

**CONWY 1 – SELF-CHAIRED  
THEME: THE STUDENT VOICE**

**3.1 Andy Coverdale, Claire Mann, Odessa Petit Dit Dariel, University of Nottingham**

**SYMPOSIUM: 3 papers, 75 Minutes**

***The Student Voice: What students are saying about their visual learning experiences - Paper 1: Process – Empowering the student voice***

The notion of engaging, motivating, and empowering learners through learner-centred and personalized classroom design has become an increasingly popular topic of interest in a number of high-profile educational research studies, both nationally and internationally. These projects call for dramatic shifts in pedagogical strategies from traditional didactic delivery to more active, constructivist designs, and an increased use of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). But what do the learners think about their educational experiences? In a research study undertaken by the Visual Learning Lab (VLL) at the University of Nottingham, VLL Student Interns developed and carried out a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project entitled “The Student Voice: What students are saying about their learning experiences.” The main objective of this study is to use the students’ voices to develop staff development workshops as a method of feeding back comments made by learners in order to ultimately improve the quality of learning experiences in higher education (HE). Another VLL project running concurrently will invite students at the University to participate in a video competition to share their own personal learning experiences.

This first paper on this theme reports on conducting the research project; the process and issues related to eliciting the student voice.

In light of the challenges facing academics in HE (Theme 2) as they engage with the changes taking place in their classrooms as a result of these technologies and shifting paradigms, the VLL Student Interns used PAR as a means of enabling communication and collaboration between researchers, students and staff and to set the foundations for on-going ‘action-reflection’ cycles. PAR is a research method which is built on critical pedagogy and is particularly appropriate for this study involving students researching students. The research study has developed through a number of stages, starting with the Primary Investigators at the VLL engaging with community participants (Student Interns) to identify relevant learner issues. This led to the initiation of a research project (Student Focus Groups at a various departments exploring the Students’ Voice) and an identified action plan (feedback to staff and Heads of School through staff development workshops). As reflection is a key element in PAR, it was essential that the interns identify and examine the ways in which their roles as students may have influenced the extent to which participants shared their views, and how their perspectives influenced data analysis.

***The Student Voice: What students are saying about their visual learning experiences - Paper 2: Student voice on visual learning pedagogies***

The notion of engaging, motivating, and empowering learners through learner-centred and personalized classroom design has become an increasingly popular topic of interest in a number of high-profile educational research studies, both nationally and internationally. These projects call for dramatic shifts in pedagogical strategies from traditional didactic delivery to more active, constructivist designs, and an increased use of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). But what do the learners think about their educational experiences? In a research study undertaken by the Visual Learning Lab (VLL) at the University of Nottingham, VLL Student Interns developed and carried out a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project entitled “The Student Voice: What students are saying about their learning experiences.” The main objective of this study is to use the students’ voices to develop staff development workshops as a method of feeding back comments made by learners in order to ultimately improve the quality of learning experiences in higher education (HE). Another VLL project running concurrently will invite students at the University to participate in a video competition to share their own personal learning experiences.

This second paper reports on the analysis and findings of the research relating to outcomes for pedagogy and praxis.

Student interns have played an integral role in VLL activities since June 2008, working with Schools across the University to deliver workshops and provide training and support for both staff and students in new learning

technologies and related pedagogies. This role was recognized as offering a unique position with which to undertake research which promoted the development of the 'student voice'. A series of focus groups were conducted across the University in a number of Faculties and disciplines. The interns used a structured outline of basic questions based on generic and visual learning experiences to ensure consistency, whilst the semi-formal (informal?) format allowed further discussion to develop across a wider range of generic and discipline-specific issues in student learning. Adopting a grounded theory approach, analyses of the focus group transcripts were conducted collaboratively by all interns through face-to-face meetings and remotely using an online wiki. Emergent themes were identified and categorized around key pedagogical practices and mapped against a range of learning situations, environments and contexts. These themes and categories informed the development of key guidelines for good teaching practice which provided the basis for the staff development workshops, whilst key quotations from the transcripts were selected for the video. Findings revealed wide-ranging interpretations of what constitutes visual learning, whilst multiple aspects of visual learning were evident in discussions around specific technologies and learning contexts.

