

# Proceedings of the **Teaching Matters 2014 Conference**

Convened by the Tasmanian Institute of Learning and Teaching  
December 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>



Places  
and Spaces

## **Editor's Note**

Each research paper was reviewed using a double blind peer review process. Two academic reviewers were appointed for each submission on the basis of their independence and they reviewed the full paper devoid of the authors' names in order to ensure objectivity and anonymity.

Papers were reviewed according to specified criteria, including relevance to the conference theme and sub-themes, originality, academic merit and quality of writing.

Following review and acceptance, each full paper was presented at the Teaching Matters 2014 Conference.

### *Conference Convenors:*

Ben Cleland & Jo Osborne (Tasmanian Institute of Learning and Teaching, University of Tasmania)

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*Places & Spaces: Proceedings of the Teaching Matters 2014 Conference*

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## Introduction

I am delighted to present this compiled volume of papers that were accepted following a peer review process for publication in the Teaching Matters 2014 *Proceedings*.

*Places & Spaces* proved to be a very relevant and stimulating theme which has resulted in a collection of papers of a very high standard. It is particularly pleasing to consider the diversity of experience related in the documented research. The papers encompass both student and teacher experiences of the theme as it impacts upon all aspects of the blended learning environment: on-campus, off-campus, on-line and the unique experience of our regional campuses separated by physical distance. The diversity of approach taken by authors from different disciplines lends additional perspective. I am sure each of us who engages with these papers will learn something that can add to our own understanding of the impact of *Place* and *Space* on university learning and teaching.



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## Learning-by-Making: High Impact Learning in Design

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to describe the role High Impact Learning experiences can have in changing the way that students understand and practice design. At the School of Architecture & Design, the Learning-by-Making program provides such an opportunity, where students collaboratively design, assemble and install small community projects in both 'This Place' and 'That Place'. Students engage in three distinct learning 'spaces': they evaluate, analyse and reflect as individuals, they collaborate, negotiate and take responsibility as a student group, and they engage with diverse world-views in a community space.*

*The paper reflects on the LBM learning and teaching model through the analytical lens of a Threshold concept. The act of collaborative making can be 'transformative' in that it results in irreversible conceptual links between the design idea, fabrication and practice. The conceptual space of the project is clearly 'bounded' by the brief, budget, technology and client requirements. LBM projects are 'integrative' in that they inevitably involve materials, structures, patterns of habitation and climate control. The learning is 'discursive' in that students are encouraged to articulate their opinions on design decisions, both within the student group and with community collaborators. Students' collated reflections and observations provide rich evidence of the reflective value of High Impact Learning and its transformative role in design education.*

**Keywords:** *threshold concept, design pedagogy, experiential learning*

## **Introduction**

Learning by Making (LBM) is an approach to design teaching that has evolved over the past 20 years in the School of Architecture & Design at the University of Tasmania, involving the collaborative design and fabrication of small structures, many of which are installed in public space. Inspired by experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and the student-initiated projects that were central to architectural education in the 1970s, the emergence of LBM reflected the enthusiasm of both academics and the workshop manager for 'making', as well as the establishment of a Centre for Building With Wood within the School which importantly resulted in a new workshop facility. The underlying objective of LBM studios is to create an experience that changes the way that students understand and practice design, in particular strengthening the conceptual links between idea, fabrication and design practice. Individual LBM studios focus on the skills associated with 'collaborative making', a group of students taking collective responsibility for designing, prototyping and realising a real design project. The projects number around one hundred and include stage sets, exhibition stands, bus stops, micro-dwellings, play structures and bush installations. The LBM program is recognised nationally and internationally within Architectural education and the profession. This paper analyses the LBM methodology in relation to its potential to deliver High Impact Learning (Kuh, 2008) and does so through the lens of Threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2006).

Design is a troublesome concept to teach, as it is varied and complex, difficult to capture in cognitive dimensions (Lawson, 1997, p305), and yet easy to recognise. Design is not readily learnt or mastered through reading or instruction. Design represents a devised solution that draws from many domains of knowledge that require a reconciliation of objective and subjective decisions as to what is often an ill-defined problem. Students often experience difficulties with the apparent complexity of the design process and will often default to reducing the process into more easily digestible parts. One of the more common reductions is the separation of the design idea from the realities of construction. Holding the domains of idea and construction simultaneously, in a dynamic balance, is a difficult concept for students to grasp. The difficulty is further amplified by the tendency to teach design and construction in separate units. Attempts have been made to teach design and construction together but the convention of teaching through hypothetical problems or projects cannot effectively highlight the implications that design decisions have on construction. Executing representational design drawings does not communicate the immediacy of the implications for construction and relies on the teacher or tutors' regular feedback, evaluation and discussion of progress and success.

Understanding the dynamic relationships between design and construction requires a form of High Impact Learning (Kuh, 2008) such as experiential learning, problem-based learning or the traditional apprenticeship model. We believe that by collaboratively designing, assembling and installing small structures in public space, LBM provides an environment for students to directly experience the immediacy of design implications. The emphasis on 'designing through making' provides an impartial and tangible feedback to students regarding the success of their decisions or understanding, re-informing their understanding of design. There is no space for 'bluffing' gravity. The projects are 'live' (distinguishing LBM studios from the conventional hypothetical model). There is a client, a budget, a brief and a site, all of which need to be addressed. Students are exposed to reality, as opposed to a representation of reality.

## **Methodology**

While the core principles of 'making' and 'collective responsibility' have remained consistent over the past twenty years of LBM the model has evolved, taking on the varied priorities of the staff members involved, practical experiences, mistakes and reflections on student outcomes. While the staff involved in the LBM program are confident that significant learning occurs during the studios we have become curious as to how this might be analysed and understood within the context of learning

theories. Literature related to 'live' student studios (or Design/Build studios as they are more commonly known in the U.S.) has mainly documented the teaching approach, the outcomes and the general impression of student satisfaction. Available literature has seldom moved beyond a basic recognition of experiential learning or problem based learning theory. This is a pattern observed more broadly within architectural education and has caused a few to speculate whether those involved in the 'doing' are more adept and motivated by practice and tacit knowledge rather building than its relationship to learning theories (Fowles, 1984; Lawson, 1997; Webster, 2004). This might also be a reflection of the discipline based knowledge and discourse (Helle, Tynjälä & Olkinuora, 2006).

This paper applies a theoretical framework to the LBM model in order to gain a deeper understanding of whether this experiential learning environment is capable of fundamentally changing the way that students understand and practice design. Threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2006) were chosen as an appropriate framework to begin this analysis as it originated from a research project to strengthen learning and teaching in undergraduate courses within the discipline context (Cousin, 2006a; Boys, 2011). It provided a way for educators to focus and identify what were the barriers in student understanding and methods to overcome. A Threshold concept was considered to be "...akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (Meyer & Land, 2006 p3).

The 'live' characteristics of the LBM studio expose students to new modes of design thinking and can be related very closely to five of the most common characteristics attributed to Threshold concepts: *transformative, irreversible, integrative, bounded* and *troublesome* (Meyer & Land, 2006). These characteristics form the framework to analyse LBM, as well as locating the places of learning, both in a physical sense and in a social and learning sense. In a physical sense LBM projects are designed and fabricated within the School workshop ('this place') and are procured and installed within the local community ('that place'). In a social and learning sense students engage in active, social and creative learning (Phillips, 1995) in three distinct 'spaces': they evaluate, analyse and reflect as individuals, they collaborate, negotiate and take responsibility as a student group, and they engage with diverse world-views in a community space.

A Mixed Methods Research approach is used and employs a pragmatist worldview, where the focus is on investigating the problem and draws from available and plural data collections, such as students' reflective journals and assignment work, teachers' observations and notes and stakeholders' feedback (Creswell, 2011). We have used several examples of LBM projects and quotes from students' written assignments to illustrate the development of conceptual links between design idea, fabrication and practice. The scope of LBM units examined is from 2013 to semester 1, 2014, and involved five units with an average cohort of 19 students (Ethics Reference Number: H0014468). These students choose to undertake LBM as an intermediate or advanced elective as a part of their architectural studies. This paper reflects the beginning of an analysis of LBM through the lens of Threshold concepts. Future research will map trends occurring in cohorts and place a greater focus on practices to overcome recognised learning barriers.

### **Transformative**

The *transformative* characteristic of a Threshold concept reflects the change that occurs when a student understands a new way of thinking and/or practicing the discipline subject matter (Land & Meyer, 2006). In the context of the LBM program the students' understanding of the design process is transformed through direct experience of making, constructing and collaboration. The 'conventional' design studio cannot mimic the translation of ideas into materials and spaces, which lies at the core of the designer's experience. Despite strategies to link design and construction units students routinely resist or delay the integration of construction into a design response.

It is argued that LBM studios highlight the links between the various characteristics of the design process: the evolution of an initial design idea; the properties of materials and how they are connected; the specification of components; the fabrication of elements and the subsequent use of the space or object. Once a student has experienced an idea being translated into reality, a fundamental change has occurred in the way he or she sees the discipline and the act of designing. The magic of a line or scale model being converted into a full-size physical object cannot be underestimated. Making occurs in both 'this place' (School Workshop) during design development, prototyping and fabrication and in 'that place' (Community site) when installed.

*I find it hard sometimes to spend weeks in the design process to then present your design, and then the plans go in the bin. After seeing a design built hypothetical studios where work is put in a portfolio and forgotten are a let down. (Second year domestic student A, 2013)*

*The fact that every single detail of this small object had to be resolved reveals the delusion of the oversimplified design processes in other studio assignments. We understood that the other half of the project is to see how it can be pushed to 1:1 scale with real material. (Third year international student B, 2013)*



*Figure 1. The installation of an Outdoor Learning Space in Trevallyn (2014) (left) and an observation platform in the Styx Valley (2001) (right)*

In contrast to 'conventional' design studios, which emphasise the individual student, LBM studios encourage teamwork and collective responsibility. Perspectives of students working individually are not easily challenged and the traditional review of work, known as the 'crit', provides limited opportunity for students' active involvement. The structure of an LBM studio typically involves rapid cycles of making, followed by collective discussion and goal setting. Students are encouraged to lead discussions and are given the skills and confidence to take responsibility for the project.

*I believe that my skills in team leadership increased dramatically through having to sometimes take charge to get a task completed. (Third year domestic student C, 2013)*

Working with client bodies has exposed student groups to a range of world-views, including youth at risk of homelessness, primary and high school students, work-experience trainees, teachers, actors and artists. 'That place' provides confronting and enriching experiences for students. Three strawbale projects (2001-2002) at the Mount Arthur Centre involved a group of predominantly international architecture students working alongside rural Tasmanian youth. The Ravenswood Skatepark (1999) was designed in a vacant shop in the neighbourhood shopping centre. Architecture students, acting under the auspices of the Ravenswood Walk Tall Association, invited involvement from the community. Community youth members were encouraged to make and install models of their preferred skating features. A TV/video was also provided in the shop for youth to view and discuss



their skating videos. Samuel Mockbee, the Director of Rural Studio (a globally respected Design/build program at Auburn University) suggests:

*What we should do is go into their world and understand it. They go out there with pre-conceived ideas, only to discover that they gonna learn something from these people.*  
(Big Beard Films, 2010)

The transformative impact of LBM is not restricted to design students. The Flying DuckSeat (1997) at the Campbelltown District High School was installed in a circus-like atmosphere of music and lights, witnessed by many of the school students who had been actively involved in its design. The Castle (2007-), a long-term collaboration with a neighbouring youth shelter provides crisis accommodation to youth at risk of homelessness through the deployment of mobile micro-dwellings, giving the young person an option to maintain social networks. In addition, long-term unemployed youth are trained to assemble The Castles, gaining construction certificates and improving their future employment prospects.

### **Irreversible**

Threshold concepts are difficult to unlearn. The learning may be modified, but the core knowledge remains intact and the student is unlikely to return to previous modes of thinking (Land & Meyer, 2006). The Design Report assignment in an LBM studio is an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning, by articulating their perception of the experience, and create stronger links in their construction of knowledge. Students express the value of reflection when compiling their report. A student writes, “At least I realise now that I enjoyed the process and learnt more than I realised at that point in time.” (Third year domestic student D) The four LBM learning outcomes – speculation, collaboration, communication and making – are used as the basic structure for the Design Report.

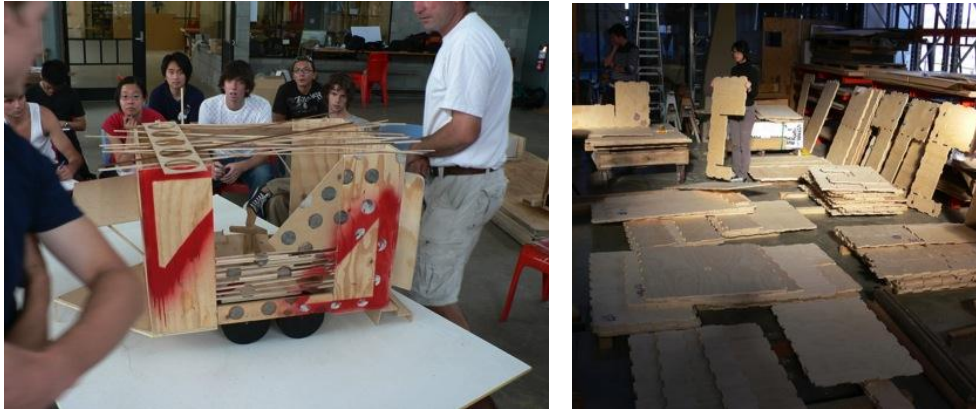
Students also refer to the learning that comes as a consequence of making mistakes. “An important attitude that I personally still need to improve is instead of being afraid of errors, I should look for errors, embrace their existence and tackle them.” Another student titles his Design Report “10 Lessons Learnt by Making Decisions and Mistakes as a Group”. Within the report it recommends that,

*The best strategy is learning from mistakes. By making mistakes and realizing that something went wrong is a natural learning ability that everyone possesses ...The value of mistakes made in the design process is what this course is treasuring the most, since failure is the mother of success, so don't be afraid to make mistakes in the designing stage. (Third year international student C, 2013)*

Students have referred to the acronym LBM as being Learning-by-Mistakes. The mistake and the subsequent remedial action are seen as a critical opportunity for learning, both by individual students and the studio as a whole.

### **Troublesome**

*Troublesome knowledge* (Perkins, 2006) is characterised as being difficult to understand. Trouble may be experienced if it is any of the following: ritual (routine); inert (recalled knowledge not actively used); conceptually difficult; alien (conflicts with own perspective); or tacit (related to a specific community of practice) (Perkins, 2006). Trouble is further experienced by the use and meaning of discipline specific language and the episteme, the way to understand or act within the discipline. All these characteristics of troublesome knowledge can exist in LBM studios.



*Figure 2. Overwhelming impact of moving from rough concept model through to full-size components*



*Figure 3. Translation of drawing into digital model into physical object and panel testing*

For many students, their identity within the student group is fragile and collaboration can be troublesome. Their roles and their relationships with other students may be problematic, uncomfortable or even traumatic (Cousin, 2006). If the ways they relate and belong are put under scrutiny, either by themselves or by others, students will find other aspects of studio content – questions of practicality, creativity and interpretation of client requirements – much more challenging. If not handled carefully by the facilitator contests over design direction within the studio group can be damaging, both to individuals and to the studio as a whole. The facilitator must ensure that the LBM studio is an emotionally safe environment, that students don't feel left out, affronted or exposed. Ownership of ideas by individuals is kept to a minimum and facilitators role-model decision-making approaches. Some students find interaction with community collaborators confronting, whether communicating with primary school children or homeless youth. This can also present a barrier to learning unless students have an opportunity to debrief and to be supported in a subsequent meeting.

There are several troublesome aspects for LBM facilitators. Firstly, the Design Reports (critical reflection) only provide evidence of students who have become self-aware of the changes the new learning has had on their understanding of the field. We believe there are students who are not aware that their experience has been transformative. The question this raises is whether self-awareness of the mastery of a Threshold concept is important? Is the new learning more likely to be irreversible if the student is self-aware? Perhaps this is what Land and Meyer (2006) refer to as a state of 'liminality', that students appear to become 'stuck' within the Threshold, neither passing through or going back. Another example of 'stuckness' is where students have had a transformative

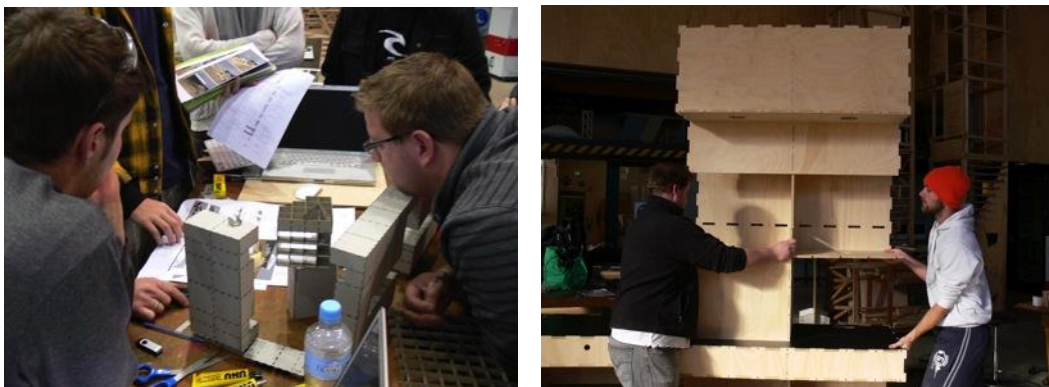
experience, as documented in their Design Reports, but are unable to apply the new knowledge in other units. First year students build a small shed using traditional timber frame construction but many find it difficult to translate that knowledge to an assignment the following semester where they are asked to document the same construction system. It is possible that for some self-reflexive learners it may take time for the full outcome of the High Impact Learning to be formed. Samuel Mockbee believes that delayed response happens to many Rural Studio students.

