

AARE Conference, December 1-5

Brisbane

SNEO 2478

Tuesday 3 December 2002

3.30 - 4.00 pm

Room Steele 309.

**Transition 101: technology, engagement and the art of conversation in
first-year art and design education.**

Kim Snepvangers and Alicia Yorke

The University of New South Wales

College of Fine Arts

Abstract

This paper reports on a research project investigating student transition into university life. The population comes from two undergraduate programs in art and design education at UNSW, College of Fine Arts. The method entailed strategic intervention and intrusion into traditional course content, assessment and delivery responding to issues of student engagement with the discipline of visual arts and design. It addressed novice perceptions of a lack of relevant tertiary skills. A diverse range of strategies crossing academic, technological and social conversations have fostered inclusiveness, increased retention and promoted settlement. Student feedback and website innovations will vivify the reported outcomes of the project.

Project Background

The two presenters are Kim Snepvangers, lecturer and first-year coordinator in the School of Art Education, COFA and Alicia Yorke a PhD candidate and one of the lecturing staff for the course. The perspective of the coordinator, students and lecturers will be represented in this paper as it has become increasingly valuable to see the needs and expectations of each stakeholder represented appropriately in learning dialogues. Importantly, the paper is co-authored. This is important because the sessional lecturing staff were paid to compile a report of the student feedback. This allowed staff to reflect on the sessions teaching from the safety and distance of being finished and to see the perspective of the students analysed in a fairly systematic way. Writing a report and compiling statistical information as Alicia has done, extends a sessional staff members engagement with the course and provides insights into some of the reasons why the design of a course would change and why it may stay the same. Further, writing a paper together has allowed extended discussion, reading and collaboration beyond the requirements of just teaching or supporting a sessional course. The nature of support and scaffolding provided for part-time staff is an ongoing issue for the coordinator.

This project is supported by a First-Year learning and teaching grant from the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education) at the University of New South Wales. Support for teaching projects allows for innovation, trial and restructuring of curriculum, assessment and transition events and dialogues. Workshops and other innovative spaces for conversation with other Awardees have a high degree of concurrence with affording change and innovation. The evaluation data collected in this project, provides a baseline for comparison and continued scrutiny of issues in course design and student engagement not possible in the typical hustle of university life and work. Extensive student feedback has been compiled for publication back to students via the web and baseline data will substantiate further course revisions in the context of student-centred learning.

The paper is organised using the following headings: Project Background, Strategic interventions and student feedback, Strategic Interventions in The First Year Experience, Interpretation of the data: analysis of student feedback and recommendations, Unintended outcomes and the Next Phase.

Strategic Interventions and student feedback

The project represents a beginning revision of a compulsory core course with seventy five students across two programs, with courses drawn from five schools at the College of Fine Arts, COFA. Enhancing the social dimension of learning is important particularly for a first year compulsory undergraduate course. The different cohorts even within this apparently homogenous group require different support, for example: straight from school; International; Advanced Standing; Design majors; Fine Arts majors; and Rural/isolated students. It would be interesting to see the data from each perspective as the comments may be derived from sources other than course content or delivery. Whilst this paper is focused on changes to assessment and student feedback, a collaborative approach using peer mentors and small group work was also envisaged and placed on trial. Initiatives in mentor training together with a clear and structured timetable of events will further define the scope of the mentors role for next year.

This project focused on changing traditional essay only type progressive assessments in a first year core course SAED 1403 Foundations of Art Education, by situating learning in real world art and design education contexts. Strategic interventions comprised providing early

ungraded feedback, peer mentor events to begin the conversation, getting the inside story by interviewing an art and design teacher and increasing information literacy (APA style) and computer technology skills. Valuing student contributions to knowledge in the disciplinary field was an important aim of the portfolio type, student-centred guide to art education as the last assignment.

Student feedback and evaluative data used in this paper is based on responses received from a qualitative survey (number = 49/75, a 65% response rate) which was devised to address the nature, type and effectiveness of learning and teaching strategies in the course SAED1403. *See note below.* Exit data interviews were conducted with all departing first year students and the reasons for leaving the course documented. Deferring students were mostly from the Advanced Standing cohort. Reasons were loss of business, therefore no capital; receiving a first diagnoses of dyslexia, parental coercion to do the degree failing after one week; clash of work and timetabled classes; family illness and increased responsibility. Meetings with the peer mentor group Art Education 2002 group review, planning and feedback were also conducted, however, do not fall within the scope of this paper.

