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Creative Practice as a Catalyst for Developing Connectedness Capabilities: A Community Building Framework from the Teaching International Students Project

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on a section of the Teaching International Students (TIS) project this article captures student and mentor perspectives within a Project-Based Professional Experience (PBPE) in the context of a large research-intensive university in Sydney, Australia. Animations co-produced with students were part of a Work Integrated Learning (WIL) compulsory upper level course, leading to a 'Community Building Framework'. The research goal shifted the educational purpose from didactic physical placements to collaborative dynamics where students, including international students, staff, and industry perspectives were 'valued'. Prioritising intercultural learning 'challenged' contested attitudes and 'built' communities of practice in a workforce focused ecology. Findings emerged from reflective interchanges whilst working iteratively and collaboratively with students, to inform the PBPE online framework. Implications for WIL academic planning included: scope for asynchronous autonomous action beyond traditional ways of working; opportunities to model creative problem solving at scale; and critical thinking skills in transferability mode adaptable to future digital workplaces.

Keywords: Work Integrated Learning (WIL), International Students, creative practice, reflection, Problem Based Learning (PBL)

Research Focus

In a 2018 article written for the peak Work Integrated Learning (WIL) body, the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN), Lomm, Snepvangers and Rourke argued, that for many international students seeking a creative industry WIL experience ‘connectedness capabilities’ (Bridgstock, 2016) can be difficult to achieve without greater institutional and policy support. To identify what kind of ‘connected capabilities’ are needed when international students embark on creative industry WIL experiences, a range of international policies and a proposal for a Community Building Framework was purposefully planned. The framework does not directly reference the terms ‘connectedness’ or ‘connectivity’: there is an implied relationship of professional and industry partnerships as an ecology that need to be nurtured through networked connections. This article reports on the values, challenges and events that were required to build a network of professional ‘in country’ connections as a Community Building Framework.

This framework is a curriculum planning scaffold situated within a university Problem Based Professional Experience (PBPE) context. This article reports on one specific outcome from a larger project known as the Teaching International Students (TIS) project. The authors are positioned in the research as industry mentors to reflect on shifts in student learning using an ‘Ecologies of Practice’ lens (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer, & Bristol, 2014; Snepvangers & Rourke, 2018). In the role of ‘insider-practitioners’, as academic industry mentors we reflected on how Project-Based (PB) learning has been designed within a Professional Experience (PE) program situated in a large Australian university. The design of the PBPE adaptively transfers individual student media artwork and studio skills to a wider audience through a scaffolded, yet iterative networked ecology. Animations developed in the PBPE provide an example of creative practice where both international and domestic students work with academics to co-design ‘visual learning artefacts’ (VLA). The PBPE described in this article placed value on moving individual media practice towards a public facing professional pedagogy. This approach valued clustering of creative/communicative capabilities as rigorous ways of thinking and was actively planned to encourage diverse cultural perspectives and to challenge contested attitudes about WIL Mentors working with international students.

This article illustrates how the purposeful design of counter-dependent media artefacts (animations) act as “catalysts for conversation” (Snepvangers, Rourke, Myoung, Lin, & Cho, 2019, p. 12) in a meaning making reflective process (Rodgers, 2002). A rigorous ‘Community Building Framework’ has been designed to promote students’ self-confidence, critical thinking skills and empowerment to self-manage change and prepare for real world workplace mobility. Dilemmas common to many students (domestic and international) in the tertiary setting, such as the first lecture, procrastination and group work act as ‘catalysts for conversation’ in situating the content of the animations. In this way, VLAs act as both staff and student resources to perpetuate new ecologies of creative practice. The research focused on how to develop connectedness

capabilities in a co-design capacity that had actionable deliverables. The authors' hypothesised that these VLAs have the capacity to unite local and international students in a WIL Project and enculturate a self-generating system within and around students, which emphasised connectedness (Bridgstock, 2016) and meaning-making (Rodgers, 2002). The objective was to actively plan a PBPE creative practice framework to equip students with capacities for self-organised autonomous action post-graduation and to prioritise local and International students working together.