*All these students, as they become successful, when they finally get registered and they really are leading the life of an architect that that's when they'll say "look! I wanna do something like when I was at back at the Rural studio. I wanna regain that sense of wonder. " so these students are getting an opportunity to produce this kind of work , within this little frame of their careers that will ultimately blossom, at some point I do believe, down the road... (Big Beard Films, 2010).*

### **Integrative**

Threshold concepts involve integrating or synthesising knowledge that was previously viewed to be unrelated (Land & Meyer, 2006). As described above, LBM studios integrate designing and making. Typically LBM projects involve multiple co-dependent design considerations including materials, structures, patterns of habitation and climate control. Even a simple bus shelter - several of which have been constructed by LBM studios - involves consideration of all these issues. In addition to these The Castle project (2007-) required an acute consideration of patterns of habitation: servicing, insulation, bathing, openings, privacy and storage of belongings. The Teardrop caravan (2014) required that most attributes of a dwelling – including plumbing, electrics, cooking – to be incorporated within a couple of cubic metres of habitable volume. These micro-domestic environments are excellent vehicles for students to explore interrelated aspects of design.

Physical models are the preferred design medium, due to their ability to communicate information in a relatively direct manner. However students are encouraged to use a variety of other media. The whiteboard remains a highly effective tool for collaborative design. Digital manufacturing offers exciting opportunities to further integrate design and making. A 'home-grown' software plug-in has enabled rapid prototyping of objects fabricated from sheet materials. Students find the combination of digital and physical modelling empowering, narrowing the conceptual gap between the designed object on the screen and its scaled or full-size outcome. Students are encouraged to red-pen, cut or add to digital models, adapt the electronic model and print a new physical model.



*Figure 4. Combination of design media ... through to full-size fabrication.*

The facilitator role is to assist twenty individuals to synthesise their ideas into a single buildable outcome. Ownership by the whole studio is critical in maintaining collaborative energy, responsibility and teamwork. Ideas are gradually coalesced, edited and distilled until the facilitator senses that a

single model can embody the studio aspirations. Timing and balance are critical. The facilitator must be confident that ideas can be integrated without some students feeling isolated and simultaneously avoiding the dangers of 'design by committee' where too many discrete ideas are forced to live together.

*When I look at the finished object I can see that my idea had been included, but in a way I hadn't thought of. (Second year domestic student E)*

### **Bounded**

The *bounded* characteristic (Land & Meyer, 2006) primarily assists students to familiarize themselves with discipline boundaries but also has a role in assisting staff in setting appropriate parameters for both curriculum and individual projects. LBM began as an elective option in the undergraduate degree (1994) but now has a presence in three years of the undergraduate program, and both years of the Masters of Architecture. LBM project typologies are based around technology, community, research and professional development. Projects are placed within the Architecture program according to required learning outcomes and level. Generally speaking undergraduate projects are very tightly *bounded* – first year students build a shed using traditional timber frame construction - while Masters projects are much more open-ended and incorporate research. The Playbox (2014), commissioned by the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office and undertaken by final year Masters students, involved the development, design and fabrication of a relocatable object that encourages imaginative play for Primary School Students. The project initially involved research into the theory of 'loose parts' (Nicolson, 1971), which promotes the use of random universal objects for creative play.

The external boundaries of a particular LBM project are given by project brief and the budget. The brief determines the performance requirements of the designed object/space and the budget determines the approach. Together they create a conceptual space for learning. Internal boundaries, relating to technology and project timeframe, are determined by the studio facilitators and serve a specific and limiting purpose. The Trevallyn Primary School Outdoor Learning Space (2013) opted for a technology based around milk-crates, chosen for their building-block qualities, colour and their potential use as stools and plant pots. The choice of the milk-crate narrowed the scope of decision-making, allowing students to focus on other design issues. The duration and intensity of a project – either thirteen consecutive days or thirteen weekly classes - may be based on a desire for either maintaining intense energy or time for reflection.

Compliance, in terms of planning, structural adequacy or safety, forms another layer of external boundaries for LBM projects. Engineers support students in the development and evaluation of their design propositions. A response to Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) has been to integrate risk management into LBM, to the extent where it is an assessable criteria. Students are required to check compliance requirements, compile necessary documentation and communicate with relevant authorities and engineers.

*After extending our knowledge on the specifications and regulations we had a more informed and realistic approach that we hope affected the design process for the better. (First year domestic student F)*

A notable exception to the bounded studio was an LBM where students were encouraged to 'phaf', play or tinker, resulting in more serendipitous propositions. This approach is underpinned by creative exploration and requires a deep understanding of materials before formal design commences.

Students numbers in LBM studios – typically less than twenty – are lower than many core units which is probably a noteworthy boundary. The recent incorporation of some LBM approaches into core

units brings with it some potential hazards, particularly in collaborative learning, due to the much larger numbers of students. There is evidence to suggest that the LBM model becomes clumsy and unwieldy when the numbers approach fifty. Groups of twenty or less allow the whole studio to collaborate effectively. The other consequence of larger student numbers is multiple facilitators, which may bring its own difficulties.

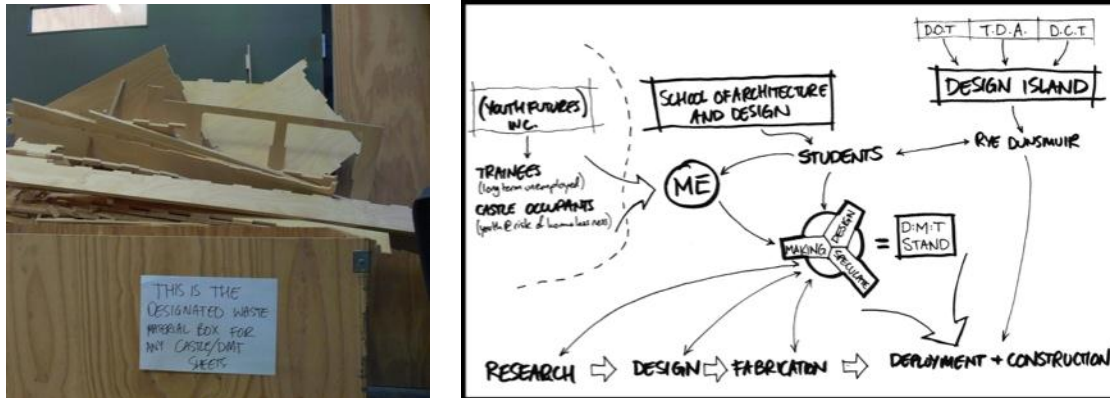


Figure 5. Waste collection for calculation (left) and student diagram of stakeholders (right).

### Discursive

Land & Meyer (2006) make reference to the role that enhancing or extending discipline language can play in mastering a Threshold concept. In LBM studios, students are required to develop their communication skills and language use in ‘this place’ - the student design team and in ‘that place’ – with community clients.

Students in LBM studios express their enthusiasm for a particular design perspective with a passion that is less evident in ‘conventional’ design studios. Some articulate their points of view persuasively because they want their own ideas to be built. Others have developed a sense of responsibility for the project and are willing to go the extra mile in order to earn respect from the client. Students with a practical mindset understand the implications of taking an idea to its built reality and argue for the simplest solution. Several techniques are employed to exercise the students’ ability to communicate. The membership of groups is kept fluid, ensuring that students communicate ideas to a range of peer groups, meaning that ideas permeate through the entire studio and that ideas cannot be defensively ‘owned’. Students’ reflections often focus on the dynamics within the studio.

*... students were guided rather than directed, leaving the responsibility up to us, simulating a real-world studio environment. At times this was an exasperating experience, when stubborn personalities cling to irrational ideologies that restrict progress. However, as the semester progressed it became apparent to me that rather than the physical model, managing group politics was the most valuable learning outcome. This included working in a team and knowing how to appropriately and positively contribute to a group discussion. (Third year domestic student G, 2014)*

*We were inevitably headed for a crash at some point. But when it came, it actually clarified things. It was such a relief to finally hear the real reasons behind some of these ideas and critique them honestly. Sure there were nearly some deaths, but the afterglow was certainly worth it. (Third year domestic student D, 2014)*



Listening and observing are important skills for a designer. In community-based LBM studios students are encouraged to be conscious of the verbal, spatial or graphic vocabularies their community collaborators use.

*The most notable difference when comparing differences between Architecture and Primary School students was the choice of words when describing elements in design. The Trevallyn students were able to effectively and clearly articulate their design ideas and concepts to other primary school students and to us architecture students. The Trevallyn students were easier to understand and were able to communicate their ideas with more clarity than most architecture students.... (Third year domestic student C, 2013)*

Another tool that assists communication amongst peers and community clients is the use of physical models. It has been found that models are most effective to communicate complex design ideas and remove ambiguity. Models are used in discussion from the concept through to the final presentation. LBM studios have developed model-kits as a common language between designers and community collaborators. Models are equally useful for collaborative design and understanding construction.

The models were a great way to interact with the children, and were very successful in deriving design ideas made by the children. (Third year domestic student H, 2013)



*Figure 6. Model workshops with School students and final model including digitally fabricated components and elements made and painted by School students.*

## Conclusion

The success of the LBM program, in terms of the quantity and quality of the built outcomes, is indisputable. The client feedback is consistently favourable, the structures have had an enduring positive impact on the amenity of many public places and the projects have touched many hundreds of people, either through participation in making or through subsequent use. LBM has become an invaluable asset to the School of Architecture, in terms of community engagement and is a highly visible manifestation of the School's professional and educational values. However, the educational outcomes of the LBM model have been more difficult to evaluate. One strong indicator of perceived educational benefit of the LBM model is how several of the program's core characteristics have recently begun to permeate other units within the School of Architecture & Design, including the 'conventional' design studios. From its beginnings twenty years ago as a single undergraduate elective the making-based collaborative studio now has a representation in every year level of both undergraduate and masters' courses. The attractiveness of LBM or High Impact Learning to staff has been the levels of student engagement and the quality of the design outcomes.

While it has been possible for several years to form a generalised opinion as to the educational benefits of the LBM model it has been the purpose of this paper to make a more objective evaluation of the learning outcomes, and to do so through the vehicle of Threshold concepts. The evidence presented here indicates that LBM studios consistently involve High Impact Learning and that the experiential content of the LBM model encourages many students to cross the Threshold concept, reinforcing their understanding of the links between idea, fabrication and design practice. Through students' reflections we can see that the primary transformative characteristics of the LBM program are as follows: the process of translating idea into reality; the ability to take risks and make mistakes; taking collective responsibility for decisions and their outcomes; the integration of varied types of thinking; the careful choice of communication media and language. We have also found that one of the most effective attributes of the LBM studio is that the place of learning is not restricted to the self-affirming environment of 'this place' - the School of Architecture & Design - but that LBM takes students into 'that place' where students and staff alike are confronted by diverse world views and expectations, further developing their construction of knowledge.

On the basis of this initial analysis of LBM using the lens of Threshold concepts we have identified some key issues to address. The first is to improve the quality and quantity of the data, meaning that we can more effectively and more accurately gauge the transformative and irreversible impact of the LBM model on students. The Design Report assignment (based on students' reflections of the LBM experience) is a good starting point but it could be more effectively targeted, requiring that students make explicit reference to the ways that they have acquired and applied new knowledge. The structure of the Design Report - currently based on the unit Learning Outcomes of Collaboration, Speculation, Communication and Making - could be extended to include more specific questions relating to our own knowledge gaps. For example, how knowledge learnt in LBM might be more effectively applied to other units, as students seem to find it difficult to integrate the new knowledge within a different learning environment. With such data we would be in a better position to develop the LBM model towards an overall aspiration that a greater proportion of students experience an irreversible transformation.

We believe that while the LBM studio provides an environment conducive to passing through Threshold concepts, for some students this may still take more time. This paper reflects our first inquiry of evaluating LBM using a theoretical framework, and there are many more opportunities afforded. The next phase to be reported are the trends across the cohorts, and later, the facilitation role to support students who experience 'stuckness'. This paper has highlighted the benefit of High Impact Learning in teaching design, both at 'this place' and 'that place' and generated new energy to learn more.

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## **This place or any place: student preferences for lecture ‘places’ in a blended learning environment in Bioscience**

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**Abstract:** *With advances in technology, students now have a choice of ‘learning places’ for lectures that enables them to “be connected to a community of learners anytime and anywhere without being time, place or situation bound” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). In our blended learning environment at the University of Tasmania, Bioscience students have the opportunity to choose their ‘place’ of lectures on an ad hoc basis – in the lecture theatre, online via synchronous web casts or asynchronous MyLO Media recordings or via podcasts – but the quality and equity of the learning experience across these modes is unclear. In this research we sought to understand why students make the choices they do about where they learn. Students enrolled in a first year bioscience unit across four geographically dispersed campuses responded to an anonymous online survey which included both qualitative and quantitative items. This paper reports demographic factors that, for the 124 respondents, are associated with mode usage and explores the thinking of students around their choice of lecture ‘place’, identifying key themes. The data indicate that the lecture theatre is the preferred ‘place of learning’ for most, with online modes viewed primarily as a supplement to, or occasional replacement for, the face-to-face experience. In their qualitative responses, students identified both pedagogical and pragmatic factors that influenced their choices. The findings provide a challenge to us to ensure that the elements that students value most in the lecture theatre are enhanced and are also available to those who choose to engage via another mode, to meet the demands for increased choice and flexibility but also to ensure equity and quality in the learning ‘places’ that we provide.*

**Keywords:** *Blended learning, student preferences, lecture attendance, podcasts*

## Introduction

Undergraduate students in Higher Education (HE) in Australia are faced with a multitude of choices about where, when and how they access learning materials. It is crucial that HE teachers understand why students choose a particular learning 'place' and what they value within that learning 'place' so that selection of teaching methods and media is based on evidence and can align curriculum with student needs and preferences.

In its vision for blended learning (Brown, Kregor & Williams, 2013), the University of Tasmania aspires to build capacity for high quality synchronous and asynchronous learning and teaching interactions to deliver high impact learning experiences, placing significant emphasis on providing choice of place and type of learning experience to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes. Currently, many courses and units are offered in the traditional lecture and associated tutorial/workshop mode and the progressive move to a blended learning environment has resulted in the use of a variety of Web Based Learning Technologies (WBLT) "for digitally recording lectures for web delivery" (Gosper, 2008, p.vi), as either an adjunct to or replacement for face-to-face lectures. Lectures can be streamed, individually downloaded or automatically downloaded by subscription (podcast or vodcast) from within the institution's Learning Management System (LMS), but essentially they are recordings of the lecture theatre delivery. This limited use of WBLT is common across the higher education sector nationally and internationally (Gosper, McNeill, Woo & Green, 2010; Wiese & Newton, 2013), but is by no means the only means of online teaching and learning.

The increase in the use of WBLT in 'on campus' courses in Australian universities has been partly in response to a changing student profile, with more students requiring flexible and accessible ways of learning to accommodate significant amounts of paid employment (McInnis & Hartley, 2002) and family commitments (Gosper, McNeill, Phillips, Preston & Green, 2007). Studies conducted within the Australian HE sector indicate that for some years now a majority of students have used recordings as part of their study (Collier-Reed, Case & Stott, 2013; Copley, 2007; Gyspers, Johnson, Hancock & Denyer, 2011). The key for teachers tasked with providing both face-to-face and online lectures in their individual subjects, without significant increases in resource allocation, may lie in understanding how students use the online offerings and what they value most in the various delivery modes.

One common, and obvious, use of online recordings is as a substitute for the traditional lecture so that the students are able to access the entire recording of a lecture at a time and place that is suitable for them (McGarr, 2009), meeting both pragmatic and pedagogical needs. However, overwhelmingly, the literature indicates that, when both modes are available, students use recordings to supplement face-to-face lectures rather than to replace them (Bongey, Cizadlo & Kalnbach, 2006; Leadbeater, Shuttleworth, Couperthwaite & Nightingale, 2013; McNeill, Woo, Gosper, Phillips, Preston & Green, 2007; Parson, Reddy, Wood & Senior, 2009; Von Kinsky, Ivins & Gribble, 2009).

The reported benefits of WBLT as a supplement to learning include catching up on missed lectures, being able to learn at their own pace (Chester, Buntine, Hammond & Atkinson, 2011), having the convenience of being able to listen in their own place and time (Evans, 2008), generating notes (Leadbeater et al., 2013), reviewing complex material and increasing their understanding of lecture material (Collier-Reed et al., 2013; McKinney & Page, 2009). Gosper et al. (2007), in their seminal survey of 13,278 students in a variety of disciplines across into 4 major Australian Universities, found that 66.7% of respondents felt that using recorded lectures helped them to achieve better results. Additionally, in studies to date, one of the most commonly reported uses of lecture podcasts was as an additional resource for review and examination preparation (Chester et al., 2011; Copley, 2007; Maag, 2006). Of particular interest is that most of these perceived benefits relate to choices made for pedagogical rather than pragmatic reasons.