***The Student Voice: What students are saying about their visual learning experiences - Paper 3: Using the student voice to impact teaching development - a video workshop approach.***

The notion of engaging, motivating, and empowering learners through learner-centred and personalized classroom design has become an increasingly popular topic of interest in a number of high-profile educational research studies, both nationally and internationally. These projects call for dramatic shifts in pedagogical strategies from traditional didactic delivery to more active, constructivist designs, and an increased use of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). But what do the learners think about their educational experiences? In a research study undertaken by the Visual Learning Lab (VLL) at the University of Nottingham, VLL Student Interns developed and carried out a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project entitled "The Student Voice: What students are saying about their learning experiences." The main objective of this study is to use the students' voices to develop staff development workshops as a method of feeding back comments made by learners in order to ultimately improve the quality of learning experiences in higher education (HE). Another VLL project running concurrently will invite students at the University to participate in a video competition to share their own personal learning experiences.

This third paper reflects on disseminating the practical output from the outcomes.

Staff development workshops initiate new cycles of PAR as academics make changes in their modules to incorporate comments made by students and begin their own 'action-reflection' cycle. In addition, our own cycle will be revised and refined through feedback from students/staff/audience such as this and other conferences.

As Hargreaves (2007) purports 'what is the point of educational research if not to inform policy and practice.' It was therefore key that this research project offer tangible output from the outcomes which could inform changes in teaching practice. The student interns decided to make a video to visually represent the student voice to teachers in a development session. The paper reports on the two-tier approach taken to ensure personalised feedback for departments relevant to their localised pedagogy, as well as generic feedback to maximise the impact of the findings. The video was delivered in a participatory workshop environment in staff workshops and staff comments noted as part of the ongoing data collection and consistent with the PAR reflective cycle used at each stage of this project.

This session will be a participatory video workshop demonstrating the approach used to disseminate the findings and to invite feedback from conference participants which may inform the PAR approach to our work and inform and maintain our reflective practice in this work.

**CONWY 2 – CHAIR: KUANG-HSU CHIANG  
THEME: STAKEHOLDERS & GOVERNANCE**

**3.2 Maria Gallo, St Angela's College, Sligo, NUI, Galway, Ireland**

***Institutional Advancement: Responding to Challenges in Building Relationships with Alumni***

Marketing strategies, alumni reunions and fundraising campaigns are growing in popularity across the higher education sector worldwide.

Institutional Advancement (IA) is an under-researched area of higher education, especially in a European context. How does a concept like IA become so familiar in practice to many, but still manage to remain so elusive? This study is an opportunity to examine IA closer, with particular reference to an Irish university setting.

Institutional Advancement is a concerted and strategic approach to building relationships with key university actors in order to increase support for the institution (Rowland 1986, 18). In this study I focus on alumni—past students and graduates. IA is comprised of three disciplines: communications and marketing, alumni relations and development, commonly known as fundraising (Tromble, 1998). What constitutes IA practice? How has IA emerged as a concept? How has IA emerged in Ireland? The purpose of this study is to explore how IA has become a part of an Irish university and the role of IA as a relationship building tool with alumni. The main research question is: How has Institutional Advancement emerged in an Irish university setting to build relationships with alumni?

As IA emerges in an Irish university setting, the university builds relationships with alumni, and these relationships have an impact on the advancement of the institution. Through a case study of an Irish university, derived from my doctoral study, I provide an in-depth analysis in three main parts. First, the study examines the emergence of IA in an Irish university setting as a borrowed concept, with practice adapted to an Irish context. I argue the emergence of IA in the Irish university case study is in response to the higher education climate, both on a national and international basis. Second, the study discusses the extent to which IA in an Irish university setting is as a relationship building tool with alumni. To view and analyse the case study findings, a cycle for building relationships with alumni is developed. To focus on the role of the alumni relationships to the institution, I employ interactive governance as defined by Kooiman (2003, 4). Finally, the research focuses on the benefit of the alumni relationship building for the institution. What does the Irish university gain in building relationships with alumni? The impact to the institution of these relationships will be examined as perceived, observed, anticipated and demonstrated.

