor programs which target struggling or ‘at risk’ students. It was through other examples of similar programs discussed at the conference that the value of all students becoming mentees became evident. No student can be seen as being ‘singled-out’, and all students on the course were assigned a mentor.

The Industrial Society (1995) defines mentoring as:

“A confidential, one-to-one relationship in which an individual uses a more experienced, usually more senior person as a sounding board and for guidance. It is a protected, non-judgemental relationship...”

The above quote provides an important clue as to what mentoring can be. The issue of confidentiality is a key factor in the success of the mentoring arrangement. There must be trust between mentor and mentee, in order for the mentee to share fears and experiences. ‘More experienced, usually more senior’, is not necessarily relevant in this case study. The mentor is a first or second year student to a mentee, who may be a year zero or year one student (depending on the course). They are not considered senior, but rather have more experience of the course, having gone through the program the year before. This prior knowledge is intended as key in showing empathy and understanding of the particular course specific issues that the mentee may be experiencing. Evidence of experience has proven more beneficial than seniority.

Mentors must also act as a sounding board, being able to listen in a non-judgemental way. During a task in the mentor training sessions, some students were unsure as to the definition of ‘sounding board’, but through discussion, it became clear that mentees should feel confident and comfortable in having opinions about the course without feeling judged. Time to communicate must also be protected and regular. This builds up a relationship, trust, and is beneficial to both mentor and mentee. Mentors were asked to commit one hour per week to making contact with mentees, usually via email, with face to face meetings arranged at least twice in the semester.

Another definition of mentoring can be seen as:

“Mentoring involves primarily listening with empathy, sharing experiences and learning (usually mutually), professional friendship, developing insight through reflection, being a sounding board, encouraging” (Gardiner, 1998).

This appears similar to the first quote, but with the addition of and focus on mutuality and professional friendship. This leans more heavily toward the issues concerned with peer mentoring among students in art and design. Mutuality is the idea that both mentor and mentee will gain from the experience. Hay (1997, 1999) argues that mentoring can be described as a developmental alliance, where: “a relationship between equals in which one or more of those involved is enabled to increase awareness...and initiate action to develop themselves.” It is consistently found that the mentors involved in the program, who must volunteer for the role, do so in order to benefit themselves as well

as through altruistic motives to help another student. Benefits to mentors are seen as 'it will add another line to my CV', 'I learned a lot more about what the University is about', and 'met new people, made new friends'.

Aims of the program:

In this particular mentor program, it was specified that the support provided by the mentor is social rather than academic.

- Focus on the social not academic mentoring
- Positive social interaction
- Orientate new students
- Encourage mentors in their own development
- Impact positively on retention rates
- Aid transition into university
- Aid students, both mentors and mentees, gain confidence
- Aid students' engagement with the University

This is in contrast to other mentor programs, which target 'at risk' or struggling students, therefore no student can be seen as being 'singled-out'. A decision was made that all students be assigned a mentor. This approach is taken at The University of South Australia's 'You're not on your own', large scale, multi-campus, first-year, peer mentoring program. All first year students are automatically assigned a mentor who is responsible for ten to fifteen mentees.

Process

Usually, potential mentors are recruited from the previous year's cohort. Students were required to apply for the role through a written statement outlining their suitability for the role. In the initial pilot project ten mentors were selected for one hundred and thirty six mentees (2009/10), with each mentor having responsibility for thirteen or fourteen mentees. In the second cycle, twelve mentors were selected for one hundred and thirty eight mentees (2011/12). In the most recent program, the number of mentors/ mentees has dropped significantly as it is running within a different course, BA Hons Contemporary Applied Arts. The student cohort is much smaller, and students traditionally have already undertaken a foundation program or similar before entering first year. This must be highlighted as possible food for thought. When a single member of staff initiates and takes responsibility for such an initiative, it must move with them if they move degree program.

Mentor recruitment occurred in March/ April of the previous academic year with training provided in April and August. Mentees were contacted prior to induction or Week Zero,

with the aim being to improve enrolment conversion from application to actual enrolment on the course. The School had found that some students accept and confirm their place through the UCAS system, but do not actually enrol. To counter this, the aim of pre-enrolment contact by mentors is for new students to feel 'part of the University' before entering the campus.

Both mentor and mentee must take responsibility in this process, and 'buy in'. There are expectations placed on both parties.

Expectations

Expectations of the mentor:

- Minimum requirement of one hour per week invested
- Program for semester one only
- Organise a face to face meeting at the beginning and mid semester
- Contact with mentee via consistent weekly emails
- Support for mentors provided by member of staff
- Regular contact from staff to chart progress and deal with issues as they arise
- Role is not one of counsellor or tutor

Expectations of the mentee:

- To be automatically assigned a mentor
- Receive first contact prior to enrolment
- Receive a weekly email from mentor
- Not to be obliged to meet their mentor
- Not to be obliged to respond to emails
- Aim to aid adjustment to university life
- Opportunity to meet with other mentees in mentor group
- Experience of a student who has 'been through it'
- Knowledge that 'someone is there'

This last point is key. Many mentees responded that although they did not respond to the regular emails, or meet with their mentor, they felt supported knowing that 'someone was there', making regular contact and were 'there if needed'.

Training

Full mentor training is provided. This includes workshops from Student Support, Students Union, and practical training sessions on what is expected from the role. By the end of the sessions, students understand what mentoring is, but also what it is not. A

particular activity focuses on a range of descriptive words and students are asked to identify those words they believe to be central to the mentoring process, those that they may be concerned about or that they believe are definitely not included in the mentor role. This is a valuable discussion point and helps tease out the defined role within the particular mentor program.

Students should understand what their role as mentor is, and how it differs from academic tutor or counsellor. They will also be aware of the details of the mentor program and how it works within the context of the specific undergraduate program. Students will also be aware of the skills required of a good mentor, and the departments and organisations within the University, their roles and the appropriate places to signpost mentees. It is at this point that any student may opt out of the program, now they know what is involved.

Students are made aware that they will also have a mentor in the form of the member of staff responsible for the program. Support for mentors was an important factor in the planning of the project, with the member of staff maintaining regular contact with mentors to chart progress and deal with any issues as they arise.

In the second cycle of the program, students were again recruited in the previous academic year. They had been mentees and had experienced the program's positive aspects, and were in a position to recognise the benefits.

Lessons Learnt

The mentors felt it was a very positive experience and they gained confidence in their ability to communicate and deal with issues. They felt they gained a greater knowledge of the University and 'how it worked'. It was such a positive experience that some mentors wished to continue the role in the following year. Unfortunately, a minority of mentors did not fulfil the required commitment of one hour per week, and regular email contact, with some mentees never meeting their mentors. It was also difficult to achieve a gender balance in mentors/ mentees, but this can depend on the make up of the cohort.

Mentees agreed that being part of the program was a positive experience. They had the opportunity to meet other students, and make new friends within quite a daunting University experience. Mentees reported finding some aspects of the course difficult, but it helped to discuss their experience with the mentor. Fortunately, some mentees fully embraced the email contact and met with mentors on a regular basis.

In the pilot project, mentors were able to discuss undergraduate courses with mentees (Year Zero students), give tours, and introduce them to studios and workshops. This also helped progression from Year Zero to Year One. Unfortunately, there was a range of experiences for mentees, some of whom may not have received regular contact. Many mentees had an extremely positive experience, enabling a greater sense of belonging and understanding of their particular course and the University. They may have received more than a weekly email, and met with mentors regularly on an informal basis. Some mentees reported getting sporadic contact with mentors. This could have been due to the selection of unsuitable mentors, but it has been reported that mentors did 'lose heart', when mentees did not reply to any email contact.

Food for thought

One of the aims of the project was to increase rates of retention. It can be difficult to define the impact on retention, as several other factors are involved. However, the course attrition rate fell below the Faculty target:

2008/09: 12.5%

2010/11: 8.2%

2011/12: 10.1%

A peer mentor program has many benefits to all the students involved and may have a wider reach than just semester one of a course. It must be noted that it is an extra workload for the member of staff responsible, perhaps 'buy in' from other members of the course team would be beneficial. The selection of mentors can be crucial to the impact of the program, with those volunteering being put through a vetting process, and aiming to retain a gender balance where possible.

It can be a very positive experience for both mentors and mentees, and provides a formalised support network for the student experience. It builds confidence on both sides and can aid transition into University. The training increases knowledge of, and a sense of 'belonging' to the University. The introduction of a peer mentor program, with initial mentor/ mentee contact occurring prior to enrolment and induction can increase conversion at enrolment, enhance a sense of belonging, and have a positive impact on retention.

“When such practices are introduced in the initial stages of a course, students are more likely to settle down, be satisfied with their experience, and benefit socially

and academically. They will also feel less isolated, and less likely to withdraw.”
(Bingham, Daniels, 1998)

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Coordinating Change

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Abstract

This paper reports on the process of diversifying assessment of the 'History and Theory of Architecture' module at Level 1 in the undergraduate Architecture course at the University of Lincoln, UK. Replacing essays (the traditional form of assessment for theoretical subjects in our school) with other types of assignments was a strategic response to: the internationalisation of the course, a variety of student backgrounds, mixture of abilities and a statistically higher incidence of dyslexia than in other subjects. In this context, written assignments represent a deficit model of assessment; the solution was to make assessments less dependent on language and the module more immersive and participatory, with assignments becoming episodes of active learning. The change in assessment was also an opportunity to re-orient theoretical submissions to become more relevant to the architectural profession. The paper details the reasons and scope of the modifications, describes methods used, within the constraints currently placed on Higher Education in general and Schools of Architecture in particular, and comments on the consequences of these changes for students and academics, from the author's point of view, as module coordinator.

Traditional Architectural Education

The purpose of architectural education is learning to design; arguably, *design* is the fundamental threshold concept within the discipline. Threshold concepts are more easily identifiable within areas where the body of knowledge can be readily ascertained (mathematics, physics, medicine), but the term *ways of thinking and practicing* is also considered to be 'a crucial threshold function in leading to a transformed understanding' (Meyer and Land 2011:9). John Soane (1753-1837), an architect of great ingenuity, believed that architecture is 'an Art purely of Invention and Invention is the most painful and the most difficult exercise of the human mind' (Soane 1929:56). However, the mind needs educating before being required to perform any such exercise. 'The difference between education and training is the development of the mind so that practitioners do not simply follow rules but decide wisely among a variety of ways' (Fish 1996 cited in Ryan 2001). Reflecting on how one learns to design, within the framework provided by Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001 in Atherton 2011), it becomes apparent that a student in architecture has to start *creating* while *understanding*. This simultaneous 'leap', in understanding and starting to function as a

designer, is the 'quicksilver flash of insight' which marks a transformed world view (Palmer 2001:4 cited in Meyer and Land 2011), a necessary metamorphosis in a student. An added difficulty in architecture is that the ability to think conceptually is not sufficient, unlike in other artistic milieus. Students with an art background find the incipient stages of a project easy, as this is the period of speculative investigation, which aims to teach how to 'attack a problem with a set of contrivances foregrounding not the solution, but the poetic tropes applied to the solution' (Deamer 2005). Students without such training often struggle longer in this first phase. The rationality of the next stage, however, building something - physically or virtually - comes more naturally, as it is easier to learn and therefore it is easier to teach. That is why the Beaux Arts required an impeccable drawing technique of classical ornamentation and the Bauhaus taught practical skills in specific workshops: teaching "mechanical" skills associated with the profession was seen as a gateway into teaching how to *design*.

The defining environment for European and North American architectural education, the studio, has been derived from the pedagogical "algorithm" employed in L'École des Beaux Arts in Paris in the nineteenth century and the apprentice system practiced at the Bauhaus, Dessau, in the 1930s (Lackney 1999:2). 'The Beaux Arts teaching system relied heavily on brilliant teachers and learning-by-doing' while solving a design problem; crucially it introduced "crits", a review method still used in architecture schools. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Bauhaus changed the attitude to design, considering that it 'was neither an intellectual nor a material affair, but simply an integral part of modern concepts of mass production and modern technology' (Lackney 1999:3); students had to acquire technical skills and undergo aesthetic training to employ those skills. Bauhaus challenged the status architecture had within the world of design (architecture was seen as fundamentally no different than product design, for instance), but the studio based teaching and learning model remained unaltered.

However, in the last ten years, architectural education has been under a lot of pressure to change; a paper on what academics write about in the disciplines of Art, Design and Architecture (de la Harpe and Peterson 2008) identified the most concerning topics as the studio reform and art/design thinking. The educational space (intellectual and physical) represented by studio has been irreversibly eroded in the years I have been teaching. The newly introduced KIS (Key Information Set) forced all programmes to assess the number of contact hours: 'most institutions are having some issues, and the really substantial issue seems to be around contact hours: what they mean and how you collect the information and make it auditable, from the point of view of the reliability, transparency and accessibility' (Hitchcock 2012). Studio teaching could be seen as

inefficient: numerous contact hours, spent in one to one dialogues, punctuated by frequent intermediate (formative) day-long crits; studio teaching is also demanding in terms of accommodation (space, wall area, furniture), at times used day and night. What is difficult to quantify, or replace for that matter, is the qualitative dimension of the teaching and learning experience, especially in the first year when the 'transformative leap' ideally should start taking place.

The reality is that while seven years ago, a student was given as much time as needed, today a studio session assumes ten minutes contact time per student - it has become a consultation. Academics are caught between the "investment-cost" paradigm shift affecting higher education - changes in funding means that universities are 'operated from an economic rationalist platform' (Lawrence 2001:5) – and the pressure exerted by validating bodies, quality assurance agencies, various surveys, but also by their moral responsibility as teachers, to equip students with at least a "professional survival kit". Studies show (McInnis 2000 in Lawrence 2001) 'increasing casualization of staff involved in first year teaching'.

First year curriculum

For the first year architecture students, project based work, with which studio teaching is concerned, can be difficult to engage with; it requires a degree of autonomy they might not be accustomed or comfortable with, especially in an unfamiliar learning environment. In schools, teaching is generally teacher centred, in effect *problem solving* (Savin-Baden 2010), while any design exercise is *problem based*: it requires students to have 'a sound understanding of the knowledge they have researched and explored, and an ability to critique information', to involve life experience, engage *with* complexity and see and manage ambiguity (Savin-Baden 2010). Devising the curriculum for this formative and transformative period is a dilemma, as tutors try to find a balance between prior experience and new knowledge, conceptual and formal dexterity, material manipulation and cultural awareness, urban context and functional necessities and so on. Deamer (2005) considers that it is the 'entire net of relationships of the studio teaching – the critic, the program, the object (project) and the student' which determines if the course will produce 'a person interested in contributing to civic life via her/his skills as an architect', an 'architectural citizen'.

Lawrence (2001) talks about the change in nature and purpose of higher education due to 'elite – mass' and 'investment – cost' paradigm shifts. The effect is felt routinely in class, affecting didactic approaches; however, the aim to produce 'architectural citizens' is not merely a mirage chased by idealistic pedagogues. As the professional accrediting

body for architecture schools, the *Royal Institute of British Architects* (RIBA) responds to pressure from practitioners who feel that the *actual* vocational education happens in the office, a state of affairs unsustainable in a recession. Statistics show that 'only 30% of those embarking on a first degree in Architecture eventually succeed at Part 3'² (Robinson 2013). The reasons are multiple, some can be extrapolated or inferred from the RIBA's statistical data (RIBA 2012), but lack of relevant skills in a competitive and over-populated profession would undoubtedly be one of them.

The *History and Theory* module I coordinate represents the first year humanities unit and covers significant architectural styles in chronological order, from ancient Greece to contemporary architecture; the "Theory" aspect is a by-product of the "History" lectures. Delivered in two weekly lectures by various academics, as a necessary introduction to cultural, historic, philosophical context to the profession, the module is shared by three programmes: Architecture, Interior Architecture Design (IAD) and Design for Exhibitions and Museums (DEM). When the teaching was affected by staff changes two years ago, it created the opportunity to evaluate what, why and how we taught within the module. Lengthy discussions allowed the rare intellectual space to debate the aim and direction of the humanities modules, it highlighted the potential for improvement of teaching and assessment and it increased individual awareness of how one's discrete contribution relates to the subject continuum. Gibbs (2010:6) confirms that 'the extent to which teaching is valued, talked about and developed' is one of the 'process variables' ('what goes on while students learn') that is difficult to quantify, but seems to surface in 'studies of the characteristics of institutions and departments that have been found to be outstanding in terms of valid dimensions of educational quality' (such as Oxford University and the Open University).