Student age, gender, confidence with technology, individual learning style and English as an additional language have all been investigated as factors which may affect rates and patterns of usage of lecture recordings. But generalising results from single studies, with vastly different methodologies and purpose, to a different student population is problematic. In a study of 2,000 first year students, Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray and Krause (2008) found a great diversity in the relationship between age and the use of technology, such that they warn against making inferences on the effect of age on use of WBLT. Whilst Williams and Michael (2007) found no age related differences in rates of access to recorded lectures via mp3 players, Gosper et al. (2007) identified age related differences in the way that students use recordings, reporting that younger learners watch selected materials while older students watch a recording in its entirety. When considering gender differences, Pham (2010) found that females listen to more hours of recorded lectures per week than males, whilst Weise and Newton (2013) reported that females were more apt than their male counterparts to use lecture recordings to generate notes and to review material. Having the confidence to use technology to learn may influence the choice of learning process, with a study by Green, Voegeli, Harrison, Phillips, Knowles, Weaver and Shephard (2003) suggesting that some students did not use lecture recordings because they were not confident with the technology. Weise and Newton (2013) focused on characteristics of the learner, suggesting that surface learners were more likely to use recorded lectures whereas deep learners preferred face-to-face attendance. Collier-Reed et al. (2013) focused on the effects of podcasting on student learning, found that recorded lectures were a particular benefit to students who are not first language speakers of the language used in classes.

Perhaps surprisingly, many studies show that lecture theatre attendance rates are unaffected by the availability of recorded lectures and that undergraduate students prefer face-to-face lectures (Bongey et al., 2006; Von Konskey et al., 2009), suggesting that there is something intrinsic to the lecture theatre experience that is valued by the majority of students. Gysbers, Johnston, Hancock, and Denyer (2011) reported that 87% of responding molecular science students almost always attended lectures, despite the choices available to them. Furthermore, many studies indicate that non-attendance at lectures is due to reasons such as illness, paid employment, timetable clashes, family responsibilities and commuting distance from campus (Dolnicar, 2005; Massingham & Herrington, 2006) rather than the availability of lecture recordings. Kelly (2012), investigating factors which affected lecture attendance rates, found that Monday lectures were better attended than Friday and that attendance was poor when students only had one lecture or class on a particular day, perhaps indicative of pragmatic rather than learning-focused decision making by students.

The findings from many research projects shed light on why students attend lectures and the reasons have been varied, relating positively to the lecture theatre 'environment', negatively to online technology, or purely pragmatic – with some age related differences. Respondents in a study by Copley (2007) felt that seeing a 'live' lecture was better and Phillips, Gosper, McNeill, Woo, Preston and Green (2007) found that attendance at lectures motivated and engaged students in learning and stimulated their interest and thoughts. Students were more likely to attend lectures if the quality of the lectures was high (Davis, Hodgson & Macaulay, 2012; Gosper et al., 2007; Gysbers et al., 2011) and if the lecturer was able to make material clearer to comprehend (Gysbers et al., 2011). Some students enjoy the social aspect of learning in conjunction with their peers (Gysbers et al., 2011). Gosper et al. (2007) found that the older the student group, the more likely they were to come to lectures because they felt that the lecturer added value, that face-to-face lectures were motivating, and they liked to communicate with the lecturer. On a more pragmatic level, younger students (Gosper et al., 2007) preferred to attend lectures to meet friends, if they were on campus anyway, and felt they would not have found time to listen to recordings at a later time and Dolnicar (2005) suggested that students will attend lectures for practical reasons such as finding out about assessment tasks and other vital information about the unit of study or course.

## **The context of this research**

Current practice in the bioscience units at the University of Tasmania, offered in multiple undergraduate programs across multiple campuses, allows students to choose on an *ad hoc* basis whether to attend lectures in the lecture theatre on their respective campuses and/or to listen to synchronous webcast recordings of these lectures or asynchronous recordings or podcasts. Historically, recordings have been viewed by bioscience lecturers as a supplement to the traditional face-to-face lectures – to be used for review and to allow students, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, the opportunity to invest more time in understanding the lecture material (Preston, 2010). For many years, recordings have also been seen as support materials for those students who occasionally need flexibility of attendance because of distance away from campus, work and family responsibilities (Enterprise Marketing and Research Services Pty Ltd, 2003). In the biosciences unit, lecture attendance has never been compulsory, but it has been an expectation. To date, most online offerings are recordings of the lecture delivered in the lecture theatre. In light of the institutional shift in emphasis to the provision of choice in place and type of learning experience (Brown et al., 2013), the suitability of these recordings as a substitute for, rather than a supplement to, lecture theatre attendance needs to be reconsidered and the preferences and motivations of our students should inform this curriculum renewal.

Compared to the typical undergraduate students in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013), the 2013 first year Bioscience cohort were older, with a higher proportion of females, and a lower proportion of recent school leavers (Thomas McCarroll-Chester, personal communication, July 2014). It is also reasonable to assume that, like most full time undergraduate students in Australian universities (James, Bexley, Devlin & Marginson, 2007), our students were undertaking considerable paid employment to support themselves or their families. In 2013, 28% of first year Bioscience students were born overseas and 14% indicated they spoke a language other than English at home (Thomas McCarroll-Chester, personal communication, July 2014). These statistics support anecdotal evidence that many of the students enrolled in our units have complex individual and family circumstances to balance with their academic studies.

Given that many of our students need to prioritise their time around study, paid employment, and family, we, as a teaching team, were intrigued to observe that many of them still chose to attend the lecture theatre and we wondered what factors determine that choice. In this research we sought to identify student preference and frequency of use of face-to-face lectures, and/or synchronous and asynchronous lecture recordings; the factors that underpin their individual preferences and choices; and the perceived value of the different modes of delivery to their learning with a view to the implications for our future practice.

## **Methods**

This research used a mixed methods design (Creswell, 2003) because we considered this approach was the most reliable way to obtain useful answers to our research questions. Data was collected in an anonymous online survey with both quantitative and qualitative questions. The inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative items in the survey provides complementarity (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989) in which the data from one method is used to clarify or elaborate the data from the other. The 26 item survey (see appendix one) included questions covering demographic details, use of social media, questions about usage of different modes of lecture delivery, reasons for using particular modes and reasons for not using particular modes. This survey was administered by email invitation to 596 students enrolled in CXA107 Fundamentals of Bioscience across the 4 campuses after week 10 of a 13 week semester. The invitation contained a brief description of the aims of the research and a web link to both the Respondent Information Sheet and the online survey. Consent

was implied by the completion of the survey. The research was approved by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics Ref No: H0013419).

Frequency distributions were calculated for questionnaire items requiring categorical and rating responses and categorical variables were compared using the Chi-square test to identify differences. Where differences were evident, ordered logistic regression (Stata Version 13, StataCorp Texas, USA) was used to illuminate the nature of relationships between mode usage and each of the demographic factors (age, gender, commuting time and primary language). Significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) are reported as odds ratio (OR) and 95% confidence interval (CI), when the other demographic factors were accounted for.

Qualitative data reduction (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003) was completed manually as a group activity. Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) we firstly generated initial codes by working our way systematically through the data to “identify interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p18). The development of overarching themes from the codes was an iterative process that began at the meeting while we were doing the initial coding and continued after the meeting. The themes were then reviewed and displayed to ensure that all identified codes appeared in a coherent and meaningful way. Illustrative quotes were selected and reported by respondent ID number.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Of the 596 students enrolled in the unit, 136 (23%) responded. 12 responses were discarded due to non-completion of responses beyond demographic details. Of the remaining 124 respondents 22% identified as male and 78% female, representative of the gender balance in the enrolled cohort. The responding cohort was, on average, older than the unit cohort, with 66% of respondents aged 24 or over. Twenty-four percent of respondents identified that English was not their primary language, substantially higher than the 14% indicated by the entire cohort on enrolment (Thomas McCarroll-Chester, personal communication of institutional statistics, July 2014).

Patterns of usage for each lecture mode is illustrated in Figure 1. The finding that 68% of respondents attended face-to-face lectures for almost all or the majority of their scheduled lectures and that less than 8% of students reported that they never attended face-to-face lectures is consistent with previous research (Chester et al., 2011; Copley, 2007; Fitzpatrick, Cronin & Byrne, 2011). However, this finding is contrary to the anecdotal estimates of attendance made by lecturers in this unit who reported attendance rates of between 40 – 60 % and may be an artefact of the low response rate and the possibility that those students who attend the lecture theatre regularly are also the students most likely to respond to a unit survey. The only demographic variable that significantly influenced regular attendance at the lecture theatre was age, with 30-40 year olds attending less regularly than those aged 18-25 (OR=3.27, CI:1.11 – 9.70).

Almost 50% of respondents reported that they listened to asynchronous MyLO Media recordings for all or the majority of their lectures with 43% reporting that they listened to MyLO Media recordings occasionally. Significant influences were evident with those in the 30-40 age group (OR= 0.27, CI:0.09 – 0.79) more likely to use recorded lectures, and those with English as an additional language (OR=4.03, CI=1.61–10.06) or commuting distance of 2 or more hours (OR=0.19, CI=0.06–0.67) more likely to use them regularly.

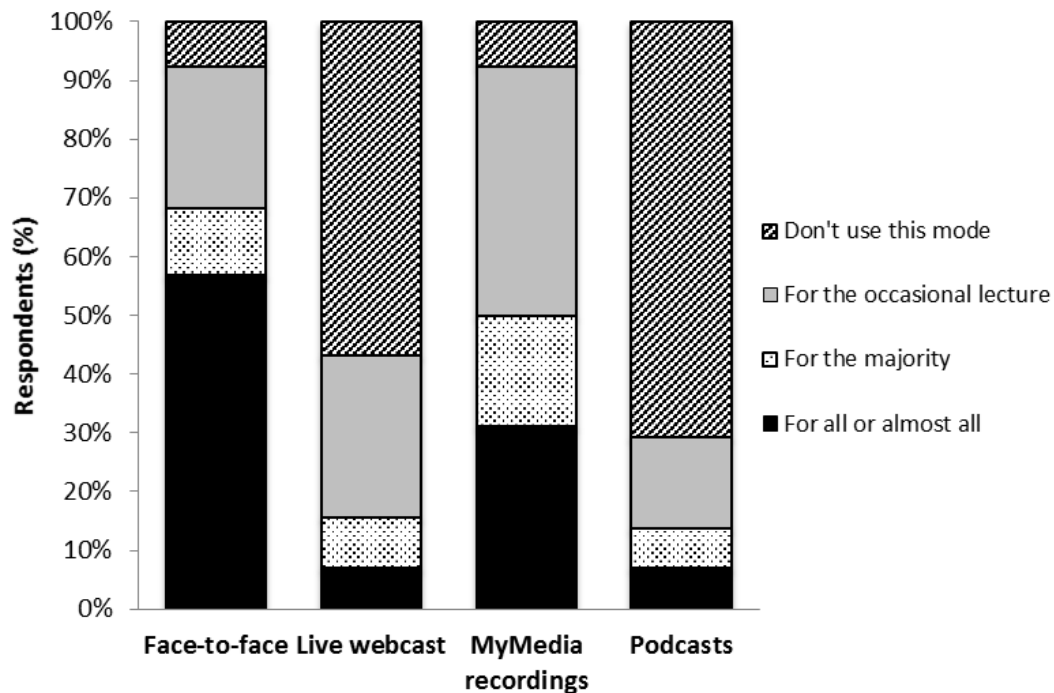


Figure1. Patterns of Usage

Only 7% of respondents reported that they never use MyLO Media lecture recordings. Preston et al. (2010) suggest that WBLT can be effective tools when their purpose is to support one way information transfer in traditional lectures and in terms of that information transfer, it may be just as effective for students to listen to lecture recordings rather than attend lectures (McKenzie, 2008). However, our results suggest that the majority of students do not choose recorded lectures as a regular replacement or substitute for traditional face-to-face lectures, perhaps not seeing them as effective tools for their learning. Instead, they opt to attend the lecture theatre and access asynchronous lecture recordings, and regularly do both for a specific lecture.

Synchronous webcasts were not a popular choice with only 17% of the respondents reporting regular use, with similar results for podcasts. Combined, just over 10 percent of respondents indicate these modes as their choice for all or almost all lectures, a small percentage but if this was extrapolated to the wider cohort this would equate to more than 60 students. Qualitative data suggested that the low take up rate for podcasts was due to students being unaware of the podcast option and not knowing how to use it. This suggests that, similar to the findings of Engstrand and Hall (2011) in their research on the use of streamed lectures, for podcasts to be an effective form of WBLT students need to be made aware of its existence and training in effective use of the technology should be made available.

The qualitative survey responses suggest that factors driving students' choice and use of lecture 'place' are either pedagogical or pragmatic. Pedagogical considerations include the effects the physical and human aspects of the learning 'place' have on learning and the best match between learning place and learning preference or style. Respondents particularly identified the benefit to their learning of social interaction that occurred in face-to-face lectures. Pragmatic reasons for choice of place include perceived benefits to time and cost, accessibility and flexibility of time and location and technical issues related to the online environment.

### **Pedagogical Factors: Physical aspects of the learning 'place'**

Comments from respondents suggested that aspects of the physical space and place of the learning environment influenced their choice of lecture delivery and had an effect on their learning. For some respondents, choice of lecture place, either face-to-face or online, depended on the level of comfort and the ability to focus on learning. Respondents who preferred face-to-face lectures commented that it was helpful to separate the learning space from their home environment because of the distractions at home.

*"I find it easier to concentrate when I sit in the lecture theatre than at home where there are more distractions." (ID 77)*

Equally, respondents indicating a preference for the online environment also identified this as a comfortable 'place' for learning with minimal distractions. For example, some students found the lecture theatre space too crowded and were *"distracted by the people"* (ID 125) around them while access to MyLO media recordings enabled others to learn in the *"comfort of (their) own home in bed in my PJs if I want."* (ID 60)

Respondents valued that, in the face-to-face environment, lecturers were able to add value to the lectures by using other resources in the learning place. Some felt that by *"Listening online you miss any added content such as demonstrations and drawings"* (ID14) done, for example, on the whiteboard.

### **Pedagogical Factors: Human aspects of the learning 'place'**

Our respondents' comments suggested that their choice of learning place was influenced by the benefits derived from interaction with the teacher and their peers and by the ways in which the chosen learning place aligned with their individual needs as learners.

#### ***Benefits to the learners***

Research by McKinlay (2007) found that attendance at lectures had a positive effect on motivation and comments by our respondents also suggested that a commitment to attend the lectures on campus motivated their study and enabled focused learning. Lecture theatre attendance seemed to provide extrinsic motivation:

*"It keeps me disciplined. If I do not have a lecture I am expected to turn up to, I find it difficult to motivate myself to watch it at home." (ID 8)*

Featuring strongly in the responses from those who chose an online place of learning was the benefit of being in control of their learning. Respondents who preferred to listen to recorded lectures identified such benefits to their learning as *"being able to do things in my own time"* (ID60) or *"allows me to learn at my own pace"* (ID48) or *"being able to do the required reading before listening."* (ID75), indicating that the benefit was being in control of both the time and pace of their learning. The online environment was also valued because, *"It's great to be able to stop part way through a lecture when you realize you have stopped paying attention and then come back to it"* (ID125), which allowed them to monitor their concentration levels and optimize their notetaking, *"can pause the lecture when I can't keep up."* (ID60)

Similar to other research (Chester et al., 2011; Scutter, Stupans, Sawyer & King, 2010), respondents comments suggested that another predominant reason for their use of recorded lectures was the benefit of being able to review the lecture material as often as the needed for understanding. For example *"I find it beneficial to be able to review certain parts I didn't quite understand"* (ID 6) or (the lecture recording)...*"Gives you an opportunity to go back over the lectures to learn more."* (ID 92).

The use of MyLO Media recordings were also identified as of particular value as a way to *“revise before exams and revisit the material.”* (ID107)

Comments from some respondents who attended face-to-face lectures suggested they chose to do so because it was the best way for them to learn. Some found it *“easier to understand what is being delivered”* (ID138), or that it enabled them to *“retain knowledge better”* (ID115) and that they found it *“easier to concentrate when I sit in a lecture”* (ID 77). One respondent identified that *“as a visual learner it is easier to grasp (material in lectures) because the lecturer uses the whiteboard to explain things.”*(ID 31).

Our results suggest that the majority of students saw value in both the face-to-face and online learning ‘place’ and so do not choose recorded lectures as a replacement or substitute for traditional face-to-face lectures but instead choose to *“combine face-to-face and recordings for better understanding.”* (ID6).

