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Contents

This issue of *Compass* is delightfully varied in content and tone, living up well to the journal's title. One of its opinion pieces considers how accelerated degrees need to evolve in a marketised Higher Education context; another takes a cynical stance to that very context; a contrasting third identifies an aspect of primary education policy and practice as the source of a possibly chronic failure by some students to use punctuation properly in their written submissions. Contrasting case studies demonstrate: the need for higher education institutions to understand better how to value those pursuing a doctorate and thus to engender in them identity and a true sense of belonging; the potency of play in transforming the way universities, their staff and their students interact, with correspondingly positive impact on teaching and learning, as well as on collaboration and morale.

The implications for the expansion of accelerated degree courses in higher education are helpfully explored by Iain Kitchener in his opinion piece, 'Are Accelerated Degrees the Future for Higher Education?' Reduced costs for students and quicker access to the graduate job market are significant drivers for this to happen, but the Iain argues that a simple reduction of three years into two would be financially untenable in terms of staffing costs and, though accelerated, would not guarantee proportionate student learning gain. Fundamentally, the success of accelerated learning in the UK context is, Iain says, dependent upon adequate funding to support the well-researched creation of a relevant and appropriate pedagogy and thereby to ensure the development of academic skills, subject knowledge and effective learner transformation; furthermore, a compressed course must be achievable within the normal academic year and not impinge upon the summer period used by teachers for research and by students for earning money. To bring positive outcomes, a curriculum of this kind might well rely on such approaches as blended learning and transformative learning theory.

In the market state, argues Patrick Ainley in 'The management of business or the business of management?', there is a gradual process of devaluation and deprofessionalising: traditional academic courses are being reduced to business-orientated activities; students choose Business as the means of acquiring the skill sets to meet employment requirements, but eventually lose out to growing numbers of managers in an increasingly automated environment. Patrick comments that Management degrees ought to provide access to a higher level in the hierarchy of management, business and administration, but, in reality, managers are likewise reduced to semi-professional roles, being less expert in the context of high-performing technology. The market state resolves itself into a 'consolidation state', run in the interests of capital investors where the only real managers are the ex-politicians and senior civil servants who use their positions to secure elite boardroom roles, for which they are arguably the least qualified.

The deployment of the 'punctuation pyramid' as a means of encouraging primary school language learners to raise the 'level' (in National Curriculum terms) of their writing by choosing alternative punctuation marks from an artificial hierarchy of punctuation is regarded by Mark Betteney in as responsible over time for the subsequent inability of students in higher education to punctuate properly. In the opinion piece, 'Where have all the full stops gone? The dangers of striving for 'University-level' punctuation', it is noted that instead of using the marks most appropriate to the conveying of their meaning in written submissions, many students still retain their early-acquired belief that one punctuation mark is somehow superior to another, regardless of its real purpose, with consequent deleterious impact upon their work. Mark's piece draws on some examples of the attitudes of real students, who have been deluded by inappropriate primary education policy and practice into believing that the more complex the punctuation, the better the writing, despite their own intended meaning. Mark, as a marker of otherwise sound and perhaps insightful student work, is at pains to debunk the punctuation pyramid policy and to challenge the assumption of writers of books on academic literacy that students reach higher education in perfect command of punctuation skills.

How do PhD 'students' see themselves? They are beyond taught undergraduate and postgraduate degrees but have yet (if this is indeed their aim) to take up a role as a full academic: is their self-perception one of 'student', 'researcher', 'teacher' or 'member of staff'? A case study by Martin Compton and myself seeks, through the lens of self-identity, to discover how those in doctoral education – whether they be in unhelpful limbo or positive liminal space – really feel about their role/s and considers how an adequate understanding of their feelings about themselves can only help to improve institutional support for them and create greater consistency in the PhD experiences they have. Only then will their supervisors and their universities be able to ensure that they feel properly valued and have a true sense of belonging. Martin and I asked registered postgraduate researchers on the Postgraduate Teaching, Learning, and Assessment course at the University of Greenwich to create personal pie charts depicting the proportions of their roles as they saw them; the findings may have been raw impressions, but any reader will become absorbed in the messages they convey, which have serious implications for higher education institutions regarding identity and belonging amongst such colleagues.

The University of Winchester's 'Play and Creativity Festival' aimed to: celebrate and re-energise teaching and learning; find alternative ways of communicating complex ideas and important messages; generate fresh perspectives and new ideas; build connections and community. Alison James, author of this lively, personal and absolutely compelling portrayal of the power of play to enthuse large numbers of disparate staff and students may feel that not everything worked perfectly, but the case study certainly confirms that the aims were more than fulfilled. 'Why play matters in a world of REF, TEF and What the Jeff' is a heart-warming account of the process of planning for the event and of carrying out the various stages of preparation, giving insights into the astonishing range of activities eventually undertaken and providing some of the hugely positive reactions of participants. The interest generated beyond Winchester and the fact that the Festival is to run again, next time including the local community, are testament to how much play can transform professional practice, generate a sense of well-being (even at a very busy time of the academic year) and guarantee downright fun for all those involved. Readers of this case study will no doubt wish to access the blog and film records of the Festival.

The coming together of such a wide range of opinions and topics covered in this issue of *Compass* underlines how conversations concerning teaching and learning continue to surprise us, engage us, and provoke critical debate. I hope you enjoy reading through the opinion pieces and case studies as much as we have enjoyed putting this issue together.

Danielle Tran
Editor

Are Accelerated Degrees the Future for Higher Education?

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Abstract

As the government pushes though the Higher Education and Research Bill, universities have an unprecedented opportunity to add well-funded accelerated degrees to their portfolios (Department for Education, 2016).
To ensure high-quality outcomes and positive student experiences, we need to establish a well-researched pedagogy for accelerating learning alongside an accelerated delivery.

Are Accelerated Degrees the Future for Higher Education?

This is clearly a provocative question, though recent announcements about raising the yearly fees universities can charge students on accelerated degree programmes should give us pause for thought. The author is currently, at The University of Greenwich, the programme leader of, and teacher on, an accelerated degree course in primary education without qualified teacher status (QTS). This compresses a full 360-credit BA (Hons) into two academic years. If we chose to engage further with this approach, what would be the consequences for the higher education (HE) sector and how would such a decision fit within the strategic aims of institutions such as Greenwich? This article will explore the drivers for accelerated degrees, identify some of the issues surrounding the initiative and consider important next steps towards ensuring that such a project is truly successful. This article will conclude by arguing that effective accelerated degrees require more than the simple reduction of a three-year programme to a two-year time frame.

The increase in accelerated degrees is being driven in part by government policy. The Conservative Party Manifesto outlined, as part of the reform of university funding, that the Conservatives would “encourage universities to offer more two-year courses” (Conservative Party, 2015, p. 35). More recently, the government published findings which concluded that there was indeed a demand by students and employers for accelerated programmes and that post-92 universities would be the most likely to offer such programmes. However, some, like Scott (2017), argue that Minister for Universities, Science and Innovation Jo Johnson’s backing of two-year degrees is likely to lead to only a few hundred such accelerated students, an argument put in doubt by the fact that the report also identified as key benefits reduced costs for students and quicker access to the graduate job market.

For many students, finance is arguably an overriding and entirely pragmatic concern when they make their choice of study. Our own programme has a mix of students, including those who opted for a cost-effective route to graduation. The current arrangements ensure that they complete the full 360 credits of an honours degree at a cost equivalent to that for 240 credits. However, this has a significant impact on staff workload, since the finance – currently limited by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) to £9,000 p.a. – brought into the Faculty does not equal the staff time required to teach those students. Lifting the cap on the amount universities can charge for tuition fees would certainly help ameliorate the problems of teaching 180 credits in a year (Stockwell, 2012), but this might be where things become more complicated. More controversially, Stockwell goes on to suggest that students who are studying as 'full time' in fact have plenty of space for additional courses of study during the academic year because they are so often lightly timetabled.

The findings (2016) of the Department for Education (DfE) identify one benefit of accelerated programmes as a means of speeding student access to the labour market. Another selling point for increasingly competitive universities is the option for students to enter the market via a Masters-level qualification within just three years. For Fielden and Middlehurst (2017), the move to allow accelerated degrees is tied to the fact that alternative providers already offer accelerated learning and progression to Masters. They identify that the Higher Education and Research Bill is broadly driven by the desire to increase competition and innovation between existing providers, but that it is predicated on an ideological belief that increased competition will serve to raise standards across the entire HE sector. The concern might be that such an approach to higher education will serve only to undermine quality and to water down the integrity of the sector.

The DfE has identified several barriers to the implementation of accelerated programmes. These include: a lack of student awareness that such routes exist; the incompatibility of certain externally-regulated courses, such as nursing or teaching; concerns about how such programmes would be valued internationally; the impact on staff research activity if teaching extends beyond the traditional term times; a reduction in summer vacation time during which students can earn. (Department for Education, 2016) However, whether these need be issues of concern really depends on the model of acceleration which is adopted.