Note: The qualitative survey used for the project was not focused on evaluating all perceptions/experiences, but the particular interventions reported in this paper and their effectiveness. An example of the survey and lecturer feedback from the first ungraded assignment will also be shown during the presentation.

Promoting settlement and improving the retention rates of first year students is also a primary goal of the project. In 1998 the drop out rates for art education at COFA were regarded in a Counselling Service report as the program with the second worst drop out rate at COFA at approximately 19.44%. By 2001 the drop out rate had fallen to 7.50% indicating a dramatic improvement in retention across the last 4 years, which is attributable to proactive School of Art Education interventions. Deciding to stay with a course means probably means that a student has identified with the program and possibilities of study. Retention rate data for 2002 is forthcoming.

Technology, engagement, and the art of conversation initially appear to be diverse and inherently differentiated words in the context of educational course design. However, the interactive possibilities of technology have always been vital to professional art and design teaching, and dialogues in both social and academic pursuits critical in a first-year course. *Foundations of Art Education* is a place to start introducing technology into first year courses, and useful because of sheer numbers and diversity of cohort for an evaluation of the interventions undertaken in Session One 2002 The recently added Cross Curriculum Content in the Visual Arts Years 7-10 Draft Syllabus adds interest and significance to the use of technology in visual arts and design curriculum. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) "provides opportunities for students to access computer-based technologies" [and] a requirement to "engage with ICT throughout the Visual Arts course in a variety of ways." (Visual Arts Years 7-10 Draft Syllabus, 2002, 20). These statements are helpful when implementing access and student centred engagements with technology for pre-service teachers.

In the project student engagement is linked to increasing course relevance by providing fieldwork opportunities and structuring assessment tasks to align with real world professional contexts. In other words the focus was on student learning and engagement within the discipline of visual arts and design rather than teaching using traditional assessment tasks. The re-design of the course requires continued revision and change in the light of this project as the delivery of course material did not allow enough time to address the assessment demands and requirements. In other words the objectives and assessment are still not constructively aligned (Biggs, 1999, 9), or trapped in a "web of consistency". For

example: some of the assessment tasks required fairly traditional essay type responses with little opportunity for student input, self-direction or problem-based activity. Lectures remained too focused on content delivery and were too different and separate from the activities required as assessed tasks. Also, there were too many tasks. Further alignment of outcomes and learning activities will be outlined during the next phase of the project.

Using the word conversation as a keyword signals an interest in increasing opportunities for dialogue and valuing student contributions. Photographs of studio review panels was one way for students to see their work being valued and recorded. Putting student work on the web and making flexible pathways through degree programs transparent using student work was one of the ways the project sought to address student identity. I now have a data bank of images ready to place on the new website. Increased dialogue between schools and programs was evidenced by opportunities across the session for contact between FY student to student, FY students and continuing students, coordinator to coordinator, SAE coordinator to first year lecturers in fine arts and design. The role of peer mentors whilst not the focus of this paper is an additional factor in transition success. The following findings from Huon and Sankey (2000) and further discussion in Hall (2000) exemplify the trend. Course coordinators should be appointed and peer-assisted mentoring schemes implemented. A focus on early intervention, promoting student-centred, and lifelong learning and systematic evaluation are key ideas. (Huon, G. & Sankey, M. (accessed, 31/10/02).

<http://www.qut.edu.au/daa/asdu/fye/abstracts/HuonAbstract.htm>

In summary then a combination of enhancements were planned as part of the project comprising photographing student work, peer mentor events and assessment changes such as, introducing an interview with a teacher in the field, a test in APA style and the creation of a student-centred guide to art education. This paper is focused on the changes to assessment in the course and the qualitative feedback received.