The HEA report regarding NSS findings in design disciplines in 2012 concludes that the most important factor affecting student satisfaction is the quality of learning and teaching, followed by personal development, organisation and management, academic support, assessment and feedback with learning resources being last (interestingly, only 71% of these variables account for student satisfaction, suggesting that there are other contributing factors not measured by the survey...). The quality of teaching is one aspect an academic can control, in a discrete measure; coordination roles extend this influence to the scope, the breadth, and how profound and relevant learning is. In our field, the aim is to create 'architectural citizens',

² qualify, become chartered architects: **RIBA Part 1** = BArch, **RIBA Part 2** = MArch, **RIBA Part 3** = work experience + exam

which does not mean necessarily qualified professionals, but individuals with a heightened awareness and discernment, with work-life experiences and options, knowledgeable or unafraid of knowledge, capable of finding and sifting through it. The *History and Theory* module is a good platform to start this attitude development: the subject itself is appealing and while it would be suitable for any art related discipline, for architects and designers it can have a focused approach. It was clear from the beginning of my involvement that the content was not to change (although it could be enriched), but what could be altered was the emphasis we placed on what was worth knowing and why. The module could facilitate this shift through the way it was assessed, in terms of types of assessment and assessment criteria.

Assessment of *History and Theory of Architecture*

The humanities represent one of main modules at levels 1, 2 and 3 in the BArch course, but they do second studio work, a fact reflected in the marks' weighting. Humanities subjects have been traditionally graded exclusively through essays, considered to be 'the most useful way of assessing deep learning' (Brown, Bull and Pendelbury 1997: 59). A couple of years ago however, two out of the three assignments for the *History and Theory* module became "*visual research assignment*" and "*group exhibition assignment*", leaving only one end-of-year essay. These changes were in response to our student intake:

- students arrive with varied abilities, one of them being academic writing. Pickford and Brown (2006) commented that: 'with approaching 50% of the 18-30 population in higher education, it should not surprise us that a significant proportion of our students [do not have] well developed skills relating to academic reading' or writing; Gee goes further by emphasising that higher education represents an unfamiliar world which favours certain 'ways of writing, knowing and valuing' (Gee 1990 cited in Beasley 1997:182) to which students need to adjust;
- in creative arts and design there is a high proportion of dyslexic students - 5.59%, compared with an overall 1.97% in the undergraduate student population (James 2003);
- new entrants have a variety of educational and cultural backgrounds: only 64% of the year one intake come via UCAS, the rest are mature students, from vocational courses, outside the UK etc; the foreign students account for 28% in an upward trend - the biggest increase has been of students from outside the EU,

although Europe is still the largest single source of new entrants at 55% followed by Asia at 33% (RIBA 2012:7).

These factors become immediately apparent when marking essays, much more than in studio. By focusing on a different set of skills with every *History and Theory* submission, a Western-centric module could become more accessible and would make assessment fairer. Pluralism in assessment resonates with The New London Group's *multiliteracy* paradigm, which encourages the usage of 'modes of representation much broader than language alone', intended to replace traditional language-based academic discourses (The New London Group 1996). Since adequate time cannot be given to prepare our diverse students to function in the new 'culture' universities represent, we have to allow their background to support this transition without penalising the "un-matchingness": differences are not deficiencies. Empowering students to use aptitudes, skills, interests that made them enrol in the first place, should promote engagement as a vital aspect of retention, especially in their first semester in tertiary education.

The module descriptor for *History and Theory* was generous in terms of how the submissions could be structured; thus, it presented the opportunity not only to diversify assessment but at the same time associate it with studio teaching. In consequence, the rewritten briefs for the new assignments manifested a clear dual purpose: to answer module specific requirements (assess knowledge of history and theory of architecture), but also teach or rehearse skills usually employed in studio (sketching, organisation of graphical information on page, development of explicit and succinct title blocks, architectural annotation, construction of physical models, design with style constraints, use of light, colour and texture to convey meaning and so on). New feedback forms were devised to make the dual purpose of the assignments transparent to students, with sets of criteria relevant to theoretical knowledge *and* graphical presentation. This was also a way to free the module from its perceived stagnation in a world of irrelevance to current architectural practice. The first two assignments were also intended to be events and work to be displayed in exhibitions, despite spatial constraints. Exhibitions can be a debriefing time and space, where students bond after a shared, often demanding experience. The perusing of all work represents implicit but informal peer review and, in the first year especially, a way of evaluating one's ranking in the new "pack".

Changes and Consequences

The first new assignment consisted of six hand drawings: three of historic buildings in Lincoln and three buildings of similar styles from books (Figure 1). Pedagogically, the first assignment was a conscious decision to re-contextualise theory because 'human

knowledge is initially developed not as "general and abstract," but as embedded in social, cultural and material contexts' (The New London Group 1996). The scope of the assignment had been alluded to in the introduction lecture at the beginning of the year, with the intention of making students aware of their immediate built environment as Lincoln, with its Roman remains, it allows history of architecture lectures to become relevant quite early in the year (followed by good examples of Romanesque, Gothic, neo-classical and Gothic revival architecture). Methodologically, the brief was intended to be what Prince and Felder (2006) define as 'structured inquiry learning' (where students are given a problem with clear guidelines of how to solve it) and also an attempt to employ 'learning-cycle based instruction' (Prince and Felder 2006:7). The emphasis in the first two assignments was on the process of learning, influenced by experiential learning theories (Kolb 1984): the act of walking around the city with a sketch book or camera in hand, while mentally trying to sort and make sense of the lectures was vital as a first step into the cycle of learning. To some extent, the accuracy of the students' conclusions was secondary, albeit important. Echoing Piaget's stance that 'learning is an emergent process whose outcomes represent only historical record, not knowledge of the future' (Kolb 1984:26), the first assignment's aim was to engage students and thus enable them to start assuming responsibility for their instruction.

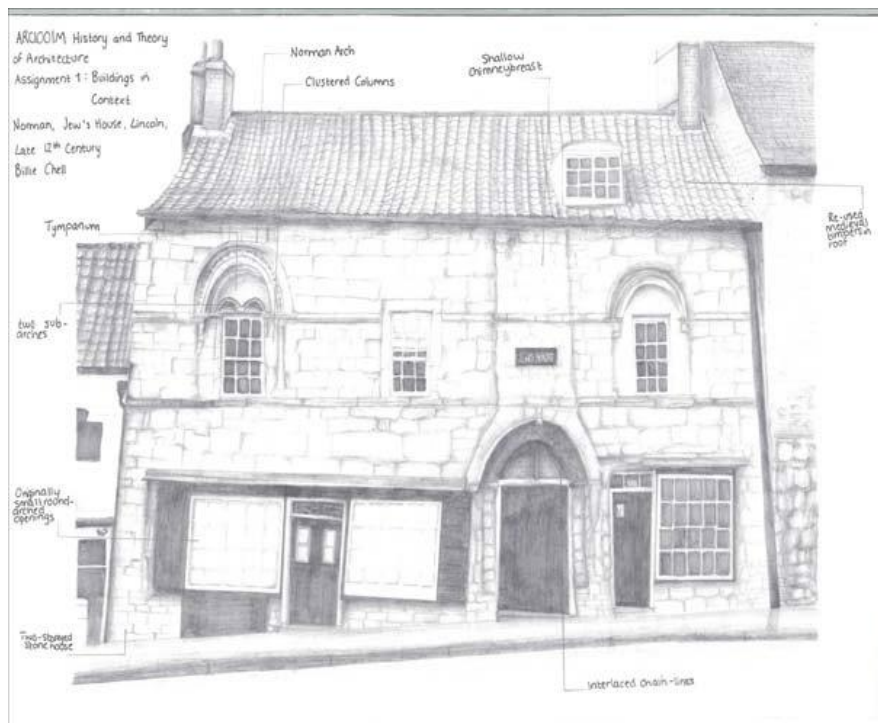


Figure 1 Assignment 1. Re-contextualisation of knowledge: Romanesque architecture exemplified with Jews House in Lincoln (drawing by Billie Chell)

Each assignment was introduced in a lecture to the whole cohort, to outline expectations and answer questions which are generally not forthcoming. However, an avalanche of queries preceded the deadline for the first assignment; this determined a change in the way the module was assisted; although the learning was still self-directed, weekly one hour drop-in seminars were made available for the three weeks before hand-ins in the spirit of 'just in time teaching' where 'lecturing is only in response to specific student needs' (Pedagogy in action). That was because first year students were not weaned 'away from dependence on instructors as primary sources of required information' (Prince and Felder 2006:4) - they needed assistance to start the transformation into self-learners.

In the first year of implementing these changes in assessment, lessons were learned which affected subsequent submissions. For instance, the first assignment revealed that, while the scope of the brief had been good and learning outcomes had been achieved in terms of testing theoretical knowledge and application of architectural drawing conventions, the wording of the brief had to offer a more explicit and detailed framework. In consequence, the brief for the second assignment was crystallised in discussion with tutors from the other programmes sharing the module, who were questioning its gambit. This ensured the simplicity of the brief's requirement: a physical model - a classical room in a box. Pedagogically, this assignment was an increase in complexity, as the students needed to synthesize knowledge tested by the first assignment in order to employ it in design; as Bruner puts it, instruction should be "spirally organized" (in Prince and Felder 2006:4). The more challenging task was also appropriate for group work. Elements of the submission could be divided and working in teams enabled interaction and dialogue, enhanced collaborative skills and individual accountability - aspects which define 'cooperative learning', shown to increase individual student performance if conducted well (Felder and Brent 2007).



Figure 2 Assignment 2. Synthesised knowledge in design: Model designed and built by architecture students, photographed by CLM students

One studio skill complementing model making is photography, as it allows the immortalisation of an ephemeral and often frail construct. With no time or resources to induct students in the art of photography, the idea of asking a Contemporary Lens Media (CLM)/PGCE colleague to collaborate with us came about: CLM students were to photograph the models the architecture students had built. The interdisciplinary collaboration was very successful as an immersive 'situated practice' experience (The New London Group 1996).

The work produced for these assignments was of high quality and certainly stimulated focused, meaningful research. The "exhibitions" (drawings pinned on boards or models displayed in studio) were testimony to a good level of ability and engagement and were appreciated by tutors and older students, who chose to slalom between the exhibition boards on their way to studio. While surface learning was still detectable, it was evident that students questioned fundamental aspects of historic styles.

Conclusion?

In the last few years colleagues who have been teaching first year studio decry the drastic decrease in contact time, foreseeing difficult times ahead. While *what* we teach

has been the same for a while, *how* we teach has inexorably been distorted as the *studio* environment changed from being a community engaged in 'meaning making' (Vygotsky 1978) into a space where individual, timed consultations take place. The modest attempt by the "History and Theory" module to use assignments as opportunities to re-create the "atelier" buzz is not going to reverse this trend. But, they weave a temporary net – of critic, program, object (project) and student – considered vital in studio education, which does not form traditionally in a theoretical subject.

The quality of submissions has been good and tested not only knowledge and skill, but also creativity, interest, determination, and application, all necessary attributes of an active learner. Changes in the teaching and learning practice on the first year humanities unit will affect the students' personal development in the long term, as the strategy of the module has been determinedly to affect their *educational gain* rather than *performance* (Gibbs 2010).

While marking the students' last submission for the "History and Theory" module, their first academic essay, Bartholomae's observation surfaces with poignancy: 'every time a student sits down to write for us he or she has to invent the university for the occasion [...]. The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the particular ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community' (Bartholomae 1985:134 in Lawrence 2002).

I cannot help thinking that while producing images or models might be partly a quest for an architectural voice, the immersive, complex, introspective nature of drawing and model making - more akin to play than academic work – exposes and reinforces the creative and expressive individuality of each student.

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Helping a diverse student population make the successful transition to academic life in an Irish Institute of Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper describes a number of positive actions that Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) has made to help students make the transition to college life. The growing diverse and international student population at the Institute has meant that a number of initiatives have been put in place to support the first year experience. Three key areas within the college work to provide a positive educational environment for students, namely, the Learning and Teaching Unit; the Student Resource Centre and the International Office. These areas have collaborated to offer a number of programmes which address both the academic and social aspects of college life. The current strategic plan for AIT emphasises the need for the Institute to deal with the growing diversity and internationalisation of the student population. Through the continued activities of these three areas, further collaboration is planned in order to fulfil these aspirations.

Introduction

AIT is situated in the heart of Ireland. Currently, over 6,000 students are registered on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the schools of Business, Engineering, Humanities or Science. Approximately 1,300 first year students joined AIT in 2013/14. The student population in AIT has become increasingly diverse over the past decade. The current first year cohort includes school leavers, students from further education, mature students, and students with disabilities. In addition, AIT has become an internationally focused institute with students from 72 countries worldwide. Responding appropriately to the social and academic needs of these students, and developing a first year experience, requires institutions of higher education to develop a variety of strategies and interventions that promote a sense of belonging, thereby assisting student success (Andrews, 2012). Recent national and European publications have similarly stressed the need for students to engage in their studies and college life as quickly as possible (Department of Education and Skills, 2011; European Commission, 2013). Higher education institutions have also been encouraged to capitalise on their reputations and attractiveness by developing better services to receive and support international students (Department of Education and Skills, 2011; High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, 2013).

This paper will focus on three core areas within AIT which have collaborated to develop strategies in accordance with these requirements, helping students to make the transition to tertiary education. The *Learning and Teaching Unit* provides opportunities for staff development, with an emphasis on developing and supporting an inclusive curriculum based on the principles of universal design (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2014). The *Student Resource Centre* provides a number of programmes to first year students, such as induction and Peer Assisted Student Support (PASS). With assistance from the *International Office*, AIT has implemented a series of academic and social initiatives to support international students. Taken together, these three units represent a holistic approach to assisting students in their journey through tertiary education.

Learning and Teaching Unit

The Learning and Teaching Unit was established in December 2005. This vital resource is dedicated to the support and advance of teaching and learning at AIT. The unit provides a number of key functions and supports which help to promote an inclusive culture of teaching and learning. In relation to the first year experience, the unit helps students to make the transition to tertiary education by providing support in two key areas. Firstly, through the provision of academic professional development and secondly by assisting programme design and development.

Mariss (2011) states that,

'The primary purpose of academic staff development is to expand the educators' awareness of the various tasks they must undertake to contribute to the effective education of their students and the accomplishment of the organisation's objectives.'

This is particularly pertinent in relation to an institution of higher education such as AIT where the diverse student population makes it absolutely vital that staff are well-equipped to contribute successfully to the effective education of their first year students. To this end, the Learning and Teaching Unit provides a number of in-house courses and training sessions in conjunction with the Learning Innovation Network (LIN) for staff. For example, the Unit offers a Post-Graduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning which includes a number of stand-alone Certificates such as the 'Certificate in Learning and Teaching'; 'Certificate in Technology Enhanced Learning' and 'Creating an Inclusive Curriculum'. The aims of these modules are to provide educators with the pre-requisite

skills and knowledge to be able to enhance the learning experience for students. Taken together these modules provide an opportunity for staff to improve and develop their practice appropriate to students from diverse backgrounds. It furnishes academic staff with the skills necessary to tailor their teaching to the needs of students, and it provides a reflective space for staff to discuss and reflect on best practice. Voluntary participation in modules such as 'Creating an Inclusive Curriculum' has enabled staff to design their courses in such a way as to engage first year students by providing an inclusive educational environment. Pertinent feedback from academic staff who have completed these modules suggests that lecturers become more aware of the needs of their students, as the following comments illustrate:

'Completing the Certificate in Teaching and Learning gave me the opportunity to alter my practice to include techniques such as group work and paired exercises which encourages students to become more engaged in their learning.'

'Using rubrics in my marking has made my assessments more transparent and allows students to have a better understanding of what is required of them.'

'Coming from a practical background in Social Care, the module allowed me to connect academic theory to practice in a way that enhanced my engagement with students and provided me with the skills necessary to share my knowledge and experiences in the classroom environment.'

'Doing the module on 'Creating an Inclusive Curriculum' offered me the opportunity to consider the different cultural and academic needs of international students. One quite simple example is that I now try to make sure to alter my teaching by speaking more slowly and making all the material available on Moodle [AIT's virtual learning environment] so that all students can access my lecture notes.'

The Learning and Teaching Unit has sought to address the needs of the first-year student through the creation of the institute-wide *Learning and Development for Higher Education* module, a programme which is mandatory for all students in the first semester and which aims to help 'first year students to adjust to third level learning demands'

(Ginty & Harding, 2013). This is a study skills development module which is contextualised to each discipline area and uses active learning techniques. Evidence has shown that students who complete the *Learning and Development for Higher Education* module have a higher chance of completing the entire programme (Equal Ireland, n.d). The aims of *Learning and Development for Higher Education* module are to provide students with an understanding of what is expected of them as a learner. As Ginty and Harding (2013) explain, 'it reinforces and develops key academic skills such as ICT, creativity, innovation and teamwork'. Given the diverse student population at AIT, it is particularly necessary for students who are adjusting to a new educational landscape. Students from culturally diverse backgrounds have to come to terms with a completely different educational framework and system. Tasks from lecture note-taking to written assignments may necessitate a fundamentally different approach. Often times there is a mismatch between what students understand and what is expected of them by their lecturers. *Learning and Development for Higher Education* is designed to help with that transition and to provide students with an understanding of what is expected of them in the new academic environment. Overall, the Learning and Teaching Unit through the creation of *Learning and Development for Higher Education* has been fully committed to 'empowering' first year students and to help them integrate fully into student life at AIT (Ginty and Harding, 2013). Through these and other initiatives, the Unit seeks to ensure quality standards are met in the processes of updating existing modules and updating new ones.