#### References

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### 3.3 Eugene Sebastian, Monash University, AU

#### ***Overseas Students Protest in Australia***

In April to June this year, thousands of Indian students Marched in Sydney and Melbourne to protest against a spate of violent attacks that victims have called racist.(1) Carrying Indian flags and chanting slogans, the protesters marched through both cities calling for the Australian government to intervene to protect students. The protest attracted international media coverage, forcing the government to respond by introducing a range of initiatives aimed at safeguarding the reputation of its lucrative A\$15.5 billion export education services sector. Overseas students protest is not new in Australia. In March 1985, the Australian education aid policy to developing countries, the *Overseas Students Program* (OSP). (2) Under its sweeping changes, it raised visa fees for existing overseas students and allowed Australian universities to market their degree programmes abroad. The shift from education aid to education trade significantly transformed the OSP into a lucrative revenue generating export services sector, ranking it as Australia's third largest export industry after coal and iron ore and the largest services export in 2008. (3) and the move to sell Australian education abroad unleashed a deregulated, market-driven model of full fees for overseas student recruitment (4) ; forced universities to reform and restructure themselves to take up the entrepreneurial challenge of selling education services; introduced a new commercial vernacular in higher education with notions such as 'consumer-supplier' contractual relationships and 'value for money. (5); and signalled the beginning of a total overhaul of Australia's broader higher education reforms.(6) The government's reform of education aid did, however galvanise overseas students to mobilise in opposition to fee increases and introduction of full fees. Primarily from developing countries in the Asia Pacific , and principal beneficiaries of Australia's most success aid program, these students reacted to policy shifts by independently organising protests against what they viewed as the commercialisation and increasing exploitation of higher education as an export commodity.

My presentation will focus on overseas students protest that took place between 1985 until 1995. It specifically outlines the motivations behind the formation of an overseas students' protest, the methods used by the students in mobilising and the results of the overseas students protest in contesting the measures, which the government brought during the ten year in focus. In seeking to understand Indian students action today, a lot can be understood from exploring historical development in overseas students actions generally. The broader theoretical question I pose is: can overseas students as temporary residents located outside the boundaries of domestic politics and framework of citizenship, and in a position of relatively limited, and in some instances absence of, political, social and legal rights, influence public policy decisions that directly impact on them.

Adopting a case study approach (8), my paper uses data and references from government materials such as Parliamentary Hansard, policy statements, Senate Committee reviews (9). It draws from primary source documents available from overseas student organisations at campus, state and national levels. Materials from these student bodies, include executive minutes, policy and conference documents, campaign materials and media releases. And to balance the use of organisational documents, it draws on sources of information from newspapers and government documents.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Reuters India, 2009, Indian students protest in Australia against attacks, accessed on 17 September: <http://in.reuters.com/article/topNews>

<sup>1</sup> Reuters India, 2009, Indian students protest in Australia against attacks, accessed on 17 September:

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000, *The Emergence of Entrepreneurial Public Universities in Australia*, IMHE General Conference of the OECD Paris, September; Department of Employment, Education and Training

<sup>1</sup> Smart, D. & Ang, G., 1993, *Exporting Education: From Aid to Trade to Internationalisation?* IPA Review, Melbourne; Bannikoff, A., 1994, "Exporting Education – The challenge of marketing education: the Australian experience", paper presented to the International Education Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 21 – 22 June; Harold, R., 1990, *Marketing the academy: Aspects of exporting higher education courses*, A report prepared for the Industry Commission; Hudson, H., 1990, *Overseas student policy in Australia 1980 – 1990*, A report prepared for the Industry Commission, Industry Commission, Canberra; Jarrett Committee, 1985, *Report of the Steering Committee for Efficiency Studies in Universities*, Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, London; Massaro, V., 1994, "New universities and new concepts – planning for the future", paper presented to the International Education Conference, Kuala Lumpur, 21 – 22 June

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<sup>1</sup> Snow, D.A. & Trom, D., 2002, *The case study and the study of social movements*, pp.146-172, in Bert Klandermans, & Suzanne Staggenborg, (eds.), *Methods of social movement research: Social movements, protest and contention*, volume 16, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

<sup>1</sup> Clemens, E.S., & Hughes, M.D., 2002, *Recovering past protest: Historical research on social movements*, p.203, in Bert Klandermans, & Suzanne Staggenborg, (eds.), *Methods of social movement research: Social movements, protest and contention*, volume 16, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

<sup>1</sup> Snow, D.A. & Trom, D., 2002, *The case study and the study of social movements*, pp.146-172, in Bert Klandermans, & Suzanne Staggenborg, (eds.), *Methods of social movement research: Social movements, protest and contention*, volume 16, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

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<sup>1</sup> Clemens, E.S., & Hughes, M.D., 2002, *Recovering past protest: Historical research on social movements*, p.203, in Bert Klandermans, & Suzanne Staggenborg, (eds.), *Methods of social movement research: Social movements, protest and contention*, volume 16, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

### 3.4 Rebecca Khanna, University of Glasgow, UK

#### **Reduced to a tick box? An inquiry exploring the journey of curriculum review and approval in pre-registration allied health professional degree programmes**

##### Introduction

The focus of this paper is linked to one of the most contentious aspects of educational practice, the experience of curriculum review and approval of courses within higher education. Although the curriculum represents a dynamic future, much of UK government reform within pre-registration education of allied healthcare professionals (AHP) appears concerned with standardising learning experiences more narrowly and tightly than before.

