

The University of Manchester

The Centre for Higher Education Research, Innovation and Learning (CHERIL) Final Report: The Bridge to Higher Education: A Case Study using the Fashion SOC as the Scaffold. Ms. Rachel Studd and Dr. Gianpaolo Vignali, EPS, School of Materials

Introduction:

The motivation for the initiation of this project came from a need for knowledge in the Fashion discipline area following the first successful CHERIL funded project: 'Transition into University'. There was an opportunity to further research and develop the Fashion Small Online Course (SOC) resource to help support transition, **bridging the gap** between the two sectors of secondary and higher education, as referenced by Briggs et. al. (2012); (Chambers et. al. (2002) and Cohen et.al. (2012)).

Key findings from previous research highlighted:

- More students are finding difficulty adjusting to university teaching (Macaskill and Taylor 2010).
- Currently there is a problematic transition for 14-17yr aged group as these are engaged at school in a 'narrative' to learning whereas university follows a more independent, analytical approach. (Marland, 2003).
- There is a need to cultivate autonomous thinkers who are confident in their ability to organise and execute 'the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura 1997).
- Self-efficacy has been extensively explored in relation to academic success and retention, (Brooman and Darwent 2014)

A key characteristic of UK higher education has the emphasis placed on the responsibility of student initiated learning (QAA, 2012). It is seen as important to support the development of self-reliance in order to progress successfully through the transition into higher education. Increased self-reliance needs to be one of the aims of a successful transition from school to higher education. Bingham and O'Hara (2007) cited in Beaumont et al (2014), confirm the difficulty that students experience in becoming autonomous learners. This is elaborated further highlighting the importance of exploration into effective approaches to '**scaffold the development** of self-regulated learning skills'. A self-regulated learning (SRL) model comprises three key stages: forethought, performance and self-reflection (Zimmerman and Schunk (2004) cited by Beaumout et al. (2011)). Beaumont et al. (2014) suggests that there is a requirement to ease the transition from school to higher education and that it is the first year university curriculum that needs to change by firstly weaning students off 'spoon-feeding' and encouraging self-regulated learning. It is suggested that this progression can be '**scaffolded**' by providing high levels of guidance at the start of the year that gradually reduces as the students gain experience (Beaumont et al. 2014).

A proposed framework (Figure 1) has been developed from the literature research to show the transition, highlighting where a '**bridge**' should be formed, to support the development from the students learned behaviour into autonomous learners as required by higher education.

Figure 1: Transition Model



Aim of the research:

From this background the aim of the project was established:

• to aid transition to university in actively supporting the progression to becoming an automous learner.

The project aimed to develop 'bolt-on' activities within the SOC, which presents concepts and tasks directly supporting the content aligned with the University first year, first semester units. These bolt-ons support students by creating a **bridge** that they can self-navigate through and enhance their SRL. Relationships with each of the unit teams who run the identified **bridging** units will be formalised so that parity can be coordinated between the SOC activities and the first five weeks unit content.

From this aim there are several key outcomes to the project including:

- Develop bolt-on's for the SOC that will align with each first semester first year unit;
- Create a phased transition for first year students in the first five weeks into the HE system.
- Develop an set of tools to support both staff and students work through the transition

Based on the framework created in figure 1, and the previous project FASHION SOC outcomes, figure 2 highlights how the capsules further develop and align with the undergraduate degree programme structure for the first year, first semester.





Methodology:

A mixed method approach has been adopted for this project split into collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. To initiate the project, consideration was taken as to the three fashion SOC themes and the three undergraduate units alignments. Background research assisted in 'setting the scene' to facilitate the storyboard development and planning of the SOC Learning Pods. Considering the academic theory presented by Gale and Parker (2014) with their 3 broad conceptions of transition: induction (T_1), development (T_2), and becoming (T_3) this will be used to map and analyse the success of T_1 and T_2 to provide a possible solutions for T_3 . Pre and Post engagement questionnaires will assess accessibility and review whether transition was considered supportive and students felt more capable to navigate the change once the site goes live.

