

# SCOPE

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learning & teaching 5:  
Capability: people, practice and frameworks

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## DEPLOYING CAPABILITIES: LOCAL, NATIONAL, TRANSNATIONAL LENSES

David McMaster and Oonagh McGirr

As outlined in a recent report by the World Bank, graduate employability has become a key concern of governments and education providers across the globe – and of particular concern to New Zealand, Australia and the UK.

With employability as the key driver of curriculum development, institutions are increasingly working to align or co-construct curricular and educational outcomes to fit industry needs and preferences more closely. Of central concern in these shifts is the development of learner capabilities – and cognate concepts (soft skills, employability skills, twenty-first-century skills) – which are also intended to empower students to achieve their career goals, as well as make meaningful contributions to local and global communities.

While these skills have been central to certain subject areas, where curricula have been closely aligned to requirements for accreditation from professional bodies (for example, in nursing and engineering), the development of personal effectiveness in communication and cross-cultural skills, team-working skills, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, along with digital literacies, is now being sought, in addition to the sound disciplinary knowledges which once held a privileged place. The embedding of these capability skills in curricula, along with a range of extra-curricular activities – internships, work-based learning opportunities, career self-management, entrepreneurship, social and cultural networking opportunities – serves to enhance graduate employment prospects.

However, as the contributions in this issue of *Scope* demonstrate, capability development is not a one-way street – it is equally relevant to the readiness displayed by educational institutions and to academic and professional staff. Nor, though often presented in instrumental terms, should these shifts be endorsed uncritically, as the papers in this *Scope* (*Learning and Teaching*), 5, set out to demonstrate.

In her contribution, Claire Goode focuses on the issue of organisational capabilities and readiness as they relate to the delivery of academic programmes offshore. Her extensive survey of the literature on transnational higher education suggests that institutions need to understand the importance of being “capability-ready” in a broad range of educational practices before embarking on such ventures.

This imperative of being a capability-ready institution is addressed in Oonagh McGirr’s paper, which sets out Otago Polytechnic’s strategy for academic staff capability development, highlighting the necessity for continuous professional development for learner success to be premised on responsive and agile formal policies and processes which support multiple development opportunities for all teaching and professional staff.

This link between academic and learner capability enhancement and learner experience is illustrated in Rachel Cash’s article, which takes the reader through the process of designing a blended course template, key to any technology-enhanced learning practice, and the capability building that ensued across the polytechnic in step with the progressive introduction of the template.

This dual capability building that (often) occurs in technology-enhanced learning is further exemplified in Bronwyn Hegarty's extended interview with Matt Thompson, a carpentry teacher at Otago Polytechnic, which explores the introduction of e-portfolios in the certificate programme.

Returning to the international and transnational realm, Behnam Soltani and Jean-Philippe Loret show, through their interviews with international students studying in New Zealand, that capability building for learners is not a one-size-fits-all phenomenon. As their research clearly shows, as these learners tackle the challenges of a new living and learning environment in a novel cultural context, they need to develop a raft of additional cultural capabilities if they are to be successful in their studies and in the transition to the workplace.

Staying in the transnational arena, and also focussed on the question of learner capability, David McMaster offers a persuasive critique of the representation of the learner capabilities of Arab students studying in transnational programmes throughout the Persian Gulf. In his contribution, McMaster clearly shows that – as in Philippa Kearney's critical reflection on the discourses of employability, "What Lies Beneath?" – affirming the value of employability integrates the various narratives that conjoin to produce the idealised figure of what Kearney calls the "neo-liberal employable subject:"

Taken together, the papers in this second cluster show that, as with any learning and teaching practice, who is capable of what and who decides is inflected with power and knowledge practices, be they local, national, global or neo-colonial.

# READY OR NOT? CONSIDERING BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR DELIVERY OF TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION – A LITERATURE REVIEW

Claire Goode

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a review of the existing literature on best practices in offshore education in a tertiary context, and considers at what stage of programme delivery such practices should be implemented. With education rapidly progressing as a global commodity for export, the need to consider organisational capabilities and readiness to deliver quality educational experiences offshore is unavoidable. “Attention to the international dimension of higher education has become increasingly visible in institutional strategies as well as national and international agendas” (Jones, 2015, p. ix).

Educators, curriculum leaders, and other stakeholders could all benefit from reflecting on the multiple elements that contribute to effective offshore delivery, and the pedagogical approaches related to an internationalised curriculum and to offshore education. These include the relevance of course content for particular cultural contexts, the student experience (including, for example, student expectations, challenges experienced by students, and factors affecting student performance), and the demand for excellence in all aspects of teaching and learning. Investing time in planning and preparation can enable tertiary institutions to deepen their understanding of the complexities of offshore delivery, and help articulate different interventions that could be offered to raise standards and student achievement, while developing best practice from staff, before embarking on offshore delivery.

In 2001, Adam drew attention to offshore or ‘transnational’ education as “an under-researched and often misunderstood area” (p. 5). Twelve years later, an article by the British Council confirmed that there continued to be significant gaps in the literature and asserted that “it is time for the various stakeholders to work together to improve the evidence base” for the delivery of higher education programmes overseas (British Council, 2013a). Still in 2017, while recognising that growth in transnational education has been considerable, Henderson, Barnett and Barrett agreed that substantial gaps in knowledge remain, and emphasised the need for educators to “share learning and emerging best practice, and to explore how [offshore education] can best be developed” (pp. 11-12).

Investigating educational programmes, in relation to recognised effective practices, contributes to further understanding of best practice in education (in similar contexts), and helps identify aspects of learning, teaching, and delivery which may be applicable in many contexts, such as face-to-face, fully online and/or blended delivery, and the offshore delivery of cross-cultural educational programmes:

*Academic [programmes], the students who study them, and the academics who design, deliver, and assess them are at the heart of [institutional] endeavours. Research both informs and results from these [programmes]; outreach and enterprise activities are fuelled by and support them*

(Jones, 2015, p. x).



In examining the literature, I begin by considering existing research into transnational education in general, before moving to focus on quality standards in offshore education, and issues around academic assessment. I conclude with a synthesis of principles of best practice which should be implemented before, during, and after delivery of an offshore programme.

## WHAT IS 'BEST PRACTICE'?

Educators use the phrase 'best practice' for a variety of systems, procedures, and behaviours which "may or may not have been rigorously evaluated" (Arendale, 2018). While questioning the frequent use of the term, Arendale defines best practice as the "wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmatic approaches to achieve positive changes in student attitudes or academic behaviors" (ibid.). These "positive changes" are one aspect of best practice, certainly, but Hargreaves and Fullan go one step further; defining best practice as "existing practices that already have a good degree of widely agreed effectiveness" (2012, p. 51). In this paper, then, I review the literature relating to educational practices which are widely agreed as effective, and which can have a positive impact on learning and teaching.

## OFFSHORE EDUCATION

Offshore education is "the provision of academic courses to students who are physically situated overseas" (Seah & Edwards, 2006, p. 297). Sometimes referred to as "transnational," "cross-border," or "borderless" education (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016), it is seen as a fast-growing opportunity for educational institutions (O'Mahony, 2014; Smith, 2009; Waterval, Frambach, Driessen, & Scherpbier, 2015), with demand for offshore education forecast to exceed demand for onshore delivery to international students (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006a, 2006b; Knight, 2014; Pearl, 2013; Waterval et al., 2015). Providers and their programmes are increasingly crossing borders to build their own profiles, to meet students' demand for quality, and to respond to students' reluctance to leave home in order to gain a qualification. As the British Council (2013b) highlights:

*The differences between educational sectors, institutions and the landscape of particular countries are increasingly blurred: countries which traditionally held a role as a source of international students have become study destinations and play host to international students; new alliances both international and national are being formed; and private and corporate sectors are increasingly active as providers (p. 1).*

As well as being a new source of income, the transnational model offers institutions the opportunity to build their brand and develop their reputation (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013): "In today's age of global knowledge and technology, an interconnected network and global awareness are increasingly viewed as major and sought-after assets" (Hénard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012, p. 7). Research prospects, too, are enhanced with these international connections, as are opportunities for increased staff and student mobility (Shams & Huisman, 2012; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012) and enrichment of staff learning and development (Keevers et al., 2014).

While there are several advantages for institutions, then, there are also concerns. These include power relationship inequalities (Keevers et al., 2014), questions around the "difficulties in assuring quality at a distance" (Adam, 2001, p. 35), and possible "conflict between quality and profit" (ibid.), as well as issues with the dominance of Western-centric curricula (Knight, as cited in Matthews, 2013; Trahar & Lazarus, 2015; Whitsed & Green, 2015), opposing cultural expectations (Keevers et al., 2014), and a fear that transnational education is "exacerbating [the] brain drain and in some case[s] not meeting technical and science skills gaps" (Knight, as cited in Matthews, 2013). Offshore teaching involves "multiple people, cultures, roles, settings, programs, and modes of delivery" (Hicks & Jarrett, 2008, p. 239), so that its complexity and challenges, alongside the opportunities it presents, should not be underestimated.

For institutions looking to enter the cross-border market, they must decide if they wish to either compete with or collaborate with local institutions (Knight, 2014). A third option is to co-exist, with the foreign provider perhaps

offering something unique in the local context. Regulations and policies can also be challenging, including concerns around quality assurance. As Knight (2014, p. 53) underlines, while “more national quality assurance and accreditation agencies have been created, ... [they] have generally not focused their efforts on assessing the quality of imported and exported programs.” Other considerations for stakeholders include whether to invest in offshore infrastructure or to rely on that which is provided by the ‘host’ country (Hénard et al., 2012), and how to adapt their pedagogical approaches to best meet different learning styles in different global regions (Heffernan, Morrison, Basu, & Sweeney, 2010).

There has been very limited research into the value of transnational education for the learners themselves (O’Mahony, 2014). O’Mahony’s analysis of the existing literature on transnational education (2014, pp. 13-15) highlighted 12 key themes that appeared in the material, and ranked them according to frequency. ‘Learning’ ranked seventh out of twelve, just behind ‘teaching,’ with the themes of ‘globalisation,’ ‘policy,’ and ‘trade’ at the top of the table. This is surprising when we consider that “[o]ne of the main goals of internationalised higher education is to provide the most relevant education to students, who will be the citizens, entrepreneurs and scientists of tomorrow” (Hénard et al., 2012, p. 8). Investigating students’ perceptions of the value they see in courses delivered in an offshore setting would be valuable for any institution, and would also contribute to the academic literature.

While there is little available research focusing on students in transnational programmes, the views of learners travelling overseas to study at a tertiary institution have been examined. Ramsden, for example, asserts that students’ “expectations are as varied as their experiences” (2008, p. 2) and calls for a radical rethink of curricula so that they may be “imbued with international perspectives” (ibid., p. 10).

Internationalisation of the curriculum, then, can be included in a model of best practice. Mahat and Hourigan (2007) investigated the satisfaction levels of international students attending Australian universities, while Russell, Rosenthal, and Thomson (2010) examined the needs and well-being of international students attending a particular university in Melbourne. Hart and Coates (2011) considered how East Asian students studying at a university in the United Kingdom respond to dissatisfaction with their tertiary experience, and several researchers (including Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Lin, 2012; Sultana & Smith, 2011; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013) have explored the experiences of international students at different North American universities. For example, in their 2005 research into international students enrolled in undergraduate programmes in the United States, Zhao, Kuh, and Carini asserted that “relatively little is known about the extent to which international students are satisfied with their experience” (p. 211) – although this could be perhaps because their paper preceded the real explosion in institutions competing on a global level to attract students, the “rising percentages of international students” (Montgomery, 2010, preface), and higher levels of student mobility. International attendees of tertiary courses may have specific expectations regarding, for example, the advantages that their course or context enjoys over equivalent programmes in their respective home countries.

Educators, institutions, and researchers may question the impact of studying in one’s home country compared with studying overseas, and what best practice principles might be applied to minimise this. It could, for example, be argued that international students studying abroad are faced with cultural challenges, displacement, and family commitments (whether their family has moved with them or has decided to stay in their home country), while local students must manage their home life and potentially ongoing professional commitments alongside their academic studies. Investigating expectations of best practice in student support and pastoral care is a gap in the literature.

The establishment of student identity in offshore programmes has also been challenged (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006b; Evans & Tregenza, 2001). In Chapman and Pyvis’ research into postgraduate students in transnational programmes, for instance, participants “expressed the shared view that it was not possible for offshore students to feel that they were part of the university community” (2006a, p. 295), despite the students’ efforts to create a sense of belonging. Similarly, the concept of staff identity may be tested. Unlike delivering extramural courses or teaching international students in a university’s home country, “the offshore experience can position the academic as a minority in a foreign culture” (Seah & Edwards, 2006, p. 299). Removed from their usual institution and their customary classroom

context, “teachers undertaking transnational programs have to be equipped with skill sets marked by high levels of intercultural understanding” (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016, p. 18). Furthermore, Keevers et al. (2014) highlight the need for continuous professional development explicitly tailored to transnational teaching teams. Offshore delivery, then, may suit some academics but not others, and some students but not others. A model of best practice should include factors which contribute to identity.

Linked to the concept of identity, offshore education has been criticised for “eroding national cultural identities and leading to cultural homogenisation, most often in the form of Westernisation” (Knight, 2014, p. 55). The implications of using materials designed by Western educators for learners in non-Western countries are the subject of considerable research (for example, Doherty & Singh, 2005; Gulati, 2008; Luke & Dooley, 2009; Wright, Dhanarajan, & Reju, 2009). Luke and Dooley (2009, p. 3) go so far as to say that “the international spread of English via Western curriculum and language teaching methods is a form of ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Phillipson, 1992).” Cousin (2011), on the other hand, while agreeing that there is a need for sensitivity, challenges “issues of imperial power and hegemonic grip” (p. 585) and calls for educators “to look with a fresh lens at what it takes to produce an internationalised curriculum” (p. 592).

While I agree entirely with the idea that “the changing global environment requires people to engage – and be able to work – with people from cultural, religious and/or linguistic backgrounds or world views that are very different from their own” (Bolstad et al., 2012, p. 3), I wonder whether Western approaches to course delivery impact on student performance in any way. Students from all countries may be impacted by their national values, for instance, when it comes to critical thinking and reflective practice. In some cultures, for example, “authority is seldom criticised” (Prescott, 2002, p. 247), and students may be uncomfortable or even unwilling to critique published material or to challenge something which is presented in class. Cultural sensitivities, then, merit further enquiry, and would again contribute to understanding how effective courses are considered to be, particularly by students who are not from Western countries, whether English is their first language or not. Institutions seeking to enter the transnational market need to be willing to review the cultural and contextual appropriateness of their curricula, materials, and pedagogical approaches.

The relationships between key players in offshore projects also need to be considered, in order to understand the roles of different stakeholders. In terms of relationships, it is important to reflect too on the teacher–student connection, investigating, for instance, whether students respond differently to different lecturers, such as those from a Western background compared with those from a non-Western background, staff with or without particular professional experience, or male versus female academics. These relationships may vary, depending on the cultural background of the individuals concerned and their professional experience. Understanding these intricacies will be of help to other educators involved in offshore or multicultural education.

## QUALITY STANDARDS IN OFFSHORE EDUCATION

We cannot identify principles of best practice without reflecting on the importance of quality, and how this is reported in the existing literature. As Hénard et al. emphasise, “internationalisation of programmes entails ... ever more demanding expectations in terms of quality of pedagogy, student assessments and the learning environment” (2012, p. 8). While the concept of ‘quality’ may be difficult to define (AbdiShahshahani, Ehsanpour, Yamani, Kohan, & Hamidfar, 2015; Stake & Schwandt, 2006; Stufflebeam, 2016), I tend to agree with Stufflebeam’s argument: “It would be a cop-out to conclude that a program’s merit is only in the eyes of different beholders and could legitimately be judged good or bad depending on who is doing the judging” (2016, p. 47). It is possible, indeed necessary, to look at quality and best practice from an objective stance, and to seek input from as many points of view as possible, in order to present a balanced picture.

The principal challenge facing educational institutions working in transnational contexts is to “demonstrate continuity in their scholarship and aptness of teaching, while at the same time convincing their market place that their degree

retains its integrity, irrespective of location or mode of delivery" (Castle & Kelly, 2004, p. 56). Pyvis (2011) calls for "context-sensitive measures of quality" to be used in transnational higher education, and argues that discussions around quality need to respect diverse education traditions, rather than assuming that "a programme delivered in one country [can be] used as the reference point for quality in a programme implemented in another country" (p. 733). However, while a "universalist mindset" (Hoare, 2013, p. 561) can hinder quality in education, it is also important to bear in mind that "agreements on, for example, international benchmarks and standards ... are not reached easily" (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009, p. v). Furthermore, academics and administrators working in offshore programmes may feel that they are "serving two masters" (Dobos, 2011), if the 'home' campus and transnational stakeholders cannot agree on key aspects such as quality standards. One principle of best practice, then, is to ensure that these standards are negotiated and agreed upon before a course begins, and then reviewed at regular intervals.