### ***Influence of the teacher***

Druger (2003) notes that it is not the information presented in lectures but the experience of attendance which is important for learning. Part of that experience includes interaction with teaching staff. In Bioscience we have a teaching perspective that focuses on nurturing students (Pratt, Collins, & Selinger, 2001) and believe that lectures provide a crucial opportunity for personal contact with lecturers and peers. Our findings suggest that students value attendance at lectures for the same reasons. Some respondents preferred to attend lectures face-to-face because they found it *“more personal”* (ID 69) and that the *“physical presence is beneficial”* (ID 93) or that they *“like to see the person teaching”* (ID 66) and enjoy *“getting to know...(the) lecturer”* (ID 129). Comments suggested that human aspect of the learning place increased the level of engagement in learning and that they were *much more likely to be engaged with the lecture in person than if it is simply prerecorded on my laptop.”* (ID 128)

The personal connection with the lecturer, for some students, translated into a sense of obligation and they felt that *“attending a lecture someone has taken the time to be there to teach me is far more important than just listening to lectures online.”* (ID 25)

Others valued attending lectures because they were *“kept up to date with housekeeping information”* (ID 42) and got *“additional information delivered on topics through discussion.”* (ID143)

The quality of the interactions with lecturers was also an influence, with students attending the lecture theatre because the *“lecturer is engaging and enthusiastic”* (ID42) and finding it helpful when the *“lecturer puts it in simpler terms”* (ID 31) According to one respondent:

*“Recorded lectures are boring and unanimated. Face-to-face, the teacher engages with the class, can go into more detail and reiterate parts people are obviously lost with”* (ID8)

One way for students to check and clarify their understanding of content is by asking questions and our findings, similar to those of Copley (2007), highlight that our respondents who attended face-to-face lectures valued the ability to ask questions to clarify their understanding and the immediacy of the response to those questions. This is reflected in comments such as *“I feel I can learn better if I can ask questions and seek clarification face-to-face.”* (ID 88) and *“... I can ask questions to the lecturer and receive an instant response.”* (ID7).

Respondents who reported using both face-to-face and the online lecture ‘place’ did so because they identified the benefit of experiencing a variety of lecture styles. According to some the *“Lecturers are*



*all different. Some explain things better than others.”*(ID 92) and using both face-to face and recordings *“allows me to really learn as the two different lecturers have different teaching styles.”* (ID6)

### ***Influence of peers***

The benefits from interactions with their peers featured strongly in the comments from respondents who attended face-to-face lectures. These students appreciated that, for them, learning is a social activity and that being together with their peers had many benefits. One such benefit was that attending *“face-to-face lectures helps me feel like a student as I interact with other students.”* (ID144), suggesting that being in a group positively affected their identity as a student.

Comments such as *“When I am in face-to-face lectures I feel more involved in the class and can participate with discussion.”* (ID11), *“I can participate with other students and test my understanding.”* (ID55) and *“I also find that attending face-to-face lectures more social and being able to talk about lecture content afterwards.”* (ID21) suggest that, for some students, being in a group increased interaction and participation in collaborative learning.

Some students described benefits to personal relationships from learning together in a lecture theatre. For one respondent it *“gives university a (sense of) community”* (ID9) while others valued *“making lifelong friends”* (ID49) or *“meeting friends”* (ID 142) and *“having fun.”*(ID8)

### **Pragmatic Factors: time, cost and technology**

Time management was a common theme evident in responses from both those who preferred face-to-face and those who preferred to listen to lectures online but the rationale varied. Comments such as *“It helps to have the time for the lecture blocked out for that purpose, rather than trying to fit the lectures in at other times during the week”* (ID 14)” and *“Time management reasons – if I am at uni I will do the work and be less likely to be distracted “*(ID110) highlighted that those who attended lectures recognised a benefit in having a particular time imposed on them for the lectures.

Our qualitative data also supports the view that WBLT can be effective tools for increasing accessibility and flexibility for students who cannot attend for bona fide reasons such as sickness, distance from campus, work commitments, and family or other personal reasons, (Gosper et al., 2010; Preston, 2010) with many respondents citing these reasons for use of lecture recordings as a substitute for lecture theatre attendance. Fifty eight percent of the respondents in this study lived within one hour travel from campus, 30% lived between 1 – 2 hours away and 12% took more than two hours to travel to campus. Comments from respondents such as *“it is more convenient to watch online than to spend 2.5 hours commuting each way to attend a lecture.”* (ID 30) and *“Saves me a lot of money on petrol.”* (ID 48) highlights that saving time and money was a prime reason for substituting online for face-to-face attendance.

Respondents who chose MyLO Media recordings for their primary learning mode gave reasons related to accessibility and flexibility such as *“easier to manage time with other commitments of work and family”* (ID 2) and *“MyMedia (recordings) can be made available wherever I wish...even while travelling.”* (ID 114). They also commented that the technology enhanced their learning as they could *“watch them at a faster speed”* (ID141) which was a more efficient use of their time and could *“keep them all in iTunes rather than having to log into MyMedia.”* (ID75) Students using podcasts commented that *“Podcasts take up download at home “* (ID115) but valued them because they were portable and *“you can listen anytime and anywhere.”* (ID120).

Issues with technology featured in comments from respondents who preferred face-to-face lectures. Online recordings were seen as often unreliable and with poor quality audio so *“attending face-to-face eliminates the risk of problems with lecture recording.”* (ID15)

## **Conclusions and implications**

Our students use a combination of WBLT and lecture theatre experiences, making active choices about their place of learning for a wide variety of pedagogical and pragmatic reasons. They are aware of their learning preferences and make choices about 'place' to meet their learning needs, while still considering pragmatic factors of time and cost when making final decisions. However, our current teaching practices and the available method of recording live lectures, is probably not conducive to providing choices of equal quality and equal value in the online environment. On the basis of our students' comments about the value they place on attending the lecture theatre to engage with peers and teachers in their learning experiences, we would be wise to enhance our teaching in the lecture theatre to further increase interaction between attendees, whilst exploring ways in which these experiences can better translate to the online space. To increase engagement and truly offer choice, with real equity, we would need additional resources, advice and training to explore the range of WBLT for use in lecture production so that the online experience is more than a form of one way transmission and is more like the 'face-to-face' experience. The Institutional plan for operationalising the vision for blended learning is still in its infancy and should be informed by studies such as this – situated within the institution, reflecting the student voice of the institution and identifying the strengths and limitations of the available technology.

We concur with Milne (2007, p 14) who, in his vision for the design of the learning places of the future advises that

*"at a basic level, all learning results from interaction whether they be with aspects of the environment, with information, with other people, or through some combination of these. Applying the concept of interactivity to the real world means creating environments that will preserve the richness of interactions that are not technology mediated and to allow these interactions to co-exist with those that are technology mediated."*

## **Limitations of the study**

The low response rate for the online survey reduces the likelihood that the sample size is representative of the entire cohort, limiting the generalisability of the results. This response rate was not unexpected as research has shown (Donmeyer, Baum, Hanna & Chapman, 2004) that response rates to online surveys are generally lower than those completed in class. In addition, survey respondents were not representative of the total cohort in age or English as a first language. Secondly, the research provided only self-reported attendance figures rather than more objective head counts and given that the self-reported rates for attendance at lectures were higher than the anecdotal reports from lecturing staff, it may also be that the students who attended lectures were more likely than others to respond to the survey, confounding the data and again reducing the veracity of generalising to the wider cohort. However the qualitative data provides a worthwhile snapshot of student preferences and uses for different modes of lecture delivery in our particular context.

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## Appendix

### An investigation of the factors which influence Nursing and Paramedic undergraduate student attendance and usage of either face to face or web based Bioscience lectures

#### *Survey questions used in the Online Survey*

##### **Instructions**

These questions relate only to your lectures in Bioscience units of study. In these Bioscience units of study you have the option of listening to lectures face to face, as a live webcast or as a MyLO media file. We are interested to know your preferences and ways of using these different options.

#### **Part 1 – Information about you**

Q1 In which program are you enrolled?

- Nursing ☐
- Paramedic Practice ☐

Q2 Which campus do you attend?

- Launceston ☐
- Hobart ☐
- Darlinghurst ☐
- Rozelle ☐

Q3 Gender

- Female ☐
- Male ☐

Q3 What is your age range?

- 18 - 23 ☐
- 24- 30 ☐
- 31 - 40 ☐
- 41 + ☐

Q4 Do you consider English to be your first language?

- Yes ☐ No ☐

Q5 How long is it since you completed secondary school education?

- Last year ☐
- Within the last 5 years ☐
- Within the last 10 years ☐
- Longer than 10 years ago ☐

Q6. How confident are you in using the MyLO learning management site?

- Very confident ☐
- Moderately confident ☐
- Not confident ☐

Q7 Select the computing and social media tools you use

- |             |        |                          |
|-------------|--------|--------------------------|
| a. Email    | Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|             | Seldom | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|             | Never  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. You Tube | Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|             | Seldom | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|             | Never  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Facebook | Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|             | Seldom | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|             | Never  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Twitter  | Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|             | Seldom | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|             | Never  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q8. How long does it usually take you to travel to campus?

- |                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Less than one hour | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Between 1 -2 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than 2 hours  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Part 2 - Attendance and use of lectures**

Q 9. Do you attend face-to-face lectures in Bioscience ?

- |        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mostly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Seldom | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**The next three questions relate to the reasons for your choice of type of lecture presentation. We are really interested to find out how you use the lectures in your learning so, in addition to any other reasons make sure you include any reasons related to your learning.**

Q10. What are your reasons for attending or not attending Face-to-face lectures ?

I go to face to face lectures because.....

I don't go to face to face lectures because...

Q11. Do you use My Media lecture recordings in Bioscience ?

- |        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mostly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Seldom | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I use My Media lecture recordings because...

I do not use My Media lecture recordings because...

Q12. Do you use webcast lectures in Bioscience?

- |        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mostly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Seldom | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I use webcast lectures because...

I do not use webcast lectures because...

Q13. Do you use podcast lectures in Bioscience?

- |        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| Always | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mostly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Seldom | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I use podcast lectures because...

I do not podcast lectures because...

*Thank you for your time*

## Starting In Place: a preliminary investigation of first year curriculum design in response to critical regionalism

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**Abstract:** *Negotiating between the demands of This Place, in the form of engaging and enriching learning experiences, and That Place, in the form of experiencing learning in a regional location, draws attention to issues of grounding and belonging in the transition to university. Situating students' experience in place has been a key driver of the first year curriculum in the core theory units within the Bachelor of Contemporary Arts. This study takes a reflective and qualitative approach to curriculum design, by exploring the concept of critical regionality (Mules, 2005) as framework for evaluating the strategies that place regional location at the heart of the first year experience. Critical regionality asserts that regional location, rather than always being at the periphery of a centre elsewhere, forms a powerful grounding for making a future. This emphasis on making taps into increasing interest in the conjunction of regionality and the creative industries.*

*In the first year theory units, learning activities and assessment tasks embed students in the local community through connections to sites, institutions, events and people, and require students to explicitly reflect on their negotiation of the flows between local and global in their developing creative practices. By reviewing the development of these units over the past three years, I will assess how use of the framework of critical regionalism enables students to effectively manage the transition into university study, to relate to challenging material and to identify pathways for career and professional development. I will also question the extent to which the centrality of place is necessarily regional by discussing possible improvements in the program, and its applicability outside this local context.*

### Introduction

For students embarking on their higher degree studies, the promise of grounding is a sense of safety in a new, uncertain and therefore unstable world, while also offering a launch pad. In this paper I take up the idea of grounding literally – arguing that the sense of belonging in a place can be a powerful force in the first year student experience. My interest is particularly in how a critical engagement with regional place can inform first year curriculum design: this engagement with place occurs, therefore, at the level of design and in the experience of students as they move through their first year of study. The methodological approach in this paper is reflective, threading together accounts of curriculum development and classroom experiences with critical theory elements taken from both discipline-specific and interdisciplinary sources. As a preliminary investigation, the scope of this project is restricted to the construction, delivery and modification of two first-year units over the past three years.

Specifically, I will use this paper to look at the design and experience of two core units in Theory as part of the Bachelor of Contemporary Arts. Situated within the Tasmanian College of the Arts (within the Faculty of Arts), students enrolled in the Bachelor of Contemporary Arts degree are physically located in Launceston at the Inveresk campus. As students in a satellite campus at a regional



university, a significant part of their university experience is defined by their location. I consider the context for the development of these units in creative disciplines and how the particular understandings of place currently taken up in these disciplines position place as an emergent, lived experience rather than a cartographic terrain. I then look specifically at regional location, introducing the framework of critical regionality, before exploring its application in curriculum design and the resulting student experience. Therefore, explicitly positioning regionality as a framework for student experience is not only an intellectual exercise in surveying issues in the art world, but part of their lived experience in completing their degree and progressing beyond it into creative careers.

## **Place and Pedagogy**

The transition into university study within the creative and performing arts involves navigating a particular set of demands. Students who take these courses are developing their creative *practice* – a term that encompasses both technical and cognitive realms, where the making or doing of creative work requires engagement with the work as process and as entity. Students therefore need to not only master the ‘skills and knowledge of the practice, languages, forms, materials, technologies and techniques’ in their discipline, but also the ability to ‘develop, research and evaluate ideas, concepts and processes through creative, critical and reflective thinking and practice.’ (Holmes and Fountain, 2011, p12) This requirement to think critically and reflectively about work as it is being done means that a sense of one’s position, the grounding from which a perspective can be developed and articulated, needs to be explicitly placed within the curriculum throughout the degree. The compulsory Theory minor within the Bachelor of Contemporary Arts program, sitting alongside Visual Arts and Theatre majors, aims to empower students with the critical tools to articulate their perspective. The first year Theory program is structured as two core units at introductory level (semesters one and two), and is intended to work in parallel with other introductory units in the major programs.

Students encountering art theory in a first year tertiary environment often imagine it to be an alien and alienating experience. Starting with place is a strategy for making compelling and multifaceted connections between what students encounter in the classroom, the studio and everyday life beyond the university. Carter and Geczy open their discussion of art theory by noting the ‘negative connotations’ of theory, coming from a ‘deeply entrenched cultural fiction that sets ‘heart’ [practice] against the head [theory] but always to the advantage of the heart’ (2006, p24) that also imposes a division of ‘life’ and theory. Entering into this predetermined terrain, structuring the teaching of theory through a grounded sense of location can be a powerful tool for engaging students and empowering them to make their learning meaningful. Starting with place when teaching art theory means both grounding the potentially overwhelming abstractions of theory, while also building a critically informed understanding of location. In this way, students are enabled to situate their current experiences and future directions. By modelling the production and understanding of location as an emergent process, students can find ongoing relevance to their practice.

Underlying my thinking about place is an understanding of it as emergent, affective, embodied and experiential – that the continual construction of space parallels the constructivist nature of learning. From this perspective, place is made and remade. De Certeau evokes the experience of ‘walkers’ ... who ‘make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility.’ (1984, p93) Yet while de Certeau emphasises the corporeality of space, resistant to representation, space has nonetheless become fruitful terrain for the creative arts. For Jen Harvie, ‘drama has long narrated people’s relation to the places where they are, what these places mean and what relationships they make possible.’ (2009, p11) The view of place as emergent and undetermined has profoundly influenced contemporary art, and particularly site-specific work in various forms. Miwon Kwon provides a highly influential account

of the movement from 'site' as constructed through the physical positioning of work in the form of an object to 'site' as place encountered and produced, arguing that:

*'the site is now structured (inter)textually rather than spatially, and its model is not a map but an itinerary, a fragmentary sequence of events and actions through spaces, that is, a nomadic narrative whose path is articulated by the passage of the artist.'* (2002, p29)

The textuality of Kwon's site points to its potential for interpolation and interrogation through an art theory framework, just as Helen Nicholson suggests that the performative nature of space opens up possibilities: 'what might it mean' she asks 'if a city's spaces, events, streets, pathways, buildings, vistas and so on are all considered to have pedagogical force?' (2012, p95) This bringing together of place and pedagogy points to the multiple ways that they can engage and amplify one another.

## **Risk of Regionality**

Much of the writing on place focuses on urban settings, and often on major metropolises. Harvie traces the narration of place within theatre as a profoundly urban format, resulting from both its preoccupations with content and the material conditions of its production. In defining the regional against the urban, and particularly against the metropole, regional centres like Launceston have a decidedly precarious position. Finnane has argued that framing the arts in regional settings as primarily ameliorative poses significant problems. Beyond casting these areas into a perpetual deficit model, it changes the evaluation of art produced to emphasise social function at the expense of other criteria. Similarly, Gibson's writing on cultural industries in regional settings takes up the 'convergence' of 'an "economic turn" in arts policy commensurate with a "creative turn" in regional economic development policy' (2008, p42) to explore the possibilities and pitfalls of such approach. He highlights the fact that '[t]he idea that the arts are vital to local, regional and urban economies is one capable of being appropriated by a diversity of actors (from museums and galleries to youth employment agencies)...' (p42) Gibson notes that such appropriations risk placing regional arts into a competitive and inappropriately comparative mode rather than recognising and taking up opportunities for collaboration and creativity.

Yet the precarious position of regional centres may also give them a particularly useful perspective advocated by critical regional studies. Warwick Mules (2005) suggests that:

*'as products of technological dematerialisation in the global age, regions are a mixture of data and earth, historically made through the accumulation and condensation of material and informational configurations that ground inhabitants in a space-time reality which is as remote from their daily life as it is close at hand. As 'original' ground, regions constitute the substrate of life. But as dematerialised territory, their borders do not bind into a coherent whole. They intercalculate point to point in a shifting constellation of edges.'*

Using critical regionality as a framework for approaching curriculum design therefore requires simultaneous attention to the material conditions of a regional location, engagement with the specific histories of that location, and, additionally, its interconnections with other territories. Furthermore, critical regionalism emphasises the contingent, shifting and fragmented nature of regionality – it does not envision regional location as unchanging or unitary. As a framework for thinking about curriculum design, critical regionalism functions as a call for a sensitive, nuanced, flexible and situated engagement with place as geographic and cultural location.