In the United States, accelerated degrees have been around for many years. The Washington State Council of Presidents (2016) defines these as "an innovative approach to improve college affordability, address workforce needs and increase degree completion." The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU, 2012) defined four models for such programmes, one of which, the compression model, fits with that being promoted through the Higher Education and Research Bill and this model does address concerns raised in the previous paragraph. Completing the study during normal term times would avoid a reduction in student and staff time for other activity during the summer.

The final issue is arguably by far and away the most serious for us, as teachers and academics, to address. Although authors such as Davies, Slack and Howard (2012) found that there were no significant differences in outcomes between accelerated and traditional three-year students, this remains an area of limited research. It could be proposed that a successful accelerated degree programme cannot simply be three years of study delivered over two. Such a choice would be perilous at best, because the learning is forced to progress through levels 4-6 during that compressed time frame. This presents new challenges and it is my belief that a pedagogy for accelerated degree level learning will be required if students are to achieve the greatest possible amount of learning. Blended learning has much to offer in this regard, as may transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997), in forcing the development of critical analysis and more meaningful changes in frames of reference for our students as part of accelerating that process of learning. The learning gain of students from any discipline on an accelerated programme is likely to depend upon a range of factors. It is possible that we might construct a framework for accelerated progress which can be bolted to any programme and discipline, but the effective action research necessary to produce this result has yet to be undertaken.

I would argue that there is a core need for an accelerated curriculum which guarantees both the development of academic skills in tandem with subject knowledge and the fundamental transformation of the learner. Though we may glean much from the experience of accelerated programmes in the US, we must seek to refine the process within our own context if this is to be really successful for our own students.

The University of Greenwich already runs an accelerated degree in primary education and degrees in Language and Literacy and Mathematics Education which can serve as test beds for the pedagogical development outlined above. The University's Primary Department blazed the way over the last three years, but decisions are now required about how to place these programmes within a mixed-economy portfolio, alongside degree-level apprenticeships and extended degrees. At a time when funding is strained, decisions must be made about fees, value for money and support for accelerated students. Yet, of greater importance to the success of this new enterprise is the need for a pedagogy to be generated through research and engagement with the teaching community and with the support of academic development units. It is not only the time frame which must accelerated, but also the learning gain of students. In this way, the established university sector can confidently diversify its portfolio, address government policy and meet the needs of a wider range of students in the future. Change could indeed start here.

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The management of business or the business of management?

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Business is a large and diffuse activity and growing larger with the expansion of the new market-state, in which virtually all former-state services are contracted out to be run as businesses – if not yet directly for profit, then in heightened competition for customers.

Consequently, nearly all of the academic and more or less technical and specialised disciplines developing the various professional areas of expertise for which further and higher (tertiary) education previously prepared its students are being turned into business activities. This has long been the case with some subjects – Architecture, for instance – but now students of Health or Engineering find that they too must not only practise their skills but also, competitively, sell them to clients, in order both to secure employment and to maximise customer satisfaction, so as to attract more business.

It is not surprising, therefore, that applying for Business is popular amongst school leavers seeking secure employment. It collects together various academic sub-disciplines to cover component areas of accounting, marketing, economics etc. in 'skill sets' that hopefully 'bridge the skills gap' to match available employment. These sub-disciplines collected together do not then have more than a vocational relevance, because they do not focus, as do traditional academic disciplines, on any one central practice and/or theoretical canon. For example, the discipline of Education collects its constituent elements of philosophy, psychology and sociology in relation to the art – or is it a science or craft? – of teaching/pedagogy.

However, management could possibly constitute itself as the general activity common to multifarious businesses, so that degrees in Management would indicate more than a higher (and usually even more expensive) level in the hierarchy of management, business and administration. This, however, raises the question of whether generic management exists – as distinct from 'leadership', for instance. If providing a service in the new market-state depends upon satisfying customers, so as to grow the business, does not the effective management of such businesses depend upon meeting this bottom line: whether the service provides better and cheaper proverbial widgets (or more fancy ones in a niche market), more tasty beans or more satisfied students than the competition?

In other words, a new profession – as suggested, for instance, by Richard and Daniel Susskind in their prediction of a post-professional society – in which, as they conclude:

> 'in the end, the traditional professions will be dismantled, leaving most (but not all) professionals to be replaced by less expert people and high performing systems… new roles will arise but… these too, in due course, may be taken on by machines.' (2015, 303)

Managers of organisations would then be validated and prepared by various levels of the academic discipline of Management, this constituting the unified and unifying discourse that draws together the various elements of their art, craft or science – in the same way, as suggested above, that Education does.

It seems, however, that there is little demand for such degree level validation for a new management profession, although would-be managers pay through the nose for various MBAs. Again, this is because, like the businesses that managers manage, the activities are too diverse in themselves and all their various combinations. As a result, whilst managers, in whatever business they undertake, are typically pitted against workers to grow their business by growing the number of managers at the expense of an increasingly automated, outsourced and digitised workforce, they do not form a definite cadre – especially as managers themselves are subject to the same remorseless reduction to semi-professionalism that the Susskinds describe.

As a result, as the market-state morphs into what Wolfgang Streeck (2016, Chapter 4) calls a ‘Consolidation State’, run directly in the interests of capital investors rather than indirectly through the mediation of the market (let alone any democratic pretensions); the real generic managers are the politicians. They, and their top civil servants and other consultants, hold briefs for different departments of government – health, employment, transport etc. – that they interchange. At the end of their tenure in office, they interchange again, passing through the notorious revolving doors that usher them into corporate directorships, the management of investment funds or the boardrooms of banks.

Peculiarly, most of this administrative caste are prepared academically – insofar as they are prepared at all – by what Lloyd George (one of the few prime ministers who wasn’t so prepared) called ‘the Staff Colleges of the old Universities’ (Taylor, 1965: 70).

Paradoxically too, even at this level of governance in a Consolidation State, the functions of this managerial elite become reduced towards an algorithm, seeking only profit maximisation at the expense of culture, the environment and humanity’s future.

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Academic writing: Is there such a thing as 'university-level' punctuation?

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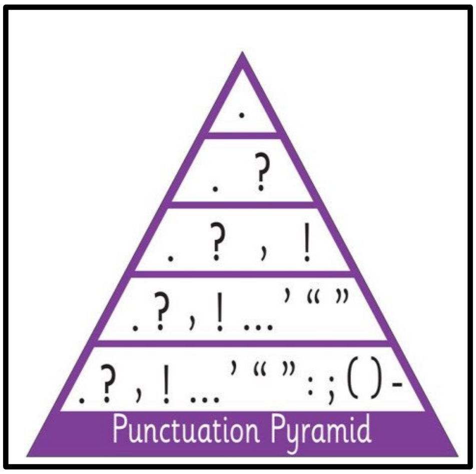
Abstract

This opinion piece makes connections between common strategies currently being deployed in primary schools and a growing perception amongst lecturers that a significant minority of undergraduate students have difficulty with punctuation, a difficulty which can render their written submissions very hard to read. This piece offers possible explanation, citing the 'punctuation pyramid' and considering the long-term effects of a primary education policy that encourages primary-aged children to 'up-level' their writing, a practice which many students bring to their undergraduate studies.

Keywords: Punctuation, up-levelling, adult literacy, primary education policy

Introduction

While marking written submissions at a range of levels, all lecturers, tutors and supervisors across higher education will at some point, I am sure, have experienced a tension. The content of the work being marked is sound (insightful, even), but the sentence construction is very weak and thus, in the mind of the marker, arises the inevitable question: 'Can this submission attract a pass grade?' Often, the source of the problem is either a lack of punctuation or – more commonly – the misuse of punctuation. This article argues that a factor contributing to this malaise is the direct, if unintended, long-term consequence of a particular aspect of primary education practice: the 'punctuation pyramid'.



Despite a long and diligent search, I have found no person or body claiming copyright over this pyramid, but it is a prominent addition to any primary school classroom: many versions of it are available, each visually different, but all identical in content. The pyramid presents a cumulative hierarchy of punctuation, which children are encouraged to master. It functions like Wilson's (2009) Criterion Scale, which was a method of assessing children's writing in accordance with criteria-referenced levels, though Wilson's original scale included much broader aspects of writing than punctuation alone. In primary schools today, children are encouraged to refer to the punctuation pyramid, both to see the progress they are making in their punctuation journey and, by choosing to insert into their completed first draft alternative or additional punctuation from higher up the pyramid, to 'up-level' their work. In visual form, the punctuation pyramid compellingly announces that (for example) a hyphen is two levels 'better' than a comma; that brackets are more advanced than speech marks. The ambitious writer will therefore be inclined to replace one with the other, often unaware of the effect that that might have on meaning.

Various pyramids dealing with different aspects of writing are available to primary school children. McDonald (2016) critiques the current policy, openly applied in many primary schools which requires children, after they have written a sentence or paragraph, to up-level their writing, perhaps by using words deemed to be more powerful than the ones they originally selected. Pyramids are often provided to help children (triangles populated with words or examples, very simple at the top, moving to examples of greater complexity and ambition further down), with the intention of raising writing scores (Barrett, 2014). McDonald argues that this policy leads directly to "a reductionist approach to language whereby the actual meaning of the sentence is secondary to the technical feature being used" (McDonald, 2016: 19). McDonald gives the example of the sentence '*The cat sat on the mat.'*, which, up-levelled, might become: '*The cat slept quietly on the mat.'*, a sentence which has had its meaning changed in the interests of more powerful, yet contextually inappropriate, vocabulary.