Strategic Interventions in The First Year Experience

The changes to course assessment tasks were based on a reading of some literature on the First Year Experience. In summary the key ideas emerging about The First Year experience (Huon and Sankey, 2000) comprise:

- the importance of social inclusion and providing opportunities for developing students identity and continued socialisation;
- engaging students with the disciplinary context of the program;
- students finding and using sources of advice;
- discovering career options in the students chosen discipline;
- moving away from an excessive focus on content and coverage of subject matter, focusing instead on the experience of the learner and development of an independent learning capacity;
- improving academic performance especially writing and reading skills;
- adjusting to different teaching methods;
- providing early feedback and assessment;
- remoteness of academics, contact with senior staff, academics assuming too much;
- introducing peer interaction/support/tutoring.

In addition, in their Executive Summary, McInnis, James & Hartley (2000) report on "... a trend of less attachment and commitment to a range of aspects of university life and academic work on the part of those who work longer hours in paid employment". (McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000, 2). "Study occupies a smaller proportion of a growing number of students' lives". (McInnis, James & Hartley, 2000, 2). The authors go on to suggest that the

"decline in motivation to study, the increase in the hours of paid work, and the trend towards less engagement with the university have implications for policy ...". These issues also have implications for learning in higher education. In an earlier study, McInnis and James (1995) highlighted "school leavers ... [as] ... a particularly problematic group" who were "less certain of their roles", "less diligent" and "less academically orientated". (McInnis & James, 1995, xi). In summary, "... a third said they were not ready to choose a university course, two-thirds thought university was more demanding than school, and 45% believed that the standard at university was higher than they had expected". (McInnis & James, 1995, xi).

According to McInnis and James (1995) "Two practical issues for teaching staff are central: the need for early and clear communication of expected learning outcomes, and the provision of timely, diagnostic feedback". (McInnis & James, 1995, xii).

With these ideas in mind the following interventions were implemented in the art and design education foundation course in Session One 2002:

- providing initial assessment as feedback only, eg: Hotlink #1 was ungraded?
- providing assignment feedback sheets and using assignments by fellow students as constructive, formative feedback?
- boosting your competence with APA style by providing ungraded, re-submission opportunities?
- giving you quick, constructive feedback in minimum time, as assignments called "Hotlinks" suggests? (Hotlinks was chosen as the name for the assignment tasks as it suggests a faster timeframe for doing each task and receiving early feedback).
- introducing Library skills and The Learning Centre early in the session to start the process of acquiring research skills?
- increasing course relevance and developing links to the art and design education field by interviewing art and design teachers?
- inviting an Indigenous guest speaker to introduce you authentically to key issues in the field of art and design education?
- structuring a one hour lecture/one hour workshop format for the course?
- inviting the perspective of the student in the production of the Student Guide to First-Year Art and Design Education.

For the purposes of this paper we have chosen four of the changes to focus the discussion which are loosely based on the four assignment tasks. They are:

1. providing initial assessment as feedback only, eg: Hotlink #1 was ungraded?
2. boosting your competence with APA style by providing ungraded, re-submission opportunities?
3. increasing course relevance and developing links to the art and design education field by interviewing art and design teachers?
4. inviting the perspective of the student in the production of the Student Guide to First-Year Art and Design Education.

Ungraded feedback was chosen because taking the pressure off students in transition is highly recommended. The assignment whilst called "ungraded" was organised using the format set out in Appendix 2. Categories of excellent, good and fair allowed students to be placed in three large groups for feedback rather than receiving individual marks. APA style was included as increasing information literacy is a focus of many university academic and library initiatives and staff in the School of Art Education, particularly sessional staff wanted some reassurance that APA style was being systematically addressed in first year. The test format was trialled with a small mid-year intake group and seemed successful, the notion of a test was designed to place importance on gaining competence in APA style.

The interview was selected as it represented the most significant change from an in-class (traditional lecture/essay format task to a field work experience and allowed students to gain real life-world experiences in the safety of returning to the school that they went to, in most cases. Gaining access for the interview and negotiating with the art/design teacher was the responsibility of each student. The teachers role inadvertently became that of a mentor as students positioned their understanding about what art and design teachers do against practice. This approach seeks to make students autonomous agents and anticipates relationships and connections that they will need to make when getting their own schools for future professional experiences. Allowing students early access to the field assists with their career choices at a time when they are not sure about their future.