## Context in Curriculum

Scholarship on first year curriculum design emphasises the development of outcomes, activities and assessments that foster student engagement and empowerment, and as a result, facilitate student transition into higher education, foster retention and academic achievement, and enable student identification with their field of study (see Bovill, Bulley & Morss, 2011). Bovill, Bulley and Morss argue that empowerment in this context is not just about the relationship between student and university, but a far wider context: that it 'help[s] them develop the ways in which they think about, and act within, the world.' (p198) This call for embedding first year engagement in a wider context is taken up by Penn-Edwards and Dennison in their proposal for a 'fourth generation' approach to transition pedagogy, which calls for an inclusive approach to the curriculum that reaches out to include 'the wider social/civic non-education community in which that university is situated' (2014, p33). Such an approach, they suggest, needs to be 'respectful, responsive, and transparent' by valuing the communities that students bring with them as engaged with over the course of their degree as partners in the learning process. In their discussion of 'The Belonging Program at RMIT, Araújo et al.(2014) demonstrate how a sustained and narrative-driven transition process uses the conjunction of place and people as a device for familiarising the city and the cohort, to break through a sense of anonymity that both might share. Through embedding transition activities throughout the degree, contextualised by place and industry, this program has 'helped inform students' sense of identity and belonging to their cohort, program and profession' (Araújo et al., 2014, p29). In designing the first year BCA Theory curriculum, I have used partnerships with local arts organisations along with more general explorations of the challenges of regional arts to foreground a critical regional framework for the students.

In the semester one Theory unit, FFA193 Theory Basics, 'Regionalism' is one of the weekly themes. Through tutorial discussions, a lecture and readings, students are asked to identify the opportunities and challenges for creative practice in a regional location. These activities were complemented by a new assessment ask, introduced in semester one 2014. Students submitted weekly responses to a prompt for reflective journal entries. For the regionalism topic, students were directed to:

*Identify one arts organisation based in a regional area (eg, gallery, theatre company, artist cooperative, community arts). How does this organisation deal with their regional location?*

Responses to this task tended to highlighted the connection between the arts organisation and the community and/or place that it belonged to (first year student, visual arts major: 'the way I see it, the location of a creative practice can be used to host it, to inspire it or both') and therefore as a strength in building a unique expression of place. Many entries drew on student's own experience (first year student, mature age, visual arts: 'in hindsight I think art, in respect to its creation in rural, localised areas is vital, to originality, and to sharing that work by giving back to the community') to sometimes position their current interests or to look for the possibilities in the future (first year student, visual arts major: 'it advocates and provides a platform for local artists to showcase their work'). Yet while many entries focused on regional arts in terms of opportunities or success stories, some entries explored the limits and difficulties faced by regional arts organisations and therefore by regional practitioners, either through their interface with funding bodies/priorities, available infrastructure, and lack of community support (first year student, theatre major: 'it was the level of respect (or lack of it) ... that hindered our success ...we often had to make the best of what little we had'). This journal task sat alongside others that engaged with place more indirectly, including a comparison of discourses of wilderness that implicitly picked up on current Tasmanian issues, and an activity task that directed students to experience and creatively respond to the urban environment. Throughout the reflective journal task, students made connections between their previous experiences, their specialist creative disciplines and the unit content in order to better articulate and situate their

creative practices. Critical regionalism's attention to specificity and materiality is picked up through the journal's focus on specific examples and embodied actions.

In looking at arts organisations in regional settings, the journal task aimed to make clear the importance of structures, both physical and cultural) in enabling and supporting creative work. The Theory curriculum is designed to utilise synergies with local arts events and organisations. One example is our engagement with the Junction Arts Festival, an annual event now in its fourth year. Junction Arts Festival has a 'focus on live arts, participatory and site-specific performances that place the audience at the centre of the experience and use non-traditional venues, outdoors, and present in a range of public and private spaces.' (Junction Arts Festival, 2014) Junction's commitment to new work in these forms places it at the front of current trends in contemporary arts, but also through bringing together place and people, implicitly explores the creative potential of regional locations. As part of an extended four-week focus on 'Audience' in the semester two unit FFA193 Theory Techniques, students are introduced to Junction's rationale and development by a guest lecture from the festival director, Natalie de Vito. Two subsequent assessment tasks then take advantage of the opportunities offered by Junction. In an essay relating to the 'audience' theme, questions require students to test theories of audience participation against examples of contemporary creative practice. Bringing together the scholarly literature on the topic with creative work can enable students to test claims of participatory and site-specific work to empower, transform and activate the audience, to alter the role, skills and status of the artist, and through its response to sites and venues, speak to specific spaces and places. In this unit, students also look at documentation and ephemeral art (including performance), and explore the possibilities of documentation through the development of a portfolio of records and responses to ephemeral work. Students are strongly encouraged to use Junction events as the basis for part of the portfolio. Fostering an extended engagement with the festival not only enables students to critically and reflectively assess individual works and the events as a whole, but has also led to students taking on volunteer and internship roles to extend their experience.

Through the incorporation of guest speakers who bring their expertise while also modelling the experience of working in a regional arts setting, the first year Theory curriculum can give students insight into negotiating the claims of place and the development of a career that often includes, if not requires, geographic mobility. A semester two field trip to the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery not only introduced students to the curator of contemporary art, Damien Quilliam, but also through a guided tour of the current exhibition encouraged students to consider how the built environment (a restored colonial building) and the cultural location (a long-running institution) frames their experience of the Gallery. This year a similar field trip to Theatre North, with a presentation by the General Manager, Greg Leong, will give another example of institutional location. Bonnie Marranca (2013, p1) argues that a theatre training within universities needs to engage across disciplines and should, in part, require familiarity with institutional critique that would 'examine theatre productions, festivals, cultural policy, funding and institutional structure', by analogy with visual arts' tradition of examining curation, exhibitions and institutions. This call recognises the need for students to negotiate their pathways through studies and beyond as practitioners who can function within an industry. For regional practitioners, the challenge of making opportunities and making decisions about the ability of a regional location to support a career, or to provide a grounding for future development elsewhere, requires a high level of awareness and conscious engagement with institutions and industry structures.

### **Critical Regionality as an inclusive approach**

Across three years of curriculum development, the critical and reflective approach to place fostered by critical regionalism has informed the increasing centrality of place in the first year Theory units. By drawing attention to the specificity and materiality of regional location and resulting experiences, the

curriculum has engaged with the lived experiences and communities students bring with them into higher education. In engaging with regional institutions, and making explicit the contexts within which they operate, students become conscious of the histories and power relationships that shape these places and the pathways of people who work with and within them. Recognition of the interconnections of regionality also draws attention to the flows between local and global: critical regionalism and internationalisation need not be poles apart.

Further directions for this program might therefore include connections and partnerships beyond Launceston. There is also the potential for connecting the first year curriculum design with curriculum in subsequent year levels, to continue fostering this engagement with place and community. Work integrated learning could provide one platform for the further development of partnerships with local events and institutions. Increasing flexibility in curriculum could also aim to draw in opportunities to engage with emerging artists (and relatively recent graduates), and to take advantage of evolutions in local arts spaces through artist-run initiatives.

Is this approach to curriculum design essentially regional? Attention to place is hardly the sole preserve of those outside capital cities, and engagement with local institutions and communities is just as, if not more so, possible in major urban centres. None of the teaching practices here described are unprecedented, and would be replicable in other settings. To me, the regionality of this approach to curriculum lies its scale and its explicit articulation of the intersections of place and power. Natalie de Vito, Junction director, has noted the particularly 'human' scale of Launceston, that its central area is easily taken over by a festival. This human scale also applies to the arts community in Launceston, a network organised around key institutions and people that it is relatively easy for students to actively engage with. That 'human scale' can support and empower students, particularly early in their practice. Further, the inclusion of a series of reflective and critical assessments and activities that foreground an interrogation of place and institutional/industry power enables students to meaningfully situate themselves, and to think critically about where their studies will take them. Mules (2005) argues that '[b]ecause they lie on the periphery where power is at its strongest by being furthest away, regions have a particular capacity to make power account for itself.' My hope is that through their experience in this place, and at this time in their studies, students take up the tools to fashion their own perspectives on community, space, and location, informing their creative practices and pathways in the world.

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## **Innovations in distance learning in maritime business education: Experiences from the Australian Maritime College**

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**Abstract:** *The paper explores the role of innovation in distance learning in maritime business education, using the Department of Maritime and Logistics Management (MLM) in the Australian Maritime College (AMC) as a case study. Besides reviewing the evolving literature on distance education, adult pedagogy, and learning and teaching online, this paper details MLM's experience of delivering distance education over the last 25 years to a world-wide undergraduate and postgraduate student cohort. In particular, the current learning and teaching approaches and the influence of technology on the learning environment are explained, as well as investigating future challenges in delivering distance education.*

*With students from every continent, distance education from MLM provides access to learning for these geographically remote students, with the unit coordinator located in a different place and often time zone from the student. Over time, the method of delivering distance education has evolved. Initially it was delivered by a traditional approach, with print materials being posted through the mail to learners. Nowadays electronic media is being more widely incorporated, such as individual and group communication via web conferencing and provision of supplementary resources including lecture materials, audio and video files to deliver e-Learning through the use of technology.*

*The paper concludes with an explanation of the lessons learnt from the blended learning experience and the current challenges facing both students and lecturing staff. MLM's future strategic direction towards innovative learning and teaching in delivering distance education is also discussed. In essence, the paper argues that the continual innovative use of technology will be necessary for the further development and enhancement of MLM's successful distance learning program.*

**Keywords:** *distance learning, technology, innovation*

## **Background**

In the past, distance education tended to be undertaken by students living remotely from the campus, often hundreds or thousands of kilometres away. More local students are also taking the option of distance learning nowadays as they combine not only their work life with learning but also their personal and social situations. The advent of online learning has enabled students to study at their convenience in terms of time and space. At times the challenges of distance learning are blurred as lecturers may be dealing with mainly, or only, local students taking the distance education option.

This paper focuses on the international experience of distance learning in the Department of Maritime and Logistics Management (MLM) that has a multitude of complexities, including the enhanced challenge of asynchronous delivery separated by time-zones, geographic proximity and isolation, and culture; for many students it is also their first entry into tertiary education. These circumstances typify the experience of MLM which has students enrolled from over 20 countries throughout Asia, India, Africa, Europe and the Pacific Islands, in addition to all States of Australia. MLM has offered distance education since 1988, initially for seafarers to study maritime business, often to assist the transition from ship-to-shore. Today, MLM's distance education students range from school leavers to senior employees including CEOs, in varied industries including shipping, ports, logistics, and international trade, both domestically and internationally. The majority of the students are studying part-time whilst working full-time in often demanding job roles in the maritime or logistics industries where for example, they may be working seven day rosters of rotating shift work, be on call 24 hours per day, or working in remote areas such as oil and gas rigs or on ships.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the planned development of MLM distance learning and the increasing use of technology that has transformed the MLM product into a hybridised service offering that bridges distance learning and on-campus learning. The paper provides an overview of the extant views on distance learning from a pedagogical perspective and compares this with the MLM experience in developing the hybridised approach which is explained via a framework of teaching engagement enabled by technology. The paper then explains the lessons learned and challenges that this new paradigm of teaching engagement can create for both students and lecturing staff. The paper concludes by suggesting new developments for MLM's distance learning and future directions for research.

## **Pedagogical views on distance learning**

Distance education is a techno-social development with a long history incorporating many changes in the forms it takes and the techniques and tools involved (Spector, Merrill, Merriënboer & Driscoll, 2008). A key feature is that the instructor and institution are physically separate from the students (Schlosser & Anderson, 1994). Despite its long history, the terminology utilised remains unclear, making it difficult for evaluation of key aspects and elements involved. For example, inconsistent definitions are found for the terms distance education and distance learning; these terms are also often used interchangeably (Moore, Dickson-Deane & Galyen, 2011). With modern technology being more widely involved in distance delivery, the variety of terms lacking clarity is increasing. Terms such as e-Learning and online learning are frequently used without consistent agreement on their meaning. Ellis (2004) indicates that e-Learning incorporates interactive TV, satellite and audio- and video-tape in contrast to views of authors such as Nichols (2003) who focuses solely on web-based delivery. Further, authors such as Conrad (2002) and Benson (2002) suggest that online learning is a modern version of distance learning. Reviewing the range of terms available, Moore, Dickson-Deane, and Galyen (2011) conclude that distance learning involves a learner and an instructor, a range of instructional resources occurring in different times and/or places and that e-Learning provides further opportunities for instructional exchanges. When surveying attendees at an educational



technology conference, they further found that wide differences in terms also occur in the field, as designers create and name contexts and objects used for instruction/teaching.

Concurrent with technological change, the social worldview of those involved in distance education evolves. Over time, different pedagogies and learning activities develop, for example, Anderson and Dron (2011) discuss three generations of distance learning, commencing with the view that teaching initially was focused on pedagogy of cognitive-behaviourism. Akin to a transmission system, the lecturer has the locus of control and changes in behaviour and knowledge of the learner are evidence of outcomes. Subsequently, social-constructivism came to the fore, with acknowledgement of the social nature of learning and that learners construct new knowledge from their existing base in the light of new information. Context becomes important and learning is focused on interactions. More recently, connectivism which indicates learning is based on building networks and connections, has gained prominence. Linkages facilitated by the internet enable learners to find and apply information to solve problems. A key implication is that information retention is not as important; lecturers may be absent as learning focuses on recognising critical connections (Barnett, McPherson & Sandieson, 2013).

The community of enquiry model contains three components, teaching presence, cognitive presence and social presence, which are useful when considering the changes in social worldview, arising from developments in pedagogy. These three components overlap to create the educational experience for all parties involved in delivery of distance education (Garrison, Archer & Anderson, 2000). The components are similar to those developed by Biggs (2003) in his 3P learning systems model, which considers instruction/teaching and learning to be interconnected systems. In this model the four key components are student factors and teaching context (blended mode) which forms the presage stage; learning focused activities, creating the process stage in the centre and the final product, being student learning skills. Hamilton and Tee (2013) investigated the 3P model finding that outcomes from teaching and learning need to be considered from all four constructs, not only learning outcomes. They indicate that as the interactivity increases, greater support will need to be provided to students and teachers.

## **The MLM experience from delivering distance learning**

Initially MLM's education program comprised a Graduate Certificate for students employed at sea, in shipping companies or ports. Today, MLM offers three undergraduate degrees, an Honours program, a full suite of postgraduate programs and higher degrees by research programs. All of these programs are available in both distance learning and on-campus modes; block teaching is available for the corporate market. The programs are also all offered in full-time and part-time modes.

Initially, MLM relied on the traditional, hardcopy study guides consisting of 12 modules (one for each study week) with conceptual frameworks developed by lecturing staff. Each module averaged 20-25 pages that synthesised the content of a textbook (if one is used) and a large collection of readings. The study guides and readings were mailed to the distance students; assessment items were contained in the unit outlines. On-campus students received two-hour lectures and a one-hour tutorial per unit per week but did not receive a copy of the study guides. Often the content differed somewhat for the two cohorts depending on when updating of materials occurred. Further, the assessment tasks were usually different for the two cohorts and two unit outlines were prepared. The two cohorts were effectively treated as being separate learning communities; the underlying pedagogy was based on the traditional push model, prevalent at that time (Hamilton & Tee, 2013).

The underlying pedagogy of staff began to change in the early years of this century. Teaching staff, through interactions with education developers, became more interested in fostering learning communities through a constructivist approach, which fitted well with changing student

requirements. Through an intense range of discussions with both distance learning and on-campus students in 2008, it was found that each student cohort wanted the benefits of the other. That is, distance learning students wanted an on-campus experience that made them feel part of a classroom, even if it was virtual, while on-campus students wanted the study guide and readings materials in addition to their classroom activities. Together these prompted the development of the blended learning project to effectively combine the learning experience for both cohorts. MLM successfully applied for internal funding from the University of Tasmania to create new study guides. The new study guides, developed based on unit learning outcomes, focused on an applied learning approach that substantially reduced the 12 module content to an average of five pages each, in addition to the readings, thereby introducing efficiencies in unit development and updating of study guide materials. Another key change was that the learning outcomes for each module of the study guide were replaced by focus questions to direct student learning through the activities provided and thus scaffold the learning (Hmelo-Silver, 2007). Simultaneously, the provision of technology was changing in the University, with the introduction of My Learning Online (MyLO), based originally in WebCT and currently desire2Learn as the learning management system was made available to all staff and students. The increasing availability of technology and the new study guides enabled MLM to create a blended learning community from 2008.

