

Preparation for an uncertain world: International curriculum development for mental health occupational therapy practice preparation

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Recipient of the Thelma Cardwell Research Award

Preparation for an uncertain world: International curriculum development for mental health occupational therapy practice preparation

Final Report

September 2015



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Executive summary

Overview

This research explored the role of education in preparing graduate occupational therapists for the field of mental health and beyond. It draws on the WHO Mental Health Action Plan (2013 – 2020) in examining how the knowledge and skills of occupational therapists can be enhanced. This was considered not only in terms of delivery of evidence based, culturally appropriate and human rights orientated mental health care, but also through effective problem solving, leadership, advocacy of the profession, team work, and the strengthening of evidence and research for mental health.

Project focus

The project involved the development, delivery and evaluation of a final year Online International learning (OIL) module, delivered amongst three Occupational Therapy pre-registration programmes to include Coventry University (CU) the University of Cape Town (UCT) and PXL Limburg University, Belgium (PXL). A total of 200 undergraduate students were involved and were allocated to twenty international e-action learning sets (ALS), or discussion forums across the three institutions. The students were linked to the discussion forums via their final year module on their respective course programmes. In particular the project offered undergraduates the opportunity to explore a globalised picture of mental health occupational therapy practice through the use of pedagogy designed to encourage students to think creatively, engage in individual and group problem solving, develop innovative ways to deliver culturally-sensitive services, to discuss strategies, take calculated risks and consider ways and means of extending the reach of the profession (Pattison, 2006; 2008). The project aimed to equip students with personal entrepreneurial capacities to deal with greater levels of uncertainty and complexity in their professional practice (Ravasi & Turati, 2005; Gibb, 2007). The opportunity for international exposure also allowed for the development of a richer understanding of the role and scope of occupational therapy in other contexts.

Aims

The key research aims were to:

- Explore student perceptions about the OIL experience, the approach to learning and the educational value of the international learning opportunity
- Examine any shifts in occupational therapy students' intercultural sensitivity
- Understand student, graduate, academic and learning technologists' perspectives and experience of this approach to pedagogy including lessons learnt and next stage developments

Key findings

The findings from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) show that there was a significant difference in the scores for interaction and engagement pre-test and post-test. These results suggest that for those respondents who completed the pre-test and post-test ISS felt more engaged and confident in intercultural communication after they had participated in the module, and that their intercultural sensitivity subsequently increased.

The findings from the qualitative data focus on the students' overall learning experience and are presented in five overarching themes:

1. Beginnings: Intrigue, interest, hopes, trepidation

This theme represents the students' response towards a new learning opportunity. It describes the sense of intrigue and apprehension they experienced as a result of being involved in the project. The theme captures students' anticipation about 'knowing what to do', and feeling 'able to do it' as well as a general excitement and expectations about the professional learning opportunity.

2. Using real scenarios from graduates first posts

The 'real life' aspect of the graduate scenarios was very well received and this seemed to encourage student engagement. However, many students expressed their desire for more background case information including more detail linked to the context within which the case was situated. An appreciation of the differing cultural practices and experiences began to emerge. Students were clearly beginning to consider the national and international implications of their studies, and considering how practice might apply in different contexts. They then began to seek out interaction with students from other countries.

3. International representation and exchange

This theme illustrates how the students related to one another and sought to exchange ideas. It also highlights how student, graduate and tutor interactions prompted both challenge and disruption, prompting participants to reflect upon their values and contributions. It further focuses on the impact of participation of students on learning outcomes. It is sub-divided into several key areas, international representation; language difficulty; negotiating the Moodle site, engaging and posting ideas; international exchange

4. Connecting and learning with others

This theme illustrates the learner gains the project offered the students and the resulting insight it offered them about their (globalised) profession. The discussions prompted students to consider their professional values, therapeutic reasoning and professional identity.

5. Going forward: learner gains and advice for others

This theme encapsulates student reflections on their experience of the discussions and their overall learning. Many provided thoughtful and encouraging advice for new learners, which highlight significant elements of their own developing perspectives. It also demonstrated how students considered ways to take forward their own learning into future practice.

Key messages

This online, international learning (OIL) project aimed to facilitate students' confidence as occupational therapists in a global context, considering contemporary mental health practice. The focus was therefore not only to enable the exploration of theory underpinning the current context, but to up-skill students with practical means of contributing to their future mental health practice.

Engaging diverse points of view facilitates not only critical thinking but also intercultural attitudes and skills such as valuing diverse perspectives and managing one's anxiety. Setting up the international online forum, whilst innovative and creative, involved a great deal of work led by Coventry but agreed across partners.

Asking graduates to donate complex scenarios from their first year of work provided students with first hand content from the world of practice, which was clearly valued. Working in international groups offered students opportunities to interact with other students' cultural models, which lead to the disruption of their respective ways of thinking, and to the generation of new discourse.

Both the UCT and PXL Limburg programmes could only offer voluntary engagement from students. Of the 50 students who opted to engage from Cape Town only 29 enrolled, and some of those enrolled did not participate, resulting in some forums only having Coventry students. It was expected that this would be reflected in mid module and end of module evaluations, which was the case.

Having international scenarios to focus upon still required students to consider a globalised perspective of practice. Students were prompted to explore themselves as occupational beings, which will ultimately enable them to facilitate client's occupational exploration with an innate depth of understanding. The entrepreneurship element of the students' respective

summative assignments also facilitated the student's vision for professional practice in a wide range of areas.

As the students engaged with one another and encountered difference in fellow student perspectives and epistemologies it was at first challenging for them to generate active dialogue or to reach productive consensus. Through facilitating purposeful opportunities to interact, students were provided with opportunity to communicate, listen, and negotiate across complex cultural, experiential and epistemological perspectives.

Technology enhanced learning continues to be a priority for further development educationally and professionally, with higher education needing to explore and embrace a range of learning platforms and methods that will enhance and invigorate learning to ensure currency, interest and diversity within the curriculum. Where students have done well they clearly grasp the notion that the profession needs to be viewed within a local, national and international context.

The focus on mental health practice scenarios opened students' eyes to issues and challenges occupational therapists face in multi-agency team work, prompting them to think about how their core skills of occupational analysis, critical reflection, therapeutic reasoning and creativity are required.

Students were able to examine socio-cultural-political challenges impacting client and community empowerment. They were required to consider their role in promoting issues of social justice, social activism and advocacy with, and on behalf of people and communities.

Recommendations and next steps

- Maintain the project focus as students really appreciate the opportunity for engagement with international students and the insight they gained in how OT's have to work differently across other cultural settings
- Graduate scenarios will continue to be used and improved upon. Improvements will include providing more information on the broader context in which the scenario was based as well as considering the socio- political climate, policy frameworks on both a national and international level and challenges of the country and effect on the working environment. Scenarios will also focus on one specific challenge, which will make the scenarios more specific and focused. This will improve quality and ensure consistency
- Place more emphasis on the exchange of literature to construct evidence-based answers and to enable exploration of different interpretations of the evidence (considering different socio-cultural realities).
- Continue to have graduate facilitation and have graduates train next year's graduates
- Each partner institution will review and refine links between host modules and online forums to ensure a smooth academic passage for students that is continuous and coherent, leading to their assessment.
- Plans are underway regarding how to facilitate online language barriers and their translation and how to facilitate and encourage students to contribute when they are not familiar with contributing to online discussions
- Guidelines for contributing to the discussion forum will be created for students and discussion forum questions will be reviewed.
- Guidelines for facilitation will be created and graduates who facilitated last year will help training of new facilitators with a view to expanding this practice where possible
- To ensure that students participate from all countries students summative assessment will be linked to the engagement and learning from the online discussion forum
- Problem solve ways to develop and embed cross-institutional formative (and summative) assessment strategies
- Involvement of another international partner, Nanyang Polytechnic, Singapore this next year, 2016 (80 students), which will increase international student involvement in each seminar group with a view to expanding collaboration further the following year.