In 2005, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published its 'Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education,' in collaboration with the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), in order to "sustain the development of quality cross-border higher education that meets human, social, economic and cultural needs" (OECD, 2005, p. 3). The guidelines encourage all stakeholders to take responsibility for good practice, and to "strengthen the dynamics of openness, collaboration and transparency" (Vincent-Lancrin, Fisher, & Pfothenauer, 2015, p. 3). A 2015 report released by the OECD asserts that, while "further progress is still required" (ibid.), the guidelines have been adopted by multiple governments and educational institutions. This is significant when we consider that the report incorporates input from 32 (ibid., p. 11) of its 35 member countries. I reiterate, though, that they recognise the need for further progress.

The Council of Europe's 'Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education' (Council of Europe, 2014) also makes several suggestions for ensuring quality in offshore contexts, and focuses these on three main drivers. The first is that the quality of education delivered in a foreign country should be equivalent to that of other institutions and should meet the basic expectations of the 'host' nation. The second recommendation is that quality assurance is the responsibility of the institution awarding the qualification. The third major principle relates to clarity and transparency: clear information should be provided about the qualification, including "the nature, duration, workload, location and language(s) of the study programme" (ibid.), and "the quality of educational services ... should be based on specific criteria, which are transparent, systematic and open to scrutiny" (ibid.). Other commentators echo these recommendations, while also emphasising the importance of "localiz[ing] the curriculum" (Shams & Huisman, 2012, p. 110), the need for "regular communication and feedback, including inter-institutional visits and joint programme evaluations" (Dunworth, 2008, p. 106), and for "regular reviews of student performance and ... feedback from staff and students" (Castle & Kelly, 2004, p. 55). The Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (2005) proposes a transnational quality strategy which fulfils four principles, again centred on accountability, transparency, and equivalence, while also requiring that "[q]uality arrangements ... seek to promote a culture of continuous improvement, of which a key element is regular self-review" (p. 8). We can see, then, how these examples mirror the OECD's calls for collaboration, openness and transparency, and can guide discussions around best practice in offshore education.

## ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT

As Wiggins (1992, p. 33) underlines, "good teaching is inseparable from good assessing," and, just as in any other educational context, practices regarding assessment design and administration should be regularly reviewed in transnational programmes.

Some researchers (for example, Angéil-Carter, 2014; Ferguson, 2007; Lillis & Curry, 2010; Starfield, 2002) have found that the written work of native and non-native speakers is often assessed differently, albeit perhaps subconsciously, by markers who perceive a native speaker's ability to manipulate language and structure as an indication of greater understanding of the subject content, while second-language speakers are often seen as

relying too heavily on recognised authorities in the subject area. Starfield emphasises that, if this type of “patchwork plagiarism” does occur, that it may be “a survival strategy rather than a conscious effort to deceive” (2002, p. 126). It is also worth noting that, for particular cultures, using the exact words of a published author, for instance, is seen as a sign of the utmost respect, rather than a case of academic theft, and that plagiarism is considered a very Western concept (Adiningrum & Kutieleh, 2011; Bloch, 2007; Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Pennycook, 1996). In multicultural contexts, clear guidelines and expectations would help students understand how to cite the work of others in their own academic writing and presentations.

Questions of plagiarism aside, though, Starfield goes on to assert that “[s]tudents ... who speak and write the legitimate language have a greater likelihood of becoming successful; their writing appears to be subjected to a lesser degree of scrutiny” (2002, p. 138). This echoes Bourdieu’s (1991) much-cited work around inequality and power imbalances in language use. Although student and tutor understanding of what exactly is required to produce a ‘successful’ piece of work might differ (Lea & Street, 1998; Starfield, 2004), principles of best practice should be investigated here. Is it enough for teaching staff to provide instructions and marking guides, for instance, for each assessment? It may well be that students and stakeholders, possibly from different countries and cultures, have different expectations of how much information and support should be available to learners, so that they might succeed in an assessment.

## CONCLUSION

A synthesis is provided in Table 1, which shows principles of best practice which should be implemented before, during, and after delivery of an offshore programme, as identified in the literature. Since these practices are iterative, and for ease of reference, the recommendations for the pre-delivery or planning phase and the post-delivery phase have been combined.

Further research is still needed, with particular research gaps in the following areas: the value of transnational education for learners, best practice regarding student support and pastoral care in offshore settings, and the challenges of cultural sensitivities and appropriateness of curricula, materials, and pedagogies.

Transnational education is here to stay, and institutions would do well to reflect on and review their capabilities and readiness to compete in offshore markets before embarking on new ventures.

**Claire Goode** is a member of Otago Polytechnic’s Learning and Teaching Development team. Her career has spanned 20 years in a variety of education contexts in New Zealand, France and the UK. She enjoys seeing how educational technology can enhance learning and teaching opportunities, and is particularly interested in teacher development.

Table 1: Summary of best practice principles for offshore education, identified in the literature

PHASE	BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLE	AUTHORS
PRE-DELIVERY	Deciding on relationship between delivery and host institutions (e.g., collaboration, competition, or co-existence?)	Bordogna, 2018; Council of Europe, 2014; Dobos, 2011; Healey, 2015; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Knight, 2014; OECD, 2005; Stafford & Taylor, 2016; Wilkins, 2016
	Negotiating and agreeing on quality standards across institutions	Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Dobos, 2011; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Keevers et al., 2014; Knight, 2014; OECD, 2005; Pyvis, 2011; Stafford & Taylor, 2016; Vincent-Lancrin, Fisher, & Pfothenhauer, 2015
and		
POST-DELIVERY	Reviewing quality of imported/exported programmes	Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Castle & Kelly, 2004; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Knight, 2014; Stafford & Taylor, 2016
	Reviewing infrastructure	Hénard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Wilkins, 2016
	Reflecting on appropriateness of pedagogical approaches	Bordogna, 2018; Castle & Kelly, 2004; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Gulati, 2008; Heffernan et al., 2010; Hoare, 2013; Lamers & Admiraal, 2018; Luke & Dooley, 2009; Wright, Dhanarajan, & Reju, 2009
	Reviewing relevancy, currency, and appropriateness (e.g., cultural, contextual) of curricula and learning materials	Caniglia et al., 2018; Castle & Kelly, 2004; Council of Europe, 2014; Cousin, 2011; Doherty & Singh, 2005; Gulati, 2008; Healey, 2015; Hénard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Hoare, 2013; Knight, 2014; Luke & Dooley, 2009; Pyvis, 2011; Shams & Huisman, 2012; Wilkins, 2016; Wright, Dhanarajan, & Reju, 2009
	Ensuring internationalised curricula	Bolstad et al., 2012; Caniglia et al., 2018; Cousin, 2011; Doherty & Singh, 2005; Hénard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Hoare, 2013; Keevers et al., 2014; Knight, 2014; Pyvis, 2011; Ramsden, 2008; Trahar & Lazarus, 2015; Whitsed & Green, 2015; Wilkins, 2016
	Managing expectations of students and of institutions (through transparency and clarity of information)	Council of Europe, 2014; Hart & Coates, 2011; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Lin, 2012; Mahat & Hourigan, 2007; OECD, 2005; Ramsden, 2008; Russell, Rosenthal & Thomson, 2010; Stafford & Taylor, 2016; Sultana & Smith, 2011; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Vincent-Lancrin, Fisher, & Pfothenhauer, 2015; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005
	Recruiting staff with high levels of intercultural understanding	Bordogna, 2018; Hoare, 2013; Knight, 2014; Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Lamers & Admiraal, 2018; Seah & Edwards, 2006; Wilkins, 2016
	Reviewing academic rigour and integrity of qualification	Castle & Kelly, 2004; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; OECD, 2005; Stafford & Taylor, 2016; Wilkins, 2016
	Ensuring equivalency of qualifications (across delivery and host institutions) by reviewing mode of delivery, workload, course duration ...	Castle & Kelly, 2004; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; OECD, 2005; Stafford & Taylor, 2016

Table 1 (continued): Summary of best practice principles for offshore education, identified in the literature

<b>PHASE</b>	<b>BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLE</b>	<b>AUTHORS</b>
<b>DELIVERY</b>	Maintaining agreed, transparent quality standards across institutions	Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Dobos, 2011; OECD, 2005; Pyvis, 2011; Stafford & Taylor, 2016; Vincent-Lancrin, Fisher, & Pfotenhauer, 2015
	Providing pastoral care and support for students and staff	Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Lin, 2012; Russell, Rosenthal & Thomson, 2010; Sultana & Smith, 2011; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005
	Ensuring clear channels of communication	Castle & Kelly, 2004; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Dunworth, 2008; OECD, 2005; Stafford & Taylor, 2016; Vincent-Lancrin, Fisher, & Pfotenhauer, 2015
	Conducting joint programme evaluations	Dunworth, 2008
	Establishing transparent and systematic feedback processes, including academic reviews, course evaluations, and a complaints process	Castle & Kelly, 2004; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Dunworth, 2008; Hart & Coates, 2011; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; Lin, 2012; OECD, 2005; Pyvis, 2011; Stafford & Taylor, 2016; Sultana & Smith, 2011; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Vincent-Lancrin, Fisher, & Pfotenhauer, 2015; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005;
	Organising and facilitating regular inter-institutional visits	Dunworth, 2008
	Establishing a sense of community among students and staff	Chapman & Pyvis, 2006a, 2006b; Keevers et al., 2014; Knight, 2014; Lin, 2012; Seah & Edwards, 2006;
	Reviewing assessment practices	Council of Europe, 2014; Hénaud, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017
	Maintaining academic rigour	Castle & Kelly, 2004; Council of Europe, 2014; Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Henderson, Barnett, & Barrett, 2017; OECD, 2005; Wilkins, 2016
	Embracing a culture of self-improvement	Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005; Keevers et al., 2014; OECD, 2005

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## ON CAPABILITY-BUILDING FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: POSITIONING LEARNING AND TEACHING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT OTAGO POLYTECHNIC

Oonagh McGirr

### ABSTRACT

As we seek to strengthen our leadership in the ITP sector as providers of an exemplary learner experience, we are tasked with ensuring that our community is informed and current in its practice for the core business of facilitating learning and teaching at Otago Polytechnic. If we wish to honour our commitment to realising the potential of our people, we need to provide accessible opportunities for professional development of staff. Here we propose a model for academic staff development which positions learning and teaching as a cross-institutional activity to foster collaboration for the enhancement and dissemination of good pedagogic practice. *Kia tu ki te tāhi* – our people make a better world.

Keywords: Otago Polytechnic, capability, potential, excellence, tertiary education, improvement

### INTRODUCTION

At the time of writing, Otago Polytechnic is recognised as a leader in the national tertiary sector (ITP) in the field of vocational education. In the face of imminent sector change, and the competing demands of the post-millennial employment landscape, the challenge we face is how we maintain our leadership and respond with agility in preparing the workforce of the future – including our own.

As we seek to deliver excellence by fulfilling our mission to build the capability and realise the potential of our learning and teaching community – our staff and students – we acknowledge that in order for us to reach our goal, we must set high expectations. Equally, we are mindful that in order to meet those requirements, we have a duty to ensure that we prepare our people for the endeavour. We believe the key to success lies in providing our colleagues and peers with opportunities to scope and inform individual needs for development by supporting continuous engagement with explicit professional pathways and by rewarding achievement, commitment and qualification which are integral to the development and progression of the individual.

### TO MATOU WHAKATAKA: BUILD CAPABILITY, REALISE POTENTIAL

With the publication of its Strategic Directions document in 2017, Otago Polytechnic set out its aspirations for the future, positioning the institution to support growth and achievement by enacting the underpinning values of accountability, caring, courage and empowerment (Otago Polytechnic, 2017). The Strategic Directions document identifies what we aim to do and how success will look. Our message is implicitly simple – here is what we want to achieve, this is what it will look like, and this is how it contributes to the success of our stakeholders.

Our Strategic Goals   Ō Mātou Whāka ā-Rautaki		
GOAL 1	Achieve excellent outcomes for our learners.	<p>1.1 Provide best practice, research-engaged learning and teaching to maximise learner success – academic and employment</p> <p>1.2 Provide fit for purpose and attractive learning and teaching facilities (space, IT, equipment) for all campus locations.</p> <p>1.3 Provide a comprehensive and integrated set of support services for learners to maximise academic and employment success.</p> <p>1.4 Develop academic staff as skilled and suitably qualified educators.</p> <p>1.5 Ensure our learning and teaching is informed by research.</p> <p>1.6 Ensure our graduates are prepared for a digital workforce.</p> <p>1.7 Improve secondary tertiary participation.</p> <p><b>By 2021:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Course completion rate: 80% degree, 80% pass degree for all programmes and learner groups.</li> <li>Qualification completion rate: 70% for all programmes and learner groups.</li> <li>Student employment rate: 85%.</li> <li>100% academic staff teaching on degrees are research engaged.</li> <li>All undergraduate programmes meet CP accreditation expectations.</li> </ul>
GOAL 2	Lead the way in sustainable practice.	<p>2.1 Embed education for sustainability in all undergraduate programmes so that our graduates may practice sustainability in their chosen sector.</p> <p>2.2 Operate sustainably in all that we undertake, respecting staff and student wellbeing, minimising our environmental footprint and expanding our environmental land base.</p> <p>2.3 Encourage sustainable practice in our communities. Trees planted in sustainable forestry, stormwater.</p> <p><b>By 2021:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>45% of undergraduate programmes address BES.</li> <li>No lost time injuries.</li> <li>80% reduction in waste to land W (base 2017).</li> <li>30% reduction in energy consumption by ending 80% new build (base 2017).</li> <li>2000 trees planted.</li> <li>2000 volunteer hours p.a. by CP staff overall.</li> </ul>
GOAL 3	Be a responsive Treaty partner in meeting the educational aspirations of mana whenua.	<p>3.1 Develop an effective partnership with Aotū Tūwhaitiri Ngāi Whānau.</p> <p>3.2 Attract, support and retain Māori staff progressively to Māori learner participation.</p> <p>3.3 Develop staff expertise in Māori cultural competencies: Māori cultural practices, Te Pūn, Tikanga, Teoio, inclusive pedagogies, etc.</p> <p>3.4 Ensure Māori learners participate and succeed as Māori, achieving at the same or a better rate as non-Māori.</p> <p>3.5 Embed Māori knowledge and perspectives in all programmes of learning.</p> <p>3.6 Foster Māori research and contribute to the advancement of mātauranga Māori.</p> <p><b>By 2021:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Māori learner participation rate 10% absolute, 80%.</li> <li>Māori learner success equals or exceeds rate for non-Māori.</li> <li>% of Māori staff exceeds % of Māori learners.</li> </ul>
GOAL 4	Be a committed and agile organisation.	<p>4.1 Make a consistent annual operating surplus for long future investment.</p> <p>4.2 Continue to diversify revenue through consultancies and micro-ventures (startups).</p> <p>4.3 Improve the visibility and availability of Central Campus.</p> <p>4.4 Deliver Aotūwhaitiri International Campus as a profitable and long term sustainable business.</p> <p>4.5 Achieve world class quality management in both learning and teaching, achievement and in organisation and management.</p> <p>4.6 Secure the confidence of our stakeholders.</p> <p>4.7 Strengthen our culture as an innovative, caring, accountable organisation committed to excellence.</p> <p><b>By 2021:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operating surplus 5%, before improvement investment.</li> <li>New SAC funded for more 20% of total revenue.</li> <li>NZQA Category 7 (4C+3)</li> <li>NZQEF Gold Award</li> <li>Staff to CP ratio = 20% agreement 100%.</li> </ul>
GOAL 5	Attract and sustain exceptional staff who make a difference.	<p>5.1 Provide an outstanding and satisfying work environment, supportive of high performance, and staff engagement.</p> <p>5.2 Develop staff as globally informed and expert practitioners in their fields.</p> <p>5.3 Recruit and retain a diverse workforce reflective of student demographics.</p> <p><b>By 2021:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>90% staff satisfaction WEL.</li> <li>90% permanent academic staff tertiary teaching qualified and internationally engaged.</li> <li>CP workload reflects learner profile.</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Otago Polytechnic, Strategic Directions 2017-2021.

Key to sustaining best practice and making further strides in the consolidation of excellence is the articulation of a clear framework which supports those charged with our core business of learning and teaching to achieve the strategic goals set out in the document:

1. Achieve excellent outcomes for our learners
2. Lead the way in sustainable practice
3. Be a responsive Treaty partner in meeting the educational aspirations of mana whenua
4. Be a committed and agile organisation
5. Attract and sustain exceptional staff who make a difference.

Logically, in pursuit of these goals, it is incumbent on the institution to consider how it might best serve those responsible for achieving our goals, and how we might provide them with every opportunity to access development and support for success. If we seek to encourage a high level of academic capability in our staff, then our duty is to create the conditions for such achievement.

## INFORMING OUR ENDEAVOURS

When considering the body of staff who contribute to the ongoing success of our students, it is helpful to think about the dimensions of practice (Higher Education Academy, 2011) – what it is we do, what we need to know, and what informs our practice – activity, knowledge and values. From an operational standpoint, we draw on our position descriptions, employment contracts, profile and expectations, course and programme blueprints and departmental strategic plans to inform our activity, knowledge and values. In combination, both sets of features indicate the capabilities – skills, knowledge and attributes – required in order to fulfil the mission and vision of Otago Polytechnic enacted by delivering in accordance with our role specifications and needs. If we assume that the initial conversation begins with the application and interview process, we can say that on accepting the job offer and taking up a role, our academic staff commit to a continuing conversation about professionalism – and implicitly acknowledge the discourse of development as core to any discourse. Our role is to establish and promote awareness of staff development as an integral part of practice.