In the "Hitchhikers Guide to Art and Design Education" the focus was on the student-centred nature of the task and the importance of representing diverse perspectives of individuals within the one cohort. Interestingly some enterprising students renamed the guide to "A Personal, Lo-Tech Guide for the Art Education Novice" and "The Mature-Aged Students Guide to Art Education" and "Art Education-The Official Guide". It was also the assessment which contained computer literacy tasks and the capacity to synthesize information gained throughout the course.

Interpretation of the data: analysis of student feedback

The graphical representations of student feedback are based on qualitative responses and do not rigidly conform to a numerical scale. It was the intention to get feedback which reflected the needs and interests of the students in an open-ended extended format rather than a closed survey.

1. Providing Initial Assessment as Feedback Only?

Hotlink #1 was ungraded. Written feedback was provided on student's work and progress with the aim of establishing a climate of feedback and communication early in the session.

Of the overall respondents, 44% indicated that 'feedback only' for Hotlink #1 was frustrating, 37% found that it was helpful, whilst 19% felt that it should be graded.

Of those respondents that stated the assignment was frustrating: about

33% believed that it was because of its demanding nature and 18% put in less effort due to the assignment being ungraded. The remaining respondents experienced frustration which could be described using the following broad categories: assignment being ungraded; an increased workload for Advanced Standing; pressure was still evident; subsequent assignments were unrelated; a very hard question; too many assignments; and an in-class task preferable.

Examples of this feedback included:

"As Advanced Standing we have so many assignments it was pretty frustrating to have one that didn't count".

"It was quite annoying that it was ungraded because it was a topic that did require a lot of effort to do".

Of those respondents that stated the assignment was helpful:

52% believed that it defined the standard expected within the subject and at University level and 26% felt less pressure because it was ungraded. The remaining respondents found the assignment helpful as it was new information without judgement; it was very effective; eased the students into the course; and mistakes were highlighted without penalty

Comments included:

"That was an effective way for students to gauge the academic standard expected of them in thinking and writing about art education theory".

"It made me feel more confident and positive about my work - less pressure was applied".

Of those respondents that stated the assignment should be graded:

58% felt that the assignment should carry a small weighting

43% believed it should be graded 10%

Examples of this feedback included:

"Very frustrating. To have it be worth a small amount like 5% would have meant more effort was put in and so assessment was valid. Felt like a waste of time".

"Good idea but led to over loaded work amount. Feel marking as a 10% for instance would have meant more focus/care and less stress later on".

Recommendations

There were a similar percentage of students who found that providing written feedback only for Hotlink #1 was helpful as there were those that found it frustrating. It is difficult to know what to change and what to keep when the responses to providing ungraded feedback is approximately equal. One of the lecturers believed that all of the frustration reported stemmed from no mark being awarded for the task.

A similar quota believed that the first assignment was helpful in that 'feedback only' defined the standard expected within the subject and at University under less pressure.

Based on the suggestions from students and interpretations of students needs, it would appear worthy to award a grade to Hotlink #1. A small percentage, such as 10%, given to the Hotlink would provide all the students with the opportunity to experience the demands and expectations of the course, with feedback provided, without placing a significant component of marks to the task. Alternatively, making the first task less demanding with fewer interruptions to class time early in the first 5 weeks will allow a greater focus on the knowledge and skills necessary for a first year student. So if you make the task less demanding, a weighting may not be necessary.

On the other hand, the strongest sense of frustration was a consequence of the assignments demanding nature. Students at this early stage of their degree felt overwhelmed at their workload so time and effort spent on Hotlink #1 not being rewarded with a grade felt futile. It

is worth noting however, that the students provided this feedback at the end of the session. The context in which student evaluative feedback is requested becomes important. Had students responded to "feedback only" immediately after Hotlink#1 was returned, the students comments may have been quite different. As the pressure to complete assignments became greater towards the end of session, (especially for Advanced Standing students who are completing 4-5 theory based courses), the sense of having already completed what would have been a High Distinction assessment that subsequently did not count was heightened.

Importantly, demanding can also mean challenging, which is what students in a recent survey of UNSW students said they wanted from their courses. Challenging pre-existing expectations that a student brings to University and providing challenging tasks if appropriately conducted, can be linked to feelings of success when negotiating a university identity.

2. Boosting your competence with APA style by providing ungraded, re-submission opportunities?

Students completed a test in class which included APA style quoting, referencing and a bibliography. The tests were handed in and mistakes corrected. Students were then given the opportunity to re-submit the test the following week where upon marks would be awarded.