Main Report

Introduction

This research explores the role of education in preparing graduate occupational therapists for the field of mental health and beyond. It draws on the WHO Mental Health Action Plan (2013 – 2020) in examining how the knowledge and skills of occupational therapists can be enhanced. This is being considered not only in terms of delivery of evidence based, culturally appropriate and human rights orientated mental health care, but also through effective problem solving, leadership, advocacy of the profession, effective team work, and the strengthening of evidence and research for mental health.

Further, this study builds upon the findings from a cross-contextual pilot study which examined recent occupational therapy graduates perspectives about the ways in which their training equipped them to work in enterprising ways across diverse communities and contexts in the mental health arena (Wimpenny & Lewis, 2015). Graduates from the University of Cape Town (UCT) South Africa, and Coventry University (CU) UK, were interviewed and the data analysed and interpreted. The findings from the pilot study revealed that in spite of the distinctions between the UK and SA contexts, a shared identity, shared socialisation processes and similar problems were revealed. These were most obviously demonstrated through graduates' questioning of their on-going capacity to be part of the practice community in an authentic way (Wimpenny & Lewis, 2014; Wimpenny & Lewis, 2015). Significantly, the graduates in the pilot study revealed that more opportunity is needed within the curriculum to embrace uncertainty, consider risk and organisational challenge and replace feelings of doubt and insecurity with improved agency in order to be able to manage the 'not knowing' (Wimpenny & Lewis, 2014; Wimpenny & Lewis, 2015).

Project focus

The project involved the development, delivery and evaluation of a final year, online international (OIL) module, delivered amongst three Occupational Therapy pre-registration programmes to include Coventry University (CU) the University of Cape Town (UCT) and PXL Limburg University, Belgium (PXL). In particular the OIL project offered undergraduates the opportunity to explore a globalised picture of mental health occupational therapy practice through the use of pedagogy designed to encourage students to think creatively, engage in individual and group problem solving, develop innovative ways to deliver culturally-sensitive services, to discuss strategies, take calculated risks and consider ways and means of extending the reach of the profession (Pattison, 2006; 2008). The project aimed to equip students with personal entrepreneurial capacities to deal with greater levels of uncertainty and complexity in their professional practice (Ravasi & Turati, 2005; Gibb, 2007). The opportunity for international exposure also allowed for the development of a richer understanding of occupational therapy in other contexts.

Research aims:

The key research aims were to:

- Explore student perceptions about the OIL experience, the approach to learning and the educational value of the international learning opportunity
- Examine any shifts in occupational therapy students' intercultural sensitivity
- Understand student, graduate, academic and learning technologists' perspectives and experience of this approach to pedagogy including lessons learnt and next stage developments

Literature Review

OT education & graduate preparedness

The scope of mental health occupational therapy practice context globally continues to change and it makes sense that parallel changes in mental health education take place. Contemporary practice is a fluid, challenging responsibility, which requires practitioners to work with heavy caseloads, in complex situations often of an indeterminate nature (Higgs, Andresen & Fish, 2004). Practitioners need to develop capacity to be knowledgeable about their specific contribution and to make explicit their professional understandings (Pettican & Bryant, 2001; Higgs et al., 2004). Consequently graduates need to project a strong professional identity, demonstrate skills in evidence-based practice, critical thinking and resilience (Hodgetts, Hollis, Triska et al., 2007; Duncan & Alsop, 2006). Further, the accepted understanding of the role of occupational therapy practice must be widened to encompass the diversity of what the profession has to offer (Lorenzo, 2010).

Whilst there has been little focus on mental health occupational therapy practice preparation, a number of studies have taken a broader curriculum view (see for example, Hodgetts et al., 2007; Doherty, Stagnittii & Schoo, 2009; Scheerer, 2003; Lee & Mackenzie, 2003). Such studies, whilst addressing a range of practice and education themes, typically reveal that new graduates grapple with low confidence when entering the working world. They have difficulty making the shift from student to graduate and the need for support structures to be put in place is evident. Further, graduates have reported feeling inadequately prepared in the area of practical techniques and experience a large gap between their own perceived level of competence and perceived unrealistic expectations of themselves (Hodgetts et al., 2007). It is evident that it takes time for graduates to feel competent and gain professional confidence, including clarifying their professional role, and being clear of their responsibility when working within a team (Wimpenny & Lewis, 2015).

Graduates rely heavily on theory to guide their practice and their interactions with other members of the multi-disciplinary team (Hodgetts et al., 2007; Banks, Bell & Smits, 2000). While practice education was seen to be the most beneficial aspect of the curriculum in preparing graduates for practice, the literature points to improved educational strategies to integrate theory into practice (Banks et al., 2000; Wimpenny et al., 2006; 2010).

Online learning

Education must prepare students for a world that is increasingly interconnected, independent and diverse. Students need on going practice and multiple opportunities to learn how to form and maintain relationships effectively communicate, and work co-operatively with people from different backgrounds (Krutky, 2008).

The work of Trujillo et al., (2009) indicates that students are acclimatized to socialisations and connections via a web-based medium and are open and willing to use it in resolving challenges.

McKenna, Boyle, Palermo and colleagues (2014) investigated student's perceptions of participating in an online, web-based module to facilitate inter-professional education, in which OT students were included. The programme provided opportunity for students to watch how professionals worked in a way they would otherwise have been unable to achieve in clinical practice. A self-selected sample of 46 students volunteered to be involved in the study. The data from focus groups (13-15 participants in each) revealed four main themes; 1) professional understanding, 2) patient-centeredness, 3) comparison with other inter-professional education activities and 4) overcoming geographical boundaries. Students were overwhelmingly positive about their learning experiences and the value of the module in assisting their understandings of the roles of other health care professionals.

The study of Rogers, Mulholland, Derald et al., (2011) highlighted that in order to be successful, online courses require infrastructure of technical and pedagogical support for students and educators, and that specific attention should be given to the types of courses that stimulate creative ways of mentoring students. As an example, Bodell, Hook, Penmand and Wade (2008) explored the use of blogs to enable OT students and professionals to share their experiences and learning for their own continuing professional development. Whilst the 60 occupational therapy blogs by professionals and students varied tremendously in style and content, they shared common themes of reflecting on OT research, practice and education.

The participants considered blogging to be a valued means of bringing OTs together to share common interests and create networks of contributors, who together formulated knowledge founded in the experiences of the network itself. Further, such online networks can stretch across geographical boundaries and time, promoting cultural diversity and exposure to new ways of thinking. Bodell et al (2008) concluded that the time is now ripe to create a critical mass of clinicians who are able cheaply, easily and speedily, to share their experiences and learning for their own professional development and for the greater good of the profession.