Research objective

The following hypothesis was proposed: PBPE is positively related to meaningful outcomes and connectedness capabilities related to international students' preparedness for work experience. A key focus is valuing the dynamics between individual students, academics and community/industry mentors within a workforce focused ecology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Australian International Education Policies

Graduate employability in the International Education policy context in Australia is wide ranging and a full discussion is beyond the scope of this article. For the purposes of articulating how creative practice and project-based mentoring can act as catalysts for change, this article focuses on how the concept of connectedness is articulated in a select group of policies. In 2013, the International Education Advisory Council (IEAC), formed by the Australian Government, produced *Australia: Educating Globally* report. The report highlighted a number of economic and educational needs, constraints and challenges, specifically the significance of professional partnerships to enrich cultural understanding in workplace culture. Cultural understanding, educational quality and English Language Proficiency (ELP) were signalled as important in enhancing employability skills.

In 2016, the three-pillar strategy identified by the Australian government in the *National Strategy for International Education 2025* (NSIE) emphasized training and research for future skilling, employability and engaging with industry through WIL opportunities. Linking courses with industry in this policy was described using three pillars titled: *Strengthening the fundamentals*; *Making transformative partnerships* and *Competing Globally*. The second pillar is of most importance to this article, as the authors are interested in how ideas about collaboration engage with robust links to industry, innovation transfer, internships and work-based learning. In the strategy, enhancing connected graduate employability involves strengthening overseas government-to-government and institution-to-institution partnerships. Enhancing mobility supports the significance of having relevant and flexible visas for study and work for international students. The importance of networked connections through alumni

partnerships, such as in the *Australian Global Alumni Engagement Strategy 2016-2020*, also supports this development. NSIE sets out best practice in making social, professional, cultural and alumni connections. As argued by Lomm, Snepvangers and Rourke (2018), policies demonstrate disparate references to connectedness and professional identity formation, which they see as key for professional success in host countries. When working with international students a reflective practice lens was used (Schön, 1983, 1987; Kemmis et.al, 2014) to reveal textual and visual evidence of students' 'lived experiences' using an 'ecologies of practice' lens (Kemmis, et al., 2014). The work of Bronfenbrenner in Zhang (2018) and the work of Snepvangers and Rourke (2018) and Rourke and Snepvangers (2016) provide structures for enhancing connectedness to address these gaps in current policy. The 'Community Building Framework' and events and deliverables from this project demonstrate how an individual psychological reading has been extended beyond family/home and individual creative practices, towards peer to peer and industry learning ecologies.

The 'Gig' Economy

The artistic project-based process mirrors many creative start-ups, 'gig' economies as well as co-design practices in the professional and commercial world. Here, virtual, mobile, digital platforms as well as a dual focus on sharing economies (Narasimhan, Papatla, et al., 2018) and outsourcing (Green, Walker, Alabulthim, Smith, Phillips, 2018) as a new way of working are increasingly the custom. In this more recent entrepreneurial ecology, individuals act as creators/sellers shifting the focus from professional business models towards ordinary consumers becoming prosumers, able to work, sell and create services and goods that were once only exclusively produced by larger enterprises. In the 'gig' economy, employees no longer work in long term 'jobs', rather they are hired for 'gigs', under malleable arrangements where they work to complete particular tasks within a defined timeframe (Friedman, 2014). Typically, loyalty does not extend beyond the life of the project, focus on real world issues or tend to engage with mobile media (Ma & Yang, 2018). The PBPE as discussed in this article, focuses on developing international students' academic and cognitive mobility and equipping them with self-confidence and maximum adaptability in the creative industries to move beyond a disciplinary focus towards interdisciplinary clusters of skills. In the case of the PBPE this included shifting animation and media arts students from a focus on being an animator with a Media Arts degree, towards presenting storyboards to clients, time-management technologies and ethics, participating in a range of professional presentational formats (workshops, prizes, forums, conferences etc.) and group learning with mentors and peers.

Linking Reflection and the World of Work

The ecological link the authors make, lies between practice and reflection in adult learning environments articulated by Glowacki-Dudka and Barnett (2007). The shift for these authors, is in the transformation from reflective practice as an individual pursuit towards reflection being a critically important factor when