McDonald (2016) thus makes the point that children are taught to use powerful or premiership vocabulary almost arbitrarily in order to 'improve' their writing. This opinion piece argues that the same kind of teaching approach, applied to punctuation, can lead directly to indiscriminate use of 'premiere' punctuation, for effect.

Punctuation and meaning

The misuse or non-use of punctuation may well serve to change intended meaning. For example, Rosen (1995:40) famously showed how '*The butler stood at the door and called the guests' names.'* contrasts sharply with '*The butler stood at the door and called the guests names*.' Similarly, the omission of the comma in the question *'Shall we eat, Grandma?'* gives us a most alarming suggestion. As for the importance of the full stop, '*I am sorry you cannot come with us.'* conveys a very different message from '*I am sorry. You cannot come with us.'* Punctuation use is not an exercise in technical mastery of high and low levels, yet, to a child, the pyramid's message is apparently clear and unambiguous: 'Brackets are more advanced than speech marks'. However, it is patently absurd to suggest to a child that written dialogue will be superior if the lower-level inverted commas are replaced with higher-level brackets! The pyramid gives the impression that a high-level writer will need to demonstrate high-level punctuation. By the time that writer goes to university, it stands to reason that s/he will need a very high level of punctuation indeed.

Ironically, books on academic literacy at university level usually have very little to say about punctuation, leaving the student who wishes to self-improve rather bereft of help and information. Of five regularly-borrowed books from the libraries of the University of Greenwich (Bailey, 2015; Solomon, 2013; Brandt, 2009; Gillett *et al,* 2009; Levin, 2004), only two (Bailey and Gillett *et al*) make overt reference to punctuation – and these two together dedicate only three pages to the subject. Given that these five books have a combined output of over 1,150 pages focused upon academic writing, the compelling assumption must be that, amongst writers of books on academic literacy, correct punctuation by students is taken for granted. We who mark the essays know differently.

Education policy

The drive to use impressive vocabulary and punctuation is symptomatic of the tendency of successive governments to elevate knowledge over skills when formulating education policy. For example, Morgan (2015) stated the following when presenting education policy after the publication of a new national curriculum (DfE, 2014).

> "At the heart of our reforms has been a determination to place knowledge back at the core of what pupils learn in school. For too long our education system prized the development of skills above core knowledge"
> (Rt. Hon. Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education, 27th January 2015).

Most primary school teachers would agree that education philosophies at either end of the pedagogical 'skills versus knowledge' spectrum do not lead to a balanced education for children. Carr (2009) observes that, although the drivers of educational policy may hold binary views as to the 'best' form of education of educational philosophy, teachers tend not to advocate skills over knowledge, or vice versa. Children need both.

The long-term effects of 'up-levelling' punctuation

The following responses were taken from individual developmental tutorials I conducted after a recent formative essay submission during an induction week, where weak or eccentric punctuation in each student's work was discussed. The responses demonstrate how each of these students had the 'know-of'' about punctuation, but did know have the 'know-how' to go with it.

> Kate: *I was terrified when I handed that essay in. I wanted it to be good enough for university. I wanted to impress, so I used grown-up punctuation.*

> Femi: *I really, really did not want to fail my very first essay. I wanted to write at a proper standard. I've never used colons before. I thought it might help.*

> Andrea: *I'd read other students' essays. There's four of us who are friends. We showed each other what we had done, and they'd all used posh words and lots of punctuation, so I did too.*

The strategy adopted by Kate, Femi and Andrea – to use punctuation to impress – demonstrates that, though they may know of various forms of punctuation, they lack the skill to punctuate appropriately. Such liberal application of punctuation marks, without understanding of how each works, is an error common to a significant minority of our undergraduate students.

Our current undergraduate students are, in part, the product of their primary education and, although they know about the hierarchy of punctuation, they do not necessarily know what to do with that information. They have been taught that a hierarchy of punctuation exists, but a proportion of them, in pursuit of 'better' writing, uses that hierarchy indiscriminately.

Conclusion

The most meaningful outcome of my tutorials with Kate, Femi and Andrea was that they all left my office unencumbered by their previously strongly-held, but errant, notion that now that they were at university they were required to be impressive in their use of punctuation and vocabulary. I am of the view that we would, during induction, do our students a great service were we to teach and assure them that an essay is an exercise in clarity, not in literary gymnastics. The implication of the punctuation pyramid is that 'complex is best', but if students arrive at university still labouring under this misconception, they may well find that their experiences, progress and grades will suffer accordingly.

McDonald (2016) concludes by saying: "Introducing children to new words which they did not know before is ... powerful [but] this needs to be done in a context" (p.20). The same is true of punctuation. In all aspects of writing, primary-aged children and university students alike would do well to value, master and utilise the humble and the appropriate, rather than misapply the seemingly impressive. That strong yet simply-punctuated sentences are preferable to unnecessarily complex ones is advice that needs to be voiced during induction; it will be received with relief by most students.

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Why play matters in a world of REF, TEF and What the Jeff

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On April 28th 2017, I went on Twitter and found it bouncing with announcements, memes, gifs and pictures proclaiming #edballsday. Now, I know who Ed Balls is – he's a dancer who was once a politician – but I have no idea how we came to have an Ed Balls Day; or, what one is. However, it really doesn't matter. It made me laugh and someone had written a brilliant poem dedicated to him and the point seemed to be the collective joke – something daft that brought people together to appreciate the enjoyment as much as the purported purpose. Virtually and dispersed, we were all momentarily playing together.

#edballsday typifies a What the Jeff[1] moment. It's a statement of incredulity that can be applied in so many contexts. What is this? What does it mean? How on earth did this come about? Questions that seem to apply whether we are ruminating on the Ed Balls phenomenon or our current ride on the ghost train of educational change. As I write, we are hurtling through the tunnel of pre-election legislative push-through, our white knuckles gripping the handle. Will we get thrown off on the next bend? Will we arrive safely at our destination? And if we do, what state will we be in? Elated by the thrill and clamouring for another go? Or queasy and doubtful we can take any more?

We all know what is lurking to go "BOO!" at us from different dark angles: Brexit, the Teaching Excellence Framework, Research Excellence Framework, changes to the quality landscape, student recruitment and general uncertainty. Three of these represent the intensification of the metric- and measurement-driven culture of Higher Education (HE). Singly, each can be daunting; clustered together, they are pretty terrifying. We are all dealing with them in multiple strategic and operational ways, some of which are obvious, whilst others – *playing* in response to difficulty – may seem counter-intuitive. However, playing in the face of challenge is something that we have done at Winchester recently and its success has surprised us.

This article is an informal account of our experimental 'Play and Creativity Festival': an event guided by some simple principles, the minimum of structure and few directives. Our mission was to (re)instate play at the heart of higher education community and activity, driven by four main desires. These were to

- celebrate and re-energise teaching and learning
- find alternative ways of communicating complex ideas and important messages
- generate fresh perspectives and new ideas
- build connections and community

The theoretical basis to our belief in play recognised that infinite forms of play exist – and they suit different people. We draw from Stuart Brown (2010), Pat Kane (2004), Brian Sutton Smith (2006), Robert Fagen (1981) and other eminent play theorists who argue that play is

[1] What the Jeff ?! Vernacular expression indicating surprise; polite equivalent of phrase using word starting with eff. Can be used in response to HE-related developments which are viewed as baffling or flawed.

crucial to human learning, behavioural development and socialisation. Brown, in particular, defines play in its myriad forms as being pleasurable and apparently purposeless. And yet his research evidences that it is not just fun, but vital to our lives, as, when we play, we forge new neural pathways in our brains. These foster new ways of thinking and keep our minds alert. Not only this, but from compiling thousands of play case histories, he found that people who play demonstrate greater lightheartedness, empathy and optimism, particularly if they play physically. Through play, we build strength and agility, work out hierarchies and relationships, rehearse ideas and ways of being and chisel out new understandings. All of these are essential if humans are to remain responsive in the face of uncertainty and change.

With all of this in mind, it did not seem too much to suggest that the university sector needs play and players now more than ever. And so the idea of a 'Play and Creativity Festival' was born and the real thing ran from April 3rd – 7th 2017. It came from a leadership development programme generating projects to enrich the life of the University. Play and creativity were already at the heart of my interests through my work on creative reflection and PDP, as a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® facilitator and through collaborations with Chrissi Nerantzi and Prof. Norman Jackson on *Exploring Play in Higher Education* (Creative Academic CAM2a and 2b, 2015). Before joining the University in September 2016, I felt sure that the community would be playful and creative in ways it did not necessarily make visible. To my joy, I found like-minded partners in Julia Osgerby, Tina Newman and Sheila Nicholson and the four of us bid for senior sponsorship to back us in designing and running the Festival. We honestly didn't know if this would be forthcoming: would the idea sound inappropriate at a time of nervy horizon-scanning, the need to funnel resources strategically, the overwhelming demands on staff and students at the end of the semester? To our delight, however, we won complete support… and we were off!