It is evident in professional discourse that debate continues about what learning content can be used online and Hollis and Madill (2006) suggest that a blend of online and face-to-face instruction can best address the learning needs and the professional preparation of undergraduate and graduate OT students. Hayden (2013) designed and evaluated an online safe patient transfer module of OT assistants. The research findings indicated that students were able to learn this psychomotor clinical skill online with beginner-proficiency, but a student learning survey revealed the majority of the students preferred at least one hands-on classroom session where instructor feedback and interactions with classmates confirmed safe and effective clinical technique.

Mitchell and Batorski (2009) similarly examined the effect of online-guided independent study on students' critical reasoning skills. They concluded the assignment they proposed appeared to be effective for enhancing awareness of, and use of, critical reasoning skills. In conclusion they suggested inclusion (transcripts) of actual interviews with the client, family members and/or other professionals to better facilitate students' reasoning.

Intercultural competence

Students need opportunity in the curriculum to develop awareness, knowledge about others and skill development, even on campuses that explicitly promote diversity or internationalisation initiatives (Otten 2003: 14). Intercultural learning should not be viewed as an add-on to existing pedagogy and curriculum, as this may result in students not seeing the relevance or connection of such learning to their developing practice perspectives and the communication and interaction processes with others where it is required (Smith, 2010).

Academics also need to support students' potential to share experience-based insights, not just inviting stories for 'stories sake' (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Furthermore, Kumagai & Lypson (2009) question if academic teaching staff have the intercultural knowledge, resources or time to scaffold narrative-based contributions and perspectives in order to stimulate students' reflection on their biases, privileges and assumptions as well as acknowledgement of personal responsibility.

Beer, Slack & Armitt (2005) described the experiences of European OT students working together across national and cultural boundaries on the Online Internet School for Occupational Therapists (OTIS). (OTIS was founded by a collaboration of four centres in the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands). As a 'virtual college' OTIS focus is to provide internet-based courses to support and facilitate a whole range of educational activities. In their study students took part in tutorial groups (4) of mixed nationalities to discuss and propose a solution for 4 different case studies. The researchers observed that virtual teamwork developed in each of the cross-cultural tutorial groups with students establishing communities of interest (Beer et al., 2005).

Other research in the same learning environment (OTIS) was done by Slack, Beer, Armitt and colleagues (2003). Students from four European countries collaborated and communicated to carry out problem-based learning in OT (Slack, Beer, Armitt, & Green, 2003). The aim of the synchronous group tutorials was to allow the students to complete two assignments: 1) a problem-based case study, using group discussions and investigation, to recommend high-level assistive technological solutions for clients who were physically and/or mentally impaired and 2) a reflective account of their learning through the Occupational Therapy Internet School pilot course. Evaluation of the effectiveness of this learning approach was done by final assessments and published learning outcomes. In particular, transcripts from peer-to-peer sessions of synchronous communication were analyzed. Results showed differences

between the four tutorial groups in their approach to the 'process' of doing the case study assignment and its 'content'. The conclusions of this analysis of learning outcomes and assessment indicate that synchronous communication and on-line meetings between course participants can support deep learning, although this does not happen spontaneously.

Sood et al., (2014) discussed the importance of OT educators ensuring OT students are culturally competent. An international collaborative project on cultural competences (ICPCC) was designed to help students understand the impact of cultural context on client care. Entry-level OT masters students from a US programme and two universities in India engaged on an online course that aimed to explore the impact of the ICPCC on the OT students' cultural competence and to discuss the students' perceptions of culture on the OT process. Qualitative data was collected using a self-reflection form and 'The Inventory for Assessing the Process of Cultural Competence among Health Care Professionals Revised'© was used to measure students' cultural competence at baseline and immediately after participation. The findings revealed an increase in cultural competence scores amongst all three groups of students after participating in the ICPCC at p value < .05. Further, three themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis: meaning of the term culture, impact of cultural on client-centered practice, and impact of culture on occupational therapy outcomes. The participating students identified that achieving successful outcomes from an OT intervention required that practitioners recognise and always consider cultural differences in the client/therapist decision-making process. The faculties' who participated in the ICPCC project highlighted the value of cross-cultural online learning in preparing students for global practice.

With this backdrop in mind, this study sought to explore final year occupational therapy students' perspectives about how the delivery of an online international (OIL) module might contribute to culturally appropriate and human rights orientated mental health care. Furthermore, this study sought to explore how effective problem solving, leadership, advocacy of the profession, team work, and the strengthening of evidence and research for mental health occupational therapy curriculum could also be targeted, in order to prepare graduates for the challenge of contemporary practice.

Project development

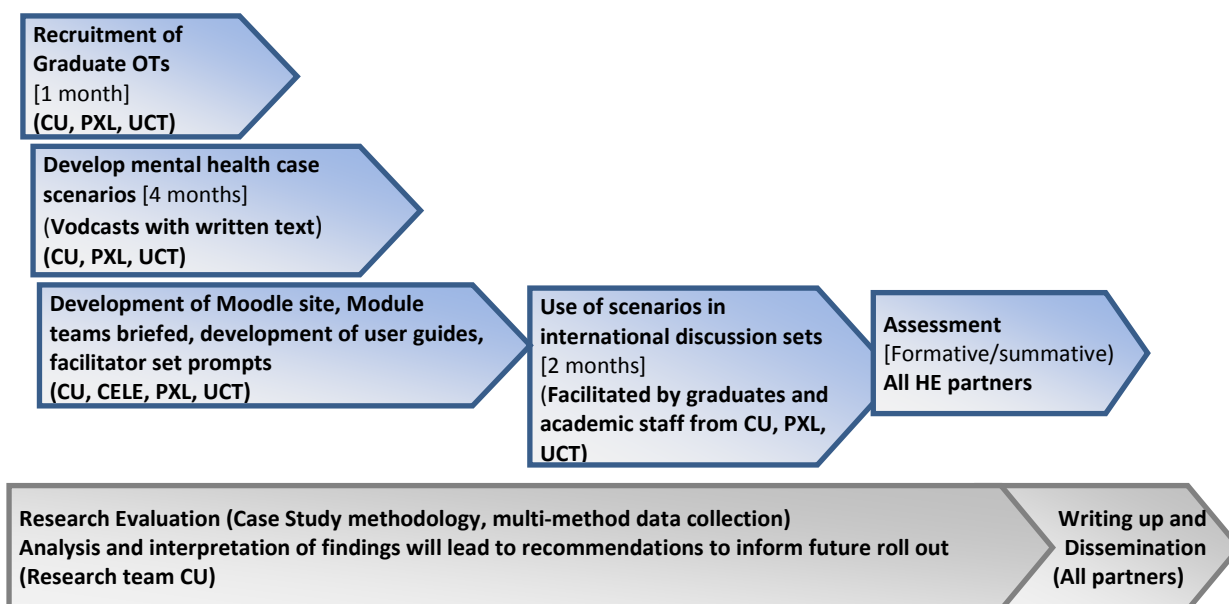
Process

Communication between the three Universities generally occurred by means of email and Skype contact. In December 2014 all partners met at Coventry University (CU) to discuss and finalise the project site, learning platform and process for the international discussion forums before launching the project across the three course programmes in February 2015. A short film was developed to introduce the students to the project team members (Please click on link below)