engaging with organizations and communities. In other words, when reflective practice was engaged with, for example, an industry group, collective concerns and expectations could be examined. A commitment to learning from experience and from evidence is the critical part of reflective practice, in contrast, learning 'recipes' for action or applying textbook knowledge to practice was less likely to result in students self-reflecting and gaining new insights and eventually autonomy (Ashcroft & Foreman-Peck, 1994). Korthagen (2001) defined reflection as the "mental process of trying to (re)structure an experience, a problem or existing knowledge or insights" (p.58). In order for this to eventuate, students need to go through the process of negotiating and finally agreeing to their own meaning of the term 'reflection' (Moon, 1999) and apply this understanding to their role and interactions with others. Internships and work placements can provide international students with the opportunity to develop their self-knowledge and individual professional behaviour (Eraut, 1994) in a foreign country workplace setting and provide opportunities through the reflective process to apply their university learning to a real-world context. As has been ascertained by Barton, Hartwig and Le (2018): "Findings showed that there is a need for universities to better support international students in completing reflective and self-evaluative assessment" (p.1). Reflection can also lead to professional development learning opportunities beyond a university setting that facilitate students to examine and evaluate what they do in a workplace environment and why they respond and behave in a particular way (Harvey & Knight, 1996).

Reflective Practice

Schön (1983, 1987) advocated that reflection is an important part of the learning process as reflectivity allows the student to see the fundamental relationship between their actions and their framing of the situation. For Moon (1999) reflection is "a tool that facilitates personal learning towards the outcome of personal development", that she argues "ultimately leads towards empowerment and emancipation" (p.88). The PBPE discussed in this article aimed to build international students' autonomy, self-confidence and empowerment to manage change in preparing for real world workplace mobility. Rodgers (2002) introduced four functions of reflection: 1) a meaning-making process, 2) a rigorous way of thinking, 3) being important in and for community, and 4) a set of attitudes. Reflection is an important part of the process of finding meaning and relevance in learning. In this 'meaning-making process' (Rodgers, 2002) students apply their own personal experience and understanding to their learning. Through this process students' identities, values, and behaviour patterns are related to how they participate, engage and contribute to the world they live in (Keeling, 2004). It is also essential for international students in higher education to develop 'rigorous way of thinking' (Rodgers, 2002), not just through the tertiary learning process but also through problem-solving activities in a professional work-related environment, a necessary skill if they are to acquire the attributes for global employability. For international students, reflecting through their creative professional practice experience provides them with the opportunity to express

multiple points of view on issues that may be difficult to communicate verbally or in writing for non-English first language speakers (Snepvangers & Rourke, 2018).

International students in particular, need to feel that they are important in and valued by their host professional community (Rodgers, 2002), through having a positive experience in a foreign working environment they can feel empowered to manage change in preparing for real world workplace mobility as global citizens. Developing a set of attitudes (Rodgers, 2002) congenial to a professional environment requires international students to engage in supportive, fruitful relationships with internship hosts, employers and mentors. This is reciprocated by the vital link between the university environment, meaningful outcomes and future industry workplaces. According to the literature Project-Based Learning increases student motivation and enthusiasm for learning, facilitates a sense of community and enhances and deepens learning, resulting in an increase in graduate employability attributes, confidence, leadership and problem-solving skills (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Fieldsend-Danks, 2016; Bell, 2010). One specific aspect of this research was to look at indications of confidence in their project-based learning through mentor reflections as a way of gauging students' connectedness and potential employability in the gig economy.

Project-Based Learning

The authors argue that online project-based experience is like a physical placement on site with a mentor, who organizes project-based experiences and learning around projects. Whilst project-based learning is not new, the key features summarized here from Thomas (2000) have salience for this work. Typically, projects are:

- complex tasks, based on challenging questions or problems, that involve students in design,
- problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities;
- give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time;
- culminate in realistic products, technologies and presentations;
- comprise authentic content and assessment;
- engage cooperative learning, reflection, and incorporation of professional skills within a community of practice/inquiry.

In PBPE, typically, projects were facilitated by a mentor guiding and informing the project with explicit goals and milestones and supervised by the university PBPE Convenor. Clear structure of project check-ins with mentors was envisaged and project deliverables were agreed upon as well as a range of virtual WIL opportunities currently emerging. For PBPE, students complete 150 hours remotely as part of a 'Study from Home' model with some face to face (F2F) meetings and synchronous and asynchronous tasks. What was significant about PBPE is that in many contemporary WIL placements students were unable to work from home as typically they shadowed an industry mentor in a real world learning

physical location. This initiative anticipates a stronger self-management and self-organisational suite of dispositions. Mirroring the ‘gig’ economy, without day to day physical placements, this approach fosters a scholarly approach to mentoring in a ‘studying from home’ mode. This research is well positioned to engage with future research directions that will embrace emergent Government directives, Work Integrated Learning (WIL), central and legal requirements to resolve arrangements for PBPE online.