## ACADEMIC STAFF AND THE FUTURE

Otago Polytechnic aspires to enable teachers to respond to and embody the profile of the future- focused teacher engaged with preparing learners for the ever-changing employment landscape (Deloitte, 2018). Tertiary education practitioners need to be adaptable, flexible and knowledgeable about and for the twenty-first century learning and teaching environments. Furthermore, in preparing for the future, and acknowledging the impact of natural attrition on a mature academic institution, we need to ensure that incoming staff will be attracted to the polytechnic precisely by the prospect of a meaningful career replete with opportunities for personal and professional growth and achievement.

## THE DUAL PROFESSIONAL

By seeking to engender integrated and informed applied practice in learning and teaching, we may also enable reflection on increasing expertise and growing experience by initiating a discourse with our staff regarding professional pathways. Such pathways need to acknowledge the layers of professional knowledge, activity and practice inherent in our roles; implicit in this notion is the concept of *dual professionalism*: pedagogic practice and discipline-led knowledge and skills.

Key feature (what)	Relationship (with what)	Nature (how)
<b>Aligned</b>	With the vision and mission of the HEI	Select/ Provide PD which speaks to core teaching approach  Focus on: experiential teaching models (inquiry / problem-based learning (PBL) / work-based learning (WBL))
<b>Valuable</b>	For the Individual and Institution	Brings professional accreditation and recognition  Bears national and international awards and credentials  Embeds portability into any offering
<b>Sustainable</b>	In terms of cost and provision	Draws on internal expertise first  Promotes and privileges scholarship  Grows internal capacity for PD facilitation and delivery  Engages with external expertise
<b>Triangulated</b>	To respond to internal drivers (policy; the Quality Enhancement Centre), external drivers (NZQA; TEC) and imperative for best practice in learning and teaching.	Forms part of an integrated model of development, recognition and reward  Draws on reflective developmental process linked to achievement  Enables conceptualisation of Professional Pathways

Figure 2. Proposed academic staff PD framework, adapted from  
"Constructing a Professional Development framework for PBL at a Middle East HEI" (McGirr, 2013).

The provision of a consolidated offering of academic staff development and upskilling is a key driver in ensuring ongoing advancement in staff capability and satisfaction (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). In engaging with an inclusive range of training and development opportunities for teaching staff at the polytechnic, we serve our internal stakeholders by enabling the growth of knowledge, improvement in practice, and a more confident and consolidated assertion of professional identity.

When conceptualising a proposed model for professional development, it is imperative that we address the challenges of growth and governance, the inherent considerations around practice and the global context in which we operate. Our intention is to establish a sustainable model of practice which will withstand the tensions inherent in a relatively young higher education institution experiencing sector change, and which will respond to fluctuations in staffing and equally tolerate increased pressure on resources as demands increase (McGirr, 2013).

An holistic strategic approach to learning and teaching brings rewards in terms of staff morale, individual perception of self-efficacy, engagement with institutional pedagogy and improved relationships across the community of learning and teaching practice (Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Kreber, 2002). In turn, a *transitional* (Kennedy, 2005) framework speaks to the need at Otago Polytechnic to work towards the desired transformation to high performance and practice. Such a model is rooted in best practice and anchors educational development in an accessible, globally benchmarked structure.

At a more granular level, an effective training and development portfolio for academic staff needs to be premised on an iterative, incremental and cyclical offering to ensure breadth of scope, depth of content and equality of access. Interventions may be multiple, multi-layered and multifarious to respond to the different needs of teaching and support staff. The underpinning features of an integrated transitional model are outlined in Figure 2.



Figure 3. Model of a community of professional practice for learning and teaching development at Otago Polytechnic – adapted from Kennedy (2005).

## THE HUB AND SPOKE MODEL

The hub and spoke (HuS) model (Glasgow Caledonian University, 2014) for a consolidated community of learning and teaching practice is informed by Wenger's conceptualisation of joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). The HuS model draws on a shared repertoire of resources and is characterised by a central core (hub) with extended reach into specific centres (spokes) which radiate to and from (and have access to) the core. A bi-located HuS service supports academic staff to exchange experience, practice and knowledge of their craft through the establishment of relationships and a common language of practice. The identified culture of continuous improvement (Otago Polytechnic, 2018) may be further reified through a focus on validation and benchmarking of the established work to support the building of academic staff capability, embed portability in training, and ultimately assure the reputation of Otago Polytechnic as a leader in achieving excellent outcomes for learners.

By advocating a HuS model of practice, we may set ourselves the goal of striving for the eventual establishment of a so-called Centre of Excellence, which sits alongside the schools and colleges, draws on expertise and works to an institutional imperative to support teaching and learning across the polytechnic. This mirrors the tried and

tested model of international practice (Kennedy, 2005) while simultaneously favouring an incremental work stream with a focus on the accreditation of such a centre – aligning well with our desire to embed sustainability and create inherent stretch targets for Learning and Teaching Development as a self-reliant entity.

A single centre with reach to and across schools enables the drawing down of expertise, access to a ring-fenced budget and the potential to grow staffing within a directorate dedicated to advancing academic staff capability. Furthermore, disaggregating training and development prevents conflict of discipline vs. pedagogy, provides embedded flexibility (for the provision of formal and informal interventions), stimulates scholarship across disciplines and facilitates an institutional discourse around teaching and learning in a consolidated community of practice. A considered framework, which is predicated on informed requests with timely planning in place, can provide spaces and places for relationship building between peer groups, enhancing inclusivity and cross-institutional collaboration.

## STRATEGIC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)

In response to Otago Polytechnic's Strategic Plan (2017), we can identify clear indicators for practice which directly correlate with the institution's strategic goals:

**Goal 1: Achieve excellent outcomes for our learners:** To further support teaching and learning practice, the facilities of the polytechnic and the methods of teaching and learning delivery should reflect developments in the international education community – *there is a need for PD to ensure currency.*

**Goal 2: Lead the way in sustainable practice:** In order to ensure a well-prepared, pedagogically informed and practice-focused academic staff cohort, we have a duty to provide access to development and career pathways – *by providing flexible PD, we ensure this access and opportunity.*

**Goal 3: Be a responsible Treaty partner in meeting the educational aspirations of mana whenua:** As an education entity which operates in a multicultural setting of bicultural governance, we have a responsibility to provide thought leadership and a platform for dialogue and exchange with our Treaty partner – *by doing PD we facilitate this dialogue and knowledge construction.*

**Goal 4: Be a strong and agile organisation:** In order to compete in the global community of tertiary learning and teaching practice, we need to ensure that our staff are upskilled, able to meet their specific professional development needs, and have the capacity to model practice for learners: *A current and meaningful PD offering helps us to meet this need.*

**Goal 5: Attract and sustain exceptional staff who make a difference:** There is a need to ensure sustainable structures for employees, which support career pathways for professional practitioners of tertiary teaching and learning. *This can be achieved by offering a variety of continuing professional development (CPD) training opportunities.*

## CONCLUSION

In consolidating our learning and teaching development activity at Otago Polytechnic into a bi-located offering and service, we seek to recognise and value what we do, acknowledge and champion dual professionalism as the leading tenet of our professional practice, and enable reward and recognition as we strive for continued excellence.

## APPENDIX ONE

Detail of Work Strands and Streams for Learning and Teaching Development at Otago Polytechnic, 2016–present

1. Establishment of a shared professional development calendar of training for academic staff, informed by institutional needs and team requirements
2. Consultation and agreement of identified PD priorities which support the Strategic Goals.
3. The continuing development of a core suite of CPD series to support development of practice in teaching, research and scholarship, notably:
  - a. Training for education research, ethics and compliance: Accessing Funding and Research Support Training
  - b. HEA Fellowship Pilot
  - c. PBRF training and support
  - d. Establishment of research clusters (2017)
4. The review and refresh of the initial and inductive teacher training (Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education) and scoping for accreditation (2017)

In development:

- a. Academic Staff Mentoring Programme
- b. The Teaching Observation Programme
- c. Facilitation Training Programme
- d. The All-Staff Capability Framework (December 2018)

## APPENDIX TWO

### Glossary of Terms for Staff Development

**Professional training** encompasses interventions which teachers may attend in person or remotely; they may be discipline- (domain) or practice- (pedagogy) focused. Typical training may be intensive, iterative and workshop- or seminar-based in support of a broader portfolio of development activity.

**Teacher education** and training provides the opportunity for enhancement and development of practice in the specific area of pedagogy, with an emphasis on reflection on and in practice. The conferment of awards assists in the recognition of achievement and excellence in pedagogic practice, which benefits the individual and the institution (Lieberman & Miller, 2008).

**Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education for all staff led by the Learning and Teaching Development team and coordinated by the College of Community Development and Personal Wellbeing:** Inductive / incremental teacher training for all academic staff to support the transition to Otago Polytechnic teaching methodology and dual professionalism in situ.

**Research and scholarship** enables those who have benefited from some CPD to then share with members of the community, either within or outside departments. The focus of scholarship activity may be on the cascading skills and knowledge element of the PD, while research may promote the investigation of practice, capacity building of decision-making around practice (Burkbank, 2003), or evaluating the effectiveness of techniques and approaches (Pine, 2009). Practitioner research and enquiry may assist in the promotion of values and beliefs around teaching and learning, institutionally and empirically. The value of research and scholarship lies in passing on knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm to colleagues.

**Mentoring** supports teacher development professionally through the informal exchange of expertise from an experienced staff member to a less experienced staff member. It is compatible with the peer-coaching model also advocated through the Otago Polytechnic Teaching Observation Programme (in development).

**Professional recognition and accreditation** for in-service teachers enables commitment to developing as a professional and motivation to achieve success through badging and awards (Kennedy, 2014).



As deputy chief executive of Otago Polytechnic, **Oonagh McGirr** is the strategic lead for academic development. She leads a diverse portfolio of directorates: Learning and Teaching; Quality, Research and Postgraduate; Global Engagement; Employability; and the Otago Polytechnic Professoriate. Oonagh has worked in international higher education for over two decades in both the public and private sectors. She has established and led academic services units; developed education strategy for regional and national government bodies; devised and delivered staff development and upskilling programmes for higher education practice; and led on institutional Learning and Teaching accreditation and recognition. She has taught on foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in modern foreign languages, cultural studies, linguistics, teacher education and research in multidisciplinary settings at new and legacy Higher Education Institutes in Europe and the Middle East. Her research interests are teacher identity in practice in higher education and the development of sustainable CPD frameworks for HE practitioners. Oonagh is a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

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# THE PERFECT BLEND: BUILDING ACADEMIC CAPABILITY IN TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING PRACTICE THROUGH THE USE OF A BLENDED COURSE TEMPLATE

Rachel Cash

## INTRODUCTION

The Higher Education Academy (2018) defines technology-enhanced learning as “using technology to maximise the student learning experience.”

While the concept of a blended course template for technology-enhanced learning is not a new one, prior to 2015, at Otago Polytechnic we were not using one. Nor were we offering to build capability within our academic staff to provide them with the skills to develop their courses in a consistent, functional and aesthetically pleasing way, in order to ensure the best experience for our learners.

Until now.

## BACKGROUND

In 2015, Otago Polytechnic implemented a blended course template for use within the Designing for Learner Success (D4LS) project. The D4LS project focused on the “redesign and redevelopment of all vocational and degree programmes to improve learner success” (Goode, Hegarty, & Levy, 2018, p. 392) in order to ensure that:

- courses were effectively and efficiently developed (approximately 400 courses (Otago Polytechnic, 2017) were developed over three years)
- consistency was achieved within programmes
- minimum quality requirements were met.

*Note:* At Otago Polytechnic, *programmes* are complete study pathways leading to a qualification, comprising individual *courses*.

If we fast-forward to 2018, the D4LS project is now transitioning to business as usual. We are starting to roll out our blended course template to those who have not been through the D4LS process and who are ready and willing (initially) to implement the template into their programme. We will then endeavour to ensure that all our blended programmes are using the blended course template over the next couple of years.

## WHY USE A TEMPLATE?

We needed to create a template to help facilitate technology-enhanced learning within our blended courses. It is important to note that the template is not required for compliance measures, but is rather a recommended structure that academic staff can use to develop quality learning experiences.

# 3 ADVANTAGES

## OF USING A BLENDED COURSE TEMPLATE

If you want to create a positive learner experience within your course, try using our blended course template. Here are our top three advantages to get you started.

### Consistency

Although there are a variety of courses within a programme, a blended course template can help achieve consistency and provide a familiar and comfortable learner experience within their learning environment.

1

2

3

### Quality

Ask yourself: Does my blended course look professional? Is it accessible and responsive in design? If not, you can benefit from using our blended course template.

### Efficiency

Save time and development costs, by rapidly creating courses and simplifying course updates, leaving time to focus on engaging with your learners.

Figure 1. Three advantages of using a blended course template. Adapted from Sahu (2014).

According to Kimberly Smith (lecturer; School of Midwifery, Otago Polytechnic):

*The blended course template will be very good for students, as it provides consistency across courses/programmes so that wherever students go they know where to find information related to particular aspects of their courses (e.g., module information, tutorial information, assessment information). This will eliminate issues with individual variability of Moodle courses that can confuse students about where they can find the relevant information for different aspects of their courses.*

Three major advantages of using a blended course template include improved *consistency, efficiency* and *quality*.

## CONSISTENCY

**Structure:** By incorporating the same components within each course in a programme, our learners can quickly pick up on the course's "rhythms and patterns and have a better idea of what to expect than if the course were designed using a varying structure" (Kelly, 2018).

Feedback from our learners shows that they often do not know what is required of them, and can easily get lost within their online course. If a course has a consistent format that is easy to follow, then in subsequent topics and modules learners will become increasingly familiar and comfortable with their online learning environment. Many programmes offer a variety of courses, all with different academic teaching staff, which often results in a huge variance in learner experience. Using a common template will help to ensure consistency across the programme, as long as we support academic staff and ensure that they are engaged in the redesign and redevelopment process.

*The template has more clarity and it is easier to locate information for the learner. The design allows for easy access to information on modules, assessments and course content. I think the greatest benefit is that the designs are all very similar in presentation, which enables the learners to have consistency of information under each of the specific tabs.*

Narinder Verma, senior lecturer; Bachelor of Occupational Therapy, Te Ohu Ora, Otago Polytechnic.

**Navigation:** Learners become familiar with the icons, tabs, menus and other important online navigation elements. "This prevents online learner frustration and makes the process simple and stress-free" (Pappas, 2018). This then allows the learner to focus on the course subject matter, rather than spending time trying to find what they are looking for. We regularly receive feedback that learners cannot find what they need. If a learner's needs and preferences are met, then this ideally "increases the level of engagement of your online learners and allows them to connect on a deeper level" (Pappas, 2018).

## EFFICIENCY

**Reduced time and development costs:** While developing a course for the first time will require substantial resources, it will significantly lessen each time the course is delivered, as academic staff will have the opportunity to review and improve the course iteratively.

**Rapid course creation:** We can back up and restore the blended course template into a new course instance very quickly. Placeholders for minimum requirements are readily available and the user can start populating the template with course-specific information immediately. This means that academic staff have more time to focus on developing engaging and interactive learning activities and focusing on what they, personally, bring to the learning experience, through delivering their knowledge and expertise in the classroom. Once the structure of the first module (for example) is developed, the user can duplicate this for use in the next module, to ensure consistency throughout the course.

**Simplified course updates:** Before the delivery of the next occurrence of a course, the dates within the course schedule will need to be revised and there is an opportunity to refresh the content to ensure that it is current, relevant and engaging. In this way, at the end of each year/semester, academic staff can focus on improving their activities, rather than reinventing the wheel in regards to content and meeting the minimum requirements.

## QUALITY

**Professionalism:** Quality blended learning will enhance our brand image and identity.

**Accessibility:** The template is designed for accessibility and includes a tool that learners can use to choose how they access the content – for example, through reading, listening, editing text appearance or highlighting text.

**Responsive design:** Learners can access their course materials on a range of devices, thereby allowing academic staff and learners to focus on the content itself rather than on the way in which the device presents the content.

James Sunderland and Alexa Andrew, senior lecturers in the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy, Te Ohu Ora, Otago Polytechnic, share their feedback after delivering their new course for the first time:

*We are really positive about the presentation of the template, that presents a professional, attractive and engaging face for our course (Foundations of Occupational Therapy). We really appreciate how content is condensed and well signposted for students and staff alike. The structure has been easy to explain and reinforce with students. This has not always been the case with previous Moodle layouts. Student feedback shows that our students have engaged with and appreciate multiple aspects of the Moodle shell for this course, in particular the quizzes, exam banks, readings questions and multimedia content. We really appreciated the level of consultation with [Learning and Teaching Development]. We felt this was a true partnership, and we had both control and access to your expert advice to guide the structure and content. Awesome.*

## FINDING THE RIGHT BLEND

How did we create the template, and how can we ensure that our academic staff are confident to use it?