Of the overall respondents, 74% indicated that providing ungraded, re-submission opportunities with APA was helpful whilst 26.98% experienced problems.

Of those respondents that stated the ungraded, re-submission opportunities were helpful:

48% believed that it introduced them to APA style

35% found it to be very effective

The remaining respondents found ungraded, re-submission opportunities were also helpful as it relieved the pressure; was good practice; and provided an informative handout

One student commented:

"That was great because it gave everyone a second chance at APA referencing - especially since we did not know how to do it".

Of those respondents that experienced problems the categories emerging included: confusion between APA and Footnote style, inconsistent handouts, felt APA was hard and some experienced difficulty in that APA was not required in any other subject. The remaining respondents experienced problems with APA style being misunderstood; concise correction of mistakes needed and that re-submission should not be compulsory.

Examples of this feedback included:

"Good but the whole APA thing seems very unnecessary - no other schools use it and doesn't art education only use it in the 1st year?"

"A little bit boring but absolutely necessary. That stuff has to be taught straight off or else I'd be struggling with it the whole way through the degree. But Art Theory uses Harvard?"

"The handouts given on APA style were extremely inconsistent and failed to cover all information needed for referencing. There needs to be a clear, concise guide provided for students".

"I thought it was a really hard thing to do. To expect a student to be able to do this test and perfectly whilst doing other assignments was a bit hard".

Recommendations

In general the students were supportive of providing ungraded, re-submission opportunities for APA style. It is difficult to know what to change about this task, although the timed in-class test and time devoted in class were not appreciated by tutoring staff who needed to balance commitments. A closer focus on the UNSW Library Subject Guides and Information Literacy (IL) standards and guidelines is suggested. Rather than being an isolated skill, just for its own sake, (IL) embedded in course content and assignments provides a more more robust context.

The students appreciated being introduced to this style of referencing and it was viewed as an effective means of facilitating their learning throughout the degree. Problems experienced centred on this style's usefulness for the other subjects within the degree, which conform to other discipline writing conventions such as MLA or Harvard Style. The demanding nature of the test competing with the delivery of content is also an issue of time and emphasis.

From the perspective of the lecturing staff APA is crucial to the student's learning, however, it does not need to consume a high level of lecture time. A brief introduction to APA in the first weeks accompanied by a clear concise handout would be appropriate. Completing a test structured as an online self-test is recommended. Clearly, from some of the comments, information about the reasons why style guides are applied needs to be identified. Embedding grades for APA style in an assignment task with clear criteria and marks for application of the style is suggested.

3. Increasing course relevance and developing links to the Art and Design education field by interviewing Art and Design teachers?

Hotlink #2 required the students to interview an art and design teacher. The interview uncovered the teacher's area of expertise, their students' interests and abilities, contextualisation of issues that emerge from teaching art, and the differences between being a student and a teacher.

Of the overall respondents, 86.08% indicated that interviewing Art and Design teachers was helpful in increasing course relevance and developing links to the Art and Design education field whilst 13.92% experienced problems.

Of those respondents that stated interviewing Art and Design teachers was helpful, 40% thought that it provided insight into the role of a teacher and 31% felt that it was interesting. The remaining respondents found it beneficial, interviewing increased the relevance of theories and the presentations were considered effective.

One student commented:

"Really interesting in getting an insight to the role of a teacher. Increased my understanding of what is involved in becoming a teacher and was fun to do".

Another student remarked:

"This was good. I thought it gave me a good grounding and overview of the issues that face high school art teachers".

Of those respondents that experienced problems some believed that the interview had no relevance to theory and that the interview should have been later in the session. The remaining respondents experienced problems such as time constraints; it being a useless task; a hassle for the teacher; privacy concerns and asking for the presentations to be graded. More structure and time is needed for presentations and some believed that the assignment wording not coherent.

Examples of this feedback included:

"It gave greater insight into practice, but it negated in some ways as the teacher I interviewed said the theory he learned wasn't very useful in day-to-day teaching".

"Good experience however a hassle for teachers - needed a long time to organise and conduct interview".