<https://media.coventry.ac.uk/Play/7749>

Figure 1: Timeline of activities

Sept - Dec 2014	Feb 2015 enrolment and 6 week discussion forum	April – June 2015	July-Sept 2015
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Graduate involvement

From August – December 2014, ten graduate occupational therapists in their first post were recruited by a range of means, including approaching practice placement coordinators, through the university Alumni, and through graduates who were involved in the cross contextual pilot study. Each graduate was invited to donate a Vodcast¹ and provided with guidance about the structure of it, in that it should be a complex case scenario from their practice that included the following:

- Taking risks, seeing and making use of opportunities to extend our professional reach
- Integrated and responsive care
- Demonstrating professional artistry and competence
- Being visible and influential with others, and in the delivery of cost effective practices with a necessary understanding of professional discourse for contemporary occupational therapy practice
- Generating knowledge relevant to global health practice issues

In addition, the graduates were asked to describe their practice setting and its characteristics, to describe some of the issues that create challenge, opportunity, unrest and potential, and what knowledge they need to draw on (propositional, experiential, practical). Each Vodcast was a maximum ten minutes in length (Please click on the link below for an example of a South African graduate case scenario). The Flemish Vodcasts were transcribed into English. Each Vodcast had an accompanying word document.

<https://media.coventry.ac.uk/Play/7759>

Table 1 presents the numbers of graduates involved and the practice settings they represented across the three countries. Each graduate was presented with a certificate to recognise and acknowledge their involvement and contribution in this reciprocal learning opportunity (see Appendix 2).

Table 1: Graduate Vodcasts

Graduate	Country	First post / community service setting

¹ A Vodcast is a video stored in a digital form (using a mobile device, or other recording equipment) to enable it to be broadcast over the Internet.

Females (2)	SA	Rural hospital, northern Kwazulu Natal Rural hospital, Eastern Cape
Males (1)	UK	Forensic hospital
Females (3)	UK	Community Mental Health Acute inpatient mental health Contemporary setting
Females (4)	Belgium	Psychiatric Hospital settings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Individual Placement & Support (IPS) ○ Drug & Alcohol team ○ Day centre ○ Peripatetic team

Learning Platform

The project used an Open Moodle platform to enable the online international delivery of teaching and learning. It involved using flipped-like seminars² and discussion forums to occur in real time (synchronously) and over time (asynchronously) in both a classroom context and via the discussion forums as part of online learning. Whilst this was an open platform it had the facility to be locked after a short registration period to ensure confidentiality of participants. The platform housed learning materials such as the graduate Vodcasts, graduate and student donated resources, website links, and other module resources. In order to engage with the site, students simply logged in with their unique user name and password from any mobile or laptop device that had access to the Internet. This pilot approach to flip-like e-pedagogy was a first for the three course programmes involved.

Learning technologist support

We drew on the expertise of Valentina Mosconi, at CU, who helped design the site for the project on the Open Moodle platform. Valentina developed a friendly userguide (See Appendix 1) and helped set up the discussion forums so that each student could gain access to the site and their group. The site was populated with website links to the three countries, news feeds, a photograph gallery, Google maps, as well as other module resources to help provide an international feel. Learning technologists from PXL and UCT were also on hand to support Valentina and their respective staff and students. Figure 2 presents the homepage of the site.

² The Flip Classroom approach requires students to digest online content, by watching video lectures, usually at home, and engaging in assigned problems in 'class' with academic staff facilitating guidance and interaction with students

Figure 2: The Open Moodle platform home page



200 undergraduate students in total were involved in this project and were allocated to twenty international e-action learning sets (ALS), or discussion forums across the three institutions. The students linked to the discussion forums via their final year module on their respective course programmes. Table 2 provides details of the modules where the discussion forum was housed, an example of a key learning outcome for that module, and the form(s) of assessment that the students undertook.

Table 2: Module and assessment

University	Number of students	Module	Example key learning outcomes	Assessment (Summative)
CU	155	354OT Employability and Entrepreneurship (An Online International Module ³ with OIL status)	Critically appraise and debate the national and global context and the future direction of the profession	(100%) Develop and produce a career narrative using digital storytelling software
PXL	16	AJ2104 Enabling Environments	Critically appraise occupational therapy in the contexts of our work in 'enabling environments', from both the clients' and therapists' perspectives	(40%) critical reflections and contributions to the discussion forum and module sessions (50%) group work task critiquing functioning teams (10%) oral report and peer

³ CU has a strong commitment to internationalising the curriculum; OIL modules have status in the university and have fulfilled certain criteria including specific pedagogical dimensions, types of student interactions, and identification of how students might benefit from intercultural learning opportunities.

UCT	29	AHS4119W Occupational Therapy Research and Practice Management	Appreciate the scope of and the relationships between the universal management functions of controlling, leading, planning and organising in occupational therapy practice contexts Describe and critically appraise the principles and procedures of organizational development	evaluation (100%) Written exam paper
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Discussion forums

The discussion forums were facilitated by a number of CU graduates (n=4) who donated the Vodcasts, along with academic support from module tutors across the three institutions⁴. In the discussion forums the students explored the graduates Vodcasts and considered challenges faced when promoting professional perspectives within interagency, multidisciplinary team working. This flipped-like e-pedagogy was designed to disrupt current teaching and learning practices on the respective modules and encourage students to think creatively, engage in individual and group reflection and problem solving, develop innovative ways to deliver international culturally-sensitive services and consider ways and means of extending the reach of the profession (Pattison, 2008:405).

Students and staff were required to enrol onto the Open Moodle site week beginning 9th February, with the six weeks of discussion starting the following week.

Each week on the Moodle platform the students were prompted to consider different issues related to the graduate Vodcasts and a series of prompts were developed by the project team, for example:

Pre-week: Enrolment

- Send student enrolment instructions to all students
- Start student enrolment

Week One: Enrolment and Group Cohesion

- Introduce and participate in warm up activities online
 - Add a picture to the international gallery
 - Say hello online and introduce yourself. Share something unique about you or a story about your name
 - Say something about your hopes / aspirations for the international element of the module

Week Two: Scene Setting

- Introduce the scenario(s)
- What are the key points to consider here in relation to professional perspectives? What are the key points in each scenario (min 1 online contribution per scenario)?
- Think about the service setting – where are the potential assets and hindrances/challenges in taking forward occupational therapy in relation to the service user's care within the team and in liaison with other agencies. The focus here is not about the actual case based intervention but how do you challenge/change/be creative/visible / influential in problem solving and negotiating occupational therapy service delivery within the service/setting/context and to be able to effectively

⁴ CU = 7 staff, UCT = 2 staff, PXL = 3 staff

advocate for the service user(s)/communities. List these and contribute to discussion around them (min 2 online contributions per scenario).

Week Four: learning from others and action planning

- Share your plans for creative professionally-orientated problem solving within multidisciplinary team work in your scenario(s). What are your anticipated outcomes? How will you know what works for whom, when and why? (Minimum 2 online contribution per scenario)
- From your international collaboration identify two key points that have informed/supported/developed your thinking/problem solving/creative approach to tackling these difficult situations in relation to (wider) team challenges (min 1 online contribution per scenario).