### Gather minimum requirements

Based on informal user feedback from academic staff in 2015, and keeping best practices in mind, we decided on a simple structure which would meet our minimum requirements. 'Must have' elements include:

- Course name and level (on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework)
- Welcome and course introduction from the course facilitator
- Course outline (all there is to know about the course)
- An overview of the required assessments (assessment type and weighting)
- Contact details of facilitator(s)

Alongside these minimum requirements, we strongly encourage academic staff to add further elements to their online courses, including:

- Assessment details and online submission functionality
- Module and topic names
- Some basic online learning activities such as asynchronous discussions, formative feedback quizzes and embedded videos with questions to consider:

Our objective is to ensure that all of Otago Polytechnic's blended courses include all of the aforementioned elements, together with features that reflect Otago Polytechnic's learning and teaching strategies and recognised effective practices. These include:

- Engaging, interactive learning activities
- Experiential learning opportunities
- Problem-based activities

### Create a simple structure

Our blended course template includes the following structure:

- Haere mai (welcome and introduction, course outline and schedule)
- Assessments
- Modules (broken down into topics and learning activities)
- Resources (course-wide resources, if required)
- Facilitator notes (a place for teaching staff to share lesson plans, suggestions for improvements, and so on. This section is hidden from students)

### Build and test blended course template

Throughout the D4LS project, a developer from the Learning and Teaching Development team would build a course using the blended course template, based on information provided from a 'blueprint' (an output from the design phase of the project). This was a good opportunity for our developers to pilot the template and improve it iteratively, based on user feedback from both academic staff and students.

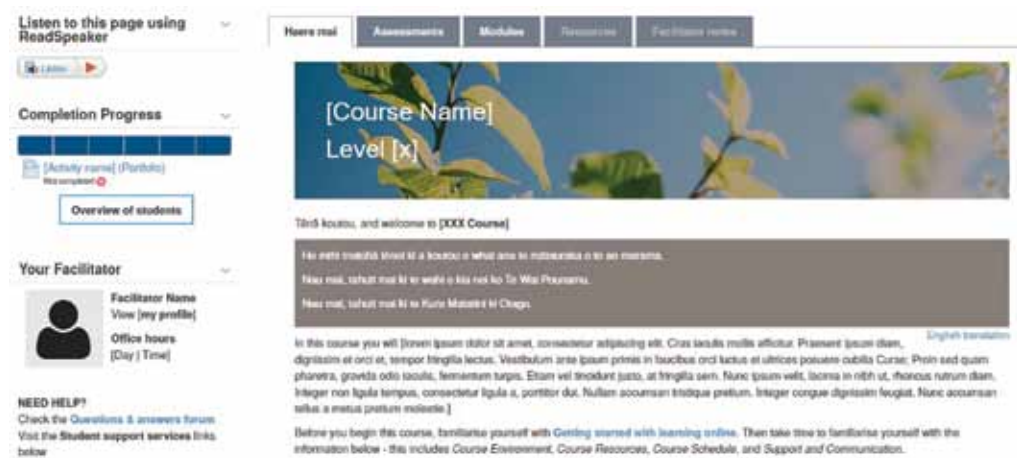


Figure 2. Screenshot of Otago Polytechnic's blended course template.

## Build capability

In 2018, as we start to roll out the template to other existing programmes (which will span across approximately two years), the Learning and Teaching Development team are beginning to work closely with programme staff to ensure that they know how to use the template. The Learning and Teaching Development team have also developed a suite of Moodle training modules. These include:

- Orientation and Assisting Students
- Copyright and Open Education Resources
- Course Administration Basics
- Resources, Learning and Assessment Activities
- \*Moodle Templates
- Before Delivery
- During Delivery
- After Delivery



Figure 3. Screenshot of the Moodle Training Suite modules (available on the Learning and Teaching Development team's intranet site).

These training modules have three delivery options to choose from:

- Self-paced (online, in your own time)
- Face-to-face (facilitated, focused sessions on campus)
- Distance (facilitated online, available on request)

\*The Moodle Templates module includes instructions on how to use the blended course template and explains why we have included many of the components. In particular, the module includes those components that are acknowledged as minimum requirements and the rationale behind this, in terms of the user experience.

## NEXT STEPS

The blended course template is available, alongside some dedicated training and support. We will work with more programme teams to ensure that their courses have a consistent design and that together we can create quality learning experiences for our learners.

We will seek feedback and suggestions for improvement of our blended course template, via online surveys and focus groups with academic staff and students. Ultimately, we want to provide the best possible online learning experience, and we need our users to share their current practices so we can seek ways to improve them.

Watch this space.

Since obtaining her degree in information communication technologies in 2004, **Rachel Cash** has worked in a variety of online development roles for the Tertiary Accord of New Zealand (TANZ) and Otago Polytechnic. She is now a learning and teaching specialist in the Learning and Teaching Development team at Otago Polytechnic.

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## MATT THOMPSON REMINISCES ABOUT THE EVOLUTION OF CARPENTRY E-PORTFOLIOS AT OTAGO POLYTECHNIC FROM 2007 TO 2018

Matt Thompson interviewed by Bronwyn Hegarty

### INTRODUCTION

A lot has happened since 2006 when Matt Thompson and Graham Burgess started getting students in the Certificate in Carpentry (Level 4) programme to take photographs of their practical skills with a digital camera. Back then, teachers were doing a lot of the work – downloading photos from the camera, uploading them to the students' internal drive, and supporting students to create electronic portfolios in PowerPoint.

By 2007, Graham had been convinced by Matt that e-portfolios had lots of benefits for both learners and teachers. Learners could provide visual evidence that they had completed tasks, and teachers could see more easily and quickly what had been accomplished. Marking would be quicker. Graham agreed that the e-portfolio method could be used to assess the Certificate of Carpentry students, and replace the traditional unit standard methods of marking workbooks. Thus, the visual e-portfolio method of assessment was born in the carpentry programme. Matt, in his quiet pragmatic way, was ecstatic. He knew how much time was going to be saved in marking, and how much more enjoyable and effective assessment would be for students and teachers alike.

In this article, you are invited to read about the evolution of the carpentry e-portfolio revolution that advanced for some years, quietly and behind the scenes, at Otago Polytechnic. The story begins with a little bit of history, and moves through the years to 2014, stopping for a while to check out some action research carried out by Dr Bronwyn Hegarty and Matt Thompson to investigate the use of mobile technologies for creating e-portfolios, and ending at the present day and the new application, Record of Work, that has been launched. The story is taking on a life of its own and word is getting out there. The article takes the shape of an interview with Matt Thompson conducted by Bronwyn Hegarty.

### THE INTERVIEW

**Bronwyn:** Thanks, Matt, for agreeing to talk about the mobile learning research that you did back in 2014. It would be good to get a bit of background first, and then we can talk through how your teaching has changed over the years and where you are now. A lot has happened in the interim.

**Matt:** Yes. I was writing something for a conference I'm working on and presenting at this year, and I remembered it was 2006/07 when we started using the first version of e-portfolios, with students taking photographs with a digital camera. This was before we had mobile phones. Then, they were getting those photos and creating PowerPoint presentations.

**Bronwyn:** So that was the old way you did it?

**Matt:** Yes, we tried different versions before that, but nothing was associated with an assessment. It was after 2007, once we did it for the first time, that, my boss, Graham, said, "Oh, this is a great idea, we could use this instead of doing Unit Standard assessments." They were really, really long, and that was a real relief for me, because it was the first time another staff member had said, well, actually, there is an advantage to this. So instead of just listening to people from the Educational Development Centre telling us this would be a good idea, here was actual proof – so that was where it kind of started from.

**Bronwyn:** Yes. I remember bringing tertiary teaching students, our teaching staff, over so you and Graham could talk to them about what you were doing with the digital portfolios, way back then. That must have been 2007.

**Matt:** It could have been back as far as then, or a wee bit later. It went on like that until about 2012, when students started saying, "Hey, this isn't the best way to do this, we could do this better."

**Bronwyn:** So what were they saying they didn't like?

**Matt:** Well, the method that we had used a digital camera, and it cost about \$200 back then, so we would share the camera around the class because the students didn't have their own. Then we would put the photos on the students' I-drive so they would have access, and they would take their photos and put them into their portfolio and then write about them.

**Bronwyn:** So what was the portfolio, and what was it in?

**Matt:** At that stage it was only in PowerPoint – because that's what I designated was the best way to do it – and it worked, and we knew how to show the students how to do it. Those students were leaving high school at that stage without the knowledge that the students had in 2011 and 2012, when they started saying, "Hey, we could do this better." This was because they already had that experience.

Something I've found with learning is that if you've got to teach a student how to use a piece of media, you could spend all your time teaching them how to use it. On the other hand, if they are doing something which is quite natural to them, and they can record it 'live' – as they would these days on Facebook, or on something that they think is quite simple to use – you're not doubling up on the learning. If you've got to spend lots of time showing them how to use a bit of software or a new e-tool, then it really slows their learning. What we really want them to do is have a look at what they've done and go from there, and make it a reflective process.

**Bronwyn:** So teaching them how to use PowerPoint would have taken up quite a lot of your time then?

**Matt:** Oh, not too bad, because it's so simple. It was kind of, create a new slide, add a photo, and as long as they curated it into some kind of legible story, then it wasn't too bad. And we marked it as we went, with the student, while sitting alongside them.

The programme was the Certificate in Carpentry (Level 4) that had been going for years. The students have always built a house as part of the programme and, as they built the house, none of their work was actually recorded as part of the course – although we know now it was the most valuable part of their learning. Since the students were spending so much time on building a three- or four-bedroom house – because that's what they really enjoyed – we thought we could try and extract some of their learning from the practical side of the programme. We thought if they could do this practical work, then they could most probably understand the theoretical side. So the e-portfolio work was about the students being able to show how they applied the theory and the practical.

**Bronwyn:** Can you give me an example of something they would have been learning to do while building the house, and how that would have been assessed, at that time?

**Matt:** Sure. Think of putting on a wall lining like gib board, and having to describe how to do the job in a written assessment. For example, students would have to explain the full range of skills and forethought that goes into actually putting a piece of gib board on a wall; it's not just about cutting and putting it on, they would have to make sure they've got the right type of gib, and cut it to length. They also have to prepare the wall, make sure the gib is straight enough to put it on, make sure the insulation is in the wall, and tick off a whole series of checks that a building inspector might do. They have to get the right tools to cut and then screw the sheet onto the wall, and apply the right adhesive. So, they could write pages without actually learning much, and assessment should be natural and real, if we can make it like that. The best assessment



Figure 1. Source: Hayden Parsons

just kind of falls out of what they are doing in the course. They do enjoy the practical side, so as they were applying the gib and going through the process they would take a couple of photographs. This did two things, it let them show a bunch of stuff through a photograph and, when they were putting together their e-portfolios, they could think back, remembering what they did and add a couple of notes: "This was the gib, this was the wall, it was straight, here's some adhesive, here's me screwing it in." Then we could see that they'd done the skill, we could observe it in the photograph, and we used a bit of professional judgement. I know you weren't supposed to do that with Unit Standards, but we knew that they'd completed the job, and it was done correctly. Then when a building inspector came in and looked at the job and said, "Yes, it's all been put on correctly," that's all we needed the students to do, rather than write and write and write.

**Bronwyn:** And so they'd have a series of photos to show each step.

**Matt:** Yes.

**Bronwyn:** And was there a certain number of steps and requirements of what they had to show for their assessments?

**Matt:** Yes. We just gave them a really simple bullet-pointed list for the photographs they needed to show for the different steps along the way. We still do this today, too, and the bottom line is – if we can see the job is done correctly and an outside person signs it off, then we know that they've followed the whole process.

**Bronwyn:** Yes. So how did they do that before – did they have to fill out worksheets?

**Matt:** Yes, they would have had to fill out written assessments or drawings, with lots of sketches.

**Bronwyn:** For a practical?

**Matt:** Yes. So when I started here, back in the day, I think there were 120 assessments in the programme.

**Bronwyn:** It must have been terribly time-consuming marking all those worksheets.

**Matt:** Well, it was not so much as time-consuming for us, but we had students who would fail; they might have been doing the tasks really well, but if their written communication wasn't that good, we were stopping the students from learning and proving that they could actually do the practical skills, and that they had the knowledge. They might not have been able to write it down correctly or remember all of the steps when writing, which was kind of unimportant. I suppose, looking back at it now, that's why they got rid of the Unit Standards; assessing using Learning Outcomes makes it so much easier.

**Bronwyn:** So, your programme is very experiential.

**Matt:** Yes.

**Bronwyn:** You've got this house that the students build – and are there other ways that they learn practical skills, where they might take photos of themselves?

**Matt:** Yes. Now with every assessed practical task there's a practice run, and then there's the actual assessment. We don't like putting students in a position where they only get to do it once. We want the students to make mistakes, as they generally learn from them. During the full-time programme, students will spend six weeks on work experience, and while they're there they photograph and record what they've learned from another tradesman; and also what they've learned overall and what they could do better next time. We also ask them to think about what the company could do better as well, without being aggressive or 'nit-picky.' If they can think about a process or an outcome and how to create something that's better, how they could do it, that is a good way to learn.

**Bronwyn:** How long have students been taking pictures of what they're doing on work experience?

**Matt:** Just for the last year.

**Bronwyn:** So that wasn't happening when you were doing the skills early on?

**Matt:** No, they were putting in photographs of their work experience, but it wasn't assessed.

**Bronwyn:** OK.

**Matt:** They just wanted to put their photos into the e-portfolio, at first. Within a year this had turned into an assessment tool, and then into an assessment tool and a CV, that they edited later on to show just their experiences to potential employers.

**Bronwyn:** So they're basically creating a visual record of their time while they're studying the Certificate in Carpentry (Level 4), aren't they?

**Matt:** Yeah. Also at that time we were teaching a one-year programme and then waving goodbye to them, and that was the end of their learning. Now we've created another four-year path of study afterward, where they take that same portfolio and build on it, you know, for up to five years really.

**Bronwyn:** So as an apprentice?

**Matt:** Yeah. That's what I do now.

**Bronwyn:** That's incredible evidence for them to be able to get into the apprenticeship programme, I guess, isn't it – to have that record?

**Matt:** It is.

**Bronwyn:** So we've got to the point where you moved from students taking images with a clunky camera, you loading them into I-drive, the student drive, and then putting it into PowerPoint, and to the stage where the students were saying they didn't want to do that anymore. Was that 2011?

**Matt:** Yes, I think it was.

**Bronwyn:** And then what happened?

**Matt:** It was about the same time as you said to me that I should do my Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education.

**Bronwyn:** Yes, the project for the Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education.

**Matt:** Which I knew at the time was a silly idea (laughing), as I really didn't want to do it. It might have been the year after that I decided it would be a good idea to do it as a project. So at about that time, mobile phone ownership in 18 to 21, and 22-year-old males in New Zealand seemed to skyrocket. I noticed it went from one or two people in the classroom having a mobile phone, and taking awful photographs – they really were – to everyone having a mobile phone, and they could all take reasonably good photographs. The students didn't always know how to share them really well, and apps weren't really that big at that stage. I don't know how many apps were on the market, but students were leaving high school with better digital skills, and we didn't have to teach them anymore, and they were starting to teach us things. So it was time to pull our socks up again, and use the students' knowledge to improve the e-portfolio. So we tried various things, and I guess I led the way by leaving it up to the students to choose how they took the photos. It was 2013/14 when you convinced me to start my Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education project and we ran an official research study.

**Bronwyn:** Yes, we had to go through planning your work-based learning project as part of a bigger research project on mobile learning, for which I had received funding from the Otago Polytechnic research office. We put in an ethics application, and I appointed a research assistant and we got going.

**Matt:** I just remembered. In 2011, I tried an i-pad for the first time, and teachers thought that education could be made better by using i-pads and mobile technology. So we had a tools app developed to use in our School, but it was a failure because no one else had an i-pad. We've come a long way in seven years. So in 2013 we started making changes in the programme, and then in 2014 we did this research project. The approach for the research was based on what I'd learnt previously from students and their new abilities when leaving high school.

**Bronwyn:** I remember early on, one of the comments you made was that the majority of your students had smartphones, and that was really important for you, wasn't it, because you wanted them to use the device that they actually had rather than you providing a bunch of devices?

**Matt:** Yes.

**Bronwyn:** Did you have i-pads at the same time, in the department?

**Matt:** Yeah, we did have some i-pads but they were just too big, with nine or ten-inch screens, to take out on the building site and we couldn't store them easily. As much as I wanted the i-pads to work, a personal mobile phone was better as it was right there in the student's pocket. They needed to be able to take photographs when they thought it was a good time to take them, rather than, "Oh, there's an i-pad, what should I take a photograph of?" Students' ownership of mobile phones was over 95%, but not 100%, so we could get students to use their phones, and it became their choice to judge that their work was worth photographing.