Our starting point was our belief that playful and creative engagement was essential for re-energising, bolstering morale, lightening the load, refreshing ideas and strengthening community. However, we had no fixed blueprint for action. Even though we were excited by the prospect, we also had no idea if anyone would want to join in; so, we decided to hold an open meeting, inviting people to come and explore with us what shape the Festival might take and how to put it on. As part of this, we invited our colleague and soon-to-be fellow musketeer Richard Cheetham, from Sports Coaching, to run an eight-minute exercise with balloons to loosen us all up.

Two things blew us away. One was that forty people turned up for this meeting. The other was that, in eight minutes, while forty 'almost strangers' ran around the room following instructions as to what to do with our balloons, we learned several things: lots about heart rate, mobility, coordination, team working, but even more about how much we laughed and how differently we felt at the end of that brief runaround. It energised our thinking and helped us frame what to do next. One of the most important outcomes was the over-riding view, voiced by those in the room, that this was not just something we could or should do – we *needed* to do it. It was clear that if balloon play could bring home to participants complex concepts relevant to body functioning and sports science, there must be countless other playful ways to inspire learning.

Whilst the pedagogic side of the Festival was of paramount importance, we agreed we wanted to give staff in any role – and students – the chance to contribute and/or to participate. We adopted an open and organic philosophy, which welcomed anyone from anywhere to do so something in Festival week – they chose the activity and organised it; we promoted it widely through a programme. We did not envisage a nice, neat, systematic conference, but something widespread and unexpected – a bit like lovely mushrooms popping up in unusual places. And so the organised, serendipitous not-quite-chaos began. The core team rapidly expanded with more play aficionados – Amy Barlow, Cassie Shaw, Jack Hancock, and Bekki Street – who threw more ideas into the mix and helped us gather momentum and offers of activities.

Through the Festival, we were both shaping and feeding from a shift, palpable over the last three years, in the zeitgeist of HE. Play is starting to be recognised as a valid part of university life in all its forms and aspects. One strand of play, gamification, has become a popular topic in journal articles which recount how the principles, rules and characters of game-playing are being adopted for high-level teaching. Building on our earlier ventures together, Chrissi Nerantzi and I are producing an international collection of play practices in HE for Palgrave Macmillan (2018). Play has suddenly become a hot conference topic, as in the National Teaching Fellow Symposium (2016) and at the PlayLearn conferences at Manchester Metropolitan University (2016/2017).

However, there is still work to do to ensure that play in HE is as roundly appreciated as things like 'innovation' and 'creativity', buzzwords which seem universally popular, whilst 'play' is a word that attracts some but makes others feel uneasy. This is often because the true nature, scope and relevance of play has been misinterpreted as something that children do and grow out of, confined to the social and leisure-based. At worst, it is considered trivial or something we do instead of the real and important. The pedagogic challenge of integrating play into HE teaching is to intrigue, inspire, stretch and amuse students by unexpected approaches to a subject, whilst not pitching the play in ways that feel childish or discomfiting.

With this balance in mind, by the time the first day of the Festival had arrived, I was wondering what we had let ourselves in for. However, I was also overwhelmed by the buzz that had built up; with well over sixty sessions running, we were turning away offers right up to the moment it started. Participants and contributors ranged from the Vice Chancellor, Assistant and Deputy Vice Chancellors to academics, students, administrators, professional services staff and more. We even had messages from colleagues in a Korean university, saying that, if they had only known about it, they would have flown over. We went from being nervous about whether people would take part to slack-jawed at the ways they responded.

The kinds of play that populated the Festival were incredibly diverse, from events which had purposeful outcomes to those which were open and free. Some were solitary or quietly communal (jigsaw building, no-sew bunting making, sensory drawing with blindfolds and music); others invited louder, more active participation, such as scientific demonstrations conducted through maggot 'racing' (to understand aspects of forensics) or playing catch in the dark to illustrate aspects of cycling safety and the design of appropriate bike lights. There was physical rough-and-tumble in the shape of a re-run of the balloon activity, this time with over thirty coaching students. Somehow, I ended up playing sitting volleyball with some third-year drama students, heady after the relief of their final hand-in. (To my astonishment, this was a hoot, although I ruined my beige trousers sliding across the sports hall.) The physical and participatory examples listed here all came from current curriculum practice and further revealed that playful pedagogies are being used to good effect on our programmes.

Some challenges were literally puzzling – learning to break code like Sherlock Holmes, or trying to grasp the niceties of eighteenth-century hand gestures and protocols for dramatic performance. There were gentler outdoor enquiries too: the Secret Life of Campus Tour combined history, geography, biodiversity, environmental sustainability and a nice healthy walk, all in one package. There were music, performance, making, sticking, LEGO building, voice and body workshops, a lecture, ceramic painting, digital gaming, labyrinth walking and imaginative contemplation. And koooooo many others! All provided the opportunity to come together and learn about a subject – and often inspired ideas about how to teach in new and unexpected ways. We rounded off Festival week with a ‘Clarice Cliff tea party’; one of the most popular drop-in events of the week had been the chance to paint slipware in the style of Clarice Cliff – with artworks, guidance materials, music of her time and a wonderful array of found, donated and gathered plain china for colleagues to decorate. These were all dried by the Friday and the table set for cake and tea amidst a riot of ceramic shapes and vivid colours.

If you have read this far, I hope some of the excitement of the Festival and the beliefs which inspired it are coming across to you. Even if you think it sounds fun, you might still be wondering what the point of it was and whether it will have lasting impact. You may also be asking what its relevance was for teaching and learning. I shall try to pull together some thoughts to conclude.

We were keen to capture, in a non-invasive way, responses to the events of the Festival and thoughts as to its value, by means of interviews and paper evaluations. Some of the former can be found in our memento film of the Festival on our blog homepage here: https://playandcreativityfestival.wordpress.com/. Extensive written feedback supported our hunch that although we are often playful and creative we do not always make this visible. It confirmed that by sharing these practices we enjoyed noticeable benefits. From a pedagogic point of view, these included learning new skills and techniques and combining unusual subjects, materials and approaches to embed concepts or stimulate thinking. Participants repeatedly remarked on the value of integrating play into teaching complex subjects. Teaching staff were inspired to modify approaches for application to their own contexts, whilst students emphasised how stimulated by activities they felt. A playful, round-campus nature walk, designed to raise awareness of sustainability and biodiversity, triggered ideas about how to use such an approach to develop language teaching. An activity with peas and sticks was seen as an effective way of communicating the history of Froebel to Education students. Three illustrations of transferability as well as value for teaching can be seen here:

- *“I feel very privileged to have seen this – This was a fascinating mix of Art, theatre, Exhibition, Play and Poetry reading as well as being a scientific treatise on the physics and chemistry of clouds (The Naming of Clouds; a performance)”*
- *“This was an excellent opportunity to engage physiologically, emotionally and socially to use our voices. We used our bodies and our voices to make sound in a way that was conscious, purposeful and self- aware ...(Playing with Voice: workshop)”*
- *“Who constructs, controls curates? Really interesting questions for each of us… relevant to all programmes – this exhibition would be a great resource across all*

faculties (The pop-up Winchester American Museum, exploring questions of content and ownership)"

A recent graduate of the University, working in student engagement, noted the true partnership value of experimenting together:

> *"There was no hierarchy in the sessions, no student-teacher dichotomy, everyone was equally new to the activity and they learnt together. The week was a refreshing and reinvigorating opportunity for staff and students to put down their pens, stop typing, and equally engage in play."*

Julia, a core team member, reflecting on the Festival, afterwards wrote:

> *"I lecture in Accounting and I am always trying to find new and interesting ways to keep students engaged with what can be perceived to be a dull and boring subject. I was initially drawn to getting involved in the Festival as I knew very little about play and creativity in the higher education context. The Festival allowed me to discover the pedagogy behind play and creativity. It provided me with a wonderful opportunity to explore how I could use play and creativity in my teaching practice. It also created a productive and exciting forum to share and discuss best practice with colleagues from my own Department and other colleagues from different disciplines and backgrounds from across the University."*

In an HE culture driven by targets, benchmarks and metrics, participants repeatedly noted what they could do when the pressure was off and the opportunity to explore was open-ended. Sessions were an antidote to wistful laments by academics about the loss of learning for learning's sake or the pleasure of playing without agenda.

There were other positives too.

We fulfilled our ambition to lift spirits and re-energise people in the final crazy taught week of Semester 2. There is never a good time to run any kind of major event and this particular week did at times feel like a bonkers choice. However, we felt that, actually, when you are overstretched *and* stressed *and* exhausted *and* the Easter holiday is just NEVER coming – that is in fact when you need to take time out and do something else. This could be for fifteen minutes, or for an hour, or longer. Student participants agreed.

The Festival certainly consolidated our sense of community and connection – time and again people fed back that they were having conversations they would not usually have, with people they would not usually talk to. We all played with people we never come across as a rule and people took part who six weeks earlier had really looked as if they wouldn't. A colleague who, if not sceptical, certainly was not sure that it was for her, observed afterwards that "the Play and Creativity Festival was marvellous, and it really brought people together".

Others remarked that a really important – but unintended – benefit of the Festival was that it served as a form of professional development, but not of the conventional kind. Sessions gave people new perspectives and ideas for tasks, approaches, teaching, relationships, team building, all of which were transferable in some way to entirely different fields.