##### Objective

This paper draws on a doctoral study, which illustrates the experiences of academics, manager-academics, registry and professional bodies of course approval within a UK university.

#### Method

Through adopting the lens of narrative inquiry and utilising interview conversations, documentary analysis and observer-participant reflections; this work seeks to foreground the stories of participants.

#### Findings

Overall, findings indicate course approval events are neither apolitical, nor neutral. These spaces rather than affording choice for collegial debate seem to have become sites of negotiation. The findings reveal a matrix of narratives; three layers interweave an ecological dynamic within and between each other. These involve the contextual narratives of course approval as an instrument; individual performance portraits of identity, perspective, power; and finally explanatory stories, which reflect the existence of a multiplicity of collectives moderating the success of approval events.

#### Conclusion

This study forms a platform for stakeholders involved in the approval of AHP courses to question current practice. Within the current context, due to the dominant discourse of regulation, what seems at risk is that dialogue concerning development of professional curricula could be threatened. In such circumstances course structures become influenced by systems of governance ensuring standards, efficiency and performance. Since the pursuit of certainty effectively regulates learning, this position challenges what can be known and possibly professional identities of the future.

#### Contribution to practice

Findings from the project address a gap within the professional literature by providing an in-depth illustration of the lived realities of course approval, which may have resonance within other AHP programmes elsewhere. In addition, it has been possible to discover influencing factors that promote satisfactory approval partnerships and recommendations to discuss with those engaged in the development of quality within higher education.

### **DENBIGH 1 – CHAIR: LINDA KOTTA THEME: NEGOTIATING PRACTICE**

#### **3.5 Charlotte Gladstone-Millar, University of Portsmouth, UK**

##### ***Higher Education Policy and Standards of University Awards: an Example of Tensions in Principal-Agent Relationships***

The last 50 years have seen immense growth in the number of UK universities awarding degrees, and in 2009 they will receive approximately £8billion of funding and teach 2.4m students. In the early 1960s the university sector was small and elite; it is now large, amorphous and diverse. This growth from a small, elite sector in the 1960s has changed the relationships between universities and government from one in which the universities enjoyed complete autonomy, to the current position where universities are tightly regulated.

This paper examines the regulation of universities arising from the development of New Public Management policies (Hood, 1995) and the higher education regulatory state (King, 2006), including increases in accountability and audit, expectations of transparency, a focus on market forces, and the growth in regulatory agencies such as the QAA and HEFCE. Regulatory changes have resulted in loss of the autonomy of the older universities and the development of a compliance culture amongst many academics at HEIs.

Principal-agent theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) is introduced as a way to assess the extent the QAA and HEFCE, acting as agents, are failing to meet the expectations of the government, the principal in the relationships. These issues are especially pertinent at a time when there is heightened interest in the role played by the QAA in the assurance of standards of university awards, and by HEFCE in its scrutiny of the finances and governance arrangements at HEIs (IUSS Committee, 2008). The tensions in the principal-agent relationship, reflected in the continual changes to the way the QAA has operated as an agent of the government during its 12 year existence, are evaluated.

The paper concludes by identifying ways the particular principal-agent contract between the government and the QAA could be amended to increase assurance about standards achieved and acknowledge the professional interests of academics across all types of HEIs. Suggestions include the identification of generic graduate attributes, the incorporation of these attributes into succinct subject benchmarks, and a reconsideration of the Dearing Report proposals for the changes to the external examiner system.

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### **3.6 Aurélie Boulos, National University of Galway, Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Ireland**

#### ***Exploring Perceptions of Creativity in Higher Education: The use of focus groups with academic staff***

An increasing number of policy makers and higher education researchers see creativity as leading the way toward a new paradigm of higher education needed for the future. In a "world undergoing rapid changes, there is a perceived need for a new vision and paradigm of higher education" (UNESCO 1998) and "innovative educational approaches through critical thinking and creativity" (UNESCO 1998) are required. Consequently, "new pedagogical and didactical approaches should be accessible and promoted in order to facilitate the acquisition of skills, competencies and abilities for communication, creative and critical analysis" (UNESCO 1998).