I added an extra dimension so that they could recognise what was good work and what was 'a bit of a failure,' so they could take another photograph later on. It was a really good chance for them to cheat, but they didn't, and although they shared their work with each other, they wouldn't give their photos away to others. We organised the students into teams, so each team of students, usually a team of three, would be given a task to do and to take a part of a house, and put the doors and windows in, putting on the lining (gib board) and the insulation, and that was a stand-alone team. They didn't help any other teams and they knew that when the task was finished – we call it a "job and knock" – they could go home.

**Bronwyn:** So was three a good size for the teams?

**Matt:** Yes – they were limited by the physical size of the house, because the rooms were approximately four by four metres – 16 square metres.

**Bronwyn:** So how did they help each other, in terms of capturing these images of what they were doing?

**Matt:** About then selfie sticks came in, so we did see selfie sticks for a while, or they would hold the phones for each other, and ask, "Can you get a photo of me doing this?"

**Bronwyn:** So they had the images stored on their own phone? So what did they do with these images?

**Matt:** For the research project in 2014, I went through some iterations of trialling different software, and we did it as a compulsory trial. Before that, I'd said to the students, "Just use anything you like – PowerPoint is great, and PowerPoint is, if you like, the default one which will work." But I had also said they could print the images out if they wanted and stick them on paper, leaving it up to them.

In 2014, because of their common use of Facebook and other social media, it didn't seem hard for them to try different applications for their e-portfolios. I trialled Facebook, Evernote and Google Plus each for a period of three weeks. Google Plus is a great platform for photo sharing, as long as they are backed up in Google Photos, which I found easy, but the students didn't find it that easy – and there were some other problems with it. We let the students use it for assessment of one Unit Standard, so they would provide evidence, and I set up a closed group so they could share with each other.

**Bronwyn:** Weren't there issues that they found it tricky to upload directly from their phone, and they had to go and download the photos at home or in the computer lab or classroom, and then upload them to Google Plus separately?

**Matt:** Yes, that's right. The mobile interface wasn't as good as the one on the desktop, so if they'd stored it, we ended up back in the classroom, using the laptops, and that wasn't really what we were trying to do. I found Google Plus great – I could use it on the mobile platform, but I spent more time than them practising, and it wasn't natural for them; and they felt like their progress was slowed by spending time mucking around learning how to use the platform. Evernote was my favourite of the three applications, because images could be annotated.

**Bronwyn:** So how did you get them feeling comfortable using those applications?

**Matt:** In each case, I nominated a Unit Standard and asked them to show me their practical skills evidence using the nominated platform. They agreed early on to trialling these applications so, in each case, I'd sit down in the classroom with them and use the data projector and form a closed class group within Google Plus or Facebook or Evernote. I'd ask them to join the group we were using at the time, and they'd get on their phones, log on and create an account. This took a little bit of time, and then they could see themselves appearing on the data projector screen, and would say, "Oh look, I'm part of this group." Once they had joined and got used to each other's nicknames, it was easy, especially as they were already familiar with each other by that stage. If they didn't have a phone they could use one of the laptops, but they were pretty much all on mobile phones by then. Once we'd used those first three applications, I let them provide evidence for the fourth Unit Standard any way they wanted – for example, they could go back to using PowerPoint or they could use another application that they'd discovered themselves.

**Bronwyn:** Did you find it time-consuming to show them how to use the applications and make sure that they were using them properly?

**Matt:** Ah, no – teaching them how to use the apps might have taken 20 to 30 minutes for each one. The most time-consuming part of all this was that they would do their homework after hours, in their time, at home, and that's when I had to start doing my work, giving them feedback on their photos and e-portfolios. I know if they were a bit more motivated they could have done it on campus, but they were generally building, so they'd just record the photos on-site, then they'd go home, and it might be 11 o'clock at night and my phone would start vibrating – "ding ding ding" – and that's when I realised it probably wasn't the sharpest idea to have told them, "I'll mark it live."

**Bronwyn:** So you were spending hours of your own time in the evening when you should have been sleeping, checking their images, because they were putting them up then?

**Matt:** Yeah. I always think that if you do it live and you ask them a question and recommend something, you should be available to check it. For example, I might say, "Is there something else you're supposed to have in this photo, or what's that big red thing in the middle?" Then they could fix it while they were ready to work. I just wanted to be that person to encourage them.

**Bronwyn:** So what time did you go to bed then?

**Matt:** When they were finished.

**Bronwyn:** Good grief!

**Matt:** I know, at the time it seemed like a good idea.

**Bronwyn:** A lot of people wouldn't do that. Their phone would be off, you know, and they'd say I'm just not doing it. But I guess you were really passionate about this project.

**Matt:** There was one other thing, though. The carrot that I dangled before them at that time was that they could have Friday mornings off, if they had done all the required work. We used to have class on a Friday morning when they used PowerPoint to create their e-portfolios as well as retests from 1 to 3 o'clock, when they'd fix up lots of assessments. So I said to them, if you can get your e-portfolio finished by the end of Thursday, you don't have to come in Friday morning. The top 80% of the class took that statement as, we don't come in on Fridays any more, and we do our e-portfolios on Wednesday and Thursday nights.

**Bronwyn:** So while they stayed away on Fridays, you were having an extra sleep, were you? (laughter). So what was your general feeling in terms of the approach you used with Evernote, Google Plus and Facebook – how sustainable was this for your teaching and how did it help students' learning?

**Matt:** OK, so it was a lot of work at the time to get it up and running, and I suppose that's the problem with using multiple platforms. But we changed from having to mark 120 assessments to marking only 80, and the size of the assessments themselves had dramatically reduced. My boss Graham, who'd been teaching at that stage for 40 years or so, was the biggest supporter of it, because he saw a reduction in our assessments – probably a third less written assessments by students. The e-portfolios still needed to be marked, but marking a visual photo was so much simpler – I wasn't looking for lots of words, I was wanting to see the process, which was in front of me. I was checking to see that they'd done the tasks correctly, and I very rarely had to ask a student to do anything more apart from having to annotate a photo. It really sped up the assessments.

**Bronwyn:** And the fact that you'd already given them formative feedback must have sped it up as well, because you'd already seen the images at 11 o'clock at night.

**Matt:** Yes, and also before then, and their learning was at a greater depth. You could see that because they had to think about things on-site a little bit more, knowing they had to collect evidence at the right time. Also, from the teacher's point of view, I knew the student was actually there on the day, as they knew they had to be there for each part of the process.

**Bronwyn:** So you and others were facilitating students doing the house build, and what they were learning there, and watching them. They were taking the photos, and you're then seeing the evidence of that work again in the evening when they uploaded it to whichever application they were using at that time. It was great that you got to see their work again and give them feedback on the evidence. Good one, Matt.

**Matt:** Also, I could tell that they were part of a team and, if they didn't really understand what they were doing, they couldn't take the photographs they needed because they wouldn't have known what was important to capture. So the method combined what they'd learnt in the classroom, and helped them to put it all together in one place.

**Bronwyn:** So they had to draw on their theoretical understanding to annotate the images to explain what they were doing. Yes, that has to help them understand it better.

**Matt:** I know it sounds really simple, but in a process like that, when I stood back and looked, I could see that they had learned at a higher level than if they'd just been writing about it.

**Bronwyn:** That's great. So, if that was working well, why did you then change, because now you've evolved into doing something else, haven't you? You're using a different application altogether.

**Matt:** In 2016, I left the carpentry department, and went and worked with the Learning and Teaching Development team. So the whole carpentry department got to do their own thing. While I was away, the format of the e-portfolio used in the full-time one-year programme changed. The e-portfolio concept fully evolved onto Google Docs, which is an excellent platform for the students to use. The students, especially the school leavers, tend to already have a Google account, that's their go-to thing now – and if you said to use something else, you'd have to teach them again. The students won't use OneNote, which is the Microsoft version. The staff here have all learnt how to use Google Docs, which was really nice to see when I came back to the department, 18 months later.

**Bronwyn:** So can they add the images from their smartphones directly to Google Docs, or do they have to go and download them into Google Drive? You can share from your phone to Google Drive, can't you?

**Matt:** I know, with my phone, every photo is backed up to Google Photos, so when you're creating a doc, the images are already there – so they're live, and on the cloud, so you don't have to worry about it. Half the students would have Apple phones, and half would have Android. In 2014 we got a really big Wi-Fi router out near the building site, so the students could have access to the Internet when they were working.

**Bronwyn:** Is that as a result of your mobile learning research project? I remember you saying at the time there were issues with wireless access.

**Matt:** Yes, and it just so happened that the building site I was traditionally working on was the furthest away from the Wi-Fi, so we had a great site where no one's smartphone could access the Internet.

**Bronwyn:** That's terrific that the Otago Polytechnic IT department responded to that and fixed the problem.

**Matt:** It's still not perfect, but yes. It's no longer 'no bars,' and now two or three out of the four showing wireless is working.

**Bronwyn:** So infrastructure is really important. I recall from the research that students didn't want to use their own data because it's expensive – and it *was* expensive at that time, and most of them wouldn't have had plans that included data.

**Matt:** No, not when they're that age – they do tend to have plans now, though.

**Bronwyn:** What happened next?

**Matt:** I started another programme in 2015, the apprenticeship scheme, which is a managed apprenticeship. Once our pre-trade students have gained employment, we manage their learning for another four years. They come in for block courses, and we see them three times a year for a one-week block course. I know that's not much, but we also go out on site and we visit them four or five times a year. While we're on site, we talk to their employer or their foreman, whoever's teaching them the practical side. They're doing a traditional, 8000-hour apprenticeship, but



its competency-based, and it takes about three to four years depending on the apprentice. When we first started doing this the traditional way, the apprentice would keep a diary, and at the end of each day they'd write down under different headings what they'd done that day. For example, they might have been putting up wall linings, so they'd open up the diary and they would open up the page on wall linings and put a brief entry in there to say, "Today I put up gib board for the day." They'd write very little, and generally they wouldn't do it, and then they were excuses like they were away for the weekend or one guy sold his car with his diary in the boot – therefore, he lost it.

**Bronwyn:** "The dog ate my diary."

**Matt:** Literally – and we'd get lots with mud on them and beer and water, and they generally just got lost. In 2016, I met Josh Galuszka and he had created an application called the Record of Work. He'd made it himself for carpentry apprentices, and he came along and talked to us at a carpentry tutors' conference. He was willing to customise this for each institution, so I worked with him over that year and we rolled the app, Record of Work, out in 2017. Otago Polytechnic and Unitec were the first ones to put it out.

I liked the whole concept, and essentially Record of Work is an e-portfolio and different to Google Docs – the approach that some lecturers started using while I was away. Google Docs is more like the paper diary and can only be seen intermittently. Once the apprentices are on a building site, we generally can't see what they've done until we go to visit them, and that might not be for two months. In two months you can do a lot of things – you could do nothing, you could push a broom around, you could be doing lots of learning but not recording it. So, the evidence wouldn't be provided. Now with the Record of Work app, we can see a daily record and it's in the cloud. Essentially it's just another e-portfolio platform and, for the Wanaka-based apprentices that I'm managing, I can go onto the app say once a week and see what they've done. Straightaway I will know if they've done anything, have been at work and have kept up their records. So I know just from checking their entries on the app whether they're doing an amazing job or have been lazy. I can give them feedback on their work, and they can see it and respond.

**Bronwyn:** So where is this application located? Can they use their smartphones to access it?

**Matt:** Yes, it's an app, and it works on any smartphone, so they take the photographs at work. Generally they use the app at night when they do their homework to put the photo into a specific box. It will be automatically curated when they select the appropriate Unit Standards or courses they're studying. They add the photo in the right place with a short description – we've given them a list of things that they must put on each photograph. It's not just 20 photos of them doing stuff – we want them to have it in the right place, with the correct judgement statements. When they've accumulated enough evidence, we always check with their employer, and there's a verification button that the employers see when they log on and they can verify the student's work.

**Bronwyn:** So they don't have to check everything, they just have to verify certain things?

**Matt:** They've just got to verify that "Yes, this is the site we're working on."

**Bronwyn:** So the students can still take tons of photos until they get it right?

**Matt:** Yes.



Figure 2. Screenshot of the Record of Work app.

**Bronwyn:** Or if they think it's a good photo, showing what they've been doing, the next step is selecting the best ones to put into this record?

**Matt:** Yes. The idea is they take one or two photographs a day – “this is what I did in the morning; this is what I did in the afternoon.” Before, we wouldn't know if the student was any good at doing a skill, because they could just show you the finished product on site, and also now we don't have to spend ages trying to find evidence in their diary. On site, because I've already seen their evidence, I can look at the big things and ask them to tell me about them and the process, and ask them questions about the materials that they are using. For example, I can ask students – where did they get the materials from, how did they work out how much to get, what is the legislation, should they have done this, is there a better way to do it, and how could they do this better next time?

**Bronwyn:** So when you ask these questions, where do they record their answers, and what does “do it live” mean?

**Matt:** I can do it in the app, or in person on the site or in a call to them, and together we might record on paper, or electronically. I can log in to the cloud where they store their records and evidence to add comments and feedback on their work. Then the apprentice gets a notification on the app – then they are required to respond to any questions. I can do the recording on the actual photographs that they're producing. I'll make comments, not on every photograph, but on some – and it's not just “Keep up the good work,” but I ask them questions directly relating to that photograph. So it might be what strength or what treatment, that kind of thing, so they're talking the lingo. The others supervising apprentices do the same.

**Bronwyn:** That sounds really good. So if you do notice a student is not producing the work they should be, what do you do, pick up the smartphone and ring them?

**Matt:** Well, we've just put another thing on the app where we get an automatic update if they haven't done anything for ten days. Even so, we should be looking at it more than that, so we text them, and we talk to their employer because their employer's got more clout than us. The employer might say to the apprentice, “Well look, do you want to do a ten-year apprenticeship”, which was something which was happening before, “or do you want to finish in three or four years?”. Before, when we were only seeing them every two months, they might promise to do something and get away with doing nothing for that long. It can become a bad cycle of false promises.

**Bronwyn:** What about the potential for cheating, like stealing their mates' photos – do they have to show themselves in the photos?

**Matt:** No – that's why we get the employer to verify their work.

**Bronwyn:** Alright.

**Matt:** We organise a logon for the employers and they can log on and see as many apprentices as we allow. I've got one employer in Wanaka, he's got three apprentices, and goes on with a single logon and sees each person's work. Unfortunately, most of the employers don't even go on. We have found that most employers take the responsibility for teaching the apprentices the practical side of the trade. They see Otago Polytechnic as being experts in managing the theory teaching and doing the onsite assessments. Employers don't want to get involved in everything if they don't have to, so what I've found easier is to do a backup. As we look at apprentices' work, we print it out as a PDF and keep it on their file here. Under Otago Polytechnic policy, you've got to make sure you're actually recording students' work and storing it in a safe place. Then we ask the employer to look at ten pages of work on a laptop screen, and verify if this is the apprentice's work. Some of them are interested and some aren't.

**Bronwyn:** That's a shame, isn't it, because they could be helping to monitor that process.

**Matt:** One of our best employers in Dunedin has got 15 apprentices, and he wants to see every single one and he takes a real interest. It takes a long time, but he's an employer who's really interested in creating a better apprentice than the next employer.

**Bronwyn:** So are they getting through their apprenticeships faster?

**Matt:** No, but they are getting a better quality experience. It's up to the employer to provide that, and as long as the apprentice is given the right scope they do okay, and we can see that and track it. For example, we can say: "Look, you've completed this now – for your next job, talk to your employer and see if you can get onto a different type of job needing a different type of skill." That way, they're getting the full range of skills. It still has to be the employer saying they're commercially competent. As an apprentice, I could say, I built this house here, but it took me 23 years.

**Bronwyn:** And it fell down at the end.

**Matt:** Yeah, yeah. So we still need approval from the employer for the apprentices to show they are competent.

**Bronwyn:** So is there any kind of, like, badging system built into the app, so you could turn it into a gamification approach so they end up with a collection of badges, gaining a badge every time they do something right?

**Matt:** Nope, we've done it the 'boys' way, where they get gold coins – no they don't. On the app, on the front screen when they open it up they've got the place where they put all their stuff and it is linked to EBS, so they can go there and get their results.

**Bronwyn:** So you call that a reward?

**Matt:** No, it's not a reward, only tracking.

**Bronwyn:** Hopefully, they are motivated enough to feel a sense of achievement when they eventually find that they've passed.

**Matt:** It is beyond me what motivates apprentices. Some apprentices, with family commitments, tend to draw out the apprenticeship for five or even seven years, because their motivation is that they're being paid a full tradesman's wage, and they're not wanting to leave their employer, and aren't worried about gaining a qualification. Some employers will link success in the programme to their next pay rise – that's the best reward I see.

**Bronwyn:** So how are the students finding all this, using this app?

**Matt:** Well, because it's me, I wanted to let them make their own choice. When we started at the start of 2017, we had about 30 apprentices using the app, and some of them went back to recording on paper. We've got 120 apprentices now and I think we've got 64 using it every day, and then there's probably another 20 using it sporadically. For some of the other ones, because their employers, some of the big companies said, "We don't want our apprentices using it, we want them doing it on paper," we had to respect the employer's decision.