Student Resource Centre

Making the transition to higher education, where the academic environment, culture, and pedagogical traditions are substantially different, can be a daunting experience for first year students (Yorke and Longden, 2004). Tinto (1975) asserts that student retention is improved by social and academic integration. Some of the social issues experienced by students at AIT include isolation, family problems, mental health problems, financial woes and disability; whereas academically students may struggle with researching and writing assignments, particular subject areas and referencing. 'A sense of belonging and confidence is vital to retention' (Madgett & Bélanger, 2008; 88). The Student Resource Centre at AIT provides a litany of services to students such as counselling, careers, support for students with disabilities, access to college for socio-economically disadvantaged students, health promotion and a medical centre, and tutors in various disciplines. Through the provision of these services the SRC adopts a holistic service that targets both the social and academic spheres of a students' life. Many institutions of higher education have provided programmes to reduce the social, emotional and academic pressures felt by students (Madgett & Bélanger, 2008), AIT is no exception.

The Student Resource Centre at AIT has provided a similar response in the form of two initiatives which will be examined in more detail.

AIT Engage began as a pilot programme run by the Student Resource Centre in collaboration with the Student's Union clubs and societies. These two bodies worked closely together to develop an online leadership resource geared towards helping students develop their skills, and mentor them in their efforts at promoting student engagement throughout the Institute. The AIT Engage programme operates from the first induction week and remains active throughout the students' college lives. The key features of the programme include creating sustainable clubs and societies, maximising student retention through social integration, developing our graduates' attributes, helping students fulfil their potential, volunteering and social responsibility, providing an online leadership resource, encouraging students to get involved and try something new and recognising student engagement and contribution outside the academic realm. This programme helps integrate first year students into the college while simultaneously taking a more long-term approach to student retention. The services available through the Student Resource Centre are intended to support students throughout their time in college.

The origins of PASS as it operates in AIT can be traced back to the 1970s in America. Supplemental Instruction (SI) was originally piloted by Dr Deanna Martin in 1973 at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) to address student retention (Martin, 2008). The idea was transferred around the world and adapted into different countries as Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) or Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS). The aim of SI/PASS is to inspire students to support each other and learn collaboratively under the guidance of trained students called Leaders (Ginty, 2009). PASS was implemented as a pilot project in 2009 through collaboration between the Learning and Teaching Unit at AIT and Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) (Ginty, 2009). Subsequently, the Learning and Teaching Unit joined forces with the Student Resource Centre to assist with administration of the programme. The initial pilot offered PASS on three courses, since then the programme has flourished and is now offered on 16 courses in the current academic year.

At AIT PASS has been embedded into a post-entry programme in which Leaders facilitate weekly study sessions with first years from the same discipline. PASS is designed to help first year students cope better with all aspects of life in tertiary education, whether academic or social. Among its aims, PASS is intended to help first year students adjust quickly to tertiary education, acquire a clear view of course direction and expectations,

develop their independent learning and study skills to meet the requirements of higher education, enhance their understanding of the subject matter of their programme, prepare better for assessed work and examinations, increase cohesion of the student group, and increase confidence. National and international research has found that these types of programmes enhance student performance and retention among first years (Etter, Burmeister & Elder, 2000; Parkinson, 2009). Further research has established the additional benefits to the second year Leaders, including increased confidence and enhanced communication skills (Stout & McDaniel, 2006). The PASS programme was evaluated at the end of the 2012/13 academic year; which attempted to assess the benefits to the first years and the Leaders who facilitated sessions. Some of the first year comments have been included below:

'PASS instilled confidence, to have someone who has been where we are when we found it difficult. First year can be very intimidating at first and PASS allowed us to express our worries and issues with the course in a safe environment.'

'PASS helped me in first year as I got to know some of my class mates as interaction was important and I found it easier to make friends which was a big plus. It also helped me understand some topics I didn't quite fully understand.'

'PASS helped me because we had an insight into the course from people who understood the course better than us, because of the closer age we could relate to the second year students more, I wasn't embarrassed to ask them questions that I would have been embarrassed asking lecturers.'

'PASS helped me to build a confidence through better understanding of topics. It made me realise that I have actually learned a lot already in lectures – great confidence booster especially in science subjects. Great learning tool.'

Sample of Leader comments:

'I really enjoyed it and learned a lot from it. I believe that the class did too and found it beneficial to ask 'silly' questions to past students rather than lectures.'

'I can now talk casually with anybody and discuss various opinions and I learned how to take others opinions on board! I also learned how to see things from different perspectives, let it be from a staff member's or a friend's or fellow student's point of view.'

'The best thing about PASS was being able to listen and figure out the right way to help students without giving them all the answers.'

'I really enjoyed being a PASS leader and I am willing to do it again. I learned and improved many skills and I found it beneficial.'

'As the sessions passed I began to fit into the role a lot more comfortably, I was very nervous at first and couldn't hold discussions very well with people I didn't know. After a few sessions I noticed I could help keep discussions flowing and wasn't nervous but more excited going to a session.'

International Office

Internationalisation is a key feature of the European higher education agenda. Reasons frequently cited for internationalising higher education institutions include improving student preparedness, internationalising the curriculum, enhancing the international profile of the institution, strengthening research and knowledge production, and diversifying their faculty and staff (Hodson, 2010). While internationalisation undoubtedly brings benefits and opportunities for higher education institutions, we cannot simply admit international students and expect them to adapt to life and education in a foreign country without adequate support. The creation of an internationally inclusive campus and the provision of appropriate information, services and programmes are critical to helping international students have positive experiences, fulfill their education goals and return home satisfied with their learning experience. A communication from the European Commission on European higher education across the world exhorts Europe's higher education institutions to develop better services to send and receive international students and researchers, including individual counselling to facilitate integration into their new environment, with language training where appropriate (European Commission, 2013). Domestic and international students face academic and social transition issues in their first year of university, but there are

distinct differences. Academic adjustment problems for international students tend to focus on language issues (Andrade, 2006) but studies have also found that international students have greater difficulties with social adjustment (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van Horn, 2002; Rajapaksa and Dundes, 2002; cited in Andrade, 2006). In a study of student expectations and perceptions of higher education, Kandiko (2013) recommends that institutions should consider direct interventions in students' transitional experiences and notes that direct intervention strategies, such as peer mentoring of incoming students, are well regarded.

Figures collected by Education in Ireland, a state agency run under the auspices of Enterprise Ireland with responsibility for the international marketing and promotion of Irish Higher Education Institutions, showed that the number of international students registered in Irish higher education institutions in 2011/12 was around 32 000, an increase of 2% on the previous year. In the academic year 2013/14, 525 international students were registered in Athlone Institute of Technology, of whom 181 came from the European Union (EU), and 344 came from non-EU countries (AIT, 2014). International students at AIT encounter immediate practical challenges such as making their way from the airport to Athlone and finding appropriate accommodation. Non-EU students must also comply with visa and immigration requirements. Other issues they contend with include loneliness, homesickness and adapting to a new, potentially very different education system.

AIT's International Office offers international students practical, pastoral and academic assistance as they negotiate their way through what can be a daunting transition period. Students are collected from the airport; accommodation is found and appointments are organised with the National Garda Immigration Bureau. Counselling and medical consultations are arranged as necessary. Students are encouraged to join the International Society, run by the students themselves but with financial and other support from the International Office which enables them to plan excursions and events at no or minimal cost to the students themselves. This can be particularly relevant for students who are looking for alcohol-free alternatives to events organised by the Students' Union.

While EU students tend to adapt quickly to life in Athlone, and generally register on undergraduate programmes immediately, students coming from further afield, from countries such as China, Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent, Brazil, are confronted by an education system and academic culture that can be very different to the one they are used to. To address the academic needs of these students, a Foundation Programme was

developed which serves as an introduction to student life in Ireland. In addition to their English language modules, *Developing Academic Practice (DAP)* is one of the core modules on this programme. Broadly similar to the Institute's *Learning and Development in Higher Education* module (formerly known as *Learning to Learn*) which is compulsory for all first year students, the module's primary focus is on helping students prepare for and adapt to the demands of an undergraduate programme in an Irish institute of higher education. Students are introduced to the academic culture of AIT, and invited to compare our system and culture to what they are familiar with from their home institutions. Managing students' expectations is essential. There is usually some discussion of academic grading, an issue which often poses considerable difficulty for international students due to differences in academic grading systems worldwide. Access to lecturers and the student-lecturer relationship are also areas where clarification may be needed. During the module, students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with time and stress management techniques, to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as learners, and to identify and pursue appropriate learning strategies. They are required to engage in self-directed learning and apply critical thinking skills. They learn how to access and use the Institute's learning support systems, and to carry out guided research. Furthermore, they analyse their strengths and weaknesses as communicators; a mandatory team project allows students to explore the potential challenges that arise within the context of intercultural and cross-cultural communication. Team and individual presentations are recorded so that students can practice and improve this key skill.

Leask (2009) argues that improved interactions between home and international students are dependent on the way in which we use both the formal and the informal curricula to encourage and reward intercultural engagement. While the work of the International Society results in many opportunities for international students to interact socially with one another, the vast majority of its members come from the Institute's international community and international students regularly express a desire to meet and interact more meaningfully with Irish students. One initiative developed in response to this has been a series of meetings between the international students on the Foundation programme and students from other programmes within the Institute which have an international dimension to their syllabus. Although these meetings are arranged by lecturers, they are largely informal, and they afford both domestic and international students the opportunity to engage in cross-cultural communication and aim to foster a sense of community for all participants.

Upon completion of the Foundation Programme, students are invited to write a reflective essay describing their experiences of and reactions to the course in general, and the DAP

module in particular. The representative sample of their responses included below indicates that they have a very positive view of the module and consider it welcome and useful preparation for their future studies:

'The module Developing Academic Practice we had great moments to discuss about many interesting subjects and we covered a number of interesting areas. Such as, academic culture in Ireland, study skills, including learning styles and time management, team work and critical thinking. It was a great experience before attending our specific course in AIT, because it has prepared us for graduation. Furthermore, I am sure that those contents will support us in a soon future. Firstly, because they were used in class in a linked way one another. Then, wherever we work aspects of communication, such as communication style, communication between cultures will be very useful for developing a great job.'

'Regarding the subjects studied, it could teach me not just for the academic purposes, but also for life. For example how accept and adapt with another culture, others systems and methods. With the teamwork, I could train the respect to each other and your respective opinion. I could learn how I have to position myself and how I have to speak according with each situation and each person. I believe that I become a bit more critical about reading and presentations as well. Every activity that involves human communication, I believe that can help and bring growth both as professional life as a personal life, and every activity that was realized brought me it, mainly the activities realized in the Developing Academic Practice module.'

'The beginning of the course was quite difficult due to cultural differences and, mainly, my low English level that made me shy in many cases. During the course, I was feeling more confident and then I was losing my shame, in the same time while I was meeting different nationalities and learning about their culture while they were learning and accepting mine.'

Future Developments

In its recently published Strategic Plan for 2014-2018, AIT has restated its commitment to further enhance the experience of all students attending the Institute. In the plan, AIT describes itself as 'a learning and teaching organisation ... committed to promoting excellence in learning and teaching so as to underpin a high quality learner experience' (AIT, 2014: 9). Addressing the needs of a diverse student population is a priority. The three areas described in this area will continue to play a central role in furthering this aims. A key area of interest for the Learning and Teaching Unit will be the promotion of a first year learning experience package and continuing the work of instituting *Learning and Development for Higher Education* throughout all disciplines of the institute. In addition, and in order to cement the collaboration between the Learning and Teaching Unit and PASS, there are proposals to link students' participation in PASS sessions to a Continuous Assessment component of the *Learning and Development for Higher Education* module. The collaboration with the International Office is also set to grow with plans to equip staff appropriately so that they can recognise and address the needs of an internationally diverse student community. In these ways, the three core areas will continue in their aim of creating an inclusive, internationally-focused and dynamic learning environment for students in their first and subsequent years of study.

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Developing self-directed learning skills in the first semester of the Pharmacy degree at Nottingham University

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the use of a library skills workbook, scripted around authentic case study scenarios. The formative workbook and follow-up lecture aimed to foster Pharmacy first year undergraduate self-regulation, learner autonomy and transition to university. It encouraged students to take a more active role in managing their learning about library skills by working through a series of case studies linked to library resources they would encounter during their course and to meet the needs of subsequent clinically focussed modules incorporating problem-based learning. The paper outlines the context of development and collaboration between the School of Pharmacy and the Libraries, Research and Learning Resources Department at The University of Nottingham. It describes the teaching delivered and provides an evaluation of student engagement and feedback.

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'Children start life full of curiosity, they are all scientists – people who ask, "why, why, why?" all the time. At some point in their middle school years, or maybe earlier their curiosity gets turned off. From that point on, people concentrate on facts. They want to know the fact, or the answer, so they can memorize it'. (Mazur 2000)

Background and Context

UK compulsory education has been criticised for following a transmission and testing model of education on the whole, which values rote learning and memorization of facts (Morrison 2014; Stewart 2014a). The teacher 'tells', pupils practice and undergo examination. Although it is acknowledged that a body of knowledge needs to be transmitted, there have been moves to include independent learning time, problem based learning and assessed course work alongside lessons and examinations (Hmelo-Silver 2004; Thomas 2013; Jaguszewski & Williams 2013). However this does not seem to go far enough as such aspirations are not, it seems, reflected in (or aligned with) an assessment practice, which is highly regulated and controlled by the examining bodies, and which only provides summative feedback on exam and coursework performance (Bloom 2014; Stewart 2014b) with no opportunity for students to feed what has been learned from a previous task forward into subsequent work (Hounsell et al 2007). Student reflection and engagement with feedback at this level therefore is very limited and restricted to drill and practice based activity. Indeed Ofqual GCSE study guidance (n.d.) includes messages and advice such as '*don't expect comments telling you where you went wrong*' and:

'don't worry about the exam you have just taken - you can't do anything about it now. Concentrate instead on the next one where you can make a difference'.

Comments like these are supposed to help but are illustrative of how students approach and engage with feedback when they reach Higher Education (HE). This appears to conflict heavily with, and place huge pressure upon, efforts to make students more responsive to feedback and responsible for their own learning in their first year at University (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick 2006). Indeed a full scale re-engineering programme may be required, not only of university assessment practices but almost certainly in relation to the restructuring of a student's approach to learning, on entry to Higher Education. Such re-engineering practices have been attempted successfully in the past, The Re-Engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) project, for example, piloted institutional redesigns of formative assessment and feedback practices using a self-regulation model in large-enrolment first-year modules across three institutions (Nicol n.d.).

Keppell and Carless (2006) point out that students' orientation to assessment in HE continues to show a value of rote learning and the accumulation of marks rather than deep, engaged learning. Sadler (2010) has observed the same sort of 'moving on' behaviour and lack of referring back, noting that students think it's not worth putting the

effort in and that its best to concentrate on the next module assignments. This may affect the level of student receptiveness and engagement with feedback at HE level, a phenomenon that has not gone unnoticed (Boud 1995a; Juwah et al 2004; Draper 2009; Hounsell 2007; Boud & Falchikov 2006; Sadler 2010; Denton et al 2008; Nicol, 2010).

Formative assessment, depicted as being an 'assessment for learning' rather than 'assessment of learning' (Hounsell et al 2007) aims to go beyond the provision of grades associated with standard summative forms of assessment, often including low-stakes assessment (with low or no marks attached) and/or promoting a level of reflection and a feedback dialog between assessors and students and students and peers in many cases (Nicol, 2010; Laurillard 2002). Laurillard distinguishes further between intrinsic and extrinsic feedback, intimating that extrinsic feedback would be of the sort supplied once an assignment was completed whilst intrinsic feedback is defined as being more incidental or current, and the type of feedback woven into day to day teaching – comments, tips, guidance, and lecturer cues, for example.