Initial outcomes:

Based on the previous research the design of the site is still the most paramount for this target audience and this created a series of significant problems in the actualization stages, which is still unfortunately ongoing. Requirements initially set out were that the site needed to be compliant within the university guidelines and therefore developed using the T4 database website system. Multiple meetings with IT and Faculty where held and developments and progress were supposedly being made. However finally it was established this was not the case and now a new strategy has now been agreed by the Faculty Marketing Team to develop this as a different site requiring a complete new build and new technical developments. This has completely delayed the project and no data has been able to be gathered and some of the developments rebuilt. Progress should begin after Easter 2017 having set the project back over 18months. Presented here are designs that have been created using Photoshop as site plans for how the structure will look once rebuilt and designed as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: The Fashion SOC



The designs in figure 3 has been based on the secondary research carried out with the idea of allowing the student an opportunity to, 'explore the content, feel, and opportunities they offer in a more personalised way' (Marland, 2003) and therefore feeling more supported with their transition.

The Learning Pod development and structure can be seen in figure 4 based on adapting (Beaumont et al. 2011) dialogic feedback cycle's (DFC) of the three stages of preparatory guidance, in-task guidance, performance feedback is being used to foster a 'scaffold' concept and providing higher levels of guidance at the start of the year to the aligned units (Beaumont et al. 2014). As can been seen in figure 4 there is a mix of content, showing visually environments for study, along with films and lecture content. Tasks and activities with immediate feedback will be linked, these will be used both in-class and independently. Content within these learning pods will be redeveloped due to updated unit teams and content.

Figure 4: Learning Pod



Conclusion:

This case study will align itself with Manchester 2020 Goal Two, key strategy of providing a "motivating environment that encourages curiosity driven enquiry and a critical approach to learning", (Manchester 2020 Strategic Plan). This will be achieved through an enriched e-learning environment. The SOC will continue its innovative pedagogical development. The SOC addresses the current issue of transition (from A-Level/BTEC subjects to university curriculum content), allowing the student an opportunity to, 'explore the content, feel, and opportunities they offer in a more personalised way' (Marland, 2003) and therefore feeling more supported with their transition.

The vision of this project therefore is to act as a guide for students to support transition into the university. It then aims to help develop those transition skills in order to understand requirements for autonomous learning. The SOC is therefore something that has potential to be rolled out across the university and already several discussions are taking place however again due to the delay in the IT/Website development this has also suffered.

Dissemination:

The outcomes from this research and development will be disseminated throughout the university to highlight the importance the transition journey and the importance of establishing a bridge. CHERIL will be a vehicle for dissemination at the annual conference and at pre-submission of bids to provide academics with a sample project for inspiration (as presented at CHERIL Conference 2017). Also it will be disseminated within the faculty via the teaching and learning structures and working closely with e-learning both of which will then be taken forward across the rest of the university faculties. Once the site goes live the project team is hoping to develop abstracts for both a subject specific conference/journal paper along with a pedagogic conference/journal paper. Further afield it is the authors' ambition to disseminate through publication to highlight the pedagogic developments made and conferences such as British Education Research association (BERA) and Society for research into Higher Education (SRHE) along with discipline specific Textile Institute World Conference (TI). Following this and the feedback received, publication in credible pedagogic conference will be sought.

Project Sustainability:

The WebApp will be created using 'Word Press' therefore allows for continual updates maintaining its long-term sustainability and functionality. The project has been developed in partnership with both the Faculty of Science and Engineering' e-learning team and marketing team, which should ensure the project is aligned with new working processes and structures within both teams.

Further Research:

Results present a link between learning styles, engagement and motivation effects on the learner's autonomy which can be investigated further. Relationship between confidence and the ability to enable self-efficacy in individual learners is clear. For learners to think more flexibly about their capabilities and by creating engagement with positive learning experiences should build their confidence. To increase the amount of flow during an individual's experience has been mapped in the FAST model below in Figure 5, which can be investigated.

Figure 5: FAST Model



Reflection:

There was a series of highly complicated situations relating to the website development which did not become fully apparent until early this year. Much of the difficulties came from IT restructuring and communications issues within handovers between various team members. Faculty Marketing have been given agreement by IT to take over the lead with this however having too many stakeholders in this project made things over complicated which really was not necessary. Should the project be run again the team would have appointed a dedicated project officer to help with the development of content and contacting industry as this was very time consuming in chase up contact whilst teaching with full loads and large student cohorts. The project also became more extensive than initially thought due to the results of the findings and the links to academic pedagogy.

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