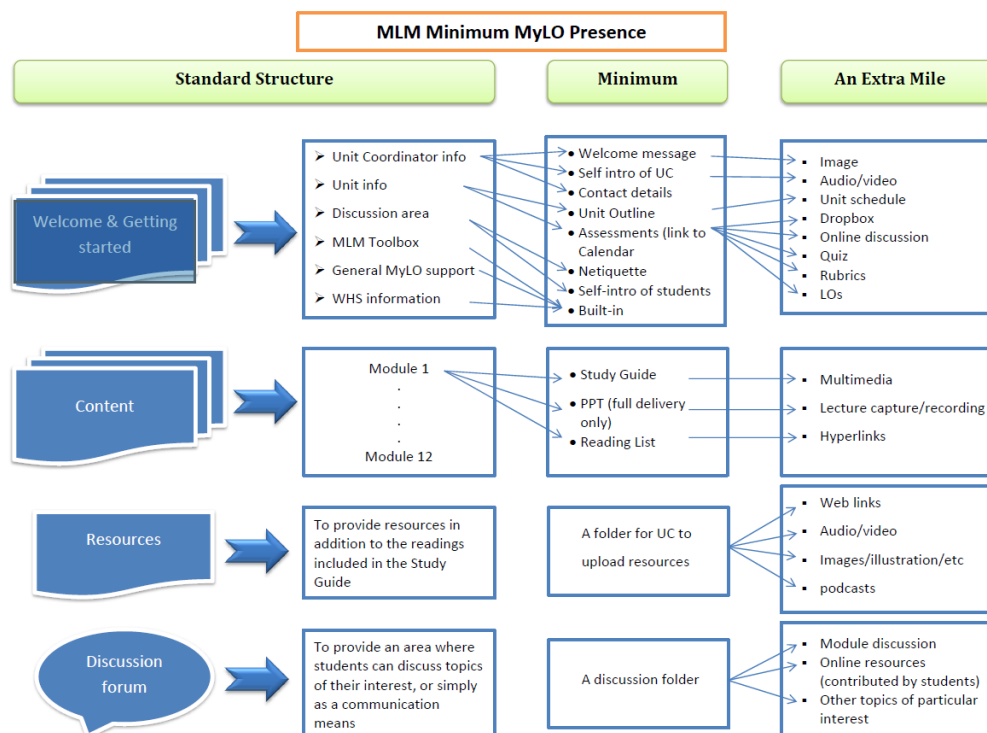
Table 1 explains the changes to MLM distance education before and after 2008. With limited technology involved, MLM's distance education pedagogy prior to 2008 can be described as cognitive-behaviourism, with which learning was predominantly defined, practiced and researched (Anderson & Dron, 2011). The teachers' role was to develop content and adopt direct, one to one communication through available communication channels such as emails. Students, as self-directed learners, undertook individualised learning independently and flexibly, therefore, the cognitive focus was strong under such pedagogy.

After implementing the blended learning project in 2008, it became clearer that embedding technology in the delivery of distance learning has changed the pedagogy used in terms of the role of lecturing staff, interactive communication, learning contents, learning activities, and evaluation. The lecturing staff's role for example, has changed substantially from a knowledge provider and presenter to a guide, facilitator and discussion leader. These approaches support the social-constructivism pedagogy with important features of cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence in terms of the community of enquiry model (Anderson & Dron, 2011). This has resulted in a much greater use of synchronous and asynchronous communications and interactions among students and between students and lecturing staff. For example, distance students in postgraduate units such as Port Management and Strategy (JNB516) and Supply Chain Management (JNB524) actively participate in weekly discussion forums and provide their knowledge in practice to their peers and the lecturing staff. This is an alternative way of constructing knowledge. Of interest is that distance students are able to do networking through MyLO, for example an informal study group has been organised in a postgraduate unit in semester 1 2014. The networking has also assisted in distance students providing information to on-campus about employment opportunities in their organisation. Therefore, knowledge creation and assimilation may not only be from MLM lecturing staff but also from other students who, as full-time employees, share their workplace experiences and industry knowledge through interactions within the online learning community.

MLM distance education	Pedagogy	Contents/ Materials	Learning activities/tasks	Technology engagement	Learning community	Evaluation (assessment)	Student factors	Teacher role
<b>Prior to 2008</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive-behaviourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing study guide</li> <li>• Creating unit structure</li> <li>• Print materials</li> <li>• CD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read and complete tasks assigned in the study guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fax</li> <li>• Email</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive presence                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individual</li> <li>- independent</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assignments</li> <li>• Take-home exams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior knowledge</li> <li>• Abilities</li> <li>• Intelligence</li> <li>• Personality</li> <li>• Home background</li> <li>• Self-directed learner</li> <li>• Time management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content creator</li> </ul>
<b>2008 onwards</b>	<u>PLUS:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social-constructivism</li> <li>• Limited connectivism</li> </ul>	<u>PLUS:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electronic materials in MyLO:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Study guide modules</li> <li>- Lecture recordings</li> <li>- Lecture slides</li> <li>- YouTube clips</li> <li>- Case study videos</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<u>PLUS:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss, create and construct</li> <li>• Online discussion and activity participation                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individual</li> <li>- group</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<u>PLUS:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MyLO</li> <li>• Webinars</li> <li>• Echo 360</li> </ul>	<u>PLUS:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching presence</li> <li>• Social presence                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individual</li> <li>- group</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<u>PLUS:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online tests</li> <li>• Online presentations</li> <li>• Online discussions</li> <li>• Links to e-readings</li> </ul>	<u>PLUS:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technological skills</li> <li>• Capabilities</li> <li>• Access to reliable download capacity</li> </ul>	<u>PLUS:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter</li> <li>• Discussion leader</li> <li>• Facilitator</li> </ul>

Table 1. Evolution of MLM distance education

The primary platform used for the communication and interaction via discussion boards, forums and webinars is MyLO, which also used extensively for the provision of learning resources that include lecture slides, lecture recordings by using ECHO360, video clips, communications such as discussion forums, and assessments. MyLO is very important for distance students as it enables them to share the same resources as on-campus students. To encourage a consistent level of service delivery between lecturing staff, MLM implemented minimum standards for providing lecturing resources in MyLO (see Figure 1). Most staff exceed the minimum requirements by providing more learning resources including lecturing recordings either in mp3 format or ECHO 360 lecture capture, weekly discussion forums and additional readings, video clips, and online quizzes.



*Figure 1. MLM minimum MyLO presence*

Source: Department of Maritime and Logistics Management (2013)

In terms of MyLO improving the use of assessment, first year units such as Financial Resource Management (JNB159) and International Business Communication (JNB154) have received positive feedback for the use of online quizzes for both assessment and for students' weekly self-review of learning. Distance students have commented that the weekly online quizzes have been '*extremely beneficial*' for their progress in the unit. Other positive feedback received resulted from including a publisher provided online English improvement tool in the above latter unit, which assisted students in improving their writing skills. MyLO has also enabled newer means of assessing students via the use of the discussion forums mentioned earlier, such as by students' contributions to discussion threads being made assessable by the staff lecturer as in the case of the postgraduate unit Supply Chain Management (JNB524).

Although technology is the key to changing the teaching delivery paradigm, it is only a means to an end, which is enabling effective delivery and engagement of knowledge. The focus should still be on delivering effective learning and not on delivering state of the art technology. However, to increase effective student engagement and enhance the student's learning experience and knowledge

adoption, it is the innovative use of technology as the enabler for the emergence of a new paradigm for teaching delivery and student learning.

## **Overcoming the challenges created by the new paradigm**

MLM distance education has been evolving towards 'e-distance learning'. However, despite how it may appear, this planned evolution has not always been smooth and straightforward. For MLM there have been many lessons learnt and challenges still remaining for both staff and students. Some recommendations for departments/schools/faculties beginning their blended learning experience for international and national student cohorts include:

- Invite colleagues from within and external to the university to share their experiences in blended learning.
- Determine the desired objectives for moving to blended learning, such as improving the student experience, providing value-added services, remaining competitive; those hoping for short term financial savings may be disappointed.
- Prepare a realistic budget that includes training costs, resources, and buy out time for lecturing staff engaged in developing their blended learning skills.
- Encourage some staff to become champions and trailblazers in adopting the new techniques and provide them with sufficient resources because they will become the intellectual and experienced experts after the training courses are completed.
- Not to rely on conceptual research on appropriate learning techniques and technologies for distance students, instead, seek out the results of empirical studies and engage in primary research with your own students to ascertain their preferences.
- Have a clear understanding of the various student segments and their educational needs and limitations such as time, cultural barriers, and available internet bandwidth.
- Understand the current limitations of staff and how they can be motivated to achieve the desired objectives in the first point.

For distance (and on-campus) students to gain the most from their educational experience through the cognitive, social and teaching presences in MLM's development of blended learning communities, a number of challenges will need to be overcome by students and lecturing staff. A key challenge for students is developing self-efficacy that 'the beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situation' (Bandura, 1995, p2). The self-efficacy to learn in an online environment results in better learning outcomes, including having the confidence with general computer skills and the use of online learning platforms (Wang, Shannon & Ross, 2013). Although students may indicate they prefer greater engagement with lecturing staff and students, this is not the situation for all students, particularly those who, due to their work or family situations, value efficiency in their learning over having in-depth effective learning experiences from engaging with multiple sources – the lecturer, students, and supplementary materials. In other words, even when online learning has been applied in distance education some students still adopt an independent and self-directed approach for learning, preferring not to engage with the learning community (Peters, 2003 as cited in Garrison, 2009). For a blended learning distance environment, skills and motivation are important for engaging students in the learning community (Wang, Shannon & Ross, 2013). Even if all the appropriate tools and resources are provided by lecturing staff, the challenges for students include:

- Changing from lurkers to active participants
- Overcoming embarrassment of asking the perceived "stupid questions" online
- Moving beyond being a strategic learner to being an effective learner
- Developing technical efficacy (Wang, Shannon & Ross, 2013)

- Being able to self-regulate their learning behaviour (Wang, Shannon & Ross, 2013).

For lecturing staff, challenges include:

- Adopting the connectivism pedagogy, i.e. a collaborative-constructivist approach to provide students a meaningful learning experience. This requires advanced applications of technology in addition to the application of Web 2.0, social networks and aggregation and recommender systems involving the co-creation and use of knowledge (Kirkpatrick, 2011)
- Both engaging in and having sufficient training for e-distance delivery and pedagogy
- Forming learning communities when lecturing staff are already time-poor; having conducted a face-to-face class, additional time is needed to engage the distance component of the learning community
- How to engage diverse groups of students, such as mature age and internationals who form part of the same learning community (Kahu, Stephens, Leach & Zepke, 2013)
- Promoting technological self-efficacy amongst students, particularly in their early units of study (Wang, Shannon & Ross, 2013)
- Balancing engagement of students in their learning and technology-mediated delivery (Dawson, Charman & Kilpatrick, 2013)
- Facilitating connection in the learning community, given the geographic dispersion (Dawson, Charman & Kilpatrick, 2013).

## Conclusion

MLM has been successfully conducting distance education over many years. During that time there have been significant changes in both pedagogy and technology. Pedagogy has evolved from a push model of education to one where a community of enquiry is formed, in which all instructors, students and the teaching presence interact in a socially-constructed world. Reflecting that changing pedagogy, the learning activities, the evaluative assessment tasks and the physical and virtual artefacts, MLM developed to assist its learners have transformed. Part of this transformation has been possible by the progression in the technological environment and hastened the transition to a socially-constructed community of learners.

Future directions for MLM relate to further developing learning communities to effectively engage our diverse learners. The creation of learning communities that overcome the lack of technical self-efficacy in first year units is a priority. A potential approach is adopting artefact creation as an assessment activity, with the artefacts created by mixed groups of learners, which may increase self-efficacy in technology and simultaneously engage diverse groups of learners. A further complex challenge for MLM relates to the use of flipped classrooms, which are becoming increasingly common in our on-campus classes. The transposition of these teaching approaches to the distance environment is a major challenge that MLM is currently considering.

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## **Peer Learning Circles: peer mentoring and evaluation of teaching within a Bachelor of Nursing program in Australia**

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this study is to report the experiences of new faculty's participation in a community of practice (CoP) at a satellite campus of a major Australian university. The purpose is to examine how the experience of building portfolios through this CoP contributed to the enhancement of teaching practices and collegiality among staff members. As this project was conducted at a satellite campus of the University of Tasmania, the sub theme of 'Inner Space' and 'That Place' is important to this project. How the staff at the satellite Campus perceive the larger main Campus can be articulated as 'That Place'. As the portfolio building program was largely guided by academics from the main Campus, the connection with 'That Space' was notable. As participants came together and a community of practice evolved, a growing identity as occupiers of 'This Place' was reported. By utilising a CoP as the vehicle to drive portfolio building amongst academics, this program resounds with the sub-theme of 'Inner Space'.*

*This is a descriptive study. The Peer Learning Circle (PLC) program occurred over an eight-week period through fortnightly video conference link-up between staff presenting in Tasmania and staff attending the program on the satellite Campus. Following completion of the program, self-evaluations were completed by the attendees. Thematic analysis was used to identify the experiences and attitudes of the participants within the program. In relation to the PLC, participants reported an experience of collegiality, teaching satisfaction and dynamism. An underlying theme that emerged was how this experience was shaped in the context of a satellite university campus. Dominant themes relating to portfolio building included professional development and career pathways.*

*This study has shown collegiality and ambition are highly valued on satellite campuses. PLCs can be very effective in addressing feelings of isolation and retrograde career movement common to satellite university campuses. Portfolio building is highly compatible with PLCs in that it requires collaboration and engenders a spirit of ambition and progression in expertise.*

**Keywords:** *communities of practice, portfolios, space, satellite campus*



## Introduction

In response to a perceived under-emphasis on teaching in favour of research, lack of campus collegiality and a perceived isolation from the rest of the University, the faculty of a satellite campus of a large Australian university formed a community of practice (CoP) with the intent of building teaching portfolios. Through this process, participants reported an awareness of the relationship between the satellite campus they occupied and the main campus. Ways in which the distance between *That Place* and *This Place* can be bridged were recognised. *This place* was seen by the researchers as their place, the satellite campus, whereas *that place* was perceived as the main campus. The following paper explores the process of bridging this divide, utilising a theoretical framework of communities of practice, while observing the space that is occupied by a satellite campus in relation to the main University. Utilising the same framework, this paper also observes the emergence of an *Inner Space* – a professional development that occurs through a CoP and, in the case of the process reported here, engenders a sense of shared identity. The experience of the staff in this satellite campus describes an important dynamic when understanding different contexts of University community.

## Background

### Community of Practice

The social theory of CoP is utilised to frame the experience of the three academics described in this paper. First articulated by Wenger (1998), the theory of CoP is orientated towards learning and social participation. Wenger (1998) points to four key components that characterise learning through social participation: meaning, practice, community and identity. Essentially, those with a shared practice and defined community, such as a group of academics, can develop a meaningful way to express their individual and collective achievements through a CoP.

While first articulated as CoP by Wenger (1998), concepts around how colleagues can work together were well established in numerous industries. In the 1960s, Kaoru Ishikawa described peer collaborations that could enhance collegiality and professional development (Ishikawa & Ishikawa, 1982). This advanced to other professions, including Education (Walker, 2011). This professional development in a community resonates with the concept of *Inner Space*. As Wenger (1998) asserts, learning and development can, and many contexts should, be a social process.

Wenger's (1998) articulation of CoP also contributes to an understanding of the places that are occupied by groups. Wenger refers to the personal histories of individuals and groups, as well as the resources and constraints, which shape the contexts in which communities operate. As different campuses within a university have their own unique contexts, the understanding from one's position of *This Place* versus *That Place* shapes the way faculty identifies themselves, develop their practice and interact with others.

### Space

Universities are places created with the aim of encouraging teaching and learning, events which take place in the campus space within (Yalali-Yildiza, Czerkauer-Yamu & Cil 2014). Campuses may be physically located next to each other or distant, with campus users meeting within campus spaces to fulfil the needs of individual learning communities (Yalali-Yildiza, 2004; Tosey, 1999). Yet as Temple (2008) states, the physical place needs to be occupied by users and adapted to create spaces for communities to exist in and meet their individual community needs.

Universities are communities, yet how these communities come together, are sustained and nurtured is dependent on the space within which they exist (Temple, 2008; Yalali-Yildiza et al., 2014). Communities are social constructs with active participants situated in the environment of shared

interests of members (Wenger 1998). As learning is a social activity, it is connected through the social and intellectual spaces of those involved in learning (Temple, 2008; Yaylali-Yildiza et al., 2014). Temple (2008) notes that even in modern day campus design, this need for learning and teaching spaces is often neglected. This is especially so with satellite campuses, where the initial impetus is more focused on the financial (Dobos, 2011).

Various authors have examined space in terms of place as occupied, geographical, institutional, territorial, physical (Boschma, 2005; Gehardi, 2008; Temple, 2008), leading to a sense of *This Place and That Place*. Whereas *Inner Space* can be said to be shared, social and intellectual between faculty (Temple, 2008; Boschma, 2005; Amin & Roberts, 2008)

### **Satellite Campus**

Despite varying literature searches, using terms such as remote, distant, satellite and isolated, scant literature was found on satellite campuses, let alone in combination with CoP. Satellite campuses, also described as remote, networked and isolated in the literature, occupy a unique space in tertiary education (Bambrick, 2002; Yaylali-Yildiza et al., 2014). Most literature focused on the motives for establishing a satellite campus including branding, finance and research outputs (Bambrick, 2002). This leads to a focus on student enrolment with minimal thought given to staff support. This oversight has flow on effects for staff connections locally and with the main campus (Bambrick, 2002).