Formative assessment practice is seen as a means of accelerating learning, optimising learning quality and raising individual and collective attainment (Hounsell 2007) and/or fostering a catalytic environment leading to delayed or deeper later learning (Draper 2009). Nicol and Mcfarlane-Dick (2006) have reinterpreted formative feedback and see it as a means of guiding students towards taking more control of their own learning, steering them gradually away from a dependence on the teacher for guidance and towards generating their own feedback as independent and more autonomous learners (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick 2006). A focus on formative assessment therefore can be seen as part of a process or strategy that allows students to play a more active role in the management of their learning (Nicol 1997) and equip students with skills to self-direct, self-regulate, self-assess and self-correct (Sadler 1989; Sadler 1998).

In practice self-regulation manifests when students generate internal feedback to actively monitor and regulate learning processes such as goal setting and orientation, adopting learning strategies, targeting and applying time and effort, managing resources, reacting to external feedback to achieve their desired outcomes (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick 2006). Following a broad definition of feedback presented by Nicol (2007b p 55), which includes informal and formal processes such as a learner generating their own feedback via self-assessment and peer evaluation, many see self-regulation as a means of laying the foundations of lifelong learning (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick 2006; Nicol 2007a).

Nicol (2007b) argues that a broad perspective needs to be taken and that efforts to develop learner self-regulation should be focussed in the early years of study (1st year) in order to enhance a student's chance of success at the outset of their university education. In collaboration with Mcfarlane-Dick (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick 2006) they offer seven principles of good feedback practice (underpinned by extensive research and case study examples) to help lecturers (re)configure their own formative learning and assessment strategies to help students become self-regulated learners.

The shift in power balance sought by a more learner centric model of assessment, is consistent with constructivist and social constructivist teaching and learning ideologies and experiential, enquiry or problem based learning instructional approaches which seek to embed reflective authentic activities, more social and independent learning and involve the student in constructing or reconstructing their own knowledge via situated meaningful experience-based learning activity (Vygotsky 1978; Dewey 1938; Piaget 1964; Kolb 1984; Hmelo-Silver 2004). Nicol (1997) and Sadler (1989) describe a shift from teacher transmission and 'telling' methodologies to an approach which seeks to increase student responsibility, autonomy and personal ownership, and to improve student confidence to take control of their own learning and construct their own knowledge. However the importance of creating a balanced teaching system which constructively aligns learning activities and assessment with this sort of learning outcome should not be underestimated (Biggs 1996).

The library workbook and follow-up lecture is one of several strategies used in a redesign of the pharmacy curriculum to assist with transition and cultivation of independent learning at the University of Nottingham.

Pharmacy at the University of Nottingham

The pharmacy course at Nottingham is a four year integrated masters degree leading to an MPharm. The degree is accredited by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) who are the regulator for the pharmacy profession in the UK. Their standards for the initial training of pharmacists require that the MPharm integrates the science and professional elements of the course (GPhC 2011).

In September 2012 the University of Nottingham introduced a re-designed MPharm course to meet the future knowledge and skills needed of pharmacists. This course begins with a semester designed to ease students' transition to the university environment and provide the basic skills and knowledge for future disease based integrated modules. The course has seven vertical themes which describe the subject

specific material, five science (pharmaceutics; pharmacology and therapeutics; chemistry; biology and physiology; and absorption, distribution, metabolism and elimination) and two professional (clinical and pharmacy practice; and professionalism and leadership).

The first semester of the course has a number of elements to assist with the transition to studying in a university environment including study skills and how to access help, development of a culture of questioning, directed study pre- and post-activities and group work. Additionally the five main types of assessment used in the course are included in semester 1 – written exam, online exam, practical write-up, essay and practical exam.

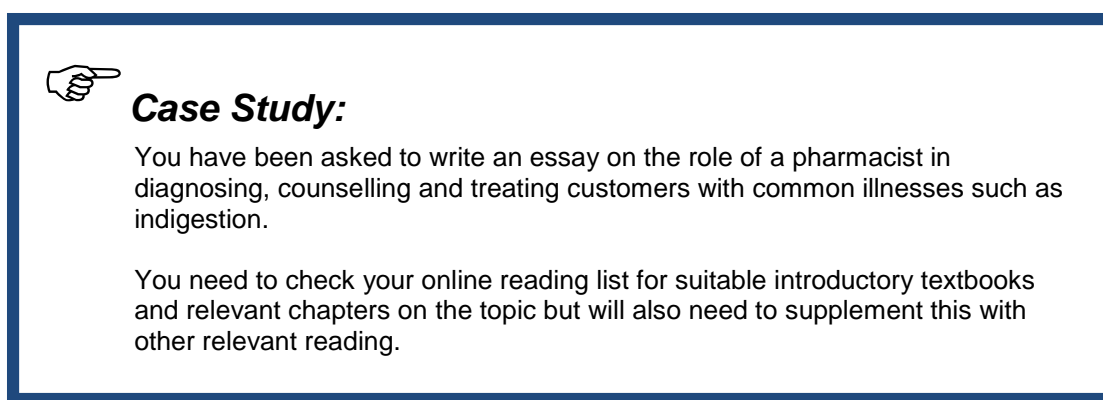
Library Skills Training


The library skills workbook was designed by the Science Librarian with input from an academic within the school of pharmacy to ensure it was relevant to pharmacy undergraduates. The workbook and follow-up lecture aimed to facilitate 'school to university' transition; underpin later module learning, assessed assignments and professional development; introduce concepts of academic integrity, quality and plagiarism; and develop students' academic information skills and self-regulation habits.

This new workbook approach replaced a three hour workshop training session (delivered 3 times to accommodate 180 students), which in practice received partial attendance and offered only limited interaction, through embedding 'hands on' time to test drive resources. To make more effective use of the resources available, students need to interact fully with resources themselves and learn by experience. This workshop originally replaced a one hour seminar with demonstration delivered in a large auditorium; however it still did not fully address students' needs. Therefore a flipped classroom approach was adopted with students expected to take responsibility for their own learning by collecting and completing tasks within the workbook; identifying gaps in knowledge, asking for assistance via library enquiry desks and emailing the Science Librarian about areas of difficulty or confusion following Mazur's (2000) Just-in-time teaching technique. A one-hour follow-up lecture enabled further elaboration of areas identified by students as needing clarification; and we also provided the opportunity for students to self-assess their workbook answers against exemplars provided by the Librarian once students' own completed answer sheets were revealed.

Students were able to complete the workbook in small groups or individually according to their preference, ultimately to encourage students to take control of their own

learning from the outset and foster opportunities for self-regulation to manifest. The workbook scenarios allowed them to seek out information and the range of resources available in the library and online and included learning about plagiarism and citing the various resource types. It facilitated self-paced learning as students are expected to complete worksheets within three weeks, outside timetabled hours, in negotiation with other group members and taking account of individual prior learning and skill sets. The scenarios were designed to fit with the teaching and assessment methods used by the School of Pharmacy (case studies, problem based learning, varied assessment diet, continuing professional development ethos) and to be retained by students for future reference in completing coursework activities.



 **Case Study:**

You have been asked to write an essay on the role of a pharmacist in diagnosing, counselling and treating customers with common illnesses such as indigestion.

You need to check your online reading list for suitable introductory textbooks and relevant chapters on the topic but will also need to supplement this with other relevant reading.

Figure 1: Case Study example

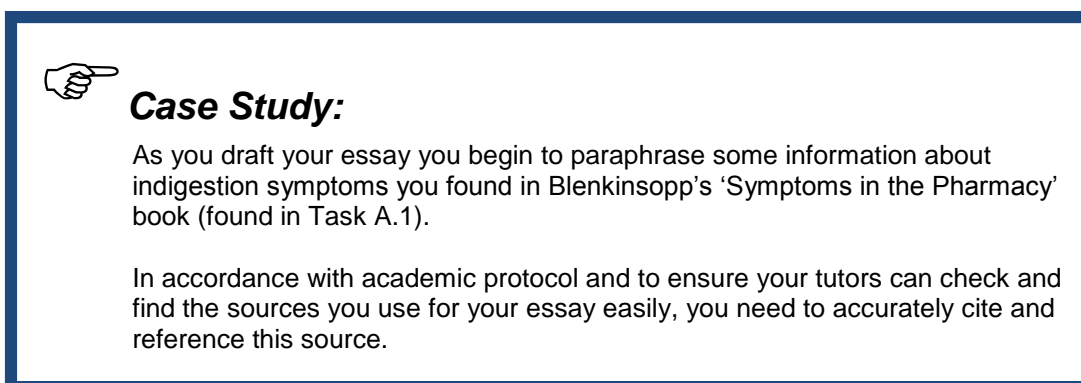
This workbook based approach had been successfully used by the Science Librarian in previous undergraduate (Environment, Engineering, Built Environment) and Professional (Legal Trainee) educational contexts outside the University of Nottingham. Recent literature suggests that working on case studies can be a means of fostering information literacy skills (Jaguszewski & Williams 2013).


Within the School of Pharmacy, the workbook was designed to bridge the gap between academic and professional contexts. It combined clinical, professional and academic practice via authentic scenario based tasks designed in collaboration with academics. Students completed the tasks using relevant library resources (both hard copy and electronic). The workbook explained about plagiarism, included links to useful information for student life at university (meningitis in university students) and included scenarios relevant to later module learning (role of the pharmacist in advising about minor ailments, ethics, and government statistics on the prevalence of smoking). It also contained scenarios designed to assist with assignments (ethics essay) and employability (accessing company information for vacation employment and an industry overview).

Students were also guided and asked to cite each source found in preparation for an essay released in the 7th week of term. Workbook activity and associated skills development were also suitable topics for inclusion in student Continuing Professional Development (CPD) portfolios, a tool introduced to students in their first few weeks of study for recording and tracking individual skills development throughout the course.

Students arrive at University with varying degrees of library and library skills exposure. Therefore self-paced workbooks can also be a valuable tool for minimising disadvantage and levelling the playing field for them in their first few weeks of study, particularly with regard to accessing resources to underpin study and becoming accustomed to university expectations around guided reading, independent learning and academic conventions such as plagiarism.

A paper based workbook was produced to facilitate note taking and physical interaction. An electronic version was considered and discounted for initial rollout, but a copy was available for students to access on the University's Virtual Learning Environment. Additionally, flash based online tutorials highlighted/linked to in the worksheets were not compatible with popular mobile devices (tablet readers) at the time. The workbook tasks however, as noted previously, included hyperlinks to electronic resources, websites, online tutorials, podcasts and QR codes for additional online information.



 **Case Study:**

As you draft your essay you begin to paraphrase some information about indigestion symptoms you found in Blenkinsopp's 'Symptoms in the Pharmacy' book (found in Task A.1).

In accordance with academic protocol and to ensure your tutors can check and find the sources you use for your essay easily, you need to accurately cite and reference this source.

Figure 2: Citing and Referencing Case Study Example

Finally a localised version of the workbook was produced by librarians from our Malaysia campus and rolled out simultaneously to our 2+2 MPharm students (where students spend the first two years at our Malaysia campus and the second two in the UK).

Discussion and Evaluation

Students were asked to complete an online questionnaire part way through the second semester to aid evaluation of student engagement and workbook completion, resulting in a 26% response rate (n=41/160). This was considered an acceptable response rate given its consistency with previous survey completion rates across the year group and its reflective male/female composition, mirroring a similar gender distribution across the whole cohort surveyed (more female than male responses).

In terms of student engagement and self-regulation, 93% of respondents reported completing the workbook. Most (49%) opted to complete it as a group rather than alone (34%) or in pairs (17%). Further cross-tabulation analysis revealed most (68%) completed the workbook as they would have preferred to in hindsight. Suggesting early successful self-regulation in terms of learner strategy adopted.

Further, whilst 32% would have preferred to complete them in a different way if they had the choice again, more students working alone/in pairs would have preferred in hindsight to have worked in larger groups than vice versa (ie group workers preferring to work with fewer/alone). In essence students preferred or would have preferred working with others than individually.

As highlighted in previous literature (Hounsell 2007; Nicol & Mcfarlane- Dick 2006; Sadler 1989; Sadler 1998) formative feedback from a variety of sources can be used as a means of encouraging students towards taking more active control of their own learning; of gradually steering them away from a dependence on the teacher for guidance; and of equipping them with skills to self-direct, self-regulate, self-assess and self-correct even in their first year of university study. Self-actualization in learning does not ultimately mean the learner must work alone in order to be 'Independent'. Autonomous learners recognize and identify gaps in knowledge and choose the learning strategy to best accelerate and optimize their learning.

Working in groups, learning from peers, collaborating, absorbing cues from others (not just the teacher) and ultimately choosing when to learn with others and when to learn alone are choices therefore just as inherently linked with effective self-regulation and autonomous independent learning as self-paced, lone endeavor.

Our findings therefore suggest even simple formative strategies encouraging the learner to take control of their own learning (work alone or in groups) very early in their first

year can help with developing self-regulation tendencies in school to university transitioning students.

Qualitative responses also revealed some would have preferred lectures or workshops, that is, more transmission or 'telling' teaching methodologies, rather than taking the time to complete the workbook themselves. Open responses however revealed a small minority clearly appreciated (enough to comment) the opportunity to 'do it themselves'

'The idea of having an activity to aid our knowledge of university life is good because you are completing tasks by yourself rather than having a lecture'

As the workbooks were designed for student to retain for later use, the opportunity for students to refer back to individual scenarios as well as their own notes was considered a useful form of formative assessment intrinsic to the workbook teaching approach. In addition to being an aide memoire throughout their course, workbooks recorded the process of learning (not just the answers), helping students to identify and take steps to address gaps in their knowledge and evaluate resources useful for ongoing study. Survey feedback at time of collation (mid second semester) however revealed 51% had not referred back to workbook whereas 31% had. Nevertheless, a further 18% of respondents thought they might use the workbook in future although they had not done so at that point in time. Additionally, 47% believed the resource would be useful to refer back to, with a further 37% as yet unsure. For those referring back, sections covering finding journal articles, citing and referencing were the most consulted.

According to student feedback, the most suitable time to roll out workbook based delivery was the start of term. The majority of respondents (73%) preferred this time slot, despite some admitting to not seeing the relevance of such training in the open responses. Much smaller numbers preferred a closer tie in with the ethics essay (10%) or later module coursework (14%). The majority of respondents (65%) also preferred to complete the workbook all in one go rather than alongside coursework (12.5%) or in separate stages over their first year (22.5%).

In our quest to encourage and produce independent, self-regulated learners it is also interesting to note the student struggle with and resistance to more learner centric models of assessment consistent with constructivist and experiential learning methodologies, emerging from our survey feedback. Students were unhappy that the workbook was not assessed by University staff after the time and effort they had put in

to complete it. Open qualitative responses revealed students would prefer it marked in the future, thought the lack of marking made it totally pointless, and didn't like completing to a deadline when no check was made on its completion or not. Moreover, not all students collected a completed model answer sheet against which to self-assess their answers, despite being told it was available (by email and in their final one hour lecture).

'It was very demotivating that the workbook wasn't checked at the end, making everyone's hard work entirely pointless'.

A comment which, reflecting previous findings (Nicol & Mcfarlane-Dick 2006), epitomises how students approach and engage with feedback when they reach Higher Education and acutely highlights the stark tension between student desire for summative assessment and teacher efforts to make students both more responsive to feedback and responsible for their learning in their first year of study at University.

This view may change over time as students reflect on their university learning, including in their CPD portfolios, about the learning and usefulness of the workbooks and the information skills developed. Equally the workbook remains with the student over the course of their remaining first year, with other module work inherently linking back to skills, sources and case studies introduced by the workbook. It is hoped therefore that the workbook will ultimately become a form of catalytic assessment (Draper 2009), where the purpose of the workbook is to trigger (later) deep learning without direct teaching input.

Qualitative feedback also indicated that students believed Library workbooks helped them: to understand different types of referencing and how to cite and reference properly (an area students wanted the final lecture to focus on); to know more about how the library system worked and different resources only available at University; to find useful information and navigate university websites; to learn by experience; and to make notes whilst completing exercises to refer back to for coursework.

The use of workbook case studies within the School of Pharmacy therefore underpins new calls for enhancing librarian teaching and learning roles, supports the need for librarian understanding of discipline specific pedagogies, where they exist, and collaborative working with academics for optimum relevance and module learning linkages. Additionally the workbooks also support recommendations for rolling out similar initiatives across different disciplines (Jaguszewski & Williams 2013).