Let me also touch upon the no-small-matter of staff wellbeing. The atmosphere in the sessions that I participated in – and trust me, I went to loads; I felt I had to! ☺ – was unfailingly collegiate, interested and good- humoured and the activities themselves were all eye-opening. With all the regularity of a refrain, people said that they felt calmer and happier as a result of participating. A final plus is that the Festival was relatively economical to put on – we organised and ran it ourselves and, whilst we did draw on small amounts of budget to pay for resources and some basic promotional materials, it cost a fraction of a major conference. Though it was a huge undertaking, somehow it bowled along and did not feel like work. Above all, it was *fun.*

Was it perfect? Of course not. The wind blew our lovely banners down. Our festival T-shirts turned up battleship grey instead of navy blue and the small ones wouldn't have fitted a mole. We said from the outset that it was an experiment, that it would be homespun, that we couldn't guarantee who would attend sessions as it was all organised on a pot-luck basis. The potluckery was both part of the charm and freedom and also something to reflect on; some sessions were extremely well-attended and others much quieter. This was no reflection on the quality of the contribution, but down to such variables as timing, location and local promotion. I invited a colleague from outside the University to run an outdoor workshop, as long as she didn't mind not knowing who might be there. I joked to her that if no-one turned up it might just be her and the West Downs cat. Shortly after her session started, she sent me a photo. Of the cat. Thankfully, others joined them moments later.

We travelled a long way in the three months leading up to the Festival and saw an awakening within the community as to what it could do for us. It is now August 2017 and since I first drafted this there have been numerous enquiries from colleagues in other universities as to how they might run a similar festival. We have been happy to discuss our experiences widely, but the true key to the success of this kind of venture is simple: it is both believing in the value of doing it and also giving yourselves as a community permission to play. We had, most helpfully, senior-team backing, but local, individual will is important, too; through our enthusiasm and belief, we got the buy-in of a wide constituency. We presented the film at the Governors' Awayday and received their blessing to run annual festivals. We are now planning the next one and looking at how we can involve our local community. In our midst, we now have a growing number of play evangelicals, all fired up to develop the event. The Festival even won a Senate Learning & Teaching Award and received the the following statement of support from the First Deputy Vice Chancellor:

> *"The festival was a perfect example of research-informed pedagogy. Built upon the research into play as a form of learning, the festival provided a forum for imaginative, challenging and fun pedagogic practice which, in turn, inspired colleagues to review their own pedagogic practice and open themselves to the possibility of incorporating elements of play. We hope the festival will continue and build upon this excellent start and become a distinctive part of Winchester's learning and teaching practice."*

Bring on Play and Creativity 18!

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Liminal space or in limbo? Post Graduate Researchers and their personal pie charts of identity

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Introduction

It may seem self-evident that new PhD “students” in the United Kingdom conduct their research in a liminal space beyond taught undergraduate and postgraduate degrees but while they are not yet in the role of a full academic (whether or not that features as part of their career aspiration) the following questions can be raised: Are they still students? Are they researchers? Are they university staff or ‘almost’ staff? Do they teach? Should they teach? For many, it’s an opaque boundary and one that we were interested in exploring from the perspectives of those negotiating it. Green (2007, p.153) goes so far as to say that, “doctoral education is as much about identity formation as it is about knowledge production”. Whilst the achievement of ‘Doctor’ as the ‘identity prize’ clearly stimulates the PhD students’ motivation, our experience of working closely with and talking to postgraduate researchers (PGRs) suggests that knowledge production remains, for most, the fundamental driver. Nevertheless, ‘identity’ as a lens through which we can perceive PGRs and their progress, and as a reflective lens through which they see their own evolution in academia has a value that we may not fully appreciate. Identity formation includes how PGRs formulate their own understandings of the ultimate ‘object’ of the PhD (Cotterall, 2015), what research actually means and entails (McCormack, 2004) and the positive and negative day to day experiences (Emmioğlu *et al*., 2017). In the worst instances, competing expectations collide and exploitation can be a consequence. We are fortunate that we have encountered nothing at all like this example cited in the *Times Higher* (2017):

> It is well known that PhD students are widely seen by academics as a cheap workforce. But to be treated with such little respect by the people who are supposed to foster your career and help you to succeed is just not right in any workplace (anonymous contributor, unnamed university).

That such experiences can occur suggests that ongoing consideration of roles, expectations and perceptions of both PGRs and their supervisors is fundamental. It is likely that, by interacting with and supporting PhD students, we may both positively influence and better understand their perceptions of themselves; in consequence, we may well be able to enhance the support we give them.

Internationally there appears to be a tendency towards PhD students being seen (or even employed) as staff and there is a suggestion that some UK institutions are considering this model (Else, 2017). In that context, it is prudent to consider our own institutional perspectives and where we locate the PhD students. At this stage of our research, we are not seeking to distinguish experiences by discipline and we have focused on those at the earlier stages of their research. Although aware of possible limitations to our study, we sought to capture and focus on the PGRs’ perceptions of themselves, as both the starting point for deeper discussions and a continuation of an existing study on identity and belonging amongst PGRs.

PGR Roles and identity

Whether they have an academic career in mind as a long term goal or not, the PGR is often seen as embarking on a research apprenticeship where "the established 'master' inducts the new apprentice into the 'mysteries' of the craft" (Yeatman, 1995, p. 9). Whether they are focused on an academic career, determinedly eschew that aspiration or are ambivalent, we realise that there is often discord amongst PGRs in relation to what they perceive to be the goals of their PhDs and how they are meant to get there. Our research seeks to examine how the PhD candidates we work with see themselves in the context of their physical, social and emotional environments. We are particularly interested in how they perceive the liminal space they are entering that bridges taught study and research. As Jazvac-Martek (2009) notes, 'Rarely considered are student intentions, motivations, or the variability of experiences and interactions that influence shifting identities' (p. 254).

There is a duality of identity or even a triality when it comes to PGRs, since they exist in a space that is simultaneously researcher, student, and often 'teacher' in the broad sense of supporting other students in their learning. In our own institution, informal discussions with key stakeholders suggest that there is a variance across departments and faculties that leads to significant differences in experience which in turn lead to often marked variance in self-concept, autonomy and comfort. The ramifications of this in terms of a PGR experience, how they perceive the University, their sense of belonging and how valued they feel are the primary goals of this ongoing research. A core component of one's sense of belonging is identity in a work/ study environment. How that identity is shaped by factors such as self-concept, significant others, policy context and the pervading institutional and social cultures is of particular interest in this article. This research has primarily focused on the first year of study where PGRs begin research, start working with undergraduates and follow a series of mandatory taught courses as the first stages in a longer research programme. We have been investigating how they see themselves (in the context of their roles, position and day to day working) in the University and in particular, we focus on where they work, who they work with, their expectations and how much they feel 'part' of the University.

Our focus

Whilst there is a considerable body of research relating to professional identity in academics and the importance of a sense of belonging amongst students at school or undergraduate level (Hoffman et al., 2016), there is much less in respect of PGRs. There are of course some interesting studies pertaining to doctoral candidate role identity (see for examples Jazvac-Martek, 2009; Colbeck, 2008). A UK sector discussion about and acknowledgement of the variance in nomenclature, roles, responsibilities and regard afforded mean that we hope our case (an urban post-1992 institution with a considerable international PhD contingent) will present a useful contribution.

This case study spotlights just one small element of the wider research and looks at an output designed originally to stimulate thinking rather than generate data. However, we found that although, as planned, our initial activity provided a clarification of terms and common framework for the focus group discussions, it also offered some fascinating insights and acted as a source of data in its own right. Whilst we acknowledge the depth and complexity of identity theory, which could no doubt add insight to our analysis, we have been keen to capture and consider the rawness of these impressions as a cornerstone to an ongoing study. Our intent in examining their perceptions about identity and belonging and an associated rationalisation of these is to help with the ongoing strategies and mechanisms of support for PGRs. We hope this paper will provoke discussion about who we want PGRs to be and how the institution and supervisors interact with them.

PGR Teaching, Learning and Assessment course (TLA)

The participants involved were all registered PGR students on the Postgraduate Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (PGR TLA) course at the University of Greenwich. The aim of the six week course, which runs twice a year (once in the autumn term and once in the spring term and simultaneously in each case at two campuses: Medway and Greenwich Maritime), is to introduce PGRs to a range of teaching and learning approaches and essential concepts and strategies when beginning teaching in Higher Education (HE). A mixture of theory, pre-class online activities, group discussions, practical assessments, and a written reflection combine to form a blended course for the PGRs. The course is compulsory and must be completed as part of the PGR development programme at Greenwich. This means that all PGRs, unless formally exempted, must register on the course, attend all classes and engage with all assessments. Until starting the course the PGRs are not supposed to do any demonstration, lab support or tutorial work. That it exists and is compulsory suggests the teaching function of PGRs is a valued and central component of the wider PGR programme. Medway is a STEM dominated campus and the research interests of the PGRs who were part of this cohort reflected this. There was a wider mix of research specialisms with the Greenwich Maritime cohort, ranging from Architecture to Music. However, for this particular case study, we are not distinguishing the disciplinary background of the PGRs and how or whether these have affected their pie chart responses. There is, of course, scope for future analysis based on this and other variables.