Methodology and methods

Ethics

Ethical approval to conduct the research was gained from each institution's research ethics committee⁵. Participant information documents were circulated and informed consent accessed for all those who agreed to take part. Issues of institutional and participant confidentiality were respected. Service user and service confidentiality was ensured within the presenting scenarios. The right to privacy, protection from harm, potential risk factors and discomforts, beneficence, respect for autonomy, non-maleficence and justice were also adhered to.

Research design

Case study methodology was selected as it provided opportunity to develop greater understanding of the 'case' (Simons, 2009) the case being a 'specific, complex, functioning thing' (Stake, 1995:2). Graduate preparedness for practice was viewed as the case. We situated our researcher stance within a social constructionist perspective (Gergen & Gergen, 2003) in the acknowledgement of multiple perspectives and the importance of accounting for differences in institutional, student and societal demographics and distinction between the European & South African policy contexts.

Data collection

Perspectives of the teaching and learning experience were captured through both qualitative and quantitative approaches:

Qualitative data

- The 'cutup' technique⁶ (adapted from Burroughs, 1963) with stakeholder groups (occupational therapy students and graduates, academic staff)
- Interviews with students
- Interviews with learning technologists

Quantitative data

- The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) (Chen & Starosta, 2000:1) (see Appendix 3) was used pre and post the six week discussion forums
- Results from each institution's respective student Module Evaluation Form

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

This scale was developed by Guo-Ming Chen and William Starosta and designed to measure intercultural sensitivity, defined as "the concept that represents the affective aspect of

⁵ PXL did not require ethics approval as the project was viewed as course development

⁶ The 'cutup' technique has been used here as a reflective writing approach. Student volunteers are sending the research team a maximum 50 words of reflections about their learning journey each week. At the end of six weeks the words will be returned for the students to create into a storied narrative. The cutup method was a mechanical method of juxtaposition used by Burroughs where he literally cut up passages of prose by himself and other writers and then pasted them back together at random.

intercultural communication confidence by referring to subjects' active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures" (Chen and Starosta, 1998). It has been used with success in a number of studies (Chen and Starosta, 2000; Fritz, Mollenberg, & Chen, 2002; McMurray 2007).

The ISS scale measures intercultural sensitivity through a 24-item scale with five factors. *Interaction engagement* (7 items) deals with participants' feelings of participation in intercultural communication. *Respect for cultural differences* (6 items) deals with how participants orient to or tolerate other cultures or opinions. *Interaction confidence* (5 items) deals with how confident participants are in the intercultural setting. *Interaction enjoyment* (3 items) deals with participants' positive or negative reactions towards communicating with people from different cultures. *Interaction attentiveness* (3 items) deals with participants' efforts to understand what is going on in intercultural interaction. There are five choices for each item in the scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree. (See Appendix 3).

Students at all three institutions were requested to complete the survey immediately before commencing and immediately after completing the Online International (OIL) Module, providing both pre-test and post-test measures.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis - Parametric and non-parametric methods of analysis were used. The ISS data was analysed using SPSS. Frequencies and descriptive statistics were first run to assess the results of each item of the survey instrument. Six paired-sample t-tests were then used to explore the total scores and composite scores of the ISS (dependent variables). These composite scores were reached by aggregating the items for each of the five factors.

Qualitative data analysis - Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A focus for the analysis was how the data sets revealed graduate perspectives about their learner experience and practice within the mental health arena. The analytic process involved a progression from description, where the data were organized to show patterns in content, and summarized, to interpretation, where themes were developed, illustrating the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications. This required an iterative process of reading, re-reading, preliminary codes and generating themes and their subthemes. The themed areas captured something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represented some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. Themes were defined and contextualized with data evidence. Situated within a social constructionist framework, the analysis process focused on the socio-cultural contexts that supported the individual accounts that are provided.

Study Findings - Quantitative data

Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)

The numbers of participants who used the ISS are indicated in table 3.

Table 3: Respondents to the pre-test and post-test ISS (by institution)

University	Number of pre-test respondents	Number of respondents to both pre- and post-tests
Coventry University	90	40
PXL University College	5	2
University of Cape Town	11	4

Unfortunately, the limited numbers of students involved in PXL University College and UCT, meant that analysis could not be completed for those six students who responded to both the pre-test and post-test surveys. It was felt that as the survey measured intercultural sensitivity and students were from very different cultures, that combining student data might result in an

inaccurate impression of students' intercultural sensitivity. Retention for CU students was 44.4%, and thus pre-test and post-test comparisons were undertaken for those 40 (female=38; male=2) respondents. Of the students who responded to both surveys, thirty-eight (38) students spoke English as their first language. One student spoke Polish as their first language, and one student spoke Shona as their first language. Six students spoke one additional language, and three students spoke two additional languages.

The ISS measured intercultural sensitivity through a 24-item Likert scale with five factors. *Interaction engagement* (7 items) dealt with participants' feelings of participation in intercultural communication. *Respect for cultural differences* (6 items) dealt with how participants orient to or tolerate other cultures or opinions. *Interaction confidence* (5 items) dealt with how confident participants are in the intercultural setting. *Interaction enjoyment* (3 items) dealt with participants' positive or negative reactions towards communicating with people from different cultures. *Interaction attentiveness* (3 items) dealt with participants' efforts to understand what is going on in intercultural interaction. There were five choices for each item in the scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree. Of the 24 items, 9 items were reverse-coded for data analysis, as these items were negatively-keyed in the ISS. Based upon a review of the literature, we formed the following two hypotheses:

H_0 = The average ISS scores will not change between the pre-test and post-test conditions ($H_0: \mu = \mu_0$)

H_1 = The average ISS scores will increase between the pre-test and post-test conditions ($H_1: \mu > \mu_0$)

ISS Findings

In order to analyse the pre-test and post-test ISS scores, it was important to first determine whether the data satisfied normality assumptions; or, put differently, to determine whether analysis using the mean would provide an accurate picture of the data. A Shapiro-Wilk test was undertaken to check for normality distribution, due to its suitability for smaller samples. The pre-test total scores were normally distributed ($p=.054$), with skewness of $-.816$ ($SE=.350$) and kurtosis of 2.177 ($SE=.688$), but influenced by an outlier. The post-test total scores were normally distributed ($p=.863$), with skewness of $-.196$ ($SE=.350$), kurtosis of $-.358$ ($SE=.688$), and no outliers. Having satisfied the normality assumptions, a paired-samples t-test was then conducted to compare the means of intercultural sensitivity in both pre-test and post-test conditions. These findings (Table 4 & 5) show that there was a significant difference in the total scores for the pre-test ($M=96.9$, $SD=7.68$) and post-test ($M=102$, $SD=7.84$) conditions; $t(39)=-3.72$, $p=0.000627$, meaning that for those 40 CU students who responded to both pre-test and post-test surveys, there was a significant increase in their intercultural sensitivity. Based upon these findings, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternate hypothesis.