Future Developments

Drawing from our experience of rolling out the library workbook and follow-up lecture to first year pharmacy undergraduates in 2013/2014 and in response to student feedback, the flipped classroom approach and case study based workbook method of teaching information skills will be retained moving forward. Whilst the majority of students who responded felt the work book was helpful some did not and therefore in order to be clearer as to how this will help their studies we have reduced the number of case studies presented in semester 1 including only those four that most closely link to coursework tasks. We retained the printed format and the full version with all the case studies will remain available for student completion online via Moodle to encourage and foster opportunities for further student self-regulation. Without overloading students in the first few weeks, later tasks will build on previous knowledge whilst embedding additional opportunities for students to work in a 'feed forward' rather than 'feedback' mode (Hounsell et al 2007); to reflect in a timely way more aligned with progressive skills development activity over the course of the first year; and to take more responsibility for their learning throughout their whole first year. The scenarios that remain in the printed version will include the Meningitis case study and those related to the preparation needed for laboratory practicals and the ethics essay, as will the information about plagiarism and avoiding it, including details of how to cite resources they use.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that the survey be repeated with 2014/2015 First Years, particularly to investigate whether the findings around self-regulation, self-orientation and self-assessment re-materialize.

Additional questions might also be added to explore further student preferences around learning via lecture or via experience in more detail. Follow up interviews may also unearth further hidden nuances between a student's desire for summative credit (rather than reassurance) and teacher efforts to foster independent and self-regulated learning.

Should workbooks and similar case study problem based learning approaches be adopted in other Schools or disciplines, then opportunities should be sought to follow up this initial research and compare results across faculties.

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Small steps towards employability

A report based on a “show and tell” presentation at the EFYE conference,
Nottingham Trent University, June 2014



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Abstract

The results of an action research study, undertaken with first year students at Richmond, the American International University in London (RAIUL), suggest that the involvement of international students in service learning via a volunteering activity in their first semester can enable them to become part of a new community outside the classroom, thus facilitating the process of settling into University (acculturation), and developing their cross-cultural skills. It also provides various opportunities for language practice and self-reflection, as well as building blocks on which to develop a range of transferable personal and interpersonal skills with potential for future employability.

1. The focus of the study

Employability has become a buzzword in today’s universities. A lack of cross-cultural and language skills has been cited as a restricting factor to participation in a global jobs market (Thom 2013.) The National Association of Colleges and Employers lists a range of transferable skills, rated in importance by employers on a par with academic skills (NACE 2013 Job Outlook Survey). Faculty and staff are increasingly expected to plan and include in courses or activities initiatives to make our graduates more employable. How

can such employability be achieved, and when should preparation start? Richmond University's employability strategy suggests service learning as a means to promoting employability, starting from orientation for first year students (Employability strategy). Such service learning is understood to include active volunteering in the community, as well as the learning opportunities derived from the activity. This raises the question: can it really be beneficial for students to be required to undertake service learning in their very first semester at University, when they are still struggling with finding their way around campus and washing their own clothes?

To take a first step towards answering this question, a small study was undertaken in the spring of 2013 with the limited aim of getting a group of students to undertake a voluntary role either on or off campus as part of a credit-bearing FYS (First Year Seminar) course – a required course at US universities. It was hoped that this experience would provide for students the basis of reflection for sections of a personal development portfolio, in which students would reflect on how their skills developed as a result. The process itself would be monitored by the teacher to gauge any apparent benefits.

Some hoped-for beneficial outcomes were as follows:

- To aid acculturation and develop cross-cultural skills for students
- To engender a volunteering "habit"
- To enhance students' CVs
- To help others in the local community

2. The practical factors of the study

Richmond has a highly international intake, with students from some 120 different countries, none of which are a dominant group. In spring 2013, a group of seven international students met for an hour once a week for one semester (13 weeks) to fulfil the requirements of this one credit mandatory course. All were in their first semester at University, came from different countries, spoke English as a second language, and were studying a variety of degree programmes. They all agreed to take part in a volunteering activity as part of the course.

3. The process

The stages of implementing the study can be seen below:

- a. Information gathering and expression of interest
 - Discussion of benefits of volunteering with students

- Overview of possible volunteering opportunities
 - Registration of interest by students
 - Contact made with charity/organisation by student and/or instructor
 - Application forms completed where necessary
 - References provided where necessary
- b. Preparation for the activity
- Dates and times agreed for activity to take place
 - Plans made for travel
- c. Activity undertaken and reported back to group
- Student undertook activity
 - Student reported back orally to the group
- d. Individual reflection by student and feedback from the teacher
- Student reflected on the activity and its effects in the PDP
 - Teacher graded the PDP and gave credit for the course
 - Analysis of the study

4. Examples of volunteering activities undertaken

It soon became clear that the preparation for involvement in the volunteering activity would be time-consuming, as it was necessary to “hold the students’ hands” at every stage (see below – problems encountered). Thus it was decided that any activity which took up 5 or 6 hours of the student’s time, either in one period or several, would be the most that could be expected. Here are some examples of the activities, chosen and completed by the students:

- ❖ Helping with the collection of non-perishable food items donated by shoppers in a local supermarket, for sending to the local foodbank
- ❖ Sorting, arranging and selling items at a jumble sale in the local community centre
- ❖ Helping to upload software and configure computers for use in an IT Café for elderly residents
- ❖ Setting up a new Facebook page for contact with University alumni
- ❖ Selling raffle tickets in aid of a local charity
- ❖ Helping with a local river clean-up

5. Problems encountered

Although these activities might seem relatively straightforward to organise and participate in, there was still a number of problems encountered at each stage of the process before the activities were completed.

a. Information gathering and expression of interest

- Students tended to be unwilling to go alone to an information session, either on or off campus, to find out about volunteering opportunities. This put the onus on the teacher to research and provide initial information.
- Students did not have the necessary confidence or communication/language skills to find out what the charitable organisation did, what it required of a volunteer and how the volunteer should apply. Research, telephone contact and application form completion therefore had to take place in group class time.
- A number of opportunities received turned out to be unsuitable for this group of students: some needed a DBS check, which can take many weeks to complete; some required local knowledge, which the students did not yet possess; some required a commitment too long for this group of students; some required help during the summer when students are not on campus. This somewhat limited choice for the student.
- When dealing with volunteer organisations, plans can progress very slowly, as many organisations are themselves staffed by part-time volunteers.

b. Preparation for the activity

- Some students were concerned about travel, as some were not yet conversant with London buses and tubes. The teacher was required to give detailed directions and timings.

c. Activity undertaken and reported back

- One student was sick on the appointed day, but had no record of the telephone number of the organiser to inform him.
- One student got lost on the way to the activity, and eventually gave up and came home, necessitating a reorganisation of the activity.

d. Individual reflection by student and feedback from the teacher

- Reflective writing was new to many students, who had never before been asked to think about the impact of their actions on themselves or on others. Some students struggled to put into writing what they had experienced, and there was not enough group time with the teacher to work on this.

- The teacher did not have the time to provide oral feedback which could help the student to reflect effectively in the future

6. Benefits noted

Despite the problems encountered in this process, a variety of benefits to the students were highlighted. Firstly, the teacher noted ways in which the process described above had helped students with acculturation, cross-cultural knowledge, language practice and other transferable skills. They were given the opportunity to discuss issues of society in the country in which they had chosen to study, such as why homelessness exists, or how people in an affluent area can be hungry (cross-cultural knowledge). They were given as much choice as possible in deciding on a volunteering activity, which for some differed from their previous experience of being told what to do (acculturation). Many students had little experience of an application process, and had to learn the language of the forms and conventions expected: for example, a next of kin had to be explained; what is a referee when not on a football pitch; how should an English style address and postcode be written (language practice). Other students were helped in writing a formal email, including a salutation and sign-off, and a check for accuracy (language practice and transferable communication skill). Others had practice in making an enquiry by phone, or in navigating a company's website (language practice and transferable communication skill). All experimented with travel websites like tfl.gov.uk and had to plan time requirements (transferable research and time-management skill). They were required to work with others whom they had not met before (teamwork skill). Despite the time constraints of the course, all the students were introduced to the concept of self-reflection, both orally and in writing - a transferable skill which has been suggested as particularly vital for employability by Jenny Moon (2004) of the University of Exeter.

Students also reported positive outcomes. The start of a volunteering habit was suggested by Students A and B: "It was great. I am going to go back and help with the book sale"; "I am willing to do volunteering in my near future as one of my dreams is to help some children or people who are suffering from poverty or illness especially in developing countries". Students C and D said "Through volunteering, I tried to smile and be polite at all times and I also tried to memorize particular sentences so that people could understand exactly what we were doing", and "It means that I know how to communicate with people properly and I try to be polite". This suggests an awareness of the importance of communicating appropriately with new people, and learning the right language for the situation. Student E became aware of his creativity - another important transferable skill: "I was doing lots of research on the others schools' websites. I got lots of ideas and a very big imagination". One of the most important comments revealed how

pleased a student was, both to meet “real people”, as she put it, and to be appreciated, as she remarked on how kind the volunteer organizer had been to her. This kind of boost to a student’s self-esteem must surely act as an aid to acculturation.

These benefits suggest that it would be worthwhile to undertake a follow-up study involving a greater number of students, and addressing, where possible, the problems previously encountered.

7. Conclusion

This small study suggests that volunteering as part of a required course in the curriculum (service learning) can be part of a strategy for beginning the process of developing student employability. This is achieved by a) helping students to focus on a range of transferable skills – cross-cultural, communication, language, time-management and teamwork skills in particular - which would not be required as part of a standard academic course in the curriculum, and b) learning to reflect on how these skills have developed. The placing of a student in a community outside the classroom, where he or she meets “real people” and is appreciated for the time given and the help supplied, rather than for academic grades achieved, may be shown through further research to aid acculturation, by providing a way in which the first year transition into university can be greatly enhanced. None of these benefits are specific to international students, and may be shown to be similarly helpful for UK students.

8. The next stage

Starting from autumn 2014, some 60 first year students at RAIUL will choose an FYS course, containing a volunteering requirement, leading to self-reflection, and embedding academic, digital and transferable skills. Some of the problems previously encountered will be addressed by using peer mentors – students who have some experience of volunteering – to help to source opportunities and to guide and advise volunteers about practical problems. The range of suggested opportunities will be limited in the short term to those not requiring a DBS check. It is hoped that amongst a larger group of students, peers will encourage and inspire each other. Adequate class time will be allocated for preparation and discussion of problems and experiences. Reflective writing will be taught and practised.

This pilot course will be evaluated from a number of points of view – see figure 1. The results will then be used to inform planning for a mandatory first year course, part of the

Richmond General Education Programme, with volunteering at its core, designed to help students take their first “small steps towards employability”.



Figure 1

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Improved two-way feedback to ease transition to mathematics at university

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Introduction

This paper describes changes made to a first year mathematics module to attempt to improve opportunities for communication between the lecturer and students. The work is in progress and the paper focuses on describing the changes and the reasons they were made.

Students registered for the module have differing intake experiences, and indeed different mathematical experiences throughout the year, meaning that some will feel material is being covered at a pace which is not suitable for them. Students only typically get to comment on module organisation in the end of module questionnaire. Large class formative feedback, including on hand-written mathematics, is too time-consuming to administer often enough to be useful. The changes made, to introduce teaching and assessment around mathematical writing³, e-assessment and regular feedback sheets, are described and a discussion of the results is given.

Teaching context

AS- and A-level Maths and Further Maths

AS-levels are a pre-university qualification comprising one year of study usually taken by 16-17 year olds. On completion, an AS-level can be a standalone award, or can be followed by an additional year to make an A-level qualification. Most students on the module have taken an A-level in Mathematics and achieved a reasonable grade. A minority have taken an additional mathematics qualification called Further Mathematics, either as an AS-level or an A-level. Precisely what content has been covered varies according to module choice and which of several exam boards were used.

Module content

Mathematical Methods 1 is a year-long module, one of six 20-credit modules that make up the first year of a Bachelor's degree in mathematics. In the academic year 2013/14 (September 2013 to June 2014), the module was taught to approximately 120 students

³ The problem with students' mathematical writing is explained by Houston (2009): "Their first submitted assessments tend to be incomprehensible collections of symbols, with no sentences or punctuation". Mathematical writing, then, is about understanding the symbols that mathematicians use as shorthand and using them correctly, in order that students may correctly and clearly communicate with other mathematicians, rather than just an "incomprehensible collection of symbols" with the answer underlined at the bottom (p. 21).

registered for one of four degree programmes in Mathematics, Financial Mathematics, Computer Science and Mathematics and Sport Science and Mathematics. It is one of three modules, along with modules in statistics and computation/numerical methods, which are taken by students on all four courses. As such, it must provide sufficient grounding in mathematical techniques to support the second year of all four degree routes, while being supplemented, for some students, by other first year mathematics modules.

The module aims to consolidate and extend previous knowledge of calculus and linear algebra, with emphasis on the underlying techniques. Content starts in topics covered in A-level Mathematics as a refresher, builds through areas only covered in Further Mathematics, before moving into material new to all. Due to the varied intake qualifications, the transition between old and new material happens at different times for different students, but the aim is to bring everyone to the same level and prepare them for subsequent study.

The author taught the module for part of the 2012/13 academic year and the full academic year 2013/14. Teaching is, per week, two whole cohort lectures and one small group session with approximately 25 per group. In the seminars, students work through exercises and ask for help as needed.

Two ways of communication

Lecturer to students

It is difficult to mark regular formative work with a cohort of 120. In the 2012/13 academic year, unless they asked for help in seminars, students' work was not evaluated by staff until after a summative class test in January. However, it would be useful for students to get some formative feedback from the lecturer before this, and particularly for those who are struggling to be aware that they are not the only one.

Students to lecturer (and each other)

Although some do so, it can be intimidating for students to speak in lectures. Some students speak to the lecturer about the module during seminars, but this is not a reliable method of data collection. The end of module questionnaire for 2012/13 collected responses from some students that the pace was too slow and the work insufficiently challenging, while others felt the pace was too fast and the work too difficult. However, the end of the module questionnaire is too late to discover these and other views. Some students have seen some topics before and may feel their time is being wasted, while perhaps being unaware that they are part of a minority. Moreover,

there are plenty of decisions to be made by the lecturer when running modules, and the typical opportunity for students to give their views on these is at the end, when changes only influence the module for subsequent cohorts.

Changes made

Formative e-assessment

E-assessment used a system designed for numerate disciplines called Numbas (see Foster, Perfect and Youd, 2012). This allows randomisation of questions, so students can get new questions for repeated practice. E-assessment allows instant feedback and the chance to re-randomise and try again, to boost the confidence of weaker students. This also provides an option for remote engagement of students who have perhaps lost touch because they believe the module is covering content they have already seen. Finally, e-assessment uses automated marking, meaning this can happen far more often than the lecturer could mark 120 formative homework sheets.

Explicit teaching and assessment of mathematical writing

Robinson, Thomlinson and Challis (2010) note that academics wish students to develop a set of core mathematical skills, including "being able to write mathematics well" (p. 141), but that such skills are often not explicitly taught and assessed. In *Mathematical Methods 1*, there is a learning outcome around mathematical writing that had not been explicitly included in the teaching and assessment. Robinson, Thomlinson and Challis recommend being "as clear about the progression of the students' skills and qualities during their course as we are currently about the progression of their content knowledge" and combining this with "assessment and marking schemes which explicitly credit the core skills" (p. 143).

Houston (2011) links good writing skills to improved thinking, saying that writing clearly requires students to organise their thoughts correctly (p. 34). He provides an explicit mark for writing, saying that students are "strongly motivated to maximise their marks and so if poor exposition is not penalised with withdrawal of marks or encouraged by giving marks, it is unlikely that students will alter their behaviour" (p. 35). He points out that good writing skills are valued by employers, and that improved mathematical thinking will make later work easier (p. 35). Houston (2009) provides two good chapters which make a useful source of material on mathematical writing.

Students were given notes on mathematical writing, backed up with seminar exercises. To support this explicit teaching of mathematical writing, a mark of 0, 1 or 2 was awarded for the quality of writing in each question in the mid-year test and end-of-

module exam, accounting for approximately 10% of the total mark. Since marks are attached, and particularly as this is unusual in mathematics, students should be given the opportunity for formative feedback. Formative e-assessment (described above) will not be able to give this feedback, since this automatically marks mathematics via computer input and handwritten work is not seen. To view students' hand-written work, feedback sheets were used (described below).

Feedback sheets

To provide for two-way communication between students and the lecturer, short feedback sheets were used in-class at the end of each topic. Students provide an answer to a mathematical question and responses to a short survey about their prior understanding and engagement with the topic. In the lecture following collection of the feedback sheets, students are given a brief presentation and discussion of the survey results, as well as an outline of common errors in method and quality of writing for the mathematical question.

This means students are able to frequently express their views anonymously to the lecturer on the content and operation of the module, and the lecturer is able to provide formative feedback on the mathematical content and writing more often than formal assessment allows.

The survey and answer to a topical question could be achieved by electronic means (see, for example, Rowlett, 2010), but this would not allow direct examination of students' writing. In this case, the added work needed to sort and analyse paper responses was felt to be justified by the opportunity to give formative feedback on this important aspect. In fact, it is not necessary to carefully mark all answers in order to give general feedback on some common mistakes; this is an advantage to this approach over a short homework sheet with individual feedback.