There are varying types of training and professional development opportunities that are made available to PGRs (both mandatory and optional) across HE institutions. These vary from one day introductions to more formal courses like our own. Some are connected directly to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Associate Fellowship level of the United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). Like many similar initiatives the PGR programme design is strongly connected to the national Researcher Development Framework (Vitae, 2017). Within that, the PGR TLA course encompasses the values that underpin the professional framework of Vitae that is evident in their four domains (2010). The design of the TLA programme also helps to support PGRs on the path to applying for Associate Fellowship of the HEA. Although it does not currently confer automatic recognition, the final session of the programme is focused on discussing the three dimensions of Areas of Activity, Core Knowledge, and Professional Values (HEA, 2017).

In the autumn term 2016-17, 16 PGRs were registered as part of the Greenwich cohort, and 18 registered as part of the Medway cohort. In the spring term 2016-17 there were 16 PGRs at Greenwich and 17 at Medway.

Methods and rationale

For our wider and ongoing research we are using a multi strategy design utilising online questionnaires and focus groups. In the 2016-17 academic year we conducted four separate focus groups, one for each cohort. The first two were facilitated by one of the authors, the second two by a colleague as both the authors had taught sessions to those two cohorts. The focus groups were carried out at the end of the course, immediately after the final face-to-face session. For the focus groups, we devised an activity to engage the participants and orientate their thinking towards notions of identity and belonging. We called this activity *the personal pie charts of identity*. As stated, we wanted to use this as a prompt and as a 'warmer' activity but the ways in which the PGRs varied in their interpretation, the simplicity of the expression and the framing it afforded us suggested that we should look more closely at these pie charts. Central to the design of this task was what Guantlett and Holzwarth (2006) describe as a 'a happy side effect' of visual methods they have used to explore identities: 'Primarily the creative activity is the starting point for developing thoughts about personal experience and identity, which are ultimately communicated to the researcher.' (p.82). In fact, for us, the 'happy side effect' was how interesting the visual aspect was in itself. This report focusses primarily on what we have seen in those pie charts.

The pie chart creation as a data source can be represented as a 'participant- generated visual methodology' (Guillemin and Drew, 2010). Much of the literature focusses on how this methodology enables the articulation of difficult to express feelings and ideas. Whilst this is a less sensitive area to, say, mental illness or the consequences of chronic illness, we feel that the opportunity it afforded benefitted the participants, particularly those that are international PGRs and are still evolving confidence when it comes to expressing themselves in English. This is especially true of the science focused PGRs, many of whom hail from a range of non native English speaking backgrounds. We share the perspective offered by Guillemin and Drew (2010):

> By fostering participation, these methodologies can be empowering... We suggest that visual methodologies offer a different approach that takes seriously participants as knowers. In addition, visual methodologies provide participants with the opportunity to produce an image that allows them to portray what is often difficult to express in words (p. 178).

Sheets of paper with an empty circle and basic guidance were handed to each student. On them was the request that they think about how they see themselves and what proportion of the self-conception pie they would give to themselves as 'student' and what to 'researcher', 'teacher'/ 'lecturer' or 'staff member'. Verbally, we suggested that they could use as many as they wished and use other terms if preferable. The terms we used are those most common in our own institutional documentation. We wanted to give each PGR the opportunity to reflect on their own roles in the University and decide for themselves how they see themselves within the institution but within a common frame of reference that could be used for comparative purposes and could also be layered upon and unpicked subsequently. We emphasised the impressionistic approach though a few from the science faculty were still clearly fazed by our unscrupulous disregard for precision:

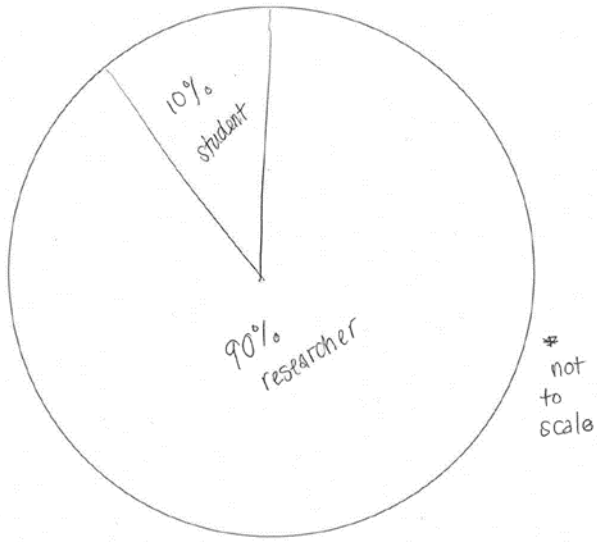

Figure 1: Sample pie chart with caveat (A12)

They were given around five minutes to complete the task. It can be seen on some of the finished pie charts that some divisions were re-worked, pointing to the careful decision making which the students were undergoing as they completed the pie chart. What drew our attention to the potential richness of such an activity for the intended purposes but also as a data source was the time, consideration and care many of them put into it. It was clear that although the five minute time allocation pushed the PGRs to make a slightly instinctive and immediate judgement in terms of how they perceive themselves, they nevertheless wanted to 'get it right' and some pondered for some considerable time and at least two of the total who completed the activity (n=38) asked for a fresh sheet so they could make it clear. Some wrote percentages in and others used lines from which we can only approximate percentages. The pie charts presented below have been selected as representative and are numbered with a letter prefix (A =autumn; S= spring) for convenience of cross referencing.

Findings and discussion

Overview

38 students took part in the pie chart activity. We found that the pie charts could be grouped into four categories:

1. The largest proportion placed a heavy emphasis on the researcher aspect of their identities (18 out of 38)
2. The next most frequent commonality were those that made an effort to split their pie chart into thirds (from the equal three way split to a range of varying proportions usually with research as the largest section) (11 out of 38)
3. A small but not insignificant minority of charts placed a heavy emphasis on perceiving themselves as being mainly a student (5 out of 38)
4. And a small number revealed an almost equal split between student and researcher (4 out of 38).

Unsurprisingly, none had more than 40% for 'teaching'. This may be different of course in other institutions where the teaching role of PhD students is more integral to the role.

Internationally the picture is different still, with PhD students often tasked with relatively large teaching or support functions, often with concomitant ‘academic’ status (Else, 2017). Although PGRs at the University are able to take up teaching positions as soon as they are registered on the PGR TLA, there may not be many opportunities available to them. Moreover, PGRs may be less concerned with taking up such responsibilities as they wish to focus more on the development of their research.

So what do these tendencies suggest? Category 1 reveals that most of the PGRs who participated in the task view themselves predominantly as the institutional nomenclature defines them, perceiving themselves as being ‘more than a student’. ‘Researcher’ connotes exploration, discovery, new thresholds of knowledge and as latter discussions revealed suggests heightened importance and value. In discussions with the PGRs many made clear they felt it sounded more prestigious than ‘student’. Whilst we provided no fixed definition of research, subsequent discussion relating to such factors as relationship with supervisors, collaboration, autonomy and even loneliness suggest that, like McCormack’s (2004) longitudinal study of three PGRs, divergent expectations and experiences were prevalent.

In some ways, category 2 is unsurprising in that if you offer people three components they may be tempted to represent each of them. Few actually suggested categories other than those we suggested so a follow up exercise where these are participant defined would be interesting. On at least two occasions during the activity, PGRs commented that they would like to be doing more ‘regular’ student facing work. Others commented that they could not of course be ‘teaching’ in any sense of the word because that had yet to complete the mandatory PGR TLA which prompted a barrage of “ well, in fact, I have been…” type rejoinders. Clarification of requirements for both supervisors and PGRs is therefore essential.

Since PGRs are not referred to as students in our university literature, even this figure in category 3 might be a surprise. They are commonly called PGR or PhD students in everyday parlance amongst academics however. It may suggest that some of the PGRs do not view their role as a PGR as one that is any more active or innovative than the role they had at university a few years before (a case perhaps of more of the same at a higher level). By labelling themselves as being more of a ‘student’ than anything else, these PGRs may be feeling as though their research is very much being guided by their supervisors on the classic ‘master/ apprentice’ model and, despite efforts here and elsewhere to encourage autonomy and independence earlier, at levels 6 and 7 in particular (QAA, 2010), either see themselves as dependent or have a more generalised view of what it means to be a ‘students’.These *students* tend, of course, to still be in the very early stages of the PhD research, and therefore will likely be more reliant on the help of their supervisors. The degree to which this relationship is supportive or directive is likely to have a significant impact on the ongoing sense of autonomy and agency in terms of their research.

Another possible reason behind such labelling is the way in which the PGRs approach their PhD. If PGRs choose to complete a PhD as an extension of a previous degree, their thesis may be viewed as a longer and more extensive dissertation, which is being supervised and guided by an expert academic. If such is the case, then the PGRs may approach their research in much the same way they would have approached a dissertation in the past - making core efforts to evaluate existing knowledge but relying on the guidance of their supervisor to steer them in the right direction. For the latter, the PGRs may view their supervisor in much higher esteem and thus perceive a hierarchy between themselves and their supervisor, leading to a self labelling of ‘student’. Crossouard and Pryor (2008) acknowledge the tendency in supervisors to adopt a hierarchical approach but propose that by ‘invoking different identity positions’ (pp.224-225) in themselves they can help support the evolution of the PGRs’ academic identity.