Recommendations

The students were strongly supportive of the interview with an Art and Design teacher. They placed a high value on it providing insight into the role of a teacher. Exposure to the role of an art and design teacher overcame feelings of uncertainty about the student's chosen degree and subsequently cemented their interest in the field.

The roundtable presentations were very effective. The students were enthusiastic in sharing their experiences and appreciated those of others.

Combining Hotlink#2, 'Getting the inside story' with Hotlink #3, 'Putting some theory into the recipe, together into one assignment would seem appropriate. It may relieve time constraints and provide greater coherence in assignments.

The recommended Hotlink format would be:

Part (a)

Transcript of the interview

Part (b)

Presentation to the class based on their interview in the form of a talk

Part (c)

A written report. Part of this report would be to discuss the educational approaches of 2 to 3 theorists discussed in class as evidenced from their interview. Broad guidelines would still

be provided as in Hotlink #2 however under each of these headings the student must draw similarities and differences between the educational approach of their selected theorist and the insight they received from conducting the interview. Each section to the assignment would be graded. This assignment would carry the most weighting of assessments within the subject.

4. Inviting the perspective of the student in the production of the Student Guide to First-Year Art and Design Education?

Hotlink #4 encourages students to reflect on their learning throughout the session. The development of the guide is intended as a dynamic record of the students' understanding of the course which demonstrates a range of knowledge about the field of art and design.

Of the overall respondents, 44.29% indicated that inviting the perspective of the student in the production of the Student Guide to First-Year Art and Design Education was helpful whilst 55.71% experienced problems.

Of those respondents that stated inviting the perspective of the student was helpful: 42% commented that it was good, 23% felt that it was valuable. Importantly, the remaining respondents found this to be personal, useful for future first-year students; creative; and the structure of the assignment to be helpful.

One student commented:

"A good assignment -allows us to express our own experiences and perspectives to other students who will be in our shoes next year".

Of those respondents that experienced problems some found that the objectives of the assignment were not clear and found the task to be irrelevant. The remaining problems experienced included that it was viewed as a generic task; that it should have been provided and not as an assignment; inappropriate time; should concentrate on theory; its design focus; heavy workload; more time; and class task preferred.

Examples of this feedback included:

" Hotlink #4 does not seem to have been designed to actually help a student learn about the Foundations of Art Education. It seems to be more a design/presentation assignment. It would have been better to design an assignment that was more theory based".

"Yes, but it seems a bit irrelevant for us and only helpful for future students".

Recommendations

Positive feedback was received for Hotlink #4 with reference to its personal and creative nature. The guide made provision for an expression of the diversity in the student cohort which is an important outcome. Students and lecturing staff however, struggled to come to terms with the objectives and requirements set for this assignment.

Many students did not hand in the work as a computer file. The ones that did were typically Design/Art Education students and some technologically advanced students. Some of the difficulties for students arose because the necessary technical arrangements were not put in

place until late in the session as the web-developer was involved and it took some time to work out. Students also study a course titled "Introduction to Computers" which was aimed at increasing students abilities to access and use technology. Assumptions were made about the perceived techno capacities of the art/design education students and many simply completed the assignments in the last few weeks and made no attempt to access technology in completing the assignment. From the perspective of the coordinator the design aspect of the assignment could also be a very good direction as often the Design/Art Education students feel marginalized in a degree which historically derives from Fine Arts. Imputing further recognition of the knowledges and skills of design is important.

A well-structured set of tasks is required from Week One to establish the aims and purpose of the guide as it became obvious that the computer format was less of an issue than the content and quality of what students wrote about. It was suggested very late in the session that the student hand in three sections, titled Transition, the course SAED 1403 and the interview with the art/design teacher. As these headings and organisation was only added as the task progressed, it would have been better to have the material set up from the beginning so that students had clear objectives which were communicated clearly to them.

It is necessary for students to begin this task in Week One within the workshop format then the second half of the lecture time can focus on a current issue within the field of art and design. Even though students were asked to begin their guides in Week One, hardly any did, so there is a need to talk with lecturers about what students can do each week and to provide well structured tasks. For example, with an online discussion students could either individually or in groups work on a task each week to contribute to their guide. This process would continue throughout the session. Many students only commenced the preparation of the student guide towards the end of the semester and as such felt overloaded with work. Online discussion offers the potential for students to post a contribution each week and learn about the field and each other in a highly structured environment. Importantly, time needs to be allocated for the task. Making a discussion posting about access, reflection, feedback and course content each week places less emphasis on making a guide for someone else, such as a prospective student.