Example results from feedback sheet questions

For all topics, students were asked four questions:

1. How familiar were you with [the topic] before we covered it? (7-point Likert-style scale from 'Not familiar' to 'Familiar');
2. How confident were you about [the topic] before we covered it? (7-point Likert-style scale from 'Not confident' to 'Confident');
3. How confident are you about [the topic] now? (7-point Likert-style scale from 'Not confident' to 'Confident');

4. The pace of lectures in MM1 this week was {too slow / just right / too fast}
(please circle).

Examples of responses, as shown to students, are shown in figures 1 and 2.

Differentiation, shown in figure 1, is a topic covered before university by all students that is included in the module as a refresher topic. The responses to questions 1 and 2 back up this claim, with many claiming familiarity and confidence before we covered the topic.

Complex numbers, shown in figure 2, is a topic not covered in A-level Mathematics, so those without Further Mathematics are unlikely to have seen it. This is reflected in the responses, with many students reporting a lack of familiarity and confidence before covering the topic, however many students' confidence improved. Three students reported a decrease in confidence, suggesting perhaps that their study of the topic at university covered areas with which they were not previously familiar and made them aware of how much they didn't know. Though most students felt the pace during this topic was 'just right', five students called this 'too slow' and eleven 'too fast'. Hopefully, seeing the whole-class feedback, those who felt the pace was too slow are convinced that this is necessary and are encouraged to be more tolerable of this for the benefit of their classmates. Equally, those who felt the pace was too fast hopefully realise that, as more than 85% of students disagreed with them, the onus is on them to address their difficulties in seminars or outside class.

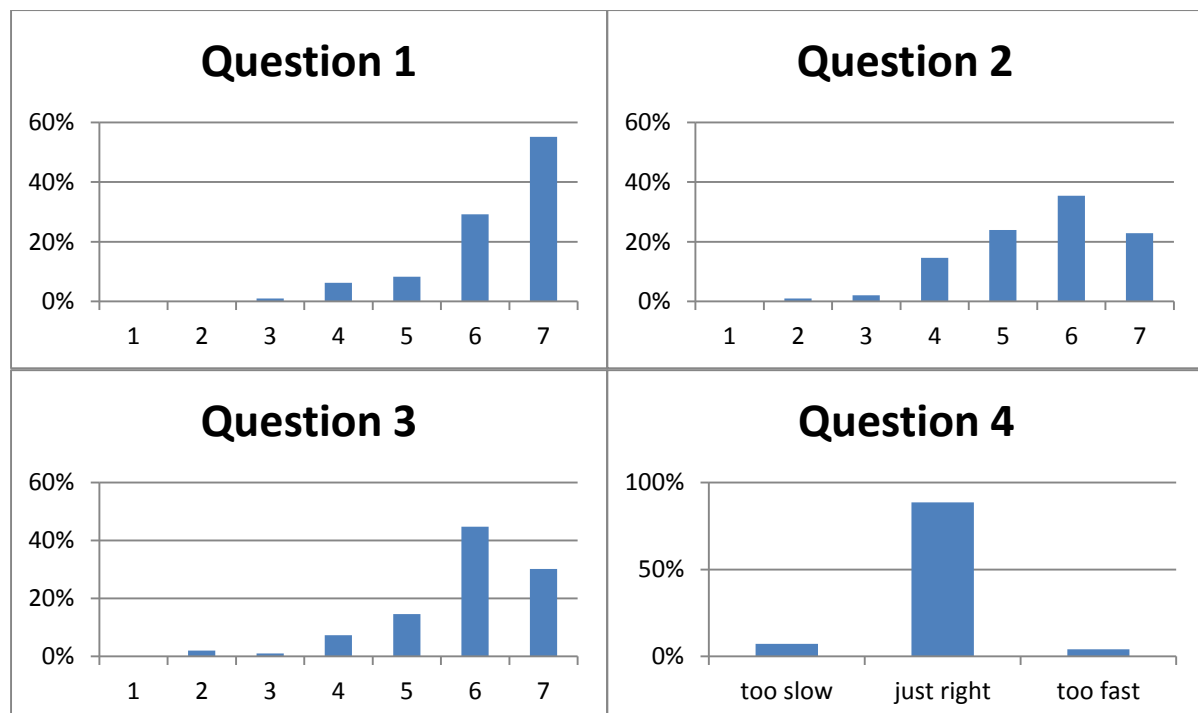


Figure 1 – responses to questions 1-4 for differentiation.

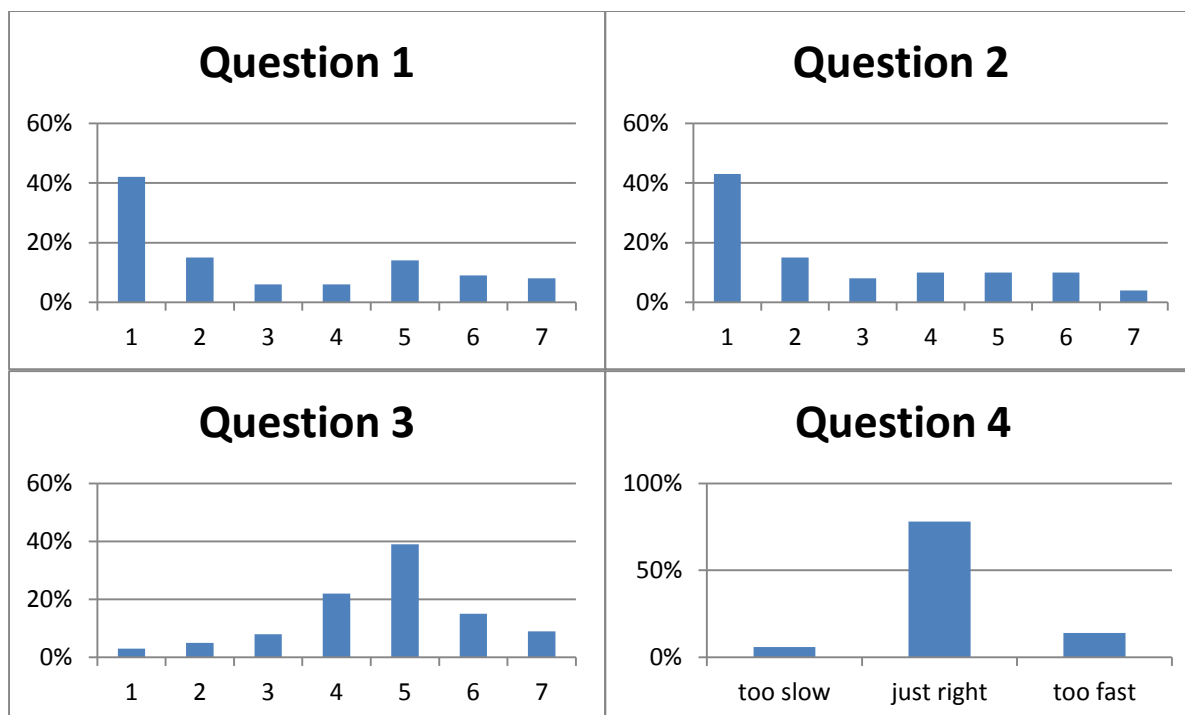


Figure 2 - responses to questions 1-4 for complex numbers.

As well as these standard questions, most topic questions also contained a question about the module organisation on an ad hoc basis. For example, in the third week of teaching, students were asked whether they had made use of annotated lecture notes that were being saved after each lecture and made available via the VLE. More than half of the students who answered this question had made use of these, which encouraged the lecturer to continue to go to the effort of uploading them.

In a question about the module booklet at the end of semester 1, several useful comments were made that led to changes in the format of the semester 2 notes booklet. One sheet asked for unstructured, free-text feedback regarding what was and was not working about the module. Some students commented that they would like more practice material, which provided the opportunity to re-emphasise the availability of the e-assessments and to talk about where to find the recommended textbooks. A question about attendance, and why students do or do not attend well, fuelled an interesting discussion of student attendance habits.

Discussion

Changes were made to a first year mathematics module to attempt to increase opportunities for the lecturer to give feedback on student work and for students to comment on module organisation. E-assessment is certainly useful for student practice material, even if it does not help provide feedback on mathematical writing.

The opportunity granted by collecting regular whole-class feedback is that the lecturer and students do not have their views of the module shaped by the small sample of students they have spoken to. The lecturer might speak to a small number of students who complain that they have seen the material before and it is being covered too slowly, while students who are struggling with the new content keep quiet. Those who are struggling may worry that they are alone, and the lecturer might be encouraged to pick up the pace. In fact, the majority of students may be struggling and need more time, and collecting anonymous whole-class feedback allows for this circumstance to be revealed to all parties. The questions about prior knowledge were useful for the lecturer to track prerequisite knowledge and to help students recognise their position in relation to the whole group. These feedback sheets also provided the opportunity for students to impact on module organisation during the current year, rather than through end-of-module feedback which only causes changes for subsequent cohorts.

The mathematical subject questions were an efficient way to provide whole-class feedback on written work in a circumstance where regular homework sheets could not be marked with individual feedback. Additionally, student performance in these questions allowed the lecturer to quickly judge how well the material was being understood. The quality of student writing in the final exam was certainly much improved on the previous year, hopefully as a result of the explicit teaching and assessment connected to this aspect.

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Step UP: UCO FE – HE Transition Programme

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Abstract

The widening participation agenda has encouraged many 'non-traditional students' to enter higher education (HE) from vocational further education (FE), but their experience is often negative as many consider leaving during their first year (Thomas, 2012). This means the need to instil in these students a sense of belonging through 'developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners' is vital (ibid p.7).

The StepUP programme sought to help students from vocational backgrounds develop this 'knowledge', 'confidence' and 'identity' and so enable them to fully engage and achieve success in their first year as an undergraduate. The project team developed a programme of short academic and information literacy events. By participating in the programme, it was intended that students would enter university and complete their first year with skills, knowledge, understanding and levels of confidence they might not otherwise possess.

The programme targeted students on FE Childcare and HE Early Years courses⁴ and was designed using an Action Research cyclical model of intervention, data gathering and feedback, review/redesign and implementation. The project gathered qualitative data regarding participants' feelings, attitudes and expectations of university and evaluative feedback on the programme.

Feedback from participants was positive and indicated that the programme had indeed supported students in developing their identity as successful undergraduate students and equipped them with some practical skills in preparation for university.

Introduction

The transition experience of non-traditional first year undergraduate students is characterised by significant challenges around adjusting to the expectations and requirements of Higher Education (HE). This is due to a range of factors stemming largely from the lack of cultural capital typical of first generation students with a non-

⁴ FE courses are generally delivered at Levels 1, 2 and 3 of the UK qualifications framework and HE courses cover Levels 4 – 8.

academic prior education (Leese, 2010; Watson, et al., 2009). A considerable amount of research has been conducted in this area both within the UK and internationally, although most of this focuses on large residential Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This paper reports on a small scale programme aimed at improving the transition experience of non-traditional students at a small Higher Education in Further Education (FE) campus. University Campus Oldham (UCO) welcomes a high proportion of 'non-traditional' students who remain at home while studying.

The Step UP programme sought to engage students actively in recognising and developing higher level academic and information skills as well as starting the process of becoming reflective students. By engaging with students before their entry onto an undergraduate programme, it was intended that students would start on a more positive note with a certain level of confidence and awareness of HE expectations.

Literature review

Much of the literature on the transition between further and higher education centres on the greater need for supporting students in their transition to HE following the Widening Participation agenda and the resulting increase in non-traditional students entering HE. Having surveyed the literature, several broad themes are apparent: the importance of establishing an HE identity and sense of belonging; the suggestion that there is a new student in HE and the need for HEIs to change their practices to accommodate the new student.

Identity and belonging

The notion of identity, particularly learner identity, was recognised by Carl Rogers and Paulo Friere who highlighted the development of the self in relation to its environment as a learning process (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Similarly, Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus acknowledge the influence of social systems, institutions and practices on our identity as students (Bourdieu, 2011). This process of negotiating one's identity through participation in a community is further developed by Wenger's social learning theory in which he argues that learning is 'a process of becoming' (2014) and our identity shapes and is shaped by our community. This 'process of becoming' reflects the process of transition to HE and the formation of a HE learner identity which is essential to achievement (Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012). In their study into understanding student transition to university, Briggs et al found that this need to create a new identity when transitioning to higher education was a result of the 'social displacement' experienced by many students on entering university. Similar findings are presented by (Scanlon, Rowling & Weber, 2007) who describe transition to university as a loss experience and

one of "identity discontinuity" as students' past educational and social experiences fail to prepare them adequately for university. This is reminiscent of Bourdieu's concept of 'field' (Routledge, 2011) and the 'social displacement' experienced by students illustrates their attempts to establish their membership in the unfamiliar 'field' of higher education.

In their exploration of non-traditional students' early experiences of higher education Watson, et al (2009) claimed that cultural capital, and particularly linguistic capital, is key to 'fitting in' and 'adapting' to the dominant culture, or 'field'. Their thematic analysis of congruence demonstrated that those students already possessing some cultural capital were more willing and able to adopt the habitus of the new field, while those whose habitus was least congruent with the new field experienced more difficulties, resistance and in one case, exclusion, thus affirming Bourdieu's own claim that 'capital begets capital' (p.679). Failure to recognise or accept this habitus of the dominant culture or 'field' in HE will inevitably result in HE's inability to ensure the success of its non-traditional students (Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012). This need to recognise and create a shift in 'institutional practices' in order to meet the needs of the non-traditional student is further explored by Leese's (2010) study which investigated the concept of a 'new student' in HE.

The 'new student' in HE is more likely to attend 'new' or 'post-1992' universities in part as a result of desiring to be amongst similar kinds of people (Hoelscher et al, 2008; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003) indicating that 'non-traditional' or 'new' students may be aware of their lack of cultural capital and do not have a natural sense of belonging in higher education. Although many of these students come to identify themselves as successful HE learners by the end of their studies, the social and economic barriers which they must overcome to enter and succeed at university remain (Hoelscher et al, 2008; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). In fact Leathwood and O'Connell claim that the WP agenda has resulted in a two tier 'elite *and* a 'mass' system' (p. 612) thereby compounding the notion of the 'deficit model, which views the problem as located within the student' (Leese, 2010, p.247) and shifting the responsibility away from the institution. Leese highlights the need for HE staff to recognise this 'new student' and focus on providing for their needs through structured support systems and processes in order to foster the identity and sense of belonging so crucial to a successful HE experience (Thomas, 2012).

The vocational educational experience of students prior to university is often characterised by 'spoonfeeding', a fact acknowledged by students themselves (Bailey, et al., 2007; O'Shea, Lysaght, & Tanner, 2012) and their FE tutors (Bingham & O'Hara,

2007; Rhodes, et al, 2002). This exacerbates the mismatch between FE (or vocational) and HE (or academic) approaches to teaching and learning and leaves the 'new' HE student ill-prepared for the skills and independence required at university (Hatt & Baxter, 2003; Hayward et al., 2008). Students are aware of the mismatch and the need to develop as an independent learner but they are also aware that this requires a certain level of support and guidance during the initial stages (Leese, 2010). Practices shown to achieve this include induction, collaboration between FE and HE and opportunities for social learning.

Induction

The induction process is considered a key contributor to a successful transition experience and establishing an HE identity for non-traditional students both in terms of format and content. There is widespread agreement on the need for an ongoing process of guidance, as opposed to a one-off induction week, to achieve a more gradual push to autonomy and independence (Bailey, et al., 2007; Bingham & O'Hara, 2007; Laing, Robinson & Johnston, 2005; Leese, 2010). Laing, Robinson and Johnston (2005) propose a 'spiral induction programme' which provides structured tasks and activities aimed at developing new students' understanding of HE expectations and also allows 'at risk' students to be identified for more targeted support. Parkes' (2014) HEADstart programme goes further by engaging with students prior to their arrival at university and thus 'fostering an early sense of belonging' (p.2). Similarly, the importance of instilling a sense of belonging at an early stage was highlighted through the 'What Works?' programme whose remit was to build student engagement against the backdrop of widening participation and increased fees (Thomas, 2012).

FE – HE collaboration

A contributing factor to students' 'early sense of belonging' has been linked to a closer relationship between FE and HE colleagues and a number of studies have pointed to the need for effective collaboration between staff at the FE HE interface. Briggs, Clark and Hall (2012) report on the positive effects on aspirations and enthusiasm gained for students attending preparation events offered on university campuses as well as visits to schools and colleges by HE staff (p.10). It has been found that Access courses specifically designed to prepare students for HE examinations and assessment methods provide an easier transition to university partly as a result of the close links between the HE and FE institutions in Hatt and Baxter's (2003) study (p. 26). Looking from a slightly different perspective, with a view to increasing access to HE from FE, Rhodes, et al. (2002) found that dialogue across the HE – FE interface was vital for raising awareness

among FE staff of the opportunities and support available in HE for non-traditional students.