Category 4 revealed an almost equal split between student and researcher. Colbeck (2008) suggests that ‘When two identities with contrasting meanings and expectations are activated at the same time, an individual is likely to experience stress’ (p.10) and, given the many systems, responsibilities and working protocols PGRs are faced with in the early stages of PhD study, we may do well to acknowledge this tension as a loci of stress and take steps to alleviate it. The split may point to tensions surrounding the PGRs’ feelings towards their study, their supervisors, and their position as a PGR in the university. For Jazvac-Martek’s (2009) longitudinal study, ‘Findings highlight doctoral students taking on a large variety of both doctoral student and academic role identities during their doctoral studies and oscillating between these roles frequently over time’ (p. 258). For PGRs who are in the early stages of their research and not taking on teaching duties, the role they have in terms of their study and place in the university may not feel much different to the ones they had when they were an undergraduate. For students experiencing the latter, they may associate themselves more with being a ‘student’ more in line with category three above. What we need to be alert to therefore is that these pie charts are a snapshot, a mere moment in time, and a significant experience could easily skew these self-concepts on a different day.

An Evaluation of Selected Pie Charts

In the section that follows, we have selected a sample of representative pie charts from each category for closer consideration.

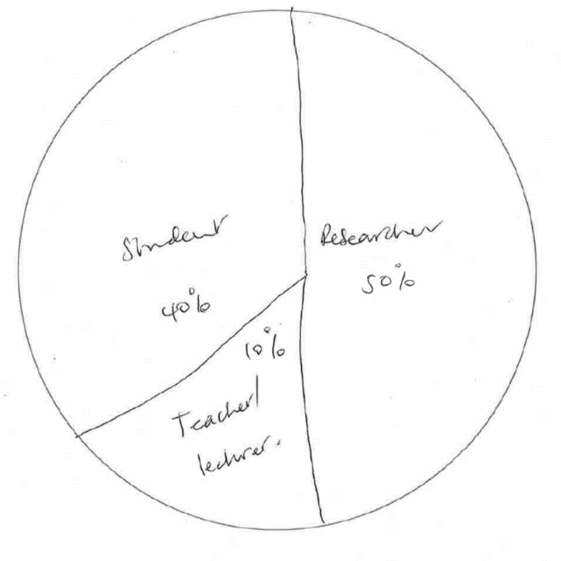

Figure 2: A20

As noted before, those in the largest cluster place greatest significance on the researcher role. The exact emphasis on the researcher role, however, varies. A20 (Fig. 2, above) allocates 50 per cent of their academic identity to being a researcher, 40 per cent to being a student, and 10 per cent to being a teacher/lecturer. It suggests that the PGR is alert to the competing identities and whilst feeling somewhat in control over the thesis and the direction of the work, s/he still recognises the significance and status of the supervisor role.

Throughout the PGR TLA, participants were asked to comment on the assessment, feedback and teaching experiences they had as students. During these discussions, most of the PGRs would comment on their experiences on their degrees. The shift to being labelled a PGR was thus also a shift to being 'something more than' a student. The latter is common amongst PGRs as they walk the line between being viewed and treated as both students and colleagues alternately or even simultaneously, particularly if they are involved with teaching duties. Since none of the respondents, even at such an early stage of their PhDs, identified solely as a student it suggests that the identity shift is occurring at varying rates and to varying extents. As stated, it is likely that the PGR label and the frequency of its use in marketing and programme materials will affect the percentage given to the role of 'researcher'. If PGRs see the prestige of studying for a PhD as a key driver and motivation behind their studies then they may allocate more emphasis to this role.

The connection between status and prestige of the various identities forms part of the data accrued from the focus groups. In a pre-course survey, registered participants on the PGR TLA course were asked about the main reason they had decided to pursue a PhD with a few of them (9 out of 31) noting that it was the title that had encouraged them to engage with further study. When completers of the course were asked the same question, 6 out of 29 stated that they had been motivated by the esteem which they believed a doctorate would bring them. The desire to obtain the title of 'Doctor' may explain why some of the PGRs favoured the label of 'researcher' over 'student' at their current stage of their degree, as 'researcher' is a label that is associated with being an academic.

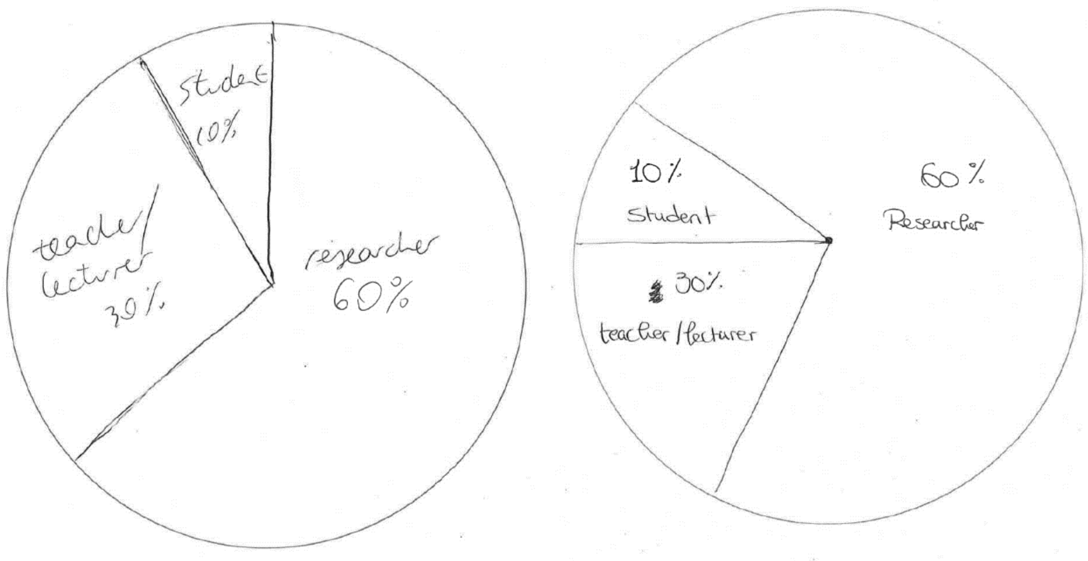

Figure 3: A7 and S7

A7 and S7 (Fig. 3, above) have the same breakdown of percentages with 30 per cent allocated to being the role of teacher/lecturer, 10 per cent on being a student, and 60 per cent to being a researcher. The relatively high 'teacher/ lecturer' proportion is interesting here. Is it aspirational? Many of the PGR respondents reported working directly with undergraduate students in a supportive or guiding capacity. We discovered that (particularly where lab work is a core feature in the research) direct contact and interaction with undergraduates from a ‘superior’ position was inevitable and sometimes preceded enrolment on the PGR TLA course.

As shown, the largest proportion of pie charts show a higher level of percentage allocated to the role of researcher. For example, S13 (Fig. 4, below) allocates a very specific 79 per cent to that of researcher, 20.5 per cent to being a student, and 0.5 per cent to viewing themselves as a teacher, suggesting either whimsy, or more likely, an acknowledgement of what they anticipate will come when the mandatory element is complete.

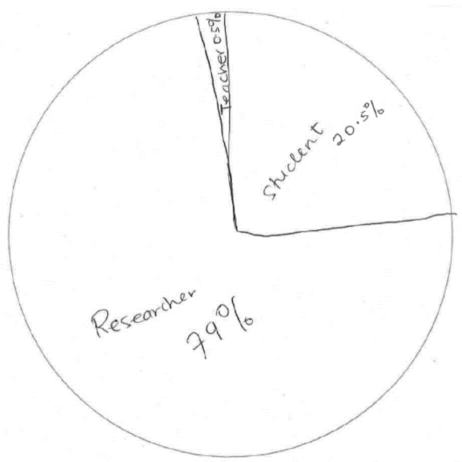

Figure 4: S13

The highest percentage allocated to being a researcher can be seen in pie charts A12 (Fig. 1, above) and S3 (Fig. 5, below), which both allocate 90 per cent to the role of researcher and 10 per cent to being a student.

Figure 5: S3

Do these pie charts reflect the level of control which these PGRs feel they have over their development and research? Or is this categorisation of identity a reflection of how they approach their work in general as PGRs? In an ideal world, the baseline expectation would be that undergraduate students study by reviewing their notes and digesting information from lectures and readings, critically regurgitating relevant information in exams and coursework. The way in which PGRs are expected to study is dramatically different. Their weeks are not taken up with timetabled classes and study is largely independent. The production of drafts for supervisors as regular check points throughout the years to track progress means the development of the thesis is crucial. The latter ultimately means different approaches to learning are employed in comparison to undergraduates. Study is more research focused, thus reinforcing the institutional term and self-concept formation as 'researchers' rather than 'students'. That there persists the connection to 'student' may not be an issue but it is noteworthy. Useful in this context is the conclusion from Baker and Lattuca (2010):

> Learning and identity development go hand in hand – it is through participation in the intellectual community in the field and the home institution that doctoral students build the knowledge and skills required for scholarship in their field of study, and make choices about the roles and values associated with a career in the academy. In this sense, students' judgments of their knowledge and skills become self-assessments as a scholarly identity emerges during the PhD experience (p. 809).