PARTICIPANTS

The WIL academic course has an average of two-hundred students enrolled in the course each year. This study focuses on five final year art and design students (local n=3; international =2; of which 3 were female and 2 male) who self-selected the authors’ PBPE project in 2018 and 2019. All of the students had graphic design skills and they had all previously produced animations during their university studies. The ‘match-making’ PBPE process comprises the following:

- 1) Industry mentors in collaboration with the Course Convenor writes project descriptions, skill requirements and provide their contact details, which were then posted online. In some instances, students write the projects.
- 2) Students choose a project from an online portal and email the PBPE mentor their curriculum vitae (CV); mentors pick the student that best matches their project requirements and organize a meeting.
- 3) Student and mentor meet to discuss project expectations, a decision is made as to the suitability of the match, if both parties agree to work together a PBPE contract is signed.
- 4) Once the project contract has been submitted to the online portal, checks on duty of care and due diligence were completed by the university Course Convenor.
- 5) Once approved the students start immediately on projects, at any time of the year.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To broaden the workplace opportunities for art and design students, academics were invited by the PBPE Convenor to propose projects that fit the PBPE objectives. This case study investigates the experiences of 5 students (2 in 2018 & 3 in 2019) mentored by the authors in their PBPE project over a two-year timeframe. This PBPE project provided students with the opportunity to plan and produce animations on topics of their choice that focused on the experiences of international students in higher education. The animations were presented as ‘catalyst for conversation’ in academic career development workshops, faculty

and university-wide forums and National and International conferences. The PBPE students were provided with the opportunity to pitch their ideas in a professional setting, self-time manage the process of planning and production of their animations; adapt to working from home and working within a limited timeframe as well as experience various ways of presenting their work in a variety of educational contexts. The key innovative feature of the PBPE was that the work occurred within a university context to develop Visual Learning Artefacts (animations) in a ‘Study from Home’ mode. In this case the mentors were university academics (insider-practitioners) and rather than requiring the international and local students to attend a physical work placement, the Community Building Framework allowed for a series of planned meetings and events. Key dates for deliverables and outcomes were collectively decided and flexibly delivered to prioritise project-led workplace relationships in each phase in an emergent and iterative process.

METHOD

The authors report on the research using a reflective insider-practitioner perspective on the PBPE that scaffolds into a phased university course Work Integrated Learning (WIL) project. The framework developed by the authors, prioritized collaboration and real-world expectations. Through a reflection-on-action (Schön in Rodgers, 2002) process the authors proposed a PBPE Community-Building Framework (refer to *Table 1: Project Based Professional Experience (PBPE) – Mentor Guide*), using a colour-coded system to identify key moments. The key was derived from the literature, including Ecologies of Practice (Kemmis, et. al., 2014), Project-Based Learning (Thomas, 2000) and Rodger’s (2002) reflective terms, focusing on ‘meaning-making’. Concepts proposed and synthesised by the authors centre on the project’s key objectives of Valuing (V), Challenging (C), Building (B), which are colour-coded. The use of the word ‘phase’, rather than a weekly program of study, signals the iterative and temporal process of transformational and meaningful outcomes.

The key moments in the developing student/mentor/community ecologies were linked to a temporal process of moving through guided activities to develop the student’s capacities to move from dependency, through counter-dependence towards the goal of independence and building student connectedness in the long term. The authors analytical process included identifying key objectives V, C and B in relation to their reflections at the completion of the project. Data was gathered from physical F2F observations, which were logged in a reflective practice journal after each phase of the project. Selected mentor ‘insider-practitioners’ quotes (authors as academic industry mentors) were then collected. Emergent themes were based on the recordings that best captured student learning in terms of confidence, shifts in understanding collaborative practice and a sense of themselves as a creative professional in each phase. The grey block text indicates a physical meeting with all participants

(students/mentors/community) as a key idea in the authors' use of reflection as a tool in the methodology of this research. Data collection included mentor reflections (journals), student feedback surveys regarding pre-post PBPE and deliverables included: storyboards, animations and research posters. At the completion of their degree programs, permission was sought from students to include their reflections anonymously from the completed WIL course – university ethics approval number HC190925.

Alongside creative practice students, the authors tracked monthly emergent student-led tasks, deliverables and outcomes to show gradual intercultural flows towards connectedness, captured in Table 1. The events, students' roles, scope and purpose of each event were compiled for future research. No pre-determined plan or step-by-step procedure was imposed at the beginning of the PBPE rather, the authors reflected on how to build a student-led ecosystem progressively that evolves and values both individual and student group issues and concerns. This methodology iteratively captures new data about how to work using temporal learning modes and trust-building beyond physical placements. A qualitative lens was used for this research with each of the five student animation projects conceived as one case study to provide real-world applicability.