The research project reported here will aim to get behind this political discourse by asking how creativity is perceived by academics in light of their own practices and how academics identify creativity within their subject areas and teaching approaches.

Creativity has been associated with "being imaginative", "being original", "exploring for the purpose of discovery-experimentation and taking risks, and "communication" (Jackson Olivier, Shaw and Wisdom 2006). However, the notion of creativity remains a contested concept in higher education, and therefore it is imperative to understand the differing perceptions of it across different discipline.

Interviews are the most frequent research tool used to elicit perceptions from students and academics on creativity and their teaching and learning experience within educational systems. This research tool can be seen as an efficient way of collecting data since it encourages participants to answer question more openly and more deeply than they could do in questionnaires. Nevertheless, few research papers based on interviews seem to give a clear and transparent explanation on how the interviews have been undertaken.

In order to creatively challenge that recurrent method of collection data, I undertook a pilot study during the first year of my PhD. One component was a focus group session organized for volunteers from the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education programme run by NUIG. Academics from diverse subject areas (and higher education institutions) worked in groups through brainstorming, concept maps and discussions in order to encourage them to express their ideas and perceptions on creativity within higher education. The session was audio recorded and notes were taken by several observers.

Numerous ideas emerged, mainly around the constraints which weigh down potential creative and innovative teaching experiences. The focus group method encouraged participants not only to talk freely, but also generated an incredible

enthusiasm and engagement among academics, adding another dimension to the session. This paper will report on the focus group method and the plans for progressing this research beyond the pilot stage.

References:

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**3.7 Venetia Giannakouli, Leeds Metropolitan University, UK  
Co-author: Graham Orange**

***Perceptions of Research and Scholarly Activity in Further Education Colleges***

The last years the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) had developed policy which aims to the significant expansion of higher education, with the central role for Higher Education (HE) in Further Education (FE) (HEFCE, 2009). HE is delivered in the majority of FE colleges (FECs) but there are significant differences in its delivery and as a result there are a lot of concerns for the quality of the learning experience. The Department of Education and Skills clearly states in order for FECs engaged in HE delivery to provide high quality learning experience for all, they should be supported in developing a research informed teaching environment (DfES, 2003). This means that colleges offering HE should increase their research capacity and their teaching staff should be active in research terms.

This paper is illustrated by qualitative data from a survey research and it aims to investigate the concept of research and scholarly activity within the context of the FE colleges. It initially reviews some ideas from the literature about the nature and meaning of research, scholarly activity and scholarship in HE and FE. Then it reports on the perceptions of 147 academic staff in further education colleges hold on what counts for research and scholarly activity in colleges. The findings suggest that there is difference between perceptions of the nature of research and scholarly activity held by academics in Universities and those held by academics in FECs. In particular, lectures engaged in HE delivery in colleges define research broadly which in many cases includes what many in Universities would consider to be scholarly activity.

One of the main factors that influence the extent to which staff research can benefit student learning is the way that staff conceptualise research and scholarly activity (Brew, 2003). Therefore, the investigation into the aspects of research and scholarly activity academics in colleges are focusing on it is considered important for integrating research and scholarly activity for the development of HE provision in FECs. These findings form part of a wider investigation into the field of research informed teaching in further education colleges in England.

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**DENBIGH 2 – CHAIR: SUSANNE MORRIS  
THEME: SUPPORTING STUDENTS' SKILLS**

**3.8 Georgina Henricksen, Birmingham University, UK**

**Old issue, new challenges? Researching graduate employability skills in small Business and Professional Service firms in the West Midlands**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> may 2009, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) published 'Future Fit: preparing graduates for the world of work'. The document urges both universities and employers to continue efforts towards the provision of employability skills training for graduates via Higher Education (HE) Institutions and HE-industry partnerships during the economic downturn. This document also highlights the impact of the recession on graduate opportunities,

suggesting that, for 2009 it is even more essential for graduates entering the marketplace to be prepared for the workplace.