Collaboration/social learning

As well as collaboration between FE and HE, the development of positive relationships and interaction between students is another key factor in ensuring a positive transition experience and ensures the social aspects of identity discussed by Wenger where interaction between learners is paramount in successful learning. The support derived from these relationships, particularly when institutional support does not suffice, has been found vital for establishing a sense of belonging (Bingham & O'Hara, 2007; Heirdsfield, Walker, & Walsh, 2005; Thomas, 2012). However, this does not remove the need for positive relationships between staff and students, indeed it is recognised that the social elements both among student peers and between staff and students is a necessary ingredient to building the HE student identity (Briggs, Clark, & Hall, 2012; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Thomas, 2012).

So, the literature highlights the necessity of establishing an appropriate HE identity in order to have a positive learning experience at university. It is this HE identity that the non-traditional students often lack so institutions need to support these students in developing their identities as undergraduates if we are to ensure 'success' as well as 'access' for these students (Bowes, et al., 2013; Hayward & al, 2008).

Methodology

This project used action research methodology in that we sought to investigate, evaluate and ultimately improve an area of practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). As UCO is a widening participation institution with a high proportion of 'non-traditional' students, the aim of improving their transition experience included a social purpose, a key feature of action research methodology (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Somekh, 2006). In line with earlier recommendations discussed in the literature review regarding the importance of FE HE dialogue, this was a collaborative venture involving the academic skills tutor, library manager and early years and childcare lecturers from the HE and FE curriculum teams within the college. We targeted students studying Childcare and Early Years in the pilot stage of the programme as significant numbers of these students lack academic skills due to the vocational nature of their FE college course.

We held three half-day events and one shorter focus group discussion for vocational FE students transitioning to HE. The programme spanned 12 months from the January of the students' final year in college through to the end of their first semester at university

(see Figure 1). The events aimed to raise awareness of the expectations and requirements of HE and provide practical academic and information literacy training as well as to introduce deeper learning habits through reflective tasks. Student participants evaluated each event in terms of its usefulness and relevance; these evaluations fed into the planning and delivery of subsequent events.

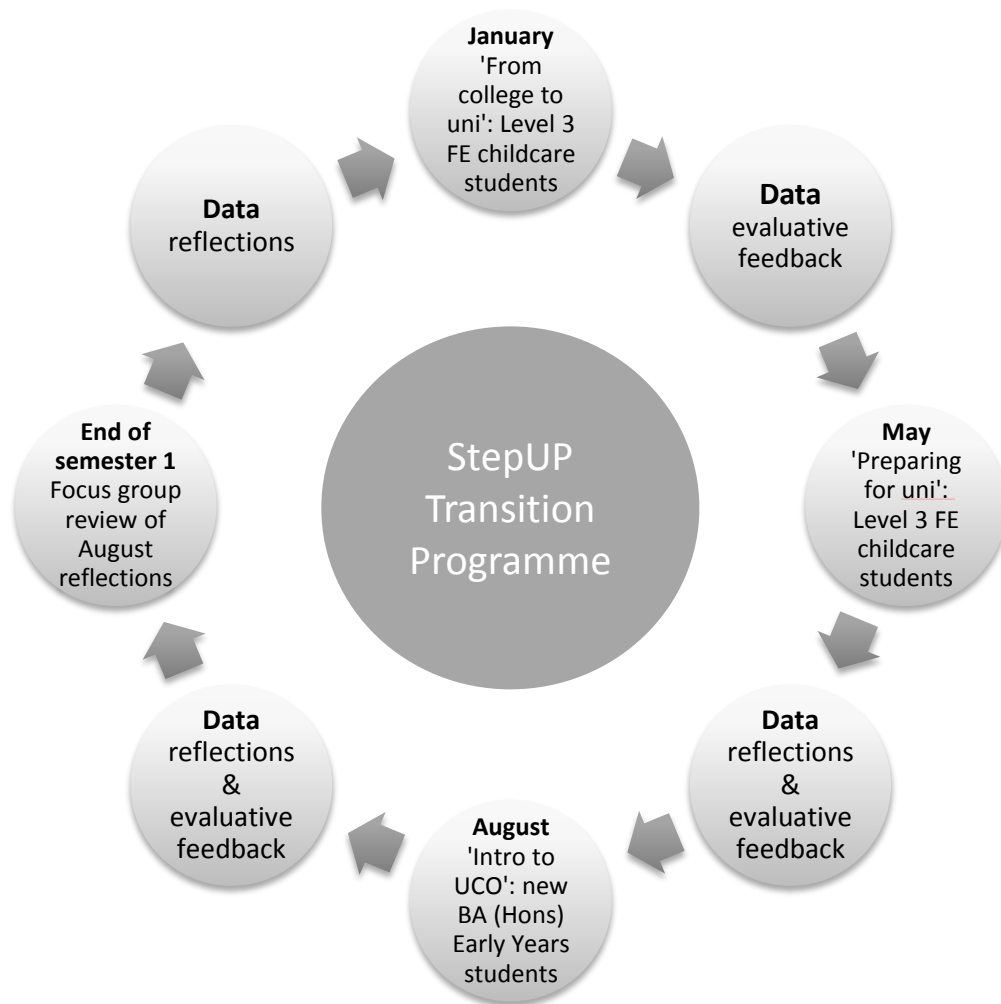


Figure 1: The StepUP cycle

We began with the August event for students starting the BA (Hons) Early Years programme at UCO in September (11 participants). Qualitative data were gathered via group reflections prompted by five questions:

1. How do you feel about starting university in September?
2. In what ways do you think university will be different from and similar to college?
3. What do you think will be the main challenges?
4. Have you made any preparations for starting university?
5. What sort of support or information might help you make a good start?

In gathering this reflective data, it was intended that students begin to recognise and develop more self-awareness regarding their current identity as FE students and what is needed to become successful HE students. These reflections were reviewed with 6 of the participants in a focus group at the end of the first semester. Evaluative feedback was also gathered after this event using an electronic polling tool.

The January event (24 participants) focussed on academic skills development rather than reflection so the only data gathered were evaluative feedback comments using an electronic questionnaire tool.

The May event (8 participants) gathered further qualitative data regarding students' expectations and readiness for HE using paper-based questionnaires.

Results/Findings

Attendance

As with similar programmes offering optional events (e.g. Briggs, Clark & Hall, 2012), this programme did not attract large numbers (see table 1) with only 11 out of 36 potential new starters attending the August event. The improved attendance at the January event was a result of it being a timetabled session within their college course. However, only eight of these students returned for the May event; the low numbers may be explained by students prioritising the completion of their college summative assessment pieces. Due to the nature of the course, the majority of participants were female, only one male attended each event.

Event	Title	Participants	Attendance
August	Introduction to UCO	New first year BA (Hons) Early Years students	11
End of semester 1	Focus group review of August reflections	New first year BA (Hons) Early Years students	6
January	From college to uni	Level 3 FE Childcare students	24
May	Preparing for uni	Level 3 FE Childcare students	8

Table 1: Attendance figures

Reflections

Attitudes towards starting university

Students' feelings about starting university were what would be expected when starting a new phase in life, that is an approximately equal split of positive ('excited', 'happy',

'looking forward to starting the course') and negative ('nervous', 'scared', 'anxious'). When asked about concerns, their responses fell into three categories: academic, practical and social. Of these, the academic concerns were significantly more prominent with eleven responses covering factors such as 'time management', 'working independently', 'working in a team', 'completing work to expectations' and 'referencing'. 'Meeting new people' and 'fitting in' comprised the two responses regarding social concerns reflecting the need for a sense of belonging and the importance of establishing positive relationships. Only one practical concern, 'work experience', was mentioned. These data indicate some characteristics of students transitioning to UCO in particular as, unlike the majority of the reviewed research, most of these students remain at home while studying, therefore social and practical concerns around friendships, accommodation and finance, may be of less importance. Conversely, these students, having a 'non-traditional' vocational background, are more concerned about their academic ability and potential performance on the course. The focus group discussion in January, which reviewed these reflections from the perspective of having completed a semester, confirmed the prominence of academic related concerns. However, there was more recognition of the social aspects of learning with several comments regarding the benefits of interaction with current students:

Ask students who have gone to uni ... I think it would have been better because then [...] we'd have a more better experience of how they... we could learn from them because we're in the same position

and an appreciation of positive relationships with lecturers:

I think that more 1:1 with tutors, you know lecturers ...

[...]

ask the tutors how you're feeling and how you think you're coping with workload, more guidance, yeah.

Preparations for university

Despite the prevalence of academic concerns, none of the students had made preparations in this area. All preparations were practical covering administrative tasks such as enrolment, organising work placements, arranging finance and accommodation (for the two students who were planning to move to the area in order to study) and, in one case, catching up on sleep. One reason for this anomaly may be that, as the respondents had already made sufficient practical arrangements, this was no longer a concern and so did not feature prominently in their responses. Similarly, academic

preparations being non-existent, may have led to the concerns expressed in this area. Another explanation may be that practical tasks are often easier to identify and address whereas academic matters are more abstract and troublesome. However, as the reasons for concerns and preparations were not explored in this project, further research would be needed to ascertain these. These attitudes and concerns indicate a certain level of awareness in transitioning students around the requirements of HE study.

Awareness of HE

The dominance and nature of academic concerns among the responses in addition to data regarding the differences between college and university suggest that the respondents recognise the HE expectations to work independently and manage their time effectively. What this recognition was based on was not a focus of the project, so it can only be speculated that sources of information may include friends and/or family with HE experience, college tutors and the internet via UCAS or individual HEI websites or social media. Participants in the May event indicated that they expected a certain level of support and guidance from HE staff which may or may not match the reality depending on the institution, programme of study and individual members of staff. Indeed, Kandiko and Mawer's (2013) study of student expectations of HE revealed 'a recurrent theme about transgression of expectations' and recommended 'direct interventions in students' transitional experiences' (p. 13).

Evaluative feedback⁵

The 'Introduction to UCO event was attended by 11 prospective students. Generally the feedback was positive with 90% of respondents finding the event 'useful' or 'very useful' (Table 2). The overriding reasons centred on receiving information and becoming familiar with the campus and peers which indicates a recognition of the importance of a sense of belonging. Similarly, the request to meet the course tutor would appear to confirm the need to establish positive relations between staff and students at an early stage. The comments regarding the need for more resources resulted from a misplaced assumption that participants would have smart phones or tablets and be able to use these to complete an interactive task. Requests for a shorter session were considered but in order to fit everything in several shorter sessions would be needed; this was rejected due to logistics and a potentially disjointed experience. All other suggestions for improvement were addressed in subsequent sessions.

⁵ Participants' responses have been copied without alteration from the original sources (online and paper-based surveys) hence some minor language errors have been reproduced.

How useful has today's session been for you? (Very useful, Quite useful, Not useful)			
	Why was it useful or not useful?	How could we make it better next time?	Is there anything else you'd like to add?
Very useful	It was informative and I found it useful for when I start in september	Shorter sessions	No
Very useful	It gave me a lot of information to reassure me that I can receive help.	Nothing	No
Very useful	Learnt a lot about the library and extra help such as study skills as well as meeting new people which I was afraid of	have more devices to do the quiz	I can't wait to start :)!
Very useful	It was usefulll because i found out a bit more about the university	More infoemation about the course	Ver usefull
Very useful	I learned my way around the campus and also the library	Make the treasure hunt more interesting, the questions were not very informal	Nope
Very useful	Get to know other students.	More resources so everyone can do it.	No
Very useful	variety of information given	Doesn't need to be better	nothing
Quite useful	Useful because we became more familiar of the campus	We could have met our course tutor	
Not useful	Already knew everything		
Very useful	Interesting points gven	Make session shorter	Enjoyed it
Very useful	Got information and was nice meet other students.	Introduce everyone so they get to know each other .	No.

Table 2. Feedback from 'Introduction to UCO' August 2013 (n=11)

The 'From college to uni' January event involved Level 3 students from the FE Childcare course. Again, feedback was generally positive although the response rate was low as

the survey was sent out after the event (only 8 out of 24 participants responded) see Table 3. 100% of respondents 'enjoyed' or 'sort of enjoyed' the events and found at least some of the activities useful. As with the 'Introduction to UCO' event, being informed and familiarisation was a key feature, but respondents also felt they had learned new skills. In terms of suggestions for improvement, it seems participants found the event somewhat dull. Attempts have been made to enliven subsequent events, however this in itself is perhaps indicative of the differences between FE where tutors strive to make lessons fun and lively and HE where the tradition is more passive lecture, chalk and talk style. Refreshments were provided at later events.

Did you enjoy the transition event at UCO? (Yes, Sort of, No)	Could you tell us why?	Did you find the activities and information useful? (Yes, Some of them, No)	Could you tell us why?2	How could we improve the event for future groups?	Do you have any other comments you'd like to add?
Yes	It was nice to see around uni	Yes	I got to know more about being independent. It helped me at my confidence level.	Being more active.	No
Yes	because it gave me the idea of how uni life will be	Yes	yes because it gave me useful websites	have a variety activities	
Yes	It was informative and entertaining at the same time. we were made to feel welcome.	Yes	It was relevant and useful.	By providing refreshments :')	No
Yes	i got all the information needed	Yes	Because it told us the advantage and disadvantage	involve more activities	no thank you
Yes	Interesting activities and very welcoming staff.	Yes	it was all very informative and good group work.	make it a little more fun, not as much sitting around.	
sort of	it was alright but i could of had something different other than early years	some of them	some we have already covered but others were new	add in a different subject other than early years so we know what they are about	overall it was alright
sort of	it was informative	Some of them No	boring	make it more lively because some of us were falling asleep	keep up the ok job :)
Yes	I personally think it was a calm introduction to university environment for me.	Yes	I learnt a number of new things and ways to make my time effective.	communicating the programme better and clearly before hand.	no

Table 3. Evaluative feedback from 'From college to uni' January 2014 (n=8)

The same group of Level 3 students were invited to the 'Succeeding at University' event in May, although numbers were much lower due to assignment deadlines. Only two evaluative questions were asked on this occasion as the bulk of the questions aimed to prompt students to reflect more on their expectations and readiness for university (see Table 4). The responses indicate that the events have had beneficial effects on students' current and future academic skills in particular with regard to internet research.

How have the activities affected your learning in current studies?	How will the activities affect future learning at uni?
know how to use google better	Know more what to prepare for.
how to search relevant info & add into assignments	Know what sources to look for.
new ways to search information	I now know how to find information on a journal article.
broadened knowledge on journals	They have made me aware of what to expect.
help me find out more information	Will understand research types more.
helped me a little	Make my assignments better.
more aware that I need to improve my grammar	They will help me with finding information on articles.
how to research relevant academic information properly	Gives me an understanding of what university work is like & how to produce proper work.
improved types of resources I use for referencing in my assignments	I have a stronger understanding of journals & how they are useful and how to look for more specific information.
affected my grammar in my assignments & help with a variety of search engines	Help to refine my searches on google to help narrow down my search. My grammar will also help me with assignments.
made me aware how to use google & tools in narrowing down information	It will help me in further research & studies as I will be able to use google & other resources.

Table 4. Evaluative feedback from 'Succeeding at University' May 2014 (n=8)

Conclusion

Despite its small scale, this project confirms findings from similar projects nationally and internationally and offers a unique perspective of a non-residential HE in FE campus. The project has highlighted the benefits of engaging with potential HE students at an early stage in order to begin the process of establishing an HE identity. Participants reported that the programme was beneficial in terms of raising awareness of the requirements of HE level study as well as developing practical academic skills which improved confidence levels.

However, as with any voluntary scheme, the students who opt in are often not the ones who are in most need and the challenge remains of how to engage the students who do not choose to participate. Suggestions have included the development of an online programme to offer more flexibility and the team are currently investigating the feasibility of this.

Nonetheless, the StepUP programme provides a positive introduction to university and opportunities for non-traditional students to begin to develop their sense of belonging and identity as successful HE learners.

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Rethinking Belonging and the First Year Experience

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Abstract

Undergraduates are most vulnerable to withdrawal within their first year. This paper, based on current doctoral research, considers the discourse of 'belonging' in student retention, arguing it is problematic in relation to part-time, mature undergraduates. It attempts to rethink belonging in relation to retention and considers some of the implications for 'the first year experience'.