Scope of the Project

Meetings with the PBPE students and the mentors (both virtually and F2F) were held at various points during the 10 phase WIL timeframe (Refer to Table 1: PBPE Mentor Guide below). Students were required to log their working at home hours on a timesheet and prepare 'work in progress' presentations at key times during the PBPE timeframe. At the first meeting students' brain-stormed ideas for their animations focusing on topics related to the international students' experience. The PBPE students based their animations on their own experiences, the local students talked to their international student cohort to form an idea for their animations. The PBPE students identified the following topics for their animations: group dynamics in the classroom - mixing the student cohort of international and local students; the importance of time management; working together on a common goal; presentation anxiety and first day introduction anxiety.

One of the main objectives for producing these 'Visual Learning Artifacts' was to use them as a catalyst for promoting conversations about challenging and contested attitudes about international students in the classroom. This creative medium assisted in promoting open conversations about classroom issues between students and students, teachers and teachers and between students and teachers. The animations were approximately five minutes in length and students were encouraged to use their own artistic style of representation. Students produced a series of storyboards to plan out each scene in their animations. These were discussed at virtual and F2F meetings where PBPE students and mentors provided constructive criticism of the animations before the final work was

produced. The PBPE ‘Community Building Framework’ utilises creative ecologies and communicative capabilities already identified as meaningful outcomes from the research. Table 1 presents a Mentor Guide showing how students can move from individual concerns to a community focus entailing: Valuing Intercultural Learning, Challenging Mentoring/Career Development and Building Communities of Practice.

Key to Table 1: Project Objectives as applied in the Mentor Guide:

Table 1: Project-Based Professional Experience (PBPE) Community Building Framework – Mentor Guide.

Temporal Iterative Transformation	F2F and/or online commitment	Tasks and Visual Learning Artefacts (VLA)
<p>Led by Mentors(*Dependent) <i>Providing the meaning-making (Rodgers, 2002).</i></p>	<p>Phase 1 Mentor Check-in</p>	<p>* Introductions & Project Briefing. * Work Health & Safety induction to ‘Study from Home’ mode; work-flows; reporting; Students & mentor’s role. * Discuss how to work effectively in F2F & online team/s. * Understanding the project phases; setting out components; timelines; deliverables & discussing technology requirements. V – Ice-breaking activities to bring forth individual issues & concerns (what matters to each person in the intercultural classroom). C - Getting the most from your mentors, discussion about format of project - based meetings, emails, requirements, protocols. B – Moving from individual making practice to group co-design dynamics.</p>
	<p>Phase 2</p>	<p>* User-centred design (as applicable). * Market research with people, target audiences. * Stakeholder-centred co-design in complex systems. V - Student perspective on issues & concerns and mentors discuss what matters to the group in the intercultural classroom & discuss target audience. C - Design sprint or challenge - introduce to community. B – sorting, selecting and shifting ideas from personal to psycho-social concerns, students having more confidence in their interactions with others.</p>
<p>Co-Led by Students & Mentors (*Counter-dependent *Independent) <i>Collaborative meaning-making (Rodgers, 2002).</i></p>	<p>Phase 3 Mentor Check-in Phase 3/4</p>	<p>* Formative review of deliverables, review prototype development. * Principles to address industry challenges, rapid prototyping; lean design; concept catalogue creation; iterative co-design with industry. V – Group contributions & appreciating the input and opinions of others; C – Challenging existing beliefs about studio as a lone practice – sharing reflections & group decision making. Encouraging shared ideas to counter avoidance of asking questions and contributing.</p>