Table 4: Paired sample descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test total scores of intercultural sensitivity for 40 Coventry University students

Paired Samples	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Pre	96.900	40	7.68215	1.21465
Total Post	102.0750	40	7.83610	1.23900

Table 5: Paired differences statistics for pre-test and post-test total scores of intercultural sensitivity for 40 Coventry University students

Total Pre Total Post	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
	-5.17500	8.79944	1.39131	-7.98920	-2.36080	-3.720	39	.001

Subsequent analyses were then conducted to examine the mean scores and differences for the five factors of interaction engagement, interaction enjoyment, respect for cultural differences, interaction attentiveness, and interaction confidence. For each factor, the data satisfied normality assumptions ($p > 0.05$) using Shapiro-Wilk tests. Paired sample t-tests were carried out for all five factors, and thus a bonferroni correction was applied in which the p value of 0.005 was divided by 5 to result in a significance value of 0.01. Findings (Tables 6 & 7) show that there was a significant difference in the scores for the interaction engagement pre-test ($M=28.75$, $SD=2.52$) and post-test ($M=30.03$, $SD=2.79$) conditions; $t(39)=-2.898$, $p=0.006$. There was also a significant difference in the interaction confidence pre-test ($M=17.70$, $SD=2.30$) and post-test ($M=19.50$, $SD=2.57$) conditions; $t(39)=-4.102$, $p=0.000202$. These results suggest that the 40 CU respondents to the pre-test and post-test ISS felt more engaged and confident in intercultural communication after they had participated in the module, and that their intercultural sensitivity subsequently increased. Whilst the mean scores of the other factors also increased, these were not statistically significant. The findings are presented in the tables below; however, the means should not be compared across factors as there were varying numbers of items in each factor⁷.

Table 6: Paired sample descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test factor scores of intercultural sensitivity for 40 Coventry University students

Paired Samples		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Interaction engagement (IEg)	Pre	28.7500	40	2.51916	.39831
	Post	30.0250	40	2.78722	.44070
Interaction enjoyment (IEj)	Pre	12.7250	40	1.50192	.23747
	Post	13.4500	40	1.48410	.23466
Respect for cultural differences (RC)	Pre	26.7000	40	2.35557	.37245
	Post	27.4250	40	2.13503	.33758
Interaction attentiveness (IA)	Pre	11.0250	40	2.01898	.31923
	Post	11.6750	40	1.78868	.28281
Interaction confidence (IC)	Pre	17.7000	40	2.30050	.36374
	Post	19.5000	40	2.57204	.40668

Table 7: Paired differences statistics for pre-test and post-test factor scores of intercultural sensitivity for 40 Coventry University students

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
IEg	-1.27500	2.78262	.43997	-2.16492	-.38508	-2.898	39	.006
IEj	-.72500	2.09991	.33202	-1.39658	-.05342	-2.184	39	.035
RC	-.72500	2.34234	.37036	-1.47412	0.2412	-1.958	39	.057
IA	-.65000	2.04501	.32334	-1.30402	.00402	-2.010	39	.051
IC	-1.80000	2.77535	.43882	-2.68760	-.91240	-4.102	39	.000

Study Findings - Qualitative data

These findings focus on the students' overall learning experience and are presented in five overarching themes:

⁷ There are a number of limitations that should be taken into account in the analysis of the ISS data. Firstly, it was not possible to include the data from PXL University College and the UCT due to limited numbers. Additionally, the retention for CU students was only 44.44%.

1. Beginnings: Intrigue, interest, hopes, trepidation
2. Using real scenarios from graduates first posts
3. International representation and exchange
4. Connecting and learning with others
5. Going forward: learner gains and advice for others

Each theme is explored in turn.

1. Beginnings: Intrigue, interest, hopes, trepidation

This theme represents the students' response towards a new learning opportunity. It describes the sense of intrigue and apprehension they experienced as a result of being involved in the project. The theme captures students' anticipation about 'knowing what to do', and feeling 'able to do it' as well as a general excitement about the professional learning opportunity. Early responses can be seen from these students' reflections below:

I am really interested and looking forward to this discussion as it is an opportunity to gain alternative perspectives from individuals in the group, and also to learn more about how other countries in the world practice Occupational Therapy (OT) as this is an area I have limited knowledge on. (CU student)

At first I was worried as I did not know much about the module, as the lectures and seminars happened I was able to understand more about the international perspectives and how it relates to OT. Also, participating in the group forum it was interesting to see others views and experiences they have within OT. (PXL student)

Admittedly I logged on this week with some slight trepidation as I anticipated what was to come. As of yet I just have questions that I hope will be answered throughout the exercise. Will I understand the case studies? Will I have anything of value to add? What learning can I take from this experience? (CU student)

This module felt like entering into the unknown before the first lectures and seminars. Attending the lecture and listening to Sarita's story really helped to begin to build a picture of what the module was all about and how OT fitted in with entrepreneurship. Her talk was really inspirational. Within the seminar the tutor asked us to think of ourselves in relation to how we felt about the module. I felt... well I had attended the lecture, so I felt I was just dipping my toes into the water but still unsure about how safe I was diving in. (CU student)

This beginning phase marked a process of discovery and adaptation. Individuals' choices about levels of engagement were evident. Students did not respond to the learning environment, content and website materials in consistent ways and came with different expectations, hopes, and ideas, as the following theme goes on to explore.

2. Using real scenarios from graduates first posts

Moving into the first discussion week saw the students settle into exploring two different country scenarios (although students were able to access to all the scenarios at the end of the module). Students were largely positive regarding the creative media used, including use of Vodcasts and found this enhanced their learning. The 'real life' aspect of the presentations was very well received and this seemed to encourage student engagement although many expressed their desire for more background case information and deeper link to context within which the scenario was situated. An appreciation of the differing cultural practices and experiences began to emerge:

I thought using international examples was great, however the cases could have had more background info to deepen our understanding of the situation (UCT student)

I think the overall project was very interesting, especially because it was international. We had the chance to learn about our practice in different countries and cultures. (PXL student)

I now have a better understanding of occupational therapy in these different countries. I've received a lot of information about cultural influences, and the actions that are taken to guarantee the patients well-being in all different domains. Being able to discuss everyone's opinions, health care systems and all different possibilities in these countries was very insightful. I'm glad I had the opportunity to interact with students from other schools and countries. It was both fun and interesting. (PXL student)

It was interesting to read about some of the difficulties and challenges the two people in the scenarios had come up against in their own practice. Listening to the ways that they have overcome challenges has allowed me to think about what I would have done in their shoes, encouraging me to think more creatively and problem solve. (CU student)

I think it was a good idea to use the vodcasts because it allowed us to hear about practice in other countries and compare and contrast how this differed to practice within the UK. It was more interesting than if we were given fake scenarios and having the videos and actually seeing the person talk about their experience was far more interactive than being given a fake scenario typed out in a word document. I think knowing it is something real that someone has experienced makes a difference in the motivation to actually give the scenarios real consideration. (CU student)

At this point, students were clearly beginning to consider the national and international implications of their studies, and considering how practice might apply in different contexts. They then began to seek out interaction with students from other countries.