There is a dichotomy in the literature between how staff based at the satellite campus view themselves as being here, with the main campus viewed as *That Place*, as staff do not feel listened to and isolated from the main campus (Smith, 2009; Lefoe & Albury, 2006). Satellite campuses, generally geographically distant to the main campus, still operate in the curricular and organisation space of the university, yet this territorial space can be unclear to new staff at satellite campuses. Dobos (2011) found that the small staff numbers generally associated with satellite campuses can result in close knit communities operating in a strong shared social space, rich in experience with opportunities to collectively professionally develop. While their teaching is valued by local colleagues, there are reports that this value is not appreciated by the main campus colleagues (Dobos, 2011; Smith, 2009). In this context of satellite campuses, a heightened awareness of the distinct divide between *This Place* and *That Place* is evident.

### **Teaching Portfolios**

As Churchman and Stehlik (2007) report, today's academics operate in a highly contested space of teaching, research and governance, yet teaching is core to many academics perception of self. Seldin, Miller and Seldin (2010) assert that the emergence of teaching portfolios over the past two decades has largely been in response to the observed gap in the value placed on teaching and research. Among the multiple ways in which portfolios are utilised by faculty, they point to two prominent uses for teaching portfolios: evidence of performance and as tools for improvement (Seldin et al., 2010).

CoP have been identified as a powerful tool for development of teaching portfolios. Place and Coskie (2006) observed that teachers who developed portfolios in a CoP were more likely to gain insights and develop than those who were not part of group while Barrett and Carney (2008) refer to the importance of shared effort. Schneckenberg (2010) goes on to highlight the sustainability of multi-dimensional portfolios, especially as a driver for competence development of faculty staff, when undertaken in collaboration with colleagues. Wolf, Winery and Hagety (1995) further add 'portfolio conversations' to the framework, where staff developed teaching portfolios collaboratively.

The literature's support of portfolio development in a form of CoP is much in line with Wenger's (1998) argument that development in a social context contributes to community, meaning and identity formation. Integral to the *Inner Space* observed in this study was the presence of these components through a collaborative approach to portfolio building.

## **The CoP Project**

Along with other colleagues, the researchers participated in a 'Peer Learning Circle' (PLC), a form of CoP. While initiated and sustained by local staff, the PLC was guided and supported by the wider CoP program at the University. The PLC was designed to support colleagues with like-minded learning and teaching initiatives and provide mentoring and the opportunity for professional development.

The PLC project at this Campus was initiated by subject A in semester 2, 2013. It was unanimously decided that to be translational to the needs of participants, the PLC program needed to be orientated towards the support of each other in the delivery of teaching material. The intent was that this collaboration would evolve into the development of a teaching portfolio.

The eight-week project was structured in nine two hour sessions covering teaching portfolios, teaching awards, feedback on teaching through peer observation and student evidence, and examining and exploring the *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* literature. All sessions were conducted by academics from the University Institute of Learning and Teaching (UITL) via video link to the satellite campus. Staff on the satellite campus gathered together face to face in the video conference room. UITL academics were based at the main campus and due to cost constraints were unable to visit in person the satellite campus. Therefore all expert input came from *That Place*. On occasions, as part of portfolio development, staff would meet in smaller groups informally. These formal and informal gatherings promoted a supportive environment where academics engaged in professional development of teaching and learning.

## **Method**

This was a qualitative descriptive study that used thematic analysis to explore *This Place, That Place* and *Inner Space* using a CoP lens. The three researchers were active participants in the research. Using their de-identified reflections, the researchers immersed themselves in the data, coding it to generate themes which were analysed and interpreted interpersonally. The research was done with colleagues directly interacting with each other as subjects (Bradbury & Bergmann Lichenstein, 2000). As the researchers were investigating their own experiences, no ethics approval was required.

## **Strengths**

Our study is a unique study in the sense that it documents the experiences of faculty members building portfolios and what that meant in the context of a satellite campus. Our findings are supported by literature describing CoP in a variety of contexts while exploring the dimension of space. As there is limited literature regarding satellite campuses, this paper contributes valuable information around the experiences and teaching practices of faculty on satellite campuses.

## **Limitations**

As investigators, we analysed and interpreted our own data, bringing our own epistemological assumptions. As only three participants, this is a small sample size and restricted to one campus. Additionally, while ours is a satellite campus, it is located in a higher urban density region than the main campus, unlike most satellite campuses reported on. This could undermine the transferability of our findings to other settings.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Following completion of the PLC program, UILT requested the following two questions be answered by participants as an evaluation of the program:

- Briefly describe your PLC project and its outcomes specifically focusing on your own achievements and providing as much evidence as you can.

- What impacts has your participation had on your teaching (and/or what impacts do you anticipate that it will have in the future)?

These same two questions were answered six months post the program by the three researchers. These were all completed before the authors were familiar with Wenger's theory of CoP. In all, six reflective pieces were analysed using thematic analysis.

To maintain anonymity, reflective pieces were de-identified using ABC identifiers and the numbers one and two for first and second reflections (Gerrish & Lacey, 2006). This process was undertaken using the six phases of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clark (2006). These required the researchers to familiarise themselves with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing our report.

Familiarisation with the data took place with all researchers present through reading and rereading the data and discussing key ideas. Discussions occurred that focused on common agreement from the ideas being scrutinized (Braun & Clark, 2006). A deductive approach to analysis was utilised. Themes were taken from Wenger's CoP which included: community, identity, meaning and practice.

Words were then coded by the researchers as belonging to one of the four above named themes. If a phrase or sentence contained two or more key words, it was allocated to more than one theme (Braun & Clark, 2006). Through a revision of the themes a fifth theme, *space*, became apparent. Accordingly, the five themes were named and defined, and key words were allocated as decided by the researchers (See table 1). This systematic approach enabled data to be organised (Braun & Clark, 2006).

<b>Community</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Practice</b>	<b>Space</b>
Collegial Collaborative Trust Connection	Effective Teacher Inclusion	Valued Colleagues in Action	Professional Development Peer Feedback Scholarship	Connected Campus Disconnected

*Table 1. Searching for themes.*

## **Discussion**

Through thematic analysis, themes were identified of community, identity, meaning, practice and space. Emerging sub themes identified collegiality, effective teacher, colleagues in action, professional development and a sense of connectedness as well as an opposing sense of disconnectedness. This is reflected with Wenger (2011) defining COP as a collective of likeminded individuals who share a desire to improve in an area they already have experience of through regular interactions.

### **Community**

The component of community in Wenger's theory of CoP is tied intrinsically to practice (1998). Community is characterised by membership of participants who empower each other and mutually engage in joint enterprises (Wenger, 1998). In the PLC undertaken at the satellite campus in this study, the community formed was focussed on the joint enterprise of portfolio building. Two key findings emerged from our study in relation to community: a community can empower and a CoP has wider implications on a sense of connectedness with others in the institution.

All participants pointed to the enabling aspects of a community in constructing their portfolios and professional development.

*The colleagues that attended the PLC program with me have been supportive and collegial in my pursuit of professionally developing my teaching and learning. (C2)*

The 'enabling' attributes of a CoP referred to by Wenger (1998), and expressed by participants in this study, resounds with the literature (Barrett & Carney, 2008; Wang, 2010; Wolf, 1995). Place and Coskie (2006) in particular observe the value of collegial approaches over individual efforts in the construction of portfolios.

The participation in a CoP appeared to have wider effect on a sense of community for those who participated. An awareness of *This Place* was voiced in a number of reflections. Particularly in the second reflection:

*As we are based distant to the main campuses, the biggest impact has been the collegiality developing among us and the respect shown by all for each other's opinions (B1)*

*For me, probably the most successful part of the PLC was the way it enhanced collegiality amongst the campus (A2)*

*I believe that the PLC program contributed to developing an environment of trust and shared visions for scholarly endeavours. (C2)*

There was also expressed was an increased connection with the overseeing body in Tasmania, *That Place*:

*The connection made with [main campus] during the PLC has also deepened with my engagement [with other main campus learning and Teaching activities]. (B2)*

These findings align with the observations of other authors in that joint endeavours tend to promote a wider sense of community. Campus life involves social interactions, shared interests and mutual goals, which foster the learning community and create a sense of belonging and collaboration (Yaylali-Yildiz et al., 2014). Inclusivity is essential to collegiality, reducing feelings of isolation and through relationship building, develops valuable peer support networks (Brandon, 2011).

## **Identity**

For Wenger (1998), identity is intrinsically linked to concepts of activity, inclusion and belonging. In that sense, a complete delineation from practice, community and meaning is neither practical nor desirable. For the PLC discussed in this paper, identity as a developing teacher was a repeated theme. In this sense, participants felt a sense of professional belonging through a stronger recognition of themselves as teachers:

*[I felt] empowered by having like-minded colleagues with similar teaching visions, collaborating to enhance our development as teachers. (C2)*

This *Inner Space* of professional development within a community was facilitated largely by the portfolio development. The reflective component of teaching portfolios is a recurrent theme in the literature and is echoed in our own reflections (Barrett & Carney, 2005; Orland-Barak, 2005).

*Writing the teaching philosophy has helped me refine my goals as a teacher and reflect on what it is that makes me a teacher. (A1)*

Identity through portfolio development is well recognised in the literature. As Windsor and Ellefson (1995) observe, teacher identity is not only evidenced by the outputs of teaching, research and governance, but also through reflection and compilation of teaching portfolios. Centra (1994) argues teaching portfolios are a way to identify and address the disconnect between what the teacher was thinking and what the teacher was actually doing, evidencing Wenger's (1998) assertion that identity relates to *becoming*.

Activity in the PLC also contributed to a growing sense of professional identity.

*Through the CoP I was able to generate a teaching philosophy that focused on my views and beliefs as a teacher. (C2)*

Professional connectedness through CoP was a repeated theme in the literature (Place & Coskie, 2006) and emerged a number of times from this study's data. Perhaps an anticipated theme that did not emerge was an expression of identity as belonging to *This Place*. However, aligning with a growing sense of community across campuses was an understanding of belonging to *That Place*.

*I feel much more connected with my academic colleagues on this campus and also with colleagues on the main campus. (B2)*

## **Meaning**

Brandon and Charlton (2011) assert meaning is negotiated through making the intangible real and engaging with those around us. It is a knowing-in-action and a reflection-on-action that continually challenges our knowledge and epistemologies (Schon, 1995). Meaning is reflected in the value placed by participants on the shared experience that was shaped by the PLC. All participants described a sense of purpose that was stimulated through the participatory model of peer feedback and other aspects of portfolio building, reflective of the *Inner Space* present on the satellite campus.

*It has been immensely rewarding to discuss with colleagues a shared desire to improve the work that we do. (A2)*

*Although the PLC has concluded, the collegiality and teaching support generated from the PLC has continued on campus. This has flowed into other areas of my work and given me valuable support in my teaching practices. (B2)*

Wenger (1998) states, learning as experience is an essential component of meaning. The sub themes of valued and colleagues in action identified above support this belief. A sense of value is aligned with Wenger's concept of meaning. Creating meaning occurs through social participation and relationships (Wenger, 1998). Tacit knowledge is made visible through interactions with others and sharing of that which is implicit (Brandon & Charlton, 2011). True meaning is found and located in the Inner Space between participants where informal interactions stimulated meaning. This is aligned to local and personal contexts (Bradbury & Bergmann Leichenstien, 2000). The experience of sharing knowledge becomes reciprocal and develops the practice of all participants, deepening personal meaning (Boud, 1999).

## **Practice**

Practice knowledge is gained through interaction, observation and shared experiences (Amin & Roberts, 2008). Wenger (1998) states, learning as doing is an essential component of practice. Participants pointed to the success of the PLC in terms of how it enhanced professional development

and the practice of teaching and provided a platform for continued professional development six months after the conclusion of the PLC. This shared *Inner Space*, among the participants was particularly important as peer observation and review played a key role in practice development.

*Although I had identified areas I wanted to improve in, by having a colleague sit in and observe my teaching practice, they were able to give me strategies to improve this aspect of my teaching. (B1)*

*I recognise now the importance of feedback. Not only through my own self-reflection, but also the feedback from peers and students... . (C1)*

*This has enabled me to better articulate to students what I want from them and what they should expect from me. It has provided a clearer framework for my teaching activities and pursuit of better teaching. (A2)*

Sub themes of professional development, peer feedback and scholarship were identified by the researchers and are consistent Wenger's (1998) description of *practice*. Professional development is an acknowledged benefit of CoP (Amin & Roberts, 2008). Boud (1999) has suggested that most academic professional development on campus occurs implicitly through informal interactions but that peer review, assists in making professional development explicit. Interaction in CoP enhances opportunities for professional interaction and learning opportunities, both informal and formal (Smith, 2009). Reflecting on CoP and practice itself also can lead to *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, a key requirement of current academics with a workload scoping teaching, research and governance (Churchman & Stehlik, 2007). Through sharing *This Place*, the CoP experience on the satellite campus contributed to collegial professional development.

## **Space**

Space has been described in dimensions of place as physical, institutional, geographical and occupied (Boschma, 2005; Gehardi, 2008; Temple, 2008). Less explicitly, space can also be conceived as social, shared and intellectual (Temple, 2008; Boschma, 2005; Amin & Roberts, 2008). Due to the location of the researchers' campus and past experience as staff within the tertiary sector, space was identified as a key theme in the findings. Initial reflections such as 'undertaken in XXX', (A1); 'to the main campus', 'sense of place' and 'distant' (B1), were followed up in the second reflections with 'reduced feelings of isolation', 'been connected', 'contacted colleagues in YYY' (A2); 'more connected', (B2) and 'inclusiveness'. This richer data from the later reflections suggests the importance of *That Place*, *This Place* to the participants and the *Inner Space* that had been created through the PLC.

This dichotomy of disconnected and connected through space was stronger in the earlier reflections and had been diluted in the later reflections, similar to Dobos (2011) findings where staff on satellite campuses felt a greater inclusion with main campus through inter-campus projects. This is consistent with the notion that learning is shaped by a spatial context, that is, situated in the context that shapes the experience of participants (Wenger, 1998; Tosey, 1999). Lefoe and Albury (2006) also report on similar findings to this CoP whereby the CoP increased feelings of feeling valued, scholarship and connectedness, as well as providing an avenue for professional development. We theorise that these findings may have been shaped by the fact that participants came together initially, through joint feelings of disconnect with the main campus. However, the collegiality that developed among the researchers assisted in overcoming the initial disconnect, and with the passing of time and ties made during the PLC with the university, these feelings have dissipated.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the experiences of the participants in coming together through a PLC on a satellite campus. The Wengerian lens of CoP has been used to identify powerful themes of community, practice, identity and meaning with the additional theme of space identified by the researchers, to make sense of the experiences during and after the PLC. *This Place*, *That Place* and *Inner Space* were all themes that impacted the experience of participants.

Through participation in the PLC, participants were able to address a concern in relation to the perceived under-emphasis on teaching. Participants reported a deeper connection to the University after the PLC; a shared identity with both *This Place* and *That Place*. This occurred through the collegiality engendered through a collaborative endeavour to enhance teaching through portfolio building. The experience of the staff in this satellite campus describes an important dynamic when understanding different contexts of University community.

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## **Achieving a sense of ‘place’: reflections from a satellite campus**

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**Abstract:** *This paper will examine the gaps, barriers and facilitators of ‘place’ in the context of undergraduate nursing students completing a fast-track degree on a satellite university campus. Being a relatively new campus with a degree of isolation from other schools and broader university resources, we believe that a ‘sense of place’ is an important pre-condition for learning success, and also reflects many of the personal and inter-personal characteristics or attributes that we strive to achieve in our graduates.*

*Our contemporary understanding of health and health care is informed, in part, by a focus on the multifaceted relationships between sociocultural, environmental, economic and political determinants, and how these influence, for better or worse, the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. A similar paradigm also plays out in health professional education. In the preparation of undergraduate nursing students, we have recognised that various social and environmental determinants can either enhance or impede learning and teaching success. Creating a positive learning environment is an aspirational goal of learning and teaching. Our proposition is that while the tangibles of ‘space’ (built and natural environment, facilities and technology) are an important part of this, it is a sense of ‘place’ (identity, connection, relationship and belonging) that has the greatest potential to enhance learning experience and outcomes.*

*This paper will present the observations and reflections of a small community of practice from the first-year teaching team; and the results of a community needs assessment ‘foot survey’ undertaken by the students as part of the undergraduate curriculum. In our pursuit of a strong and vibrant sense of place for our entire campus community, the paper will include a discussion of strategies employed so far, and recommendations for ongoing dialogue, research and action.*

**Keywords:** *sense of place, student engagement, satellite campus, undergraduate nursing education.*

## Introduction

*Places are endlessly made, not just when the powerful pursue their ambition through brick and mortar, not just when the design professional gives form to function, but also when ordinary people extract from continuous and abstract space a bounded, identified, meaningful, named, and significant place (Gieryn, 2000, p471).*

This paper will examine the gaps, barriers and facilitators of 'place' in the context of undergraduate nursing students completing a fast-track degree on a satellite university campus. The paper presents part of an ongoing journey and dialogue, from the abstract to the tangible, which started in the classroom and continued on into our offices and the broader spaces of our campus.

We are based at a beautifully-refurbished historic building in the picturesque natural setting of Queen's Domain. As a relatively new satellite campus in Hobart, we are endowed with generous and well-equipped teaching and learning spaces that (on face value) are highly conducive to the provision of undergraduate health-science courses. On consideration of the conference themes for this year, we were initially interested in exploring the physical and material characteristics of these learning spaces and how these either enable or impede successful learning outcomes.