		B – Moving from individual making practice to a group dynamic – discussion, bouncing around ideas & selection of one animation storyboard to promote critical thinking of individual practice. Demonstrating confidence in student interactions with mentors.
	Phase 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Prototype development – send samples as appropriate to mentor. * Take two photos of yourself “Studying from Home”.
<i>Transformative - meaning-making (Rodgers, 2002). Moving between phases.</i>	Phase 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * From storyboard prototype to demonstration of animation – public display; reception and trouble shooting. * Value propositions & business planning; mentor’s shares pathways into practice. * Mentor’s pitch training or other collaborative opportunity
	Phase 6 Mentor Check-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Summative review of deliverables. * Pitching, & industry showcase. planning. * Independent relationships – working on individual contribution; & self-initiated communication within the student group to complete collaborative project. V – Diverse student perspectives were seen in the context of the overall project success (how their contribution to TIS has a wider impact). C – How to work on another person’s animation (conceptual & technical help – working as an organised team). B – public profile development; moving towards self-management of professional footprint. Students demonstrating confidence in their abilities as a creative professional.
Led by Student (*Self-Generating Connectedness) Students’ meaning-making (Rodgers, 2002).	Phases 7-10 Final Mentor Check-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Prepare presentations (workshops, forums, conference presentations). * Address final component of completing animation; adding university branding. * Attend virtual debrief & F2F check in with mentor/s – sign off; Mentor Feedback Form; Timesheet & Project Profile. V- Self generated autonomous action; co-design format; C- Organisational Connectedness check. B - Students initiate and work as a cohesive and supportive group with students, academics, industry, & community to complete the PBPE project. Students are confident about seeking employment as a creative professional post-university.

V – VALUING Intercultural Learning - Valuing diverse cultural perspectives, co-design with international and domestic students alongside mentors as insider-practitioners;
 C – CHALLENGING Mentoring/Career Development - Challenging contested attitudes and traditional ways of working through creative and reflective means over a defined project timeline;
 B – BUILDING Communities of Practice - Building a community framework to promote student self-confidence, critical thinking and empower students to self-manage change and prepare for real world workplace mobility.

RESULTS

Students' reflections (pre and post) were recorded at the end of their PBPE. The authors' analysis of the reflective process acknowledged that often the best time to capture data regarding 'meaning-making' (Rodgers, 2002) was at the completion of the experience. Often when undergoing an experience, it can be difficult to see what has been achieved. The process mirrors the reflection-on-action cycle outlined by Schön in Rodgers (2002) whereby "the process is purposefully slowed down" (p.234) and in this case reflection is focused on academics as teachers reflecting on their role as mentors in an industry placement arrangement. The storyboards, animations and posters (See Table 1) and the presentation of these deliverables at events inform the following collected themes in the data. The three themes identified by the authors relate to what professional attributes the students, mentor and deliverables (events, posters, animations, interactions) revealed through the process of reflection. The first theme of 'developing confidence' relates to how students' progress through the PBPE from dependent (led by mentors) to counter-dependent (co-design) to interdependent self-generating connectedness (led by students). Evidence of students assuming control, taking initiative, developing confidence and self-motivation capabilities emerged from mentor and two student quotes as follows:

The more we reassured students that it was not a case of 'me and my shadow' instead they would set their own pace and direction, the more self-confident they became during the PBPE (*Mentor One-Phase 3*).

When I began PBPE, I was expecting less control and assumed I would take on the role as someone who would just follow others' creative direction. After working in a professional environment, I now know it is okay to offer up my own ideas and to take initiative in creative projects when it is necessary (*Participant 2*).

You could see how intently each student listened and how they smiled at us as we engaged them in the project and encouraged them to feel that they had ownership of the process and that we were going to have fun working together (*Mentor Two-Phase*).

These reflections demonstrate how the students became more self-motivated and confident in their abilities as they progressed through the collaborative co-design process with their mentors. One student was particularly pleased to see how their scholarly knowledge and design practice skills, developed during their undergraduate studies, could be utilised in a 'real-world' working environment. Student and mentor reflected:

Pre-PBPE, I was very anxious about the media arts industry and what sort of content would be considered industry grade, however after

doing my PBPE, I feel more confident about my capabilities and what I can provide (*Participant 1*).

It was amazing to watch their confidence grow as they realised how much academics valued their creative outputs, many asking if they could use their animations in their teaching (*Mentor Two-Phase 10*).

This student's reflection emphasizes their need to feel "being important in and for (a) community" (Rodgers, 2002), which is an important factor in the process of becoming a 'valued' creative professional. The second theme relates to 'developing creative ecologies' and making tacit professional skills and communicative capabilities visible as meaningful outcomes of the PBPE. Evidence of ecological thinking was demonstrated:

Prior to this project, I mostly worked independently on personal projects in art and animation - this required a lot of self-reflection and lack of guidance when completing a production from start to finish (*Participant 3*).

The students valued the collaborative approach relying less on our judgements as mentors to reassure them that they were progressing instead they became more enthusiastic about the project, self-motivated and more secure in their ability to produce a professional outcome (*Mentor Two-Phase 5*).