Whilst we have found tendencies and categories, the diversity in the pie charts is, in itself, reason to pause and reflect. Again, we are not intimating that this is necessarily problematic but acknowledgement of this by those who work closely with PGRs may help how we interact with them. A3 and S14 (Fig. 6, below) are selected by way of representing those pie charts which are categorised into three sections.

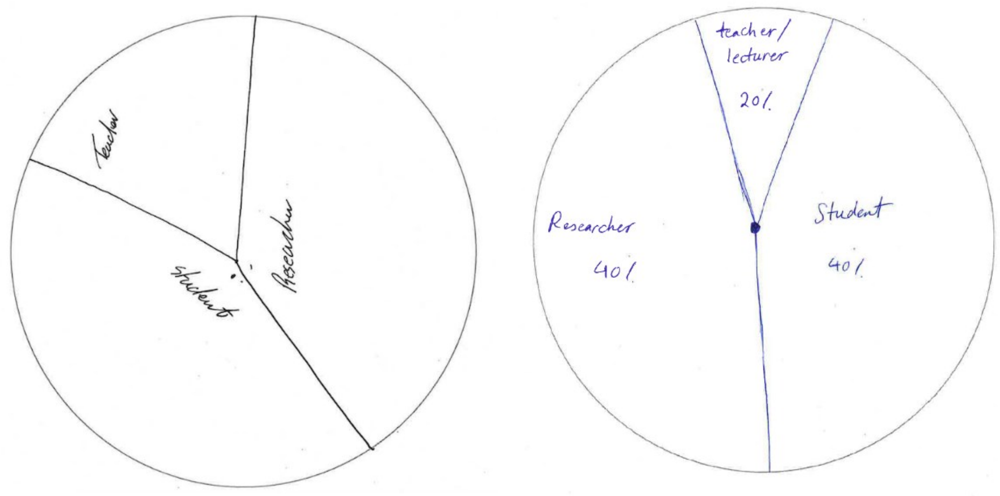

Figure 6: A3 and S14

11 pie charts were divided in this way, though the category of teacher/lecturer remained the smallest percentage – easily explained by the limited number of hours PGRs are allowed to be employed for teaching duties. It can be assumed that the pie charts which allocate a significant section to the role of the teacher/lecturer are drawn by PGRs who hold part time teaching support duties such as seminar leaders and/or lab demonstrators. However, there

is another aspect regarding the context of courses which PGRs are expected to undertake as part of their degree which may help to explain the divisions in the pie charts. The PGR TLA is strand 2 of 5 that PGRs need to complete as part of their development programme. These strands may be in addition to any department-specific courses which PGRs may also be required to complete. The number of compulsory courses which PGRs need to engage with may therefore be impacting upon how they are perceiving themselves. If PGRs are spending a significant proportion of their time in compulsory classes, this would understandably make them feel as though they are still positioned within a 'student' role. The wider issue of whether the mandatory nature and content of all these course is suitable and relevant to all needs further consideration, not only in the context of their potential to stifle autonomy and the development of researcher identity.

In contrast to the pie charts and discussion points made above, A6 (Fig. 7, below) allocates a higher percentage to the role of being a student, with 10 per cent assigned to the role of teacher and 10 per cent to the role of lecturer. This particular pie chart does not assign any percentage to the role of being a researcher.

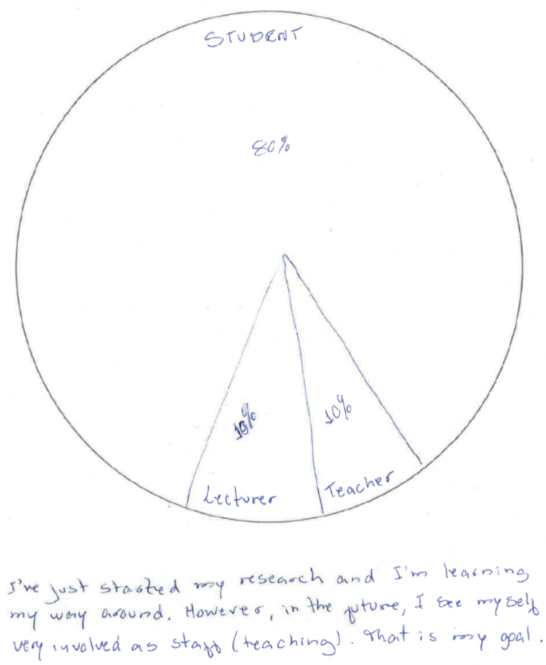

Figure 7: A6

The PGR explains this however in a note below the drawing by stating that 'I've just started my research and I'm learning my way around. However, in the future, I see myself very involved as staff (teaching). That is my goal'. What this pie chart mirrors is the argument made earlier that the perception of identity as being more of a student or researcher is dependent on the style of study being undertaken by the student. As this PGR has yet to begin fully researching her thesis area, she still feels as though she is a student, being led and directed by her supervisors. However, while she locates her current perception of identity in the pie chart by allocating 80 per cent to being a student, she also uses the pie chart to express her future goals of being viewed as a teacher and, separately, as a lecturer though at this stage, the distinction is unclear. For this particular student, the task of sketching out the way in which she perceives her academic identity, therefore, can only be answered by encapsulating both where she is situated now as well as how she sees her identity being formed in the future; pointing to the notion that identity is indeed fluid, moulded by circumstance and in constant flux.

A2 (Fig. 8, below) reveals an equal 50/50 split between the roles of researcher and student. The pie charts which are divided in this way raise the question of what it is that the PGRs view as being the key differences between being a researcher and a student. It is in many ways the perfect representation of the liminal space.

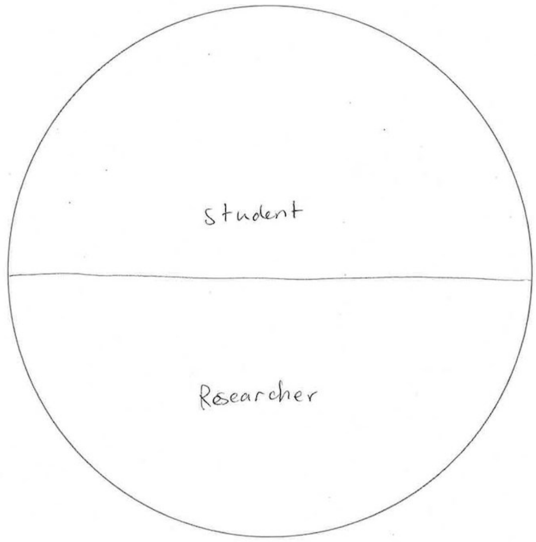

Figure 8: A2

When placing the two side by side, those broad connotations of 'Researcher' as a more active participant, in control of her/ his studies and the direction of her/ his work alongside 'Student' as a more passive learner directed by an expert are more stark. Of course the wider structure of the PGR programme may have an effect. All PGRs have five mandatory strands at the start of their PhD related to research. In this context, it is likely that the sense of being a student will more likely form part of the PGR identity. Nevertheless, it is a simple but quite profound representation of someone in a transitional space. It serves as a reminder that just because we, as an institution, call someone a researcher, does not entirely define how they see themselves. Awareness of the multiple, changing and diverse ways of seeing and presenting themselves could and perhaps *should* do more to inform the ways in which we interact and work with them.

Conclusion

Whether referring to themselves as 'students', 'researchers' or 'teachers/lecturers', the way in which PGRs self-label may in itself influence how they behave and interact. The choice of label which PGRs choose from are understandably connected to the roles they play within the University, such as the limitations to how much and what type of teaching they can do. However, the terms themselves can also be interpreted to be revealing of the ways in which they view their position in relation to their studies and their supervisors. Furthermore, the labels which the PGRs assign themselves may point to how active or passive they feel in connection to their research degree as a whole.

The intention of this case study is not to make any grand claims. Rather, through an analysis of findings stemming from a very simple pie chart focused activity, we have tried to highlight the connections which can be made between PGR self-labelling and issues concerning identity and belonging. Though an unsophisticated activity from such simplicity can, at times, come clarity. The variance in the pie charts may have implications for the PGR system within the University and definitely tallies with the *ad hoc* discussions we both have previously had with many of the PGRs on the TLA course. These pie charts can be used to gain an insight into how PGRs view their identity within the University, and in this way point to the extent to which they feel connected with the institution.

Transitions by definition require movement from one place to another. How we see ourselves when negotiating the transition to and within PhD research may determine whether we experience a more positive liminality or the uncertainty of limbo. There will always be diversity in self-concept but beginning to understand the shape of this diversity may help stimulate reflection on how we treat and interact with PGRs and in doing so inform changes in practice that may support a more positive experience. The activity and our consideration of these snapshots has certainly helped shape the direction of our ongoing research and has encouraged us to use more deliberate and sophisticated iterations in future.

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