**Bronwyn:** It's pretty Luddite-ish, isn't it?

**Matt:** Well, we have to give them that opportunity, and again, I don't want to stop them learning. Some people are technophobes, and that's fine – the main thing is they are recording their stuff, but some are doing a combination, which is really annoying.

**Bronwyn:** I remember you saying – when you initially brought in the smart phone e-portfolio approach and students were using them to take pictures of their work – that some of the employers didn't want cell phones being used. Have you changed that mind-set, do you think, now?

**Matt:** I'm going to say that when builders don't want cell phones on the site, they've got a good reason. Mainly, it's because they see their apprentices mucking around on them, and some employers have got some fairly firm views; some have even banned them from the smoko shed, as they see smoko sheds for eating and talking and not for staring at your phone. As far as the social aspect goes, I think that's really important.

**Bronwyn:** But it makes it hard, then, if the cell phone is banned, when they need to collect this evidence.

**Matt:** Yes, it's a really small minority; I'm going to say it's under five percent, maybe less.

**Bronwyn:** So to finish this part off, do you think that it's a better learning experience for your students, using apps like this and the e-portfolio and capturing this visual evidence?

**Matt:** I still think that the biggest enhancement in their learning is the time they spend putting it all together, linking theory and practical, and engaging in the process every day. For example, an apprentice might be doing Pink Batts for four days on a really big building, and over that time is tying everything in. They might say: "I did this, I'm using this material and I'm using it for this reason, and once I've finished that part of the process, I start the next part of the building process." So they're mapping the whole thing all the way along, and you can see it when you look at their evidence, day by day by day, that they're building a house, and it is really scaffolding their knowledge. The process of them putting it all together is really good learning.

**Bronwyn:** Well, it's providing structure and, even though it is teacher-directed, it's letting them organise how they go about doing it, isn't it?

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Bronwyn:** So there's some autonomy happening. Do you ever get students where you have to keep directing them, because they don't organise themselves?

**Matt:** Yes. You're always going to have that with students.

**Bronwyn:** Would that be a minority or would you think most people would kind of take charge of their learning?

**Matt:** It's still that 80:20 rule, approximately. The students that weren't going to record it on paper or by cell phone and are unmotivated – well, they're often the ones that won't finish their apprenticeship. Perhaps they're just not enjoying it. The enthusiastic ones who are really trying hard to do well, they'll be the most successful ones, and easy to track, and you don't have to worry about them. I can give them a bit of direction in the first year and they're away. I guess the big thing to me is that we can monitor the students better and know straight away if they're not having success and then engage with them. If anything, the app has given me a better understanding of failure to progress, or if there is disengagement I can step in.

**Bronwyn:** So what do you do if that's happening, and how do you help them to progress?

**Matt:** I phone them. Young men don't email.

**Bronwyn:** No women in this course?

**Matt:** Yes, we've got three.

**Bronwyn:** That's a small proportion.

**Matt:** But better than nothing. We're doing a press release shortly through marketing.

**Bronwyn:** Is there a noticeable difference in how female students engage with the process, compared to male students?

**Matt:** My experience with the women in the programme is that they have had to work very hard, like many others, to get a start in an industry where we don't employ many women. There is nothing really different about them – we are very proud to have them as part of the industry as it changes to include everyone.

**Bronwyn:** So what's the feedback? Are you getting good evaluations from the students?

**Matt:** We're getting evaluations on the programme, but not on the e-portfolio as such.

**Bronwyn:** If they didn't like it, they'd be groaning, wouldn't they?

**Matt:** If they didn't like the e-portfolio app they wouldn't use it – but it's either paper or electronic.

**Bronwyn:** Do they see the value of the e-portfolio for their CV?

**Matt:** Yes, not in the first or second year, but in the fourth year they start to realise as they get toward the end of their apprenticeship. All builders have a portfolio – you have to, not just for advertising, but you must by law now record what you do.

**Bronwyn:** Oh really? A professional portfolio.

**Matt:** So, if anything, the app e-portfolio could turn into that, mainly because it's so easy to curate and put everything in the right order. But, I was on a building site the other day and for every job they use Dropbox, and there's a platform that sits over the top called Build Me. So if you were getting a house built and you want to see what the progress is on your building site, you'd log on to this part of the Dropbox with Build Me, and you can see all the photos that have been taken for the day.

**Bronwyn:** Wow.

**Matt:** Often these apprentices, believe it or not, are given the job to record the building and the boss has said, "Take ten photos of the house each day, and put it on this Dropbox account." Then the clients and the boss can log on and see what progress has been made, and the features that have been added. If the clients can keep track, they can get things changed immediately, if they don't like something.

**Bronwyn:** So the e-portfolio app is keeping apprentices up with contemporary practice in the building industry. Was this in your mind when you started the e-portfolio method of assessing?

**Matt:** It was, and I'm really keen. One of the reasons I'm working with Josh, the original developer of the app, is because we want to say it's not just for carpentry, it's for anyone who wants to track their learning – it's just a matter of relabelling some folders where students put information, and go from there.

**Bronwyn:** It sounds really good to me, to try and encourage that regular record, logging what they're doing. When do you get them to reflect on their work?

**Matt:** The other thing I've just rolled out in the last month is trying to get them together to learn socially. We have a Facebook page, and run it through Placemakers (a NZ building supplies store); they pay for it, so we're not spending any money on this. Also, we've had one breakfast about six months ago, and we got the apprentices together with an alert sent through Facebook: "Breakfast at Placies." They put it on, and we got a couple of speakers in. This is important, because a lot of the apprentices don't know each other, and this type of get-together helps apprentices to meet others from different years and a mentor system can be created. For example, fourth years and first years could be sharing work because they got to know each other through Otago Polytechnic and a get-together like this.

**Bronwyn:** Do you think it takes less time using this new app for your teaching, and is it more sustainable for you?

**Matt:** It could be much more time-consuming because my apprentices are all in Wanaka, or Central Otago, and to go and see them is a three-hour drive. I could phone them and they might say they've done the work, but they haven't. However, I can see if it's in the app and will know straight away, so that's saving a huge amount of time.

**Bronwyn:** It's also saving you time ringing up and checking in with them every week as well, isn't it?

**Matt:** Yes, because I would literally only get around the group and it would be time to begin again. I've just come back this week from a set of site visits – I can do about four site visits a day, and that is hard because I've got to write all that up. If I don't waste time on site looking at what they've done, because I've already seen their work, I can use the time on site to ask the more important questions.

**Bronwyn:** So each year, do you sit back and review how you could change the assessment process and also how the app might need to be modified?

**Matt:** I've had three modifications made this year to improve the app, which was quite expensive. We have given the employers the ability to see what their apprentices have put on the app. The employer can now view their apprentice live and can verify the work. We had a reminded automated email added, so the apprentice is reminded when they have not made an entry. The hyperlinks were added this year, so we had four hot spots on the app home screen that we can edit the web address to whatever we liked. We have used 'how to' videos, sponsor, web pages, Google Drive and the student hub.

**Bronwyn:** So you can do it as you go, basically – you don't have to wait till the end of the year?

**Matt:** Yes. All the app changes are purely from student feedback – can we do this, can we do that? And one of the ones this year was the employer logon, that came from an employer – "I want to see what my apprentice is doing; when it was on paper I could see it, but now I can't." So we got that feature added and someone else is paying for it now.

**Bronwyn:** That's great.

**Matt:** It's nothing that Mahara wouldn't have done, and other platforms, but we've got one developer in Wellington working directly for us.

**Bronwyn:** Well, it's working really well on smartphones, and that is good. So, where are you heading in the future?

**Matt:** Probably taking on more apprentices, and we're rolling out engineering as a managed apprenticeship, with electrical and automotive, so when they are ready we'd like to roll out the same app for them. So that I guess is the next thing – use the app for engineering apprenticeships, and then we'll roll it out across the world.

**Bronwyn:** Fantastic – so it could be speaking tours, and all sorts of stuff.

**Matt:** Yeah.

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# DEVELOPING CAPABILITIES AT A NEW ZEALAND TERTIARY INSTITUTION: FROM FOREIGN LEARNERS TO SOCIALISED INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Behnam Soltani and Jean-Philippe Loret

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many international students choose to study a degree program in tertiary institutions in developed countries in the hope of improving their socioeconomic status. In so doing, they often embark on a social and cultural journey. Yet, however rich the experience might be, it comes along with challenges which are directly related to encountering a different social and cultural academic space – difficulties which international students need to overcome so that they can proceed to graduation.

Our purpose in this paper is to present international students' points of views on their learning as a way of becoming employable – or, as they are sometimes referred to, work-ready graduates.

This paper is part of a larger study of a group of 180 international students who were enrolled in an undergraduate program in New Zealand. The paper reports on the experiences of students studying New Zealand Certificate in English Language at a New Zealand tertiary institution. In this paper, we report on their learning experiences during their first months of study in their tertiary institution.

The moment when an international student enters into a relationship with a new social and cultural environment is a very sensitive one. This moment marks the time when, on the one hand, they must adapt themselves to a new social and academic space while, on the other, they need to devise learning strategies and sociocultural approaches in order to fit the new institution's social and cultural spaces. Thus, this paper deals with diverse issues that nevertheless eventually take convergent paths: employability, learning, capabilities and identity.

These overarching concepts are combined in order to answer the central question posed in this paper – How do international students understand and evaluate their *employability development*? In answering this question, we first undertake an overview of education and employment today. Second, we discuss the concept of capability that we use in conjunction with the notions of identity and learning. Third, we consider a notion that is central to this study – “community of practice” a concept coined by Lave and Wenger (1991). Fourth, we present our findings.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

International students leave a familiar space to go abroad, and often enter a different social and cultural space for study purposes. As Block reminds us, “when individuals move across geographical and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that their sense of identity is destabilized and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance” (2007, p. 864). In this context, we question how international students see and understand themselves as (1) second language learners and (2) as work-ready graduates.

We are assuming that international students, like other students, are fully aware of their educational mission – to develop a set of capabilities that will set them on a path to operating in an increasingly global life and work context. They are also aware that a tertiary institution is the place where they will learn and acquire, even if partially, the capabilities that they will need to achieve these goals. In this sense, the tertiary institution can be said to communicate with them.

In this section, we discuss the concepts of employability, capability, learning and identity, in the context of setting out the various challenges faced by international students when studying abroad.

### **Employability**

In a 2006 study of higher education in the UK, Mason, Williams, Crammer, and Guile (2006, p. 464) observed a recent change in employment requirements:

*In the wake of ... the increase in global market competition experienced by many employers, UK universities came under intense pressure to equip graduates with more than just the academic skills traditionally represented by a subject discipline and a class of degree. A number of reports issued by employers' associations and HE organisations urged universities to make more explicit efforts to develop the 'key,' 'core,' 'transferable' and/or 'generic' skills needed in many types of high-level employment.*

This phenomenon is not unique to the UK; it has affected tertiary institutions in many developed countries including New Zealand. One result has been an influx of international students into these countries. In fact, since the 1990s, the number of international students in New Zealand has increased massively. Between 1995 and 2015, numbers increased from under 10,000 to more than 60,000 (Education Counts, 2017). The contemporary context of globalisation has encouraged scholars to reformulate the question of graduate *employment*. Whereas in the 1980s and '90s, courses were mostly based on the idea of amassing a set of skills allegedly required by employers, in recent years researchers have called for a more holistic approach (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017, pp. 88-90).

As a consequence, over the last two decades, the concept of *employment* – conventionally used to measure students' academic outcomes – has drawn less and less attention and *employability* has increasingly been preferred over it.

Although employment is closely associated with concepts such as 'skills' and 'competence', which perhaps carry with them the idea of fixity, employability is associated with the concept of capability. Stephenson (1998) makes a clear distinction between competence and capability. If the former is "primarily about the ability to perform effectively, concerned largely with the here and now," the latter term "embraces competence but is also forward-looking, concerned with the realization of potential" (Stephenson, 1998, p. 2). He argues that capability is "an integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding used appropriately and effectively" (p. 2). He emphasises that capabilities are not only used in familiar contexts and to solve common problems, but can also be mobilised in unfamiliar contexts and to meet changing circumstances.

This shift in terminology reflects an attempt to describe the life-long learning process in which the international students of today are involved. According to Rowe and Zegwaard (2017, p. 89), today's graduates need to "manage uncertainty, ambiguity, and unpredictability" in an increasingly unstable labour market, a situation for which a fixed set of skills is no longer sufficient and relevant. In our digital age, with the fast-changing knowledge requirements of employment roles and their related performance characteristics, definitions of competence or fixed outcomes are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. Over the past 30 years, there have been major changes to the ways in which human performance has been described and measured, meaning that the concept of capability is increasingly relevant.



However, a close reading of the extensive literature on *employability* reveals that this concept would better be understood in terms of a process of acquiring *employability capabilities*, which implies an ability to perform professionally in workplace environments and beyond. As Holmes (2001, p. 12) argues, capabilities are relevant to 'performance,' which he explains as follows:

*Despite the rhetoric surrounding the skills agenda, it is by no means clear that employers should want skills per se; rather, they want the graduates they recruit and employ to perform in desirable ways – competently and effectively. This is the behavior, or performance that is required.*

Thus, performance is not only about technicality – being able to perform a task; it is also, and mainly, about behaviour – being able to act and think professionally. The notion of *performing employability capabilities* thus allows us to devise a very holistic understanding of what employability might be; and, in so doing, to offer a more detailed representation of the complex social processes at work in learning and acquiring capabilities.

### Community of practice

From what has been said above, we understand capability as a social construct by means of which individuals participate in the practices of their socio-academic communities of practice (hereafter CofPs) and express their knowledge of the norms, rules and expectations of their communities. The concept of CofP, coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), helps to describe how newcomers to a community learn the norms of the community from its more experienced members through legitimate peripheral participation. Thus through observation, and by standing in the periphery of the community, little by little learners move towards fuller participation in the community and its norms.

The participation of the members in such practices led Lave and Wenger (1991) to introduce the concept of communities of practice (CofP). The focus of a CofP is its in-situ or local practices, which are closely related to doing and knowing. In other words, any practice that is engaged in by social actors in a community stems from what their society does and knows. The doing and knowing of a community constitute that community. Its practices include all the abstract and concrete attributes of a given community and are the result of social interactions. These practices are both collective and individual – while there are shared norms among the community members, at the same time there are individual differences. Thus it is through practices that individuals enact their identities in complex ways.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) have defined a CofP as

*[a]n aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a CofP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.*

During this process of becoming an active and experienced member of a CofP, learners also navigate from one CofP to another within a landscape of practice. They negotiate their multiple memberships as they encounter different boundaries and translate their learning from one part of the landscape to another. When several communities of practice engage in interactions with one another, they form a landscape of practice (hereafter LofP) (Wenger-Trayner, Fenton-O'Creevy, Hutchinson, Kubiak, & Wenger-Trayner, 2014). A LofP has been defined as an entity having "shared practices, boundaries, peripheries, overlaps, connections, and encounters" (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). Individuals can move between many communities and have multiple memberships in them. Each community is known by its own practices. Boundary encounters are sites of learning which create special opportunities and challenges for learning.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is part of a larger study that used a narrative frame methodology to collect data from 180 international students from China, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Nepal at a New Zealand tertiary institution. This aspect of study focused on 45 students who completed the New Zealand Certificate in English Language. The frames use sentence starters to elicit responses from participants about their experiences from their own perspectives (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). The qualitative data analysis software package Nvivo11 was used to analyze the data collected. Data were first coded after which themes emerged out of the codings.

## FINDINGS

How do international students see themselves as learners and as work-ready students? Looking at the data we gathered, the first conclusion we can draw is that employability – the process of being employable – is understood first in terms of being able to socialise, to communicate with the target-language group (here English). Being employable is to be able to communicate in English.

Jane, a Chinese student, makes it clear that “the most important part is the communication with people.” Max, a Nepali student, explains that “the capabilities I thought would be important to learn was being able to express my thoughts into my writing.” Similarly, Sukhwinder, an Indian student, thinks that “communications skills are more beneficial to communicate with each other and sharing idea[s] for a better study.”

It is understandable that international students would emphasise communication capabilities. Developing communication skills is their major concern, as they now live in a country where English is the lingua franca and the medium of instruction and, eventually, will be the key to getting access to the local and the global labour market. This capability, that they will partly develop in New Zealand tertiary institutions, is transferable in any workplace in the country, and to many abroad. International students are conscious that to perform in any workplace they need to reach a certain level of English-language proficiency. This is also a key element in joining a CofP where communicating in English is an essential capability – a prerequisite to being involved and active within it.

Although understandable, it is surprising that none of the participants specifically mentioned work-related capabilities acquired during the first few months of their studies for the New Zealand Certificate in English Language. Nonetheless, this disconnect between the capabilities learned at the tertiary institution and those necessary for the workplace rapidly faded. When the same students were asked to think back about their learning trajectory, they all used the same discourse. In the case of communication capabilities that at the time were more an academic concern than a professional one, they considered that they had learned specific, work-oriented capabilities from them. Thinking back to his experience at the tertiary institution and reflecting on his academic experience, Sukhwinder concluded that he had learned “lot of things relevant to [his] studies, like how [...] to do work with a group [...], sharing different ideas with each other and get[ting] more knowledge.” Similarly, Sagar, an Indian student, found that university had helped him to develop professional capabilities such as “time management” and “problem solving.”