The students by the end of the PBPE could articulate clearly their work's intention and pitch their ideas to all levels of the university hierarchy (*Mentor observation of students presenting at Poster Presentation-Phase 10*).

The third theme regarding 'critical thinking skills' overlaps with valuing the role collaboration plays in developing creative practice into an ecology. Through the timeframe of the project students further developed their critical thinking skills as they worked through the stages of the design process from initial ideas to the final production and presentation of their creative outputs. As two of the students and a mentor reflected:

When I was working as an undergraduate on assignments there was always a brief to follow, this project gave me the opportunity to think more critically about my practice, with a client in mind (*Participant 4*).

In particular, for this PBPE I tried a new animation style with limited time, and it worked out quite well, so it gave me a stronger sense of accomplishment (*Participant 1*).

Students needed reassurance at the beginning that there were no right or wrong approaches to the project and that all opinions and ideas were valued, once they could see we were sincere about this I could see how physically each student relaxed and became ‘chatty’ and excited to contribute ideas, critically think and talk over each other to get their opinions heard (*Mentor One-Phase 2*).

This evidence captures students moving from individual concerns where they often lacked confidence in their studio projects to thinking about their reception and audiences in the professional practice environment. Based on ‘insider-practitioner’ observations in the case of international students, this included shifting from a reluctance to engage and initiate to the insertion of their own understandings of creative practice as they moved on in their confidence as creative practitioner. The sense of achievement, empowerment, ability to work with others and development of leadership skills were also attributes developed during the PBPE:

On completion of the PBPE I now feel empowered to start new projects with other people, and not just respond to an assignment brief (*Participant 5*).

Pre-PBPE I was unsure what I wanted to do with my future and my degree, but I think the experience helped me to orientate my goals and what I want in terms of my career and future prospects (*Participant 1*).

My practice has shifted in that working on this project with other creative professionals allowed for a more collaborative approach (*Participant 3*).

Students were more self-assured about their problem-solving skills and ability to be pro-active and productive while working on projects both independently and collaboratively (*Mentor One -Phase 6*).

The key objectives of the PBPE were to build a community framework to empower students to self-manage change and prepare for real world workplace mobility and lifelong learning. The novel approach was exemplified: in this quote: “*Students were excited (animated faces) about taking a novel approach and having freedom to guide the projects outcome. One student expressed that it was important to them that they had ownership of the process and freedom to express their opinion without being graded or judged*” (*Mentor Two-Phase 4*). In terms of overall feelings of accomplishment, one student commented: “*This project evoked a new desire of mine: to create work that can be used to educate and inform viewers of issues and ideas that can improve our way of living*” (*Participant 2*). The PBPE students had ‘real-world’ work experiences such as completing time management software scheduling and participating in online and F2F work

meetings, preparing and co-presenting in workshops and producing and presenting animations to be shown on different platforms for different audiences.

In this work situation the PBPE students demonstrated their adaptability and problem-solving skills while building on their capacity to work collaboratively and manage change. *“The students spoke up more as the meetings progressed, towards the end of the PBPE. I could see each student brimming with observations about how people had reacted positively to their work at workshops” (Mentor One-Phase 7).* Students’ PBPE outputs included: time sheets, process diaries, story-boards, animations, workshop presentations, posters and CV development. One student reflected: *“PBPE helped greatly in conceptualising and improving the quality of my work in a professional context” (Participant 3).* By showing the animations at national and international conferences they received high-level exposure of their work to a wider public, which added to their CV and built their reputation as a creative practitioner. Working in partnership invites students to share in the responsibility of shaping their learning and teaching environment and therefore helps us to challenge the unhelpful positioning of students as ‘consumers’ (Felton et. al., 2013, p. 64).

DISCUSSION

Through developing this ‘Community Building Framework’ using a reflection-on-action methodology, the authors’ have shown how to plan an academic creative practice WIL program for mentors. Table 1 was written at the completion of a two-year phased WIL program of study, working with international and local students in the Australian higher education context. Working iteratively across dependent, through counter-dependent then independent actionable tasks and deliverables, an initial finding concerned the importance of building quality partnerships. For example, evidence of valuing international student perspectives in the creative development of storyboards reflected personal concerns about studying in an Australian university. Each students’ animations were valued as individual artistic pieces. Through identifying shared themes in their animations, students valued each other’s contributions in ways that were not always possible within their usual undergraduate studies. Simultaneously, each person was challenged in the counter-dependent phases of the project through thinking about which individual contribution would best capture the group’s key aim. Each student contributed to the construction of the final animation in a vicarious, yet valued way.