The guide would subsequently form a dynamic record of the student's understanding of the course as well as a range of knowledge about the field. The student centred nature of the task and problem-based approach is a direction which needs to be pursued. Comments about the relevance of the guide for only prospective students could be addressed in this way. Providing access and increased participation in tasks like the guide will enhance the students' capacity to reflect on and make a record of their learning.

Unintended outcomes

An unintended outcome of the enhanced social, collaborative and academic opportunities afforded by the project was a First Year art education student exhibition, titled "first impressions" held in the COFA Exhibition and Performance Spaces in Session Two. The initiative of the First-Year exhibition, was only possible because my time as a coordinator was freed to visit studios, meet weekly with lecturers and generally look across the first year programs and courses in a much more systematic way. Review panel photographic sessions with all first year studio groups resulted in collaborations with the COFA web designer, studio lecturers in design and fine arts and the students themselves. The exhibition was an unintended outcome, but became one of the most engaging events in the first year calendar.

The following material is just some thoughts about what made the First Year art education exhibition, called "first Impressions engaging for students. Factors that made this task engaging:

- art education students also complete studio courses, the exhibition allows students and staff to work and have dialogue across disciplines. High relevance to working as an artist/teacher/curator/communicating ideas to others;
- clear "doable" timeframe and celebratory event component such as opening night;
- experience and prestige of having an exhibition in first year in the COFA Exhibition and Performance Spaces and not having to wait until the traditional highly competitive fourth year graduating show;
- students working together (with clear structure and support) collaboratively dividing tasks (invitation, advertising, put up, take down, framing, lighting, catering, catalogue), and showcasing in a public forum their sessions work;
- cross disciplinary, working across different schools and year groups. Continuing students with experience in exhibition management were employed to mentor first years. This partnership resulted in gift giving and ongoing meetings;
- as a drawing show, "drawing" was the focus, rather than competition or the "best" works so the focus was on the intrinsic worth of the event rather than a specific task.
- Consideration of moving this successful extra-curricula event into class time as most engaging events seem to be outside scheduled classes;
- Opportunity to employ one of the first year students to take photographs, design exhibition invitation, mail-outs and other tasks. Having a paid working a member of the peer group that was the focus of the project made communication and ownership of problems and decisions a student centred undertaking.

Although not part of the original project, the level of engagement experienced by the art education students was high. Future initiatives include extending exhibition opportunities across the whole cohort, by including more students and focusing on design as well as fine arts.

The Next Phase

Enhancing face-to-face opportunities and increasing social dimensions of learning through peer mentoring, group work and conversation is vital for students in their first year at university. Online communication offers students the potential of increased social and academic opportunities in a first session foundation course. Ninety students study across two programs and five schools at COFA, and the different cohorts even within this apparently homogenous group require different support.

Negotiating IT access and exploring motivation for study in the discipline offer enormous potential for easing the transition to university. Problem-Based Learning (PBL) has been used to re-structure course content and rethink the use of lectures and learning activities. Face-to-face workshops and assessment will focus on real-life dilemmas and controversies such as writing letters to parents, interviewing art/design teachers and constructing media releases. Web enhancements include contributing to controversial topics in an online discussion in WebCT. Focusing on issues and myths provides opportunities to transcend traditional lectures based on a weekly parade of theorists mobilising content into knowledge construction about the field of art and design education.

The next phase of the project builds a social, academic and informational space to support learning, exchange ideas and construct knowledge. Students are not tied to a two hour class

to find out about art/design education. Information and computer literacy is addressed via online self-tests on American Psychological Association (APA) style. Self-directed learning offers timely feedback, graduate skill development and anytime-anyplace learning in a hybrid environment, which reveals the excitement and possibilities of study.

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More information

For more information on this project please contact k.snepvangers@unsw.edu.au in the School of Art Education, UNSW, COFA.

Note: The support of the UNSW learning and teaching grant is gratefully acknowledged in this project as it allowed for employment of lecturers and research assistants, funding for social and academic information opportunities and a student run exhibition.