3. International representation and exchange

This theme illustrates how the students related to one another and sought to exchange ideas. It also highlights how student, graduate and tutor interactions prompted both challenge and disruption, prompting participants to reflect upon their values and contributions. It is sub-divided into several key areas, the first of which acknowledges the challenge of having international representation across all the student discussion forums:

i) International representation

I feel not as many international students took part this time around so that was a shame. I was under the impression that the main part of this forum was the international perspective, but the two international students have yet to post. The international perspective would have been provided a fantastic learning opportunity. It is always great to hear the views of my fellow cohort, but I wanted to also hear the perspectives from the two Cape Town University students. I am hoping that this week, they will participate and enlighten us with their views. (CU student)

Would there be a way of making it compulsory for international students to contribute, I feel we missed out on their opinions and experience. (CU student)

ii) Language difficulty

As the following excerpt explores, students acknowledged the hurdles within communication when working with others across different cultures and language. The Belgium, students for example, were most affected by linguistic barriers due to English not being their first language:

First of all I want to address the language use of question one during week two. My

home language is Dutch and I had a hard time to translate the sentences used to formulate the question 1. ...It literally took me a half an hour to translate the question and I hope I interpreted it correctly. Would it be possible to divide long sentence to make them easier to read for the Belgian users (and maybe the South-African users also?). (PXL student)

The first times I had to search how the forum works. But after a week it went easier. I also didn't know that there were questions [linked to the graduate scenarios]. Maybe you can strike it more. And the questions were very long phrases, that makes it difficult to translate (if your own language isn't English). (PXL student)

What was revealing though was how students were often keen to offer suggestions to help improve the delivery of the learning, rather than just raising their concerns.

iii) Negotiating the Moodle site

As described earlier, the Open Moodle Site was the online space which housed the project content including the discussion forum links, the graduate scenarios, question prompts linked to the scenarios, as well as an image gallery, news feeds from the respective countries, google maps etc. It was evident the site proved challenging for some to navigate:

If they had put headings in the Moodle page stating which week the documents and work belonged to I think that would have made things much easier. I think in this 3rd year we have that many different sites to navigate (Open Moodle, Learnium, Moodle) that simplicity would make people more motivated to participate in the work. (CU student)

Some students felt overwhelmed at the amount of information there was to digest on the Moodle site and felt the need for a more uncluttered site:

I did not know which online seminar I was supposed to be watching or what I was meant to be reading that week. (PXL student)

So many types of media makes Moodle so busy and it is hard to find anything (CU student)

Support was on hand though, as this one student shared:

On Monday I contacted the technical support as I could not access the transcripts for the videos, which was really important, especially as in one video the lady spoke in another language. I was grateful to the technical team who fixed the links promptly so I could carry on with the work. This reminded me of the importance when communicating with people of the need to have information accessible in different means. (UCT student)

Further, it was evident that students appreciated the learning gains and the mode of learning which the online platform offered them:

I think it is very knowledgeable, and very informative to listen through videos to learn how to approach and a good idea to share experiences as we may experience similar issues / situations as being part of the same profession. (UCT student)

First things first, I think this forum is a really nice method to share opinions etc. between different cultures/countries. (UCT student)

In terms of engaging in the online discussion it was evident this required students to develop new skills and confidence to both initiate and continue discussion threads:

iv) Engaging and posting ideas

It was evident that knowing what to post on the international discussion forums presented a layer of challenge in terms of managing one another's expectations:

I find online discussions a little intimidating as there is always a rush for people to post and sometimes it is difficult to come up with an original point when all of yours have been mentioned. I found this here too. Some members wrote quite lengthy posts which were hard to digest and, I feel discouraged others. I would consider a word limit to prevent this, I found questions over the following weeks to be difficult to understand what was being asked, I'm not sure if this was a personal reaction (CU student)

If I am honest I have found the forum again a challenge...knowing it is not marked and we have pressures from everywhere else it is hard to prioritise. Answering the questions takes time for one to understand what is being asked of us and another to find research to back what we are saying. (CU student)

It was also evident that tutors' phrasing of the scenario questions prompted new levels of thinking, translating and interpretation in order that students' could figure out their response and contribute to the discussion. Students felt that at times the questions were too complex and difficult to engage with:

The second question that was posed for the scenarios this week was very wordy. I was also slightly unsure as to whether we were meant to be thinking of ways we think they could have developed the service, or simply discussing the ways that they [the graduates] had already tried to be creative to develop the service. (PXL student)

I think last week (week 2) was harder as we had to give evidence and the questions were worded in a way that seemed difficult to answer. I had to re-read them several times. But I contributed and found that I learned from other's responses. (CU student)

It was interesting to observe how students coped with the situation of being with others in a learning situation having to manage the 'not knowing' and needing to be responsive within situations of uncertainty. It was evident that the students wanted more guidance up front about their learning journey and what would take place over the 6 weeks. Some students remarked that if they had prior knowledge about the study themes it would have helped them engage in richer discussion:

There did not seem to be in my group much discussion surrounding the scenarios. Someone would start the thread off beginning with the perspectives for example, and then everyone else would reiterate what they had just said. For the second question for one of the scenarios there seems to be no progression in the discussion at all. For example I made a point and two people have replied simply reiterating what I have already said. ... there seems to be nothing to discuss, as nothing new has come up in the thread. I feel like I have nothing else to say and without any additional input from other members of the group..(CU student)

I felt like the last week was a bit disheartening. Barely anybody commented on my online forum last week to reflect on their experiences. Those of us that did had little to reflect on because people had been so inactive about the whole experience. I heard many people claiming they had not made any online contributions at all. I felt slightly frustrated by this as I had been on consistently each week and answered the questions (CU student)

It was also questioned by some that as students' online contributions were not summatively assessed the motivation to engage waned:

This week there have been only a few of our group contributing to the scenarios. Whilst there may be a variety of reasons for this, and I should not jump to conclusions, I wonder if some people are not posting because it is unmarked work. (CU student)

Using online discussion forums to discuss professional perspectives, and across different countries and cultures, was a new experience for all in many ways. Whilst the CU students were used to communicating their learning through such online learning platforms the anticipated practices and skills of *international* online discussion required a new and different skill set, as the next point explores.

v) *International exchange*

The differing expectations of CU, UCT and PXL students often seemed to relate to academic practices at their institutions. For example, a Coventry student noted a perceived need to come up with an 'original' point, whereas a student from Cape Town found that this approach tended to hamper discussion:

I was surprised by how formal and academic the discussion occurred in my forum! It felt like each student was trying to raise a point as opposed to thinking critically and engaging with what was already offered.. and it was difficult for discussions to flow (UCT student)

What I think I am surprised by as this module goes on is when I perhaps learn about things I haven't come across before or if someone has very strong views on something and it relates to their culture. Whilst I hope that all challenges would be overcome, I anticipate there may be barriers to cross and the challenge will be how to overcome them reasonably without causing someone to compromise their beliefs or values which might lead to upset or discomfort, but at the same time support them to adapt (not necessarily conform) in order to survive in a mixed cultural environment. I do believe it is important to learn about the difference in cultures though to avoid misinterpretations and facilitate a good understanding and respect for other people's cultures in order to work together successfully but at the same time remember not to stereotype and treat everyone as an individual. (CU student)

I think consistent participation and actual discussion and dialogue was difficult for students in my group.. I think we participated at different times...I had to constantly reread the scenario and past forum discussions (UCT student)

I think interacting on the forum must be an obligated task for a student. The teachers are putting so much effort into this....Maybe next year other (European) countries can be included in the project so a meet-up would be possible. In that way there is a connection between the students and the project would be greater? (PXL student)

Whilst there were hurdles and challenges which impacted students' engagement, the opportunity to discuss professional perspectives with international peers and learn more about the role and scope of the profession across different contexts was clearly considered to be a positive educational endeavor, as the following section explores.