Through learning what might at first be perceived as a purely academic capability, communicating in English in an academic environment, all the participants learned “employability capabilities” that set them on the right path to becoming work-ready graduates.

Probably the most interesting findings of the study were the capabilities they thought were of particular importance – those that enabled them to function socially and culturally in appropriate ways. Max revealed that “[b]eing a student is a challenge and being an international student is even a bigger one. Consequently, I had to deal with academics’ challenges, social isolation, and cultural adjustment in the very first week in [name of tertiary institution].” In line with Max’s comments, Nishit mentioned that the first challenges he encountered were the “rules and education system of New Zealand which [are] totally different from my country’s education system.”

With these twin issues of social isolation and cultural appropriation, what is at stake is the idea of socialisation. This concept is really important for the students, who see it as the key to being accepted and recognised by others as part of the local community. Developing this attribute is very important in New Zealand society, where strong sociocultural capabilities are necessary and expected. This capability, alongside that of understanding different educational contexts, is of primary interest as these capabilities are not shared with – and often not expected from – local students. And, at some point, they will bring added value in educational terms, as capabilities that can be highlighted in the context of the labour market.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Thinking about the issue from a global perspective, we must not forget that being employable implies constructing a new identity for oneself. Thus, international students need to learn the target language, learn the necessary employability capabilities and, above all, learn how to appropriate their new social and cultural spaces – and perform all these tasks simultaneously. Ideally, this learning should take place through a dynamic process whereby communication capabilities and employability capabilities echo social and cultural capabilities, and vice-versa.

Finally, an implicit contradictory expectation is evident here. On the one hand, it is expected that international students should appropriate a new sociocultural space when at the same time they are working to become internationally employable. This situation raises two questions: (1) How can international students overcome this paradox? (2) How can tertiary institutions help international students to overcome the many challenges that stand in their way and become employable?

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# MISSION CREEP: REPRESENTING LEARNER CAPABILITIES IN TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PERSIAN GULF

David McMaster

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is drawn from my doctoral research on transnational higher education practice in the Persian Gulf. It is part reflection, part analysis of the curriculum development work I have been involved in for many years as it relates to the notion of capability-building for employability and the attendant privileging of certain epistemologies and pedagogies.

Prior to my recent arrival in New Zealand to take up a position at a well-established polytechnic, I had spent the previous 12 years working in higher education settings in the Middle East, most recently in an Higher Education Institute (HEI) originally set up by Polytechnics International New Zealand.

Like many educational practitioners who grapple with the somewhat contentious notion that graduate capability development should be the key driver of curriculum and that these so-called generic skills are transferable from tertiary education settings to the workplace, or from one employer to another; (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Kalfa & Taksa, 2015) skill-building is considered to be an important part of a tertiary education. Generally accepted capabilities such as highly developed communications, problem-solving and critical thinking skills are expected of graduates and form the foundations of a graduate identity (Clarke, 2017).

While many educators are sensitive to the imbrication of power and cultural ideologies in the production of curricular knowledge, in the context of transnational higher education and in particular international branch campuses of Western universities, how and why certain epistemologies and forms of cultural capital inform curriculum development and delivery remains under-researched.

To approach this question I explore, using a range of texts, the ways in which expatriate, predominantly Western, education practitioners working in the region frame the educational 'mission' of these institutions and the educational capabilities and (academic) development needs of students.

## BACKGROUND

The landscape of higher education in the Persian Gulf has changed dramatically over recent years. There has been a rapid expansion in the number of English-medium public and private universities and colleges throughout the region. The Gulf is now home to over 50 international branch campuses (IBCs) of institutions in France, Germany, Australia, India, the UK and the US, the majority of which are located in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar and are housed in purpose-built, state-financed "education cities" (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012; Hall, 2018). Many branch campuses and other transnational higher education (TNHE) projects are also found in Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Transnational educational institutions and joint-venture projects have become key actors in higher education reform across the region, and are undertaken in close collaboration with government, business and industry and other international education and training institutions and the broader community. In general terms, they aim to address pressing current and future needs of economic development and the region's transition to a knowledge-based economy. This transition is driven by the contemporary rhetoric of educational excellence, employability, twenty-first-century skills (new technologies/digital literacy, inquiry/project/problem-based learning), student-centred learning pedagogies, and the development of a global outlook.

In recently published 'state of the play' articles, both De Witt (2015) and Knight (2015) argue that the question of ethics has been virtually left off the research agenda. Surveying the research field, De Witt points out that "[t]o date, there has been insufficient attention to norms, values and the ethics of internationalisation practice ... the approach has been too pragmatically oriented towards reaching targets without a debate on the potential risks and ethical consequences" (De Witt, 2015, p. 354). Knight notes that while research on historical forms of colonisation on education has been a prime focus of academic research, little attention has been paid to the cultural effects of TNHE (Knight, 2015).

## CURRICULUM CONCERNS

During my curriculum development work, I became aware that these narratives were rapidly becoming embedded in the institutional ethos and were having real, material effects on the design and delivery of curricula. I was attached to the Art and Design Department and began to work alongside design colleagues and students to examine the kinds of language challenges that had arisen during classes. The first issue that struck me was that the gateway course, Design History, lacked any mention of Islamic design or Islamic calligraphy. When I asked the course leader about this, he explained that (despite being recruited as an expert) he did not have a background in Islamic design and, in any case, students needed to learn about Western art history and design which, he argued, forms the basis of current visual design practice. I had a similar discussion with the convenor of a compulsory module on contemporary business ethics which contained no mention of (the long tradition of) Islamic business ethics. It was becoming increasingly clear that the so-called "internationalization at home" experience that we were providing to students was premised on clear assumptions about what knowledge was valued and what was not.

Setting aside for the moment the broader cultural effects of these decisions and the power/knowledge matrix at work here, these assumptions are in fact paradoxically at odds with the mission to equip students with job-ready skills. Subsequent research with prospective employers in the design field revealed that it was assumed that students would be trained to work with both traditions. Indeed, the most sought-after employees were those designers who understood the aesthetic and design principles and cultural symbolism and communicative power of both traditions, their differences and how they overlapped and merged – or, as one employer put it to me, how they were in constant transformative conversations.

## FRAMING TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE IN THE GULF

In a response to these experiences, I began to dig into the scholarly work being undertaken on transnational and international branch campuses being set up in the Gulf region. Much of this work is based on practitioner case studies – academic teachers and researchers directly involved in programme delivery or, tangentially, in the evaluation or investigation of such programmes.

Interestingly, the first article that I happened upon was entitled "How do we 'Know' the Middle East?" Here, using the occasion of her presidential address to the Middle East Studies Association of North America, Virginia Aksan (2010) takes aim at what she sees as the problems emanating from the commodification of knowledge in academic life, exemplified by the growth of branch campuses of American universities in the Gulf that "export an idealized American education" which she sees as "a new form of missionary impulse" (p. 9).

As I read through this address, I remember thinking: "Finally someone in the field is using her position at an important event to problematise the presence of IBCs in the region." However, her central concern was not the cultural effects of importing a dozen US universities, complete with curricula delivered by US expatriate experts – many of whom had little or no experience of teaching in the Gulf region. Drawing on what I would argue are clear neo-orientalist tropes – in this instance, that Arab cultures simply buy or copy Western ideas without understanding their real value or meaning – Aksan claims that IBCs simply simulate Western institutional partners – without however, given their location, being able to promote critical questioning. This will inevitably restrict academic freedom, which she views as the heart of the social sciences and the humanities.

In direct response to these criticisms, Mehran Kamrava, the dean of the School of Foreign Service in Qatar Georgetown, claims that her university has "complete and unfettered academic freedom" both in teaching and research projects. Kamrava (2010) provides as evidence – completely unironically – that the courses on offer include *The Problem of Identity in the Middle East*, and *The Problem of God and Islam and the West*, and are taught by Jesuit faculty or by faculty "from other religious persuasions" (p. 133.) For Kamrava, not only is this evidence of academic freedom and critical inquiry, but it illustrates, despite its location, the institution's "mission of educating future generations of global citizens" (p. 134). Questions about academic freedom aside, what is troubling about Kamrava's rebuttal is that she seems unaware of the implications of the obvious cultural imperialism that it draws on: expatriate American Jesuit academics arriving in Qatar to teach Middle Eastern/Gulf Muslim students about the "problems" of Middle Eastern identities, God and relations with the West. Western teachers are somehow in a privileged and culturally superior position that allows them to explain back to their students their own cultural worlds and, having benefited from this instruction, that their students will therefore be transformed into "global citizens."

The key question to be asked here is just how pervasive is this cultural (neo-)imperialist approach in the literature on TNHE in the Gulf? What narratives are at work in constituting this particular eduscape? To explore these questions, in what follows I investigate a range of case studies written by academics teaching in programmes in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Oman and the HEIs that make up Education City in Doha, Qatar, in order to get a clearer understanding on how TNHE projects have been framed by those who work within them. Specifically, I examine how academics teaching in the Gulf frame their pedagogic mission; how they represent the challenges they face; and, crucially, how students' capabilities and educational needs are framed.

### THREE BOOKS – DAHL, SAUDELLI AND MITCHELL

The title of Marilyn Dahl's (2011) book-length study of her setting up and teaching in a TNHE programme in Abu Dhabi in the United Emirates – *Failure to Thrive in Constructivism – A Cross-cultural Malady* – clearly announces the ideological pitch of her analysis: the Emirati student body is presented as being undernourished and unable to grow, despite the educational sustenance it is being fed.

To make her case for this civilising or modernising mission, writing in the narrative style of a colonial missionary discussing 'the natives,' Dahl presents orientalist caricatures of generic Emirati/Arab students whom she names Ahmed and Layla. For Ahmed, she imagines that commencing in the TNHE programme is like entering "an alien world" (p. 5) where the classroom technology – a Smartboard (instead of a chalkboard) and a laptop – will "introduce him to a world he has never before imagined" (p. 5). Unfortunately, Ahmed is not intellectually ready for this new learning context and Dahl tells us that soon "his attention begins to wander. He doesn't like having to pay attention, think, plan, discuss, or solve problems. He prefers classes where he can daydream" (p. 7). How does Dahl analyze this scene? By pathologising her student: "From a Western point of view, he seems to be immature and lazy; and perhaps he is. However, there is also a historical, cultural and epistemological basis for his seeming apathy and resistance to learning" in a Western classroom environment (p. 8).

Dahl then moves on to introduce the figure of Layla, who is presented as narcissistic and vacuous. Dahl surmises that “she has almost no knowledge of anything beyond fashion and household affairs” (p. 10) and exhibits little interest in education as she is simply waiting to be married off.

Engaging in simplistic psychologising, Dahl asks rhetorically: “What aside from basic character and personality is causing Ahmed and Aisha so much trouble with their college learning?” (p. 10), factors that would explain why they have not “progressed beyond the first level of cognitive development” as indicated by the students’ writing abilities (p. 11). The answer, Dahl asserts, lies in Islam – “the profound reverence for every written word of the Quran makes it feel like a sacrilege to paraphrase or summarize anything that is written” (p. 11). This, combined with the students’ low level of cognitive development, derails implementing a curriculum based on constructivist principles. Thus, Dahl claims, the obvious educational benefits are not immediately apparent, as they are with Western students for, with Arab students, “the quickening of the mind is not as spontaneous as might be expected” (p. 13).

For Dahl, this curriculum failure can be explained not just with reference to Arab students’ previous educational experiences and the resultant lack of cognitive development and the effects of Islam, but also by the fact that the autocratic regime in the emirate is not conducive to constructivist learning principles: “Much of Western educational methodology is framed by democratic ideology and societal values. It presupposes a kind of individual inner motivation, organization of thought, global experience and level of awareness that has not yet developed in Arabic society” (p. 38).

Dahl also takes aim at Abu Dhabi’s entire education system, “Arabic educators [sic]” and indeed the entire population of the emirate, which she claims work in concert to “stifle all independent and critical thought” (p. 20), when what is needed are educational reforms that will lead to a “quicken of initiative, thinking, inquiry, discovery and application” (p. 38). Astonishingly, Dahl dismisses these concerns, claiming that they simply represent resistance to change and merely reflect “the entrenched habits and epistemological beliefs” (p. 85) of the indigenous teachers, students and institutions of the emirate.

Mary Saudelli’s *The Balancing Act: International Higher Education in the 21st Century* is a book-length account of the experiences of those she repeatedly calls “international educators” (based on the sole criterion that they have worked in HEIs in different countries). Unlike Dahl’s one-person account, Saudelli’s book is based on qualitative interviews with colleagues working at the Dubai Women’s College in the United Arab Emirates.

Saudelli states that the purpose of the programme is to prepare young women to enter the workforce by providing a pedagogical space that “values the students’ beliefs, empowers them in their decision-making process, and gives them voice in this rapidly changing developing country” (56). This, we learn, is to be accomplished through what Saudelli calls “21st century epistemologies and skills, knowledges and ideologies.”

According to research participants, the purpose of the twenty-first-century programme is to “bring the world into the classroom” (p. 70) to students who are described as being protected from the real world. “We are hired here as international educators to bring the world into the classroom.” (p. 70), as students “haven’t got a clue what’s going on around them” (p. 85). For other teachers, the mission is framed more coercively: “We have to force them to learn how to do things ... we have to force them to be curious ... we have to force them to take an interest in their own education” (p. 97).

The key to this much-needed transformation is critical thinking. Saudelli’s teachers claim that “this is the first time they [students] have been asked to think critically” (p. 94), and therefore they struggle to understand and make predictions about texts, offer opinions, identify facts, make choices or decisions, or participate in debates. These deficiencies are attributed to previous learning regimes, where rote learning and regurgitating information for exams was the norm in schools described as “incubators” or “vacuums” (p. 71). These schools not only protected students from the real world, but were places where students “have never opened or maintained a notebook” (p. 71).

Saudelli's study provides little detail about the content of the curriculum. She explains that it is designed to wake students from their passivity by means of critical thinking projects which will enable them to "get out and find out how this stuff applies in the real world" (p. 74). In part, this "stuff" consists of what is labelled "authentic" learning through the reading and discussion of newspaper articles focussed on confronting issues that "reflect what is true out there now" (p. 91) – issues that students are supposedly protected from such as divorce, crime and labour rights. According to her study participants, students have no knowledge of these issues and, once introduced to the texts, are not able to read them appropriately as they naively take news articles as fact. Therefore, they argue, learners need to be trained to read what is "missing or eliminated" (p. 74) because, in the words of another participant commenting on the same instructional material, "there is a lot of exaggeration" in media reporting in the region, and therefore students need to be able to make "an assessment of information to recognize what is true and what is not true" (p. 93) – although how teachers should go about this is not discussed.

Another curricular example offered in Saudelli's book is a research project where students undertake online research on a company based in Dubai, in preparation for site visits and interviews with key personnel. Their research is subsequently presented to classmates and teachers. By their assessment, as these students are "going from zero," the fact that they were able to research a company and present their findings was seen as a success. However, the teachers concluded that as the students struggled to respond to their post-presentation question – "What is your perception of the company from the company visit?" – their response revealed that they had a "very narrow and limited understanding" (p. 98) of the companies they researched.

My reading of these two accounts of curricular events is that, in order to intellectually rescue students, their epistemic capacities need to be framed accordingly. On the one hand, we are told that Arab students are sheltered, have inappropriate or inadequate learning histories, know little about the "real world" and, worse still, what they do know is not understood properly – that is to say, critically. Further, we learn that students struggle with tasks and pedagogical approaches that they are said to lack experience of – and yet it is their performance in these tasks that simultaneously evidences their lack of ability. It is little wonder that teachers report that students are "confused" (p. 74) and often have "blank looks on their faces" (p. 87). To me, in these instances, the curriculum and so-called critical thinking are simply wielded as instruments in the production of student failure.

In *Tocqueville in Arabia: Dilemmas in a Democratic Age*, Joshua Mitchell gives an account of his time setting up and teaching at Georgetown University's campus in Qatar, invoking and marshalling discourses of the clash of civilisations, civilising missions and the figure of the white saviour whose "coercive concern" (Jaffe-Walter, 2016) is to benevolently rescue students from their (historically explicable) ignorance by revealing the world as it really is – and what they need to do to be able to participate in this world.

Turning to discuss his curriculum, Mitchell confides that he has "grave apprehensions" about teaching Plato, Augustine, Rousseau and Marx (among other figures) who make up the Western political canon, as "students in Qatar were disadvantaged by not having had the thorough exposure to European and American history" that their Western counterparts enjoy – although this "deficiency" was somewhat compensated for by their understanding of the pervasiveness of religion. However, voicing his students' concerns, Mitchell acknowledges that students want modernisation but not Westernisation. He interprets this desire as a misunderstanding of European/Western thought that "still fills the imagination of peoples neither quite able to embrace nor repudiate the world that is now upon them."