1. Context

This paper emerges from doctoral research which aims to develop and enhance theoretical understandings and consider practical and policy implications of the impact of English universities' retention strategies on part-time, mature undergraduates. The project is a response to a dearth of literature addressing the impact of institutional retention strategies in higher education (HE) in general, but particularly in relation to part-time, mature undergraduates. It is a multiple case study involving four English universities offering face-to-face, part-time, first degree provision. However, the purpose of this paper is to rethink 'belonging' in relation to retention through a borderland analysis, ie: employing 'multiple theoretical perspectives in conjunction with one another, even when they contradict ...to portray a more complete picture of identity...a new theoretical space' (Abes, 2012:190). Can an enhanced understanding of belonging which takes account of student diversity contribute to an understanding of 'the first year experience'?

2. Retention and part-time, mature undergraduates

The first year experience is a significant factor in overall course completion; undergraduates in general are most vulnerable to withdrawal in the first year of study. But student engagement – and disengagement - with HE is structured by age and mode of study as well as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic and educational background. There is a significantly higher withdrawal rate for part-time undergraduates compared with full-time (HESA, 2014) and overall, older students are at a higher risk of early

withdrawal than younger; degree completion rates decrease as the age of students on commencement increases (HEFCE, 2009:42).

Retention is an institution-focussed term, concerned with measurement of learning within narrow, time-limited parameters. Institutional retention strategies tend to rely on a narrow version of HE studentship, assuming a typical student is full-time, young, time-rich and at least initially, residential on campus. The influential discourse of 'belonging' within UK retention literature relies on this model. Thomas argues belonging is 'closely aligned with the concepts of academic and social engagement' (Thomas, 2012:12) an approach influenced by Tinto's interactionalist theory of student departure (1975) which highlights integration and congruency as conditions of student persistence. She argues for explicit institutional commitment to nurturing and valuing 'a culture of belonging' (Thomas, 2012:19) and that a 'sense of belonging is considered critical to both retention and success' (ibid:1). If however, a sense of belonging is 'critical to retention', then all students must have the capacity to belong in order to complete their programmes successfully.

Part-time undergraduates are more likely to be female, over 21 years old and therefore defined as mature by UCAS (2014), White, to be studying in a post-1992 HE institution (HEI) and for a sub-degree level qualification, have family responsibilities and to be employed. They have polarised educational backgrounds: part-time undergraduates are more likely than full-time students to have higher entry qualifications or to have lower or no prior educational attainment (Callender and Wilkinson, 2011). Although they are frequently categorised as 'non-traditional' or 'non-standard', ie: 'students who differ significantly from the traditional student body,' (McGiveney, 1996:11), there is no 'typical' part-time student in English HE. They are 'a difficult group to quantify, defined as much by what they are not: full-time, young, as by the diverse attributes of the cohort as a whole' (Callender, 2013:2). Part-time undergraduates are clustered in post-1992 HEIs, and a majority enter HE without A Level qualifications. Both attributes contribute to vulnerability to withdrawal (Rose-Adams, 2012). Although Yorke (1999) found that that part-time students are less likely to make poor decisions re: their course, employment and family commitments mean part-time, mature undergraduates are less mobile than their full-time peers and more likely to apply to their 'local' higher education institution with a single choice. This increases the chances of making the wrong choice and is exacerbated in regions where higher education provision is limited (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). Rose-Adams (2012) reports that students applying with a single choice or through Clearing or are more likely to leave early. The majority of full-time undergraduates are studying for first degrees with only 10% studying for other undergraduate qualifications, in contrast, outside the Open University, a minority of

part-time students (37%) are studying for a first degree. The majority (63%) 'are working towards other undergraduate qualifications: Foundation degrees, Higher National Diploma, Higher National Certificate and modules at Level 4 and above' (Pollard et al, 2012:54) including professional continuing professional development qualifications.

The diversity of the cohort has significant implications for both retention and the first year experience. The multiple responsibilities which accrue with age, including employment, family and caring commitments, mean that part-time, mature undergraduates' learning careers are more vulnerable to disruption by external factors: redundancy, relocation, family break-up or illness. Assuming that external conditions remain stable enough to sustain part-time degree study, the longer the study period, the greater the commitment and motivation required for the individual to complete it and the more robust the longer-term relationship is required to be between the institution and the individual. Adapting to an academic environment and workload in the first semester and first year also present particular challenges for those part-time, mature undergraduates accessing HE with non-traditional qualifications and/or after sustained breaks from formal education.

Part-time, mature undergraduates negotiate a learner identity alongside multiple and prioritised identities (Jackson, 2008) as employee, parent, carer, adult citizen. Schuller and Watson (1999) report that part-time students working full-time are more likely to identify themselves as workers who study, while Fuller describes the experiences of working undergraduates as 'hybrid forms of participation...a two-way navigation between studentship and employment "spaces" as well as along often interrelated studentship and employment trajectories' (2007:224). Their life stage and the multiple roles they are simultaneously enacting, impact on the way they are positioned and position themselves in relation to HE. Their multiple identities, cross-cut by age, gender, race and class, position them on periphery of HE, restricting access to means of belonging recognised and validated in dominant institutional discourses. This multiplicity also challenges the emphasis on social engagement and integration within retention literature (Tinto, 1975; Thomas, 2012), which is implicitly critical of part-time, mature undergraduates' 'highly instrumental approach to HE' (Thomas, 2012:18). Thomas argues that those who find it most difficult to develop social bonds are those who are absent from/do not participate in clubs, societies, the students' union and shared living arrangements ie: 'students who live at home, are part-time, older and/or are on courses with extended contact/workplace hours' (ibid). That social engagement creates a sense of belonging is not denied, but the specification in the retention literature of where and how that engagement should take place within HE is problematic for part-time, mature

undergraduates. Their absence, as well as their difference, is regarded as problematic in relation to belonging and retention.

3. Space to belong? A borderland analysis.

I seek to theorise belonging in HE in a way which captures the particularities and complexities of part-time, mature studentship. Abes suggests that, since all theoretical perspectives are incomplete, 'to realize the complexity of student development it is important to use multiple theoretical perspectives in conjunction with one another, even when they contradict' (Abes, 2012:190). Applying what Abes describes as a 'borderland analysis' requires the researcher to 'straddle multiple theories using ideas from each to portray a more complete picture of identity...a new theoretical space' (ibid). This borderland analysis draws on Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus, field and capital, on Brah's concept of diaspora and on Massey's spatial concepts to rethink belonging through ideas of power, identity and space/place.

3.1. A Bourdieusian analysis: fish out of water

Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (1977, 1990) of habitus, field and capital theorise belonging as a relational concept, a practice and a product of the relations of power embedded in the 'field' of HE, constructed around the privileged identities of the 'authentic' student: young, full-time, residential. Bourdieu emphasises individual and group interactions with social structure, not individual deficit. The field of English HE 'even in its present mass configuration ... has retained many attributes more characteristic of an elite system' (Scott, 2009:419). Students act within the field, as more or less 'knowing agents', viewing HE as:

a privilege, a right or a necessity, depending on a variety of structural factors such as social class, race, gender and disability, which position them differently in relation to expectations about participation in HE.

Bathmaker *et al*, 2009:119

The habitus prescribes the individual's way of seeing, interpreting and acting in the world, in accordance with their social position. It is internalised and cemented during early life within family and educational structures. Habitus disposes young middle-class people to feel they 'belong' in HE: 'academic culture predominantly reflects the dominant discourse of the student as white, middle-class and male' (Read *et al*, 2003:261) and 'dominant discourses of the authentic "student" often present the first-year higher education entrant as a school-leaver with little or no familial responsibilities' (ibid: 265). When 'habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a "fish in

water”: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1990:127). This metaphor powerfully expresses not only the effortless of belonging, but the uncomfortable experience of unbelonging. Belonging in HE is problematic for those who do not fit ‘typical’ models; where there is a mismatch between habitus and field, ‘individuals experience ‘a sense of uncertainty and feelings of anxiety’ (Reay *et al*, 2010:117).

Although Bourdieu’s rendering of belonging as a relational concept is convincing in this context, it has limitations. Skeggs describes the ‘cold and mechanical classificatory manner’ of a Bourdieusian analysis which fails to communicate ‘the pleasures and pain associated with gender, class and sexuality – the affective aspects of inequality’ (1997:9). Accordingly, I seek a more nuanced understanding of belonging as a lived experience for a diverse and complex student cohort peripherally positioned in HE. This leads me beyond Bourdieu’s ‘fish out of water’ to Brah’s concept of ‘diaspora’ (1996) for an interrogation of ‘belonging’ through ideas of power and identity.

3.2. Brah’s diaspora

Brah’s diaspora is not a descriptive category of historical experience, but ‘an interpretive frame for analysing the economic, political and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy’ (ibid:15). This frees the concept from ‘particular maps and histories’ (Clifford, 1994:303) to do the work of mapping contested territories and trajectories of privilege and disadvantage in social contexts. Diaspora asks ‘not simply who travels, but when, how and under what circumstances?’ (Brah,1996:179). Brah offers a model of relational positioning which uncovers:

regimes of power which operate to differentiate one group from another; to represent them as similar or different; to include or exclude them from constructions of the ‘nation’ and the body politic.

ibid:180

Relational positioning shapes the ‘lived experience of a locality’ (ibid:189), meaning that ‘the same geographical space comes to articulate different histories and meanings, such that ‘home’ can simultaneously be a place of safety and terror’ (ibid:204).

Diaspora’s subtexts of ‘home’ and ‘displacement’ interrogate the complexity of belonging in a contested space, asking ‘what is the difference between feeling at home and staking a claim to a place as one’s own?’ (ibid:190). The process of displacement can be applied to the experiences of all new students at the start of their HE journey. In reorienting

themselves within a new environment, they invest spaces of HE with meaning through interaction with departmental buildings, libraries and social spaces. Investing meaning in space which transforms it to 'place' requires commitment and anticipates a return; it is an affective process closely associated with belonging: 'the desire for more than what is ... for some sort of attachment' (Probyn, 1996:6). Cashmore et al (2012) found that undergraduates reported a high degree of sense of belonging to a particular place within the university, most usually a departmental building or a small campus. Fenster, whose work addresses issues of gender, culture and identity in the context of urban planning, claims: 'everyday ritualised use of space ... transforms space to place, creates 'an "everyday" sense of belonging...and helps us to draw our 'private city' (Fenster, 2005:253). Yet the concept of belonging as universal, uniform or straightforward is problematised by 'practices of boundary making and inhabitation which signal that a particular collection of people, practices, performances, ideas are meant to be in a place' (Mee and Wright, 2009:772). The first year experience does not occur in neutral space as Valentine, a feminist social geographer, articulates:

Specific spaces (home, family, community) are produced and stabilised by the dominant groups who occupy them, such that they develop hegemonic cultures through which power operates to systematically define ways of being and to mark out those who are in place or out of place.

2008:18

The point is reinforced by McDowell, a feminist geographer, concerned to problematise the apparent naturalness of spatial and gender divisions:

Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded as well as the location or site of the experience.

1999:4

Campus social spaces emphasising alcohol, music and youth culture and facilities inaccessible in twilight hours can alienate and exclude older, part-time students. Opportunities for social engagement through student sports, voluntary activity and the Students Union are often literally inaccessible in that their timetabling clashes with work, caring or family life commitments. Furthermore:

even in an institution where there are significant numbers of students of the same age, class and/or ethnicity ... the dominant culture of academia meant that many

students continue to experience isolation and alienation once inside the institution...the choice of a new university has not enabled them to fully "belong" in the environment of academia.

Read *et al*, 2003:272

Part-time mature undergraduates may resist exclusionary politics of belonging by forming informal study groups located in marginal, virtual or in-between spaces of learning life: cafes, students' homes, or through online social networks. Jackson argues these 'safe spaces of affirmation offer a ... sense of belonging...in the spaces of sociality created around prioritised identities that are otherwise marginalised' (2008:153). However, this practice of belonging away from the institutional gaze is often invisible or undervalued in terms of strategy.

Like Bourdieu's theoretical framework, Brah's 'diaspora' does the work of describing the uneven distribution of power in particular spaces, but also succeeds in conveying the complexity of lived experience in those spaces. The dynamic engagement between physical, political and emotional space in the diasporic themes of journey, displacement and home creates possibility as well as inequality and Brah's companion concept of 'diaspora space', the 'intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location' (Brah, 1996:178) allows for opportunities for transformation and reconstitution 'via a multitude of border crossings' (ibid:206). Brah argues that diaspora space is inhabited:

represented as indigenous ... and who occupy the indigene subject position as the privileged space of legitimate claims of belonging, not only by those who have migrated ... but equally by those who are constructed as belonging.

ibid:178

In the diaspora space of HE, the 'typical' or 'authentic' higher education student equates to the 'indigenous' occupant with the consequent claim to belonging. Non-traditional students, including part-time (and) mature students equate to newcomers, migrants, and their claim to belonging is contested. Viewing HE as a 'diaspora space' makes visible the power dynamics within the sector but also the potential in relation to practices of belonging and strategies for retention. Brah argues that diaspora space can include space for negotiating new forms of identity and belonging:

In the diaspora space called 'England', for example, African Caribbean, Irish, Asian, Jewish and other diasporas intersect among themselves as well as with the entity constructed as 'Englishness', the impact upon Englishness ... is continually

reconstituted via a multitude of border crossings...territorial, political, economic, cultural and psychological.

ibid.

The concept suggests the possibility of opportunities for 're-inscription' in the diaspora space of HE and emphasises aspects of the spatial in relation to belonging. To build on the spatial dimension and to complete this borderland analysis, the next section draws on Massey's explicitly spatial concepts and specifically on a 'progressive' notion of place.

3.3.Massey's spatial concepts

Investigating belonging using the concept of diaspora shows belonging to be a continually renegotiated process, shaped by the power relationships inherent in social structures. Power is at the centre of Brah's diaspora. For Massey, space itself is the product of social relations shaped by power. Massey rejects the idea of space as 'something to be mapped ... a surface continuous and given with places, peoples and culture as phenomena on this surface, without their own trajectories' (2005:4). It is inherently temporal, a quality she represents as 'space-time' (1993, 1995, 2005) and 'place' is a 'particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings' (1994:5). Massey describes place, linked to a wider set of social relations as 'extroverted'. For example, the hierarchies, discourses and practices of the HE sector are expressed through the places of individual HEIs: 'a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself' (ibid). Massey's work supports 'a progressive sense of place' (1993, 1994, 2005), unfixed, contested and multiple with the opportunity for 'the negotiation of multiplicity' (2005:141). When considered in conjunction with Brah's diaspora, this suggests possibilities for transformation:

responses by those less powerful groups to their definition as Other are diverse. Some may, if they feel threatened, insist on their own alternative sense of place ... other groups may simply reject a place if its dominant meaning excludes them. Still others, however, may try to imagine quite different sense of place.

Massey and Jess, 1995:105

Like Bourdieu and Brah, Massey's concepts articulate HE as a hierarchical social space in which dominant players define and control rules and borders. Massey uses 'activity space' as a heuristic device for thinking about 'the spatial network of links and activities, of spatial connections and of locations, within which a particular agent operates ... within each activity space there is a geography of power' (ibid:55). This forms the basis for the

concept of a 'power geometry' in which place is given specificity by 'a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus...articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings' (Massey,1997). The synergies between Massey's power geometry, Bourdieu's field analysis and Brah's relational positioning form the 'borderlands' in which this analysis is located and in which opportunities for rethinking and renegotiating belonging exist.

4. Belonging and the first year experience

In summary, rethinking belonging through a borderland analysis supports ideas of identity as multiple, fluid and complex. It articulates belonging as a continually renegotiated process and understands HEIs as diverse and unfixed, with potential for multiple versions of belonging. What are the implications of rethinking belonging in HE for approaches to the first year experience?

The following points are offered for consideration. Firstly, just as universal statements of 'belonging' in HE are problematic in relation to part-time, mature undergraduates, so the diversity and complexity of the student population are counter-arguments to uniform expectations and experiences of a 'first year experience'. A 'first year experience' will be structured by age and mode of study as well as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic and educational background. Secondly, the terminology fails to adequately represent part-time study acquired in chunks or over extended periods. A 'first year' may last two years, or more, or significantly less; it may be repeated if the student withdraws and starts again. Elements of a 'first year experience' will occur in later years if a student returns after intermitting. Thirdly, do transition and induction processes assume full-time study or make other assumptions about a student's engagement with HE, the institution and other students? Fourthly, do the versions of belonging promoted and defined through institutional transition and induction processes, including validated forms of social engagement, prioritise those activities designed for younger or residential students and thus exclude those for whom they are inaccessible or inappropriate? Fifthly and finally, does the geography of power within the institution create a dominant narrative of a first year experience which identifies certain groups as 'different' and 'problematic' within the student body and how can rethinking belonging through a borderland analysis encourage institutions to imagine and acknowledge multiple first year experiences?

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