Through further reflection and dialogue we began to realise that great curb-appeal and well designed and resourced teaching and learning spaces was only one part of the equation. While these physical and material factors may help to attract students and faculty, and enhance the delivery of formal curriculum, this 'spatial-lens' ignores or neglects the contribution of social and relational characteristics that are equally, if not more important, to the achievement of positive student engagement, experience and success. Thus, our focus shifted to how people experience these physical spaces – their sense of connection and belonging, the relationships formed, the experiences shared, and the meanings and memories made. What we refer to in this paper as a *sense of place*.

As a relatively new campus with a degree of isolation from other schools and broader university resources, we believe that a 'sense of place' is an essential pre-condition for learning success, and that achieving such has the greatest potential to enhance students' university experience and outcomes. It also reflects many of the personal and inter-personal attributes that we, as a university, strive to achieve in our graduates. This paper makes visible the deliberate strategies that we have employed in an attempt to foster a strong and vibrant sense of place and community on our campus, and presents our ideas and recommendations for ongoing dialogue, research and action.

## What we mean by a 'sense of place'

*A place is remarkable, and what makes it so is an unwindable spiral of material form and interpretative understandings or experiences (Gieryn, 2000, p471).*

Place is widely discussed in fields as diverse as geography, architecture, design, municipal-planning, environmental studies, health and sociology, yet it remains an abstract and difficult to define concept, with little inter-disciplinary agreement about what place constitutes or represents (Blackmore, Bateman, Loughlin, O'Mara & Aranda, 2011; Gieryn, 2000; Reeve & Kassabaum, 1997). Moreover, many definitions tend to emphasise the abstract geometries or tangibles of space – location, size, spatial-density, technology, equipment and resources, rather than intangibles related to the psychosocial characteristics of the people occupying the space, the nature of social organisation and interaction, and the local cultural-milieu (Blackmore et al, 2011; Fitzpatrick & LaGory, 2000).

Gieryn (2000) suggests that there are three distinct features of place: geographic location, material form, and a space that is imbued with meaning and value. The first two of these features are often

used interchangeably with the conception of space. While place may derive a geographic reference and its physical and material form from space, it is the sociological perspective inherent in the third feature, which differentiates place from space, and informs our conception of sense of place as used in this paper. In this context, sense of place refers to the human or emotional response to the qualities of physical spaces (Reeve & Kassabaum, 1997), or the ways in which physical and material form are “interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” (Gieryn, 2000, p465).

Our conception is also deeply grounded in the premise that “before place can matter, people must matter” (Manning & Kuh, 2005, p2). Thus, a sense of place must support people to engage in settings where they are known and valued (Manning & Kuh, 2005); can gather together to pursue good company, lively conversation and grass-roots democracy (Oldenburg, 1999); and where interpersonal relationships, personal and professional identity and a sense of belonging can flourish. Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2008, p104) describe this ‘belongingness’ as “a deeply personal and contextually mediated experience that evolves in response to the degree to which an individual feels (a) secure, accepted, included, valued and respected by a defined group, (b) connected with or integral to the group, and (c) that their professional and/or personal values are in harmony with those of the group”.

Frumkin (2003) also introduces a sense of place as a public health construct, which aligns with our own disciplinary background and perspective. Our contemporary understanding of health is informed by a focus on the multifaceted relationships between sociocultural, environmental, economic and political determinants, and how these influence, for better or worse, the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities (Guzys & Arnott, 2014; Keleher & MacDougall, 2011). We believe a similar paradigm also plays out in undergraduate nursing education, and we contend that the social and relational characteristics of a sense of place can enhance learning and teaching success and help to mediate positive physical, psychological, social and spiritual outcomes (Frumkin, 2003).

### **Why is this important?**

Creating a positive learning environment is an aspirational goal of learning and teaching. Our proposition is that while the tangibles of space (built and natural environment, facilities and technology) are an important part of this, it is a sense of place (identity, connection, relationship and belonging) that has the greatest potential to enhance learning experience and outcomes.

There are several key drivers that have influenced our interest in sense of place. Firstly, our conception of sense of place aligns with our personal and professional belief that ‘together we can do better’, and that an investment in social-capital - the connections between people and the norms of reciprocity, trust and fair-dealing (Santasiero, 2002) will translate to a more engaged, bonded and collaborative community (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

Secondly, the benefits of a sense of place in learning and teaching have been increasingly espoused in the literature (Blackmore et al, 2011; Manning & Kuh, 2005; Reeve & Kassabaum, 1997; Santasiero, 2002). Santasiero (2002) suggests that contemporary university life provides students with the closest thing to community they will ever experience. Thus, enhancing sense of place characteristics can help to reinforce a sense of community on campus, enhance teaching and learning experiences, and further the mission and goals of the university in educational, social, financial, operational and physical ways (Reeve & Kassabaum, 1997). Similarly, strategies aimed at achieving engaged learners, a sense of belonging and student wellbeing, have also been championed in the context of nursing education (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2008; Tuomi, Aimala, Plazar, Starcic, & Zvanut, 2013). In a study of undergraduate nursing students, Levett-Jones, Lathlean, Higgins and McMillan (2009) found that a sense of belongingness was strongly influenced by the quality of relationships with staff, which led to an inclusive and connected community, where students demonstrated an increased ability to seek out independent and collaborative learning opportunities.

Finally, we believe that our focus on creating a sense of place is consistent with the University's *Student Experience Plan*, which aims to provide students with an inclusive and welcoming experience in their transition into, through and out of university, and to provide academic, social and culturally-appropriate support that facilitates inclusive and accessible learning in a community environment (University of Tasmania, 2014a).

## **Our approach**

This paper discusses data derived from two sources: the observations and reflections of a teaching and learning community of practice; and the results of a community needs assessment foot-survey undertaken by first year students as part of the undergraduate curriculum.

As members of the first-year teaching team, we developed a community of practice (COP) to examine issues associated with the engagement and education of first-year (first-semester) students in an undergraduate fast-track degree. A COP is defined as a group of people who "share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p4). These COPs often occur naturally in organisations, and flourish according to how members structure and engage in their community. Our COP evolved in a very organic way around a common student cohort and shared personal-values, professional interests and pedagogical approach.

Our COP met weekly during first semester, supplemented by informal interaction and communication in face-to-face and virtual environments. While some dialogue considered curriculum content and pedagogy, much of our focus was on the students' transition to university, their engagement with university life, and the building of supportive connections and relationships within our campus community.

The other data that informs this paper is drawn from student feedback. Student perspectives are essential in the conceptualisation of 'sense of place' and the identification of the barriers and enablers of a healthy and successful learning community. During semester one 2014, students completed a *Learning about the Community on Foot Survey* (Francis et al., 2008), focussed on socio-ecological determinants and how these influence the health and wellbeing of populations or communities. These foot-surveys are designed around a community assessment wheel. The centre or core of this wheel represents the people who make up the designated community; surrounded by eight community subsystems – physical environment; education; safety and transportation; politics and government; health and social services; communication; economics; and recreation – which may affect, or be influenced by, the members of the core community (Francis et al., 2008).

Foot-surveys often focus on a geographic area or location (the neighbourhood or community in which people live), but can also be used to assess a 'community within a community' (e.g. a campus) or a 'group within the community' (e.g. students). In this instance, the core community under consideration was undergraduate nursing students on our satellite campus. This community shared a common goal or purpose (nursing education), and thus, surveys were framed around the overarching question – *is/how is each subsystem conducive to the learning outcomes and wellbeing of the core community?* More than 100-students were deployed in small groups or teams to complete a foot-survey of an allocated subsystem. While a comprehensive community assessment often involves an evolving process of data collection and analysis, these foot surveys are brief by nature, providing a snapshot view of the subsystem or phenomena under investigation. Approximately 45 minutes was allocated for the collection of data through observation, consultation with stakeholders and personal and group reflection. Feedback and findings were then presented and discussed at a plenary-session with the larger cohort.

## **Reflections from our Community of Practice**

Our journey and dialogue began with some initial reflection about our own undergraduate experiences. We realised that our most profound memories were all about people - the relationships we had formed with our peers and teachers; and how these relationships influenced our attachment, belonging and involvement in the campus community, and advanced our formal learning and professional identity as nurses. Our sense of place at that time had little to do with the buildings or settings in which we learnt, but rather the social interactions and processes that ensued.

In regard to our satellite campus, our early reflections centred on a shared observation that the students seemed to be users of space, rather than members of 'this place': our campus community. We observed that within minutes of a class finishing our campus became a ghost-town - students left the building, mostly alone, and teachers quickly retreated behind closed office doors. To us, this absence of 'social capital' (Santasiere, 2002), or 'placelessness of place' (Gieryn, 2000), was partly indicative of a preoccupation with the formal aspects of pedagogy (classroom teaching and learning), but more so a lack of conscious effort or investment in building a healthy sense of place. In response to this, our COP made the conscious decision to be more present, what we referred to as 'purposive lingering'. We began hanging around before and after class, inquiring about students' perceptions of the course and campus, their enjoyment of classes, and their experience and expectations of university life (so far). This involved a commitment to undertaking actions that didn't necessarily fall within any formal teaching and learning strategy, but which have been incredibly powerful in developing relationships and rapport with and between our students. We quickly noticed that our presence and deliberate lingering acted as a magnet for our students. Students began to arrive early and stay late. They remained on campus between classes and gathered together in communal spaces to ask questions, share stories and engage in lively conversations. What emerged was a dynamic process of place-making, where students pursued meaningful engagement and dialogue with peers, faculty and others, and developed a powerful connection to something larger than oneself (Manning & Kuh, 2005).

As the social fabric of our campus community evolved, our COP turned its attention to pedagogy. Although contemporary pedagogy demands a more inclusive and participatory approach, we noted that our students were often merely passive recipients of content. We also recognised that the prevailing norm in nursing education was the development of knowledge and skills, rather than a socialised conception of what it really means to be and act as a nurse (Fagermoen, 1997; Johnson, Cowin, Wilson & Young, 2012). As such, our COP resolved to implement a more participatory, social-learning approach, in which people construct knowledge, meaning and identity through an intentional process of collective reflection, interaction and dialogue (Reed et al., 2010).

Our practice as educators has involved a deliberate sharing of self with students. This investment of self acknowledges our legitimate membership of the campus community, rather than seeing ourselves as being separate or external to it, and recognises that despite taking on different roles and responsibilities, we are all on a shared and reciprocal learning journey. The interactions we have with students both within and external to the classroom have been a key facilitator of sense of place and community on our campus. Loughran (2013, p120) posits that teaching is "not bound by a script or set of routines, but depends on a teacher making informed decisions about practice" and this is consistent with the choices we have made about how we interact with students.

Another strategy our COP adopted to help build a place that students feel part of, has been the use of storytelling. Storytelling not only supports the advancement and translation of knowledge, but also facilitates the development of professional identity by providing real-world stories of what nursing is like beyond the classroom. In our case, it has also assisted in the development of relationships between staff and students, helping to humanise our role and break down some of the

‘them and us’ perceptions that often arise. Green (2004) discussed the use of storytelling by teachers, suggesting that sharing stories from experience may inspire reciprocity and help in the development of an atmosphere where students are more willing to share their own stories and experiences. In the context of sense of place, storytelling can be a valuable teaching and learning technique, with the literature suggesting that within a safe learning environment where students can engage in intellectual and emotional sharing without fear of criticism or judgement, strong feelings of community can develop (Heinrich, 1992; Geanellos, 1996).

Our conception of sense of place involves a process of socialisation, which not only contributes to ones’ sense of connection and belonging, but also their self-concept and professional identity. Our COP has attempted to make a contribution in this regard through role-modelling the kind of inclusive and engaged behaviour that we think encourages the best student outcomes. For example, there is a widespread recognition that the ‘best’ kind of nurse is one who can both skilfully assess and manage the clinical demands of their client, as well as be present emotionally in order to establish rapport with individuals and groups and attend to their psychosocial needs. As educators, we believe that we can’t just teach students what we want them to be, do or know; we also have to be an example of this.

## **Feedback from Students**

The Learning about the Community Foot Surveys identified and described many physical and material characteristics of our campus, but feedback also focused on the social and relational dimensions and consequences of each subsystem considered. While perhaps being less overt or tangible, the revelation of these sense of place characteristics highlighted the collective value or significance that students ascribe to these things.

For example, when feeding-back on the ‘physical environment’ subsystem, many groups described the classroom or tutorial spaces as being large and well-equipped/resourced, yet also bemoaned the fact that the space was not conducive to the class conversations or group interactions they so desired:

*I really value the opportunity to discuss different points of view with my peers and to listen to the perspectives and experiences of others, but I don’t think the space is conducive to having such discussions.*

*I would love to do group-work at round tables. I like to see and interact with the people who are speaking and want to make the process more inclusive.*

While place-making and attachment may be partly achieved by simply reorientating the way spaces are designed, used or equipped (Blackmore et al, 2011), what was significant about this feedback was that students desperately yearn for a more interactive, relational and nurturing learning environment, perhaps more akin to their social networks or experiences of pre-university education. To this end, our COP has actively pursued an interactive and participatory social-learning approach, both within and external to the classroom setting.

Various groups also noted and described (not particularly favourably) the so-called ‘student or communal spaces’ that were available on campus, but feedback overwhelmingly focused on the absence of connection, belonging or community in these spaces:

*Hardly anyone uses those areas.*

*It feels sterile and uninviting, and really only caters to small groups or cliques.*

*It feels like the space is 'borrowed' and that our presence is unwelcome or annoying.*

*It's hard to relax in that area - it feels like we should only be there for study or official 'university business'.*

This feedback reminded us of the work of sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999; 2001) who advocated the need for 'third places' (distinct from home or work), where people could gather, put aside other life concerns, enjoy good company, and engage in spirited conversation. Santasiero (2002) expounded the importance of such places for campus communities. "You learn a lot by talking freely in an unstructured setting with your peers" (p12), many of whom come from different places with different perspectives and experiences. These third places can become the heart of a community's social vitality, serving as an informal intellectual forum, an unofficial information centre, an entry point for visitors and newcomers, and a forum for grassroots democracy (Oldenburg, 1999; Santasiero, 2002).

This issue of grassroots democracy was also raised by groups considering the subsystem of 'politics and government':

*The Student Union is centred around the main campuses. We pay our fees, but have never seen anyone and have no representation or tangible benefits here at Domain.*

*We feel isolated from the activities and clubs of the student union and the university more broadly, but what is most disappointing is the absence of our professional or disciplinary (nursing) voice in the political and wider-university discourses.*

These themes also dominated feedback on the 'communication', 'recreation', and 'health and social services' subsystems:

*Communication is mostly static, dull and top-down - the student voice is absent on this campus.*

*Being a satellite campus, we feel disconnected from services, resources and broader university life.*

*It often feels like 'out of sight, out of mind', and even when we are considered, it feels like we're an afterthought.*

A significant barrier to achieving a sense of place on our satellite campus is the disconnection and isolation our students feel, partly from one another, but more specifically from broader university life. Our conscious and active interest in this place, and our engagement and participation in the life of our community, has gone some way to reinforcing the sense of connection, belonging and identity that people want. While physical isolation from other campuses cannot be readily changed, our COP has implemented strategies to help strengthen the student voice, especially within the broader university community. To this end, one member of our COP has worked with interested students to develop a nursing society affiliated with the Student Union. The aims of this society are to create opportunities for students to get to know each other in social settings; to advance the profile and contribution of the nursing discipline; and to advocate for changes that achieve a stronger connection with each other, our campus and the broader university.



## Concluding thoughts... and where to from here?

This paper has presented a discussion based on the observations and reflections of a small community of practice from the first-year teaching team; and the results of a community needs assessment foot survey undertaken by first-year students. We initially expected this to be a targeted and time-limited piece of work focused on first-year students joining our campus in Semester 1, 2014. We now realise that developing a sense of place is an ongoing and evolving process. As such, our COP has continued to meet to discuss progress and consider future strategies, including planning for the arrival of our 2015 student-cohort. In this regard, extending our newfound sense of place and community beyond the current student-cohort will be an important priority. As relationships with students have developed there have been increasing invitations to participate in their external extracurricular events and broader social networks. This has subsequently shifted our COP dialogue to issues such as roles, responsibilities, boundaries and integrity, and these are likely to be important conversations and decisions as we move forward.

While our strategies so far have been mostly focused on building the social-fabric of our community, we are conscious that attention to the physical and material form of our campus spaces can also help to facilitate a sense of place (Blackmore et al., 2011). Accordingly, we will continue to explore ways in which positive changes can be implemented, including the student suggestions of round-tables in some of the classrooms and making the communal areas more student-centred and inviting. Santasiero (2002, p12) suggests that “if the place is homey and comfortable, relationships will have a place to thrive and a strong sense of community and belonging will emerge”.

While this paper has shared our own journey, we believe achieving a sense of place should be a priority for all disciplines in higher-education. A sense of place or community isn't built in the physical sense, it is socially constructed or made by its people. By being present, reciprocal and interactive, and through the sharing of self via story-telling and role-modelling, our COP has seen the emergence of an eclectic, vibrant and engaged campus community, at least among the first-year student cohort and teaching team. Our 'place' is now characterised by dynamic and supportive relationships between members, where people willingly share their diverse perspectives and experiences to help promote individual and collective learning. This has not only resulted in transformative benefits for our campus, but has also fostered the generic qualities or attributes of knowledge, communication, problem solving, global perspective and social responsibility, which our University aspires to develop in all our graduates (University of Tasmania, 2014b).

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