Resorting to a kind of pop-anthropology, Mitchell argues that the effects of this inability to transition to (late) modernity is evident in Arabs' inability to voice opinions as individuals, but only as members of an extended family in which, he argues, they occupy a fixed role. The effect of this, Mitchell tells us, is that unlike his American students, who see the world as "infinite possibility" and therefore see roles as constraints, Qataris begin with a "standpoint of limitation and occasionally ponder a breach." Mitchell concludes, again ventriloquising his Qatari students, that they reject the liberation that a Tocquevillian, democratic man offers, "and they do not want it because they cannot



imagine living in a world that presupposes infinite possibilities." According to Mitchell, this explains why Americans are freer with their intimate relations, but are also concerned about global suffering. Qataris, on the other hand, are role-bound and as such their intimate lives are limited to arranged marriages – consequentially, they see their obligations as being limited to their immediate families.

Faced with such intractable issues and given that "liberty is not the metanarrative of the Middle East," Mitchell argues that the antidote is a liberal arts education, as only this form of education "draws [students] out of themselves" and can "produce thoughtful citizens who are able to think both critically and deferentially." However, when challenged by students who ask why he teaches Western canonical writers exclusively, he responds enigmatically that they, like him, will need to spend a lifetime trying to understand these texts. Clearly, this is not the kind of critical thinking Mitchell is looking for.

## MISSION CREEP: WESTERN LIBERAL ARTS AS UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE

I now turn to a range of academic papers by education practitioners working in the Gulf region. Each of the writers of these brief case studies – which cover journalism, international relations, theatre studies, literary studies, and rhetoric and communication along with language issues in medical training – argues for the importance of what is variously referred to as "American-style liberal arts," "American and European university education," "the Western university system," "American liberal education," "American courses," "Western liberal curricula" – labels which have the effect of branding ownership, either in the name of the West in general or the US in particular. This association is further entrenched when it is seen to be coextensive with the so-called "modernising mission" of these programmes, which rhetorically frames branch campuses of prestigious American universities as culturally benign, quasi-development institutions whose presence in Qatar is explicable by a simple formula: modern states require modern citizens who therefore need a modern education. According to this way of thinking, liberal arts possess a "seemingly inextricable link to modern democracy" (Telafigi et al., 2014, p. 185), the best exemplar of which is offered by the US.

Across these studies, liberal arts is presented in an unproblematic, idealised form of values-based education that universally promotes not only critical thinking – seen as the unique province of Western/American liberal arts curricula – but also promises to develop "free thinking" (Cinali, 2010) and encourage a "purity of intellectual inquiry pursued for its own sake" (Telafigi et al., 2014, p. 186). It is also possessed of a "transformative power" (p. 114) that creates "rounded citizens" (Burns, 2014, p. 162) and fosters a democratic ethos described by one commentator as "the creative tension between cooperation and competition, a belief in freedom of inquiry and expression and the development of autonomy and self-reliance" (Tellis, 2014, p. 156) – a space where students become "self-driven," "self-reflexive, critical and adventurous" (p. 156).

A liberal arts education also transforms parochial outlooks into global perspectives (Kane, 2014, p. 95) by taking students out of their comfort zones (Risse, 2013) by teaching them "how to perceive, understand and navigate the world" (Woodworth, 2014, p. 174), to "speak truth to power" (Wright, 2014, p. 119) and allow them to "actualize their own humanity" (p. 118).

This idealised framing of the Western/US liberal studies curriculum underwrites, in turn, an idealised representation of disciplinary knowledge and practice in courses offered across the region's IBCs. For example, discussing his journalism course at Northwestern University's IBC in Qatar, Abusharif (2014) argues that the press as the guardian of democracy, functions to protect the public from "abuses of power" (p. 199). Although some attention is paid to the need to localise curriculum content, the course delivered in Qatar is purposefully identical to that delivered at the home campus in the US, and is proudly taught "unalloyed" (Abusharif, 2014, p. 198). As a result, although acknowledging the "temptation to narrowly reduce the universality" (p. 200) of journalistic practice, students are taught the history, contemporary practice and cultural and political contexts of journalism (including standards and ethics) of the US as the universal model of the "free press in the free world" (p. 203). However, according to

Abusharif, having advocated the universality of the journalism curriculum, the course teacher conjectures what their students will actually do with the skills and knowledge acquired during the programme, concluding that “we may harbour hope that a more open flow of information and a broader breadth of what can be covered as ‘news’ will be an outcome for the region” (p. 203).

## CONCLUSION – CURRICULUM CONCERNS REDUX

Returning to my curriculum concerns, following the informal meeting on curriculum issues described above, and emboldened by my reading, I diplomatically expressed my disquiet to a senior executive who suggested that as I had not been with institution from the outset, I should look at the original consultation research undertaken prior to the establishment of the new university. After some digging around, I discovered the original presentation slides produced by the branding company which collated the findings of community and industry focus groups. These groups were asked what kind of institution the new HEI should be.

In fact, this material revealed that both parents and prospective students did not want the new institution simply to produce trained workers for the changing economy. They agreed that the university should contribute to nation-building and economic wellbeing through education, as promulgated in recently publicised national educational reform policy proposals. Importantly, however, this group also maintained that the students’ ethical outlook should reflect their role as vicegerents of Allah, and the new university should be grounded in Islamic principles of work, understood as *amal* and *fi’l*. (Although both terms are conventionally translated as ‘work’ in English, they have much broader connotations. In broad terms, Islam is considered to be the ideology of practice and the practice of ideology – a religion of action, the praxis of the believers.) As originally proposed, this new institution would offer students an “holistic education” and be a model of “applied Islam,” where both students and university staff would be mindful of their “national and religious obligations” and would model a contemporary, moderate voice of “faith-based development.”

The findings of this market research exercise, presented to the opening team of the university, were rather different to the information highlighted during my induction six months later, which presented the university as an entirely secular institution where – by means of imported Western curricula (with embedded generic employability skills) delivered in English by internationalised educators – learners would receive an “internationalization at home” educational experience.

The changes that transformed the university as originally envisaged have now become the focus of my doctoral work.

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## WHAT LIES BENEATH? THE DISCOURSE OF EMPLOYABILITY AND THE IDEAL, WORK-READY SUBJECT

Philippa Keaney

This article is a reflection on the discourse of employability and work-readiness. The ideal subject of this discourse is queried, and I explore what is included in, and what is excluded from, this particular notion of subjectivity. This reflection seeks to reveal lacunae or spaces for transforming our understanding of how this discourse shapes lived experiences. The framing of the subject of this discourse is considered within the neoliberal context, with brief consideration given to the affective, geographical, temporal and moral dimensions inscribed within this site.

That employability is topical within academe is evidenced by the sheer volume of material that engages in some way with the concept of employability. A search for the term 'employability' in Google Scholar returns over 200,000 references to academic books and articles, while the term 'employability AND curriculum' returns over 80,000 results. Education at all levels, but particularly post-secondary, focuses not only on technical skills and knowledge, but on providing opportunities for learners to develop transferable or twenty-first-century skills. These are seen as crucial to the employability agenda, which is reinforced in both national and institutional policy (Arora, 2013). Educational outcomes coalesce with the concept of graduates' work-readiness and future work success (Wolff & Booth, 2017). Education within New Zealand is, as Ell and Grudnoff (2013, p. 74) note, "very much in the thrall of international discourses," and its engagement with the employability agenda is no exception.

Skills, personal skills, capabilities, transferable skills and attributes are all terms that are often used interchangeably, although they lack agreed definitions (Leveson, 2000). Similarly, employability is interpreted, and measured, in different ways (Yorke & Knight, 2006). For the purposes of this reflection, I draw on the Otago Polytechnic (n.d.) definition of capabilities – "a range of personal qualities and attributes that enable [learners] to be effective, and which enable them to perform in the workplace and in the community." Otago Polytechnic has developed a framework for learner capabilities that, at the time of writing, consists of 25 attributes that are considered to contribute to graduate employability. These include such traits as being effective communicators, working well in teams, acting sustainably and being culturally competent (Otago Polytechnic, 2018).

While Otago Polytechnic's learner capability programme aims to add value to learners by enhancing work-readiness, its development is employer-driven, with research data from employers identifying the capabilities considered important in new graduates. An employer-centric approach allows employers to play a key role in setting the agenda for educational outcomes (Baptiste, 2001; Gerrard, 2017). Tension exists in this research approach, which identifies and segments industry into discrete sectors that are more reminiscent of the nineteenth century than the present state of work-in-flux. The World Economic Forum (2016) predicted that over 5.1 million jobs could be lost in the five years preceding 2020, due to market upheaval. Also, with less access to secure, long-term and full-time paid employment, the employer-centric approach encourages an environment in which subjects strive to meet the dictates of employers in order to compete for diminishing returns (Down & Smyth, 2012; Read, 2009).

Euphemistic language is used to describe the subject who can weather the uncertainty of this labour market. Adjectives such as flexible, agile, adaptable and entrepreneurial are, at face value, considered positive personal attributes of the employable subject. The Otago Polytechnic framework (2018, p. 3) describes a capable person as

one who can “adapt quickly to new and changing situations. Operate outside my comfort zone.” There is no space within this paradigm to challenge change, whether it is seen as good, bad or indifferent. Individuals must cope or be left behind. In this sense, adaptability and flexibility can arguably be read as enforced acceptance and positivity when deemed surplus to employer requirements (Sultana, 2018; Urciuoli, 2008). This trope of individual flexibility in the face of change also undermines the potential for collective and collaborative approaches to seeking positive social outcomes, and the wherewithal to oppose changes that reinforce conditions of inequity.

The discourse of employability has achieved the status of logical or sound guidance, foreclosing any challenge to neoliberal hegemony (Arora, 2013). Lorey (2015, p. 66) refers to the notion of precarity within the neoliberal context as a governance tool which normalises the “just tolerable.” This level of acceptance calls to mind the words of Erich Fromm (1965, p. xiii): “Modern man still is anxious and tempted to surrender his freedom to dictators of all kinds, or to lose it by transforming himself into a small cog in the machine, well fed, and well clothed, yet not a free man but an automaton.”

The capable, employable individual potentially lacks the freedom to create self beyond employable subjectivity. They may be so intent on meeting the criteria of that subjectivity, as discussed below, that alternatives for self and collective ways of existing are not considered.

Neoliberalism is intimately engaged with the creation of *homo economicus*, who is essentially a form of capital – a being that requires continual maintenance in order to remain competitive (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Read, 2009). The commodification of the self encompasses physicality, skills, predispositions, knowledge and attitudes, so that one effectively becomes, as Foucault (2008, p. 226) noted, an “entrepreneur of the self.” Seaman’s research (cited in Urciuoli, 2008, p. 211) with students in elite United States higher education institutions revealed that these students considered themselves, not primarily as people, but rather as “products,” a very telling reflection of the commodification of self.

The commodification of self contributes to the fetishisation of skills, which is evidenced by the flourishing business of teaching capabilities (Urciuoli, 2008). In the United States, billions of dollars are generated annually from the delivery of soft skills training (Fixsen & Ridge, 2018). Professional social media giant LinkedIn (2018) boasts over 562 million users worldwide, with student membership growing. The platform offers a site where commodified, employable individuals can showcase themselves, and it also promotes and receives revenue from soft skills training (Petrone, 2018). Thus, its members are engaged in the cyclical and competitive development of self in order to remain employable.

In a similar vein to Foucault’s entrepreneur, Thomas Lemke (cited in Read, 2009, p. 30) coined the phrase “companies of one.” This relentless development of the self takes place in competition with others. It invokes a playing field of winners and losers. Certain skills and ways of being are privileged over others, with social and collective concerns accorded less importance than individual achievement (Grummell & Murray, 2015; Rooney & Rawlinson, 2016).

The employable subject becomes, and remains, a productive economic participant. In the process, social and political citizenship is legitimised (Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). According to the Tertiary Strategy 2014-2019, the New Zealand Government (2014, p. 7) has tasked tertiary education with “improved economic outcomes” in order to develop individuals as “confident, creative, and culturally enriched good citizens.” Here, good citizenship is explicitly linked with economic performance, while existing inequalities are submerged. The term “culturally enriched” is so vague as to be entirely meaningless. By explicitly identifying confidence and creativity as personal attributes of the *good citizen*, the rhetoric moves within the realm of emotional regulation (Fixsen & Ridge, 2018). The inference is that if one lacks confidence and/or creativity, one is not a good citizen. Thus, individuals are nudged towards the required neoliberal subjectivity (Cromby & Willis, 2013).

If economic participation is a requisite of good citizenship, those who are not economically productive are potentially at fault or deficit. As Read (2009) discusses, while formal governmental regulation declines under neoliberalism,

areas for intervention and scope for governance expand. Good citizens are not only self-regulating, but also function as regulatory interventions within the social sphere (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). If we circle back to Lorey's (2015) precarity, those who are perceived as less than "just tolerable" are susceptible to moral blame from those within the zone of the tolerable (Cairns, 2013; Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). It is not the conditions that are questioned, but the individual.

While attribution of fault to others for perceived non-achievement may be externally manifested, there is an internal affective dimension also. As mentioned above, the employability discourse, situated within a neoliberal framework, has an air of moral rightness about it. It has become normalised. Within this discourse, all are on an equal footing and we have ostensibly forsaken differentiation based on class, ethnicity, gender, health and sexuality. In spite of this rhetoric, however, the evidence demonstrates that lived experiences are still mediated through these lenses (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Rooney & Rawlinson, 2016). For those who may experience structural inequalities, the performative act of employability within this fantasy realm of (in)equality results in the internalisation of fear, shame and guilt (Cairns, 2013; Costea, Amiridis, & Crump, 2012; Pimlott-Wilson, 2017).

In an analysis of graduate recruitment programme advertising, Costea et al. (2012) drew on the work of Georg Simmel to further explore the affective subjectivity of graduates within the discourse of employability. In their conclusions, they identify not only the affective orientation but also the temporal dislocation within this discourse. The language of recruitment advertising reflects a future-focused potentiality for a subject who is continually faced with failure, representing a "tragic self-seeking journey" (Costea, Amiridis, & Crump, 2012, p. 35). This self-in-the-making, employable subject, is a linear project without a destination endpoint. Employability is implacably future-focused. It becomes a Sisyphean endeavour, an endless cycle in which the self is its own "do-it-yourself (DIY)" project, striving for a future that does not exist (Beck, cited in Kelly, 2001, p. 26).

The employability agenda also has geographical or spatial implications. It requires mobile workers, ready to participate in a globalised labour market. However, the term globalisation has become a site of semantic satiation, one that masks both ideology and real-world practices (Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010). Economic growth has not contributed positively to either equitable access to resources or improved sustainability for most of the globe (Alexander, 2018). Employment is not universally accessible or experienced, even when knowledge, skills, qualifications and capabilities are commensurate. This remains the case within a global context, where being competitive requires mobility and thereby affords the potential for new forms of disadvantage and alienation (Tomlinson, 2012). Mobility has acquired the status of a personal attribute, one that is a necessary component of self-preparation for labour engagement – yet mobility across borders is a site of privilege, not something that is widely and freely available (Alexander, 2018).

As with temporal dislocation, mobility, or the striving to become mobile, is also experienced affectively. The multiple interpretations and importance of geographical spaces are overlooked by the catchphrase of mobility. For those who are able to be mobile, familial, geographical and social connections are rendered invisible in the act of mobility, as is the impact of labour market changes and loss of local work opportunities (Cairns, 2013; Pimlott-Wilson, 2017). Various dislocations that are engendered through mobility may, in lived experience, become internalised as ambivalence and discomfort (Cairns, 2013).

In summary, in this reflection I have explored some of the inclusions and exclusions within the discourse of employability and work-readiness. I have identified key features of the neoliberal employable subject. Specifically, I have identified the self-regulating, self-in-progress *homo economicus*, situated in a context that privileges the individual over the collective, within a competitive market.

I initially set out to identify lacunae or spaces where we might transform, or at least question, our understanding of how the discourse of employability is enacted as lived experience. Included in this discourse is a normalisation of citizenship that requires economic participation and an infinite quest to improve the self in order to achieve, at the expense of others.

A growing body of research examining the underbelly of the neoliberal employability agenda has informed this reflection. The employer-driven approach to determining the attributes graduates require to be work-ready identifies a gap in which learners' voices are not heard. I suggest that the most important lacuna is this very void. We need to hear the voices of our learners and graduates.

Given that capabilities are defined and driven by the employability agenda, I suggest that another space for exploration would critique and challenge this agenda, and the old and new inequalities it engenders. If higher education exists to churn out economically productive subjects, let it be clear in its communication of "pedagogies of consequence," as Unterhalter (2010, p. 95) terms it. Higher education could reclaim the role of conscience and critic and ruffle the feathers of the hegemony.

Imagine – yes, imagine – what might happen if our students radically questioned the agenda that has become so 'logical' and immutable. Imagine if we could work with learners and others to collectively challenge inequitable access to resources and life experiences, including paid labour. Imagine if we were willing to hear that there are other ways of being and doing, other lived experiences, that carry meaning and value. Imagine.

We are not preparing our graduates for Wonderland. Can we accept the challenge to prepare them to speak their truth in a world where all is not as it appears?

*"Have some wine," the March Hare said in an encouraging tone. Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. "I don't see any wine," she remarked. "There isn't any," said the March Hare. "Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it," said Alice angrily.*

(Carroll, 1999, p. 109).

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