Industry calls for graduate development of 'employability skills' (Harvey and contributors 2003), 'transferable skills' (Foley 1999). 'softer skills' (Phillips 2008 or 'work-based skills' (ibid) are note a recent phenomenon however. Encouraging graduates to develop a range of attributes that will prepare them for employment whilst undertaking higher education at university has been high on the HE agenda, or at least that of the UK government's, for over two decades. Indeed, questioning the role of HE in society and its impact and relation to economic advancement dates back even further (Sutherland 2008). The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has seen a constant waxing and waning of debates considering the purpose of HE, and in particular its association with and relation to industry.

This paper builds on the substantial lineage of research on employability issues, via qualitative research undertaken on the impact and implications of graduate transferable skills on the small firms sector in the West Midlands. The research focuses specifically on the Business and Professional Service sector, including Architects, Accountants, Solicitors, Chartered Surveyors, PR and Marketing. The paper is based on a PhD research project undertaken during the recession, and therefore takes into consideration whether the economic downturn has had any particular impact on the employability skills debate.

The paper also makes a case for understanding graduate employability skills from multiple perspectives, via the incorporation of a variety of viewpoints and voices from individuals that all maintain a relationship with or attachment to the issue of graduate employability skills in the West Midlands. The research uncovers many of the challenges faced by West Midlands universities (both pre and post 1992) attempting to engage with this sector and the concerns that smaller BPS firms within the region hold towards employing recent graduates. The paper also reviews how universities and government schemes in the West Midlands are attempting to overcome the challenge of employability skills through initiatives, workshops, programmes and employer engagement; questioning whether a relatively recent drive for such schemes is fuelled by rising numbers in and rising costs of attending university.

### **3.9 Kate Swinton, University of Northampton, UK**

#### ***Bucking the trend: The Centre for Academic Practice***

With the development of widening participation and the rise of the international student, universities have faced new challenges in retaining and progressing students academically through their degrees (Davies and Elias, 2002). This paper explores the rise of the non-traditional student and the international students within the Centre for Academic Practice (The Centre) at the University of Northampton and the pedagogy behind its success.

The Centre was set up in the early 1990s, in response to what this paper will call the "first wave" of Government widening participation policy. The Head of the Centre felt that universities were opening their doors to these new students and offering them little or no support for the academic challenges that lay ahead. Arguably, a situation that has changed little over the past decade or so. Importantly, the Centre was not set up to offer remedial help, rather a place to facilitate students of all abilities to fulfil their potential (Gilkes, 2009). The Centre was also never intended as a centre to support students with additional needs such as dyslexia. The University has a dedicated team for this.

The Centre now caters for around half of the University's population through workshops and one-to-one tutorials. With the "second wave" of widening participation policies from Central Government and Europe, the Centre has seen a sharp rise of the non-traditional student as well as rise in the international student requesting help. Along with the traditional pathway students there is evidence that the majority of students are starting their courses with lower levels of core skills than even a few years ago. The Centre has had to evaluate past practice and adapt to the changing needs and abilities of the students (edited by Lea and Stierer, 2000). This paper will concentrate on research which has been carried out over the past two years on the students who access the Centre. It will further examine where and why the Centre is attracting certain students. This research has shown that the Centre breaks with the traditional model of students who access support; it is accessed equally by ethnic minorities and White students. Finally, it will explore the reasons why under males under the age of 21 are the lowest attendees and how the Centre is attempting to rectify this.

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### **3.10 Richard Bailey, Northumbria University, UK**

#### **Academic staff perspectives on the purpose and efficacy of student academic support provision**

The importance of student academic literacy, learning and study support is now widely recognised in higher education and reflected in a range of provision within, and outside of the curriculum. On the other hand, empirical research into this aspect of teaching and learning appears limited in scope. In particular the perceptions, experience and understandings of academic staff appear to be under-explored.

In this session I present the findings of a qualitative study into academic staff perceptions of the efficaciousness of generic support components in course structures and the role of dedicated learning support outside the curriculum in one institutional context. The focus is on academic staff attitudes to, and beliefs about learning and study support and the effects of institutional practices and priorities on how this type of provision is framed and delivered in the contexts of disciplinary teaching and in non-embedded structures.

The findings are also presented in terms of how they inform our knowledge of higher education practices and challenge perceptions and assumptions. The implications of the study for the direction and conduct of similar research in the contemporary context of higher education are also considered, and can be the basis for open discussion.