In terms of a second policy concern from the literature regarding the importance of networked connections, the authors purposely met F2F with all of the group members in a supportive scheduled set of meetings, (see grey blocked text in Table 1). This actively encouraged collaboration, initially mentor led, then through the co-design process, a student-led partnership emerged. Students gained confidence and their range of experiences in working as a team increased. The

purposeful local and international student interactions in each planned phase, were a positive WIL outcome. Student and mentor data from finding number one, showed increased confidence resulting from meaningful engagement with novel processes in PBPE. Gradually, through increased individual, group, team and university presentational modes, enhanced creative ecologies were built as seen in finding number two, where creative contributions to the value chain were noted by students and academic mentors.

The third finding, regarding the significance of developing critical thinking skills, was a key aim of the 'Community Building Framework', to *Value, Challenge* and *Build* mentor and students' understanding of international student perspectives on project-based PBPE. This new iterative way of working in a 'Studying from Home' mode mimicked the 'gig' economy and future workplaces in an authentic way, as students devised projects in an asynchronous mode, rather than having pre-determined line managed jobs or tasks that were linear in both process and delivery. The authors were interested in mentorship as a dynamic organic collaboration beyond teacher/student, manager/managed, employer/employee relationship binaries. In this way the project deliverables allowed students the flexibility to work, sell and create services in a mobile way across a defined timeframe. By capturing ways of valuing engagement in a 'Community Building Framework', new communities of practice beyond one workplace, broke down hierarchies to extend networks and communities in newly evolving creative projects at scale. Key findings were the significance of achieving greater scope for asynchronous action beyond traditional ways of working; increased opportunities to model creative problem solving through a critical level of experience that led to further self-generating activities at scale; and finally situating critical thinking skills in a fluid and transferable mode adaptable to future digital workplaces.

Through the methodology of reflection, the authors' mapped the various events, as moments over time that enculturated graduate connectedness capabilities. Through planned, serendipitous as well as emergent activities, students increased their confidence and the adaptability of their creative practice from disciplinary dependency towards contributions to clusters of new ways of working in the gig economy, as captured in the student and mentor quotes. Students moved from being lone isolated practitioners to a newly discovered consciousness of the contribution that they could make to society and the workforce as they positioned themselves in an evolving public context as global citizens. This is evidenced by the fact that students could contribute to workshop conversations, provide insight into dilemmas in learning and present with assurance at various events with often high-profile academic communities. Working through identified themes in their PBPE creative practice (animations) such as first day anxiety, the findings extend confidence building capabilities beyond the course/program objectives to real-world contexts outside of university studies. The creative animations are mechanization resistant as they stem from authentic international student concerns, having all been distilled from 'catalysts for conversation' in a dialogic process over time. Simultaneously, the deliverables

utilize a unique creative animation style, evolved from an individual student's studio artwork, yet also capture dilemmas that resonate with professional issues across disciplinary borders such as the first lecture, procrastination and group work.

The appeal lies in the personalized style of the animations, using relatable avatars that could be used by tutors across WIL courses as well as courses that valued the perspective of international students. The many requests for access to the animations for use in tertiary classrooms, provides further evidence of the efficacy of this creative approach. The number of people impacted as well as the range of accepted opportunities signals how students moved beyond being nervous about presenting to peers in a classroom or being unable to initiate activities when faced with new projects in culturally diverse industry contexts.

This work is innovative as creative (WIL) professional experiences typically occur in a physical location, working with a mentor on a day by day basis. PBPE has facilitated two modes of reflective reporting: one where students reflect on the shifts in their professional practice in project management beyond individual making practice towards collaborative practice with a client in mind. Secondly, for the authors the creation of an academic program of study that can signal the significance of iteration, without students having to be immersed in a physical site, each and every day. The emphasis was not on assessment in the same way as a typical course requirement but on authentic real-world experience across temporal iterative phases of transformation. The quotes and PBPE activities outlined in Table 1 demonstrate how the key objectives: **Valuing** Intercultural Learning, **Challenging** Mentoring/Career Development and **Building** Communities of Practice can evolve in the tertiary context. The PBPE students through these activities were able to reflect on the process, become more confident presenting their work, build on their CV's and widen their future work opportunities.

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