#### **CALDICOT – CHAIR: CATHERINE HUTCHINGS THEME: VIRTUAL LEARNING WORLDS**

### **3.11 Kate Roth, (1) Monash University AU (2) Macquarie University, AU**

#### ***Transition to the virtual; the Innovations, Roles and Practice of Virtual Worlds in Higher Education.***

Virtual worlds are a significant innovation in Higher Education and the number of colleges and universities using the Virtual Worlds of Secondlife© is now over 200 worldwide. The usage of Secondlife© has included role-playing, language acquisition, research on behaviours and studies in copyright law. Virtual Worlds have changed the practise of Higher Education as well as the role of higher education.

This paper presents the results of Case Studies undertaken of University students learning Chinese in Secondlife©. The students were exposed to an immersive virtual environment which was used to chat via text with a variety of students in a number of settings developed to enhance the study of Chinese in the virtual environment.

The experience of these students challenged the flexibility promoted by the developers of virtual worlds. It uncovered students' desire for greater level of participation in the virtual environment including the desire to access the environment outside class time and utilise further elements of the virtual world including speech.

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### **3.12 Jill Baird, University of Wales, Newport, UK Co author Heather Watkins**

### ***The Challenging of facilitating active learning in 'Digital Natives' and 'Digital Immigrants'***

Widening participation is an essential component of any modern Higher Education programme. One way of widening participation is by making course material more accessible by using new media resources. However undergraduate intakes consist of a new generation of students, the 'Digital Natives', but also 'Digital Immigrants' students who are less familiar with the tools of the digital age. As Kennedy et al (2008) report teaching to undergraduate students with a range of digital experiences presents lecturers with a complex educational arena to operate within. As a teaching tool new media such as MP3s and other on-line resources represent exciting new opportunities however the challenge to HE is how to ensure access for all students to these resources. Audio resources have already been demonstrated as highly beneficial for students with specific learning difficulties (Disseldorp & Chambers 2002). However it is widely suggested that such resources would benefit the wider student body (Dziuban & Moskal 2001; Kennedy et al, 2008). This paper will explore the potential impact of new learning resources, such as MP3 resources, in terms of general improvements in information recall, specific improvements in deeper level processing of core subjects and in terms of student up-take. The approach being used in this research project is to provide additional resources to all students on a large core school module and then, following the provision of informed consent to retrospectively review their engagement with the audio resources and their performance on the module. This paper will focus on the design and start up of the project, reporting on the difficulties in producing usable audio resources and in designing a quantifiable method to assess student engagement, recall and deeper level processing.

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### **3.13 Matt Mawer, Coventry University, UK**

#### **ROUNDTABLE**

##### ***Cultural divergence: The durability and resonance of digital divide discourses in education***

Changes in aspects of social practices during the rise of digital technology within mainstream western life have been vigorously theorised. One of the most resilient and pervasive outcomes of this has been a discourse of technological affinity to the digital world, giving rise to notions of cultural divergence between the inculcated and the alien student. This paper will explore how this discourse is recreated both in theorisations of the diversifying student population and in emergent theorisation of learning technologies within higher education. The durability of the discourse challenges higher education to recognise increasingly diverse epistemological and cultural practices if the university is to remain relevant and resonant with modern (not necessarily young) students.

The notion of technological affinity here is associated with Prensky's theory of "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001), drawing a relatively immutable division between those born into the digital and analogue (pre-digital) world. Despite finding little academic support, the message of cultural divergence extolled by the natives/immigrants supposition is often replicated in more nuanced and theorised forms. Literacy theorists have suggested that the shift of communicative and semantic activities to digital spaces has given rise to new multi-modal literacies, and fusions of existing practices (Skaar, 2009). Those who engage with emergent literacy practices are most likely to align with the modes of meaning-making they entail, thus replicating a 'soft divide' between those engaged with specific digital literacies and those not. This (un)familiarity has similarly been theorised through the 'uncanny', a Freudian notion of discomfort and the alienation of the once mundane. New digital spaces and practices conjure the uncanny through their disquieting challenge to 'analogue ontology' (Bayne, 2008), reiterating the theme of a divergent digital mode of being.

Whilst the immutable divide of digital and analogue may lack scope and nuance, its prescience in identifying the need for education to accommodate increasingly diverse cultural practices should not be understated. Digital technology remains potent in facilitating innovative, niche, and democratic practices (Lessig, 2008), and it is inevitable that cultural

divergence will occur not only between the 'old' and the 'young'; but also within the heterogeneity of digital practices. Recognition of increasing diversity in digital cultural practices is thus highly significant for comprehension of how innovative pedagogic strategies and spaces may resonate with modern students.

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