4. Connecting and learning with others

This theme illustrates the learner gains the project offered the students and the resulting insight it offered them about their (globalised) profession:

We were given the opportunity to learn something new in and about our profession that we can certainly use in our internship and future jobs. (PXL student)

I enjoyed finding so many readings and ideas about OT as well as discussing peoples' perspectives and different contexts. I was taken by surprise at how different our perspectives within OT itself actually were (UCT student)

I really enjoyed listening to the international student who discussed interventions I had not heard of, giving me useful tools to explore this new information such as

journals and Web links. I realised the importance of occupational therapy core qualities and how these can be used globally to enhance the quality of lives for patients... This has helped me to develop a stronger sense of identity ... I would like more opportunities to share conversations but feel that this is not always an easy opportunity. (CU student)

I think the main thing I learnt was that practice in Belgium is very similar to our practice here in the UK and they use the same models of practice... One of the scenarios emphasised the lack of resources that OT's have within a non westernised culture. What surprised me was how much she had to change her role to support the children in that society, for example having to get involved politically to fight for their rights. (CU student)

An OT has to delegate due to lack of time. Volunteers can be supportive to the elderly and can guide/learn skills. It is important that the OT has contact with a coordinator of a group of volunteers if a certain situation arises. To support to the elderly and to durably recording in a residential care centre a interdisciplinary cooperation with family/friends/acquaintances/volunteers (formal and informal care) are important. This is cost effective for the society and increases the quality of life of the elderly. (PXL student)

Furthermore, as the excerpt below illustrates, the discussions prompted students to consider their professional values, therapeutic/clinical reasoning and professional identity:

I really enjoyed listening to the international student who discussed interventions I had not heard of, giving me useful tools to explore this new information such as journals and Web links. I realised the importance of occupational therapy core qualities and how these can be used globally to enhance the quality of lives for patients. I realised the true need for occupational therapists to be able to reasoning pragmatically and how resources and laws can affect the care given to services and thus as a profession we must be aware of the global context of care. It has also been identified through discussions the importance of talking to other occupational therapists especially internationally to help gain an understanding whether other areas are facing the same issues and how these issues are being solved. This has helped me to develop a stronger sense of identity as occupational therapists. However I feel at times we required more international students to help deepen our conversations even more. I would continue to talk to international students practitioners and would like more opportunities to share conversations but feel that this is not always an easy opportunity. (CU student)

This week it really started to understand the evidence surrounding our points and this enabled me to think beyond my opinion but also identify legislations and policies and how these may impact on the service and the issues we identify. It was interesting talking to the international students. I didn't expect the case studies we were given, they really opened my eyes to issues and challenges occupational therapists may face within the wider context. They enabled me to think about how skills that can be represented with OTs for example being a problem solver and creativity can really help others and are very important. (CU student)

This week our group has found South African journals about OT and much of our discussion has been based around our findings of those. In one of the articles, 'Barriers and Strategies to increase research involvement of Occupational therapists', I discovered that there was a lack of research around our profession in South Africa meaning that it is hindering the growth of our profession. Our group also looked at the South African code of conduct and from that, I've learned that it's not about simply making a suggestion but the way you use your clinical reasoning skills can make a difference in the way you can justify your interventions. However, I've also feel that the lack of services-resources does encourage you to think creatively. For example, if my clients in South Africa could not attend a specialist school, how else could they learn skills for maths, english etc. And by turning the intervention into a functional

activity, it may be possible to facilitate some sort of intervention whereby my clients would learn new skills in a functional context. This is just a snippet of some of the things that we have been discussing that I feel I've learned and these case studies do encourage thinking outside the box. (CU student)

5. Going forward: learner gains and advice for others

This theme encapsulates student reflections on their experience of the discussions and their overall learning. Many have provided some thoughtful and encouraging advice for new learners, which highlight significant elements of their own developing perspectives. It also demonstrates how students considered ways to take forward their own learning into future practice:

Try not to be afraid to ask questions! (UCT student)

Try to share as much about the context as possible to frame the intervention and the case story that you have (PXL student)

Try to provide some reasoning to your thinking, because as it may be obvious to you, it could also be very strange to others (UCT student)

We were given the opportunity to learn something new in/about our profession that we can certainly use in our internship and future jobs. (PXL student)

I do feel that this module has been helpful and I actually enjoyed the process as it is nice to look back and see how I've grown.....the discussion has been an eye-opener to how I see myself as a developing OT - it just wasn't as obvious at the beginning. (CU student)

One of my ambitions is to be able to travel and this module sums up the perfect reason to go and experience life and grow from different walks of life and perspectives. (CU student)

I think this is a great project with much potential. It's too bad I can't participate the following years to look at the progress. Thank you for the experience! (PXL student)

Finally, it was evident that students had considered the benefits and hurdles of shared learning for shared understanding:

One of the highlights of our discussion is the use of a multi-disciplinary team and how it would be effective and beneficial for the patient's care if as many members come together to gain a better understanding of one another's perspective and somewhere in that discussion, we identified that this could be difficult at times as it is a challenge to bring lots of people together. I would say that (through this online discussion forum) that I've had a real life experience of how difficult it is to bring people together for a learning discussion despite how valuable it is, but how interesting is it that when people feel busy or overwhelmed by their work-case-load that the benefits of learning can easily be overlooked. (CU student)

Summarised findings from other project participants:

Graduates perspectives on preparing their case scenarios and on facilitating the international discussion forums:

- Concern about what the 'right' case scenario example should be and how to prepare it
- Important to share how an OT can work in a non-traditional setting using OT core values and skills, but also the challenges that go with that for a new graduate
- The students discovered how much they had in common, both the challenges and the solutions, despite often very differing backgrounds and experiences

- The difficult circumstances that students in South Africa can find themselves in on placements, particularly in rural settings, but the similarity between the core issues world-wide, for example, funding, resources & understanding of the OT role seemed common in all areas

Learning technologist perspectives on developing the Open Moodle platform and the Moodle site with the learning resources:

- Developing the Open Moodle site was fairly easy and straightforward in that it is a platform that we already use at Coventry University
- Enjoyable to think internationally and add elements within the site that would help bridge the cultural and distance gap that there is in an online environment (e.g. map, time-zone widgets, short descriptions about the joining institutions, photo gallery that students could use to introduce themselves and/or share their environment and experiences visually)
- Challenging to work out how best to structure the site to enable good usability and functioning
- Time consuming to create the site elements (mainly discussion forums but also videos, transcripts, user guides, etc.) and to arrange limited access to each group accordingly (e.g. forums for each group every week, some other elements free for all to see)
- As a first experiment, it seems to have been rather successful
- From a technical point of view, apart from some beginning niggles, it went rather smoothly
- It would be easier and more effective to have all the content and the dynamics worked out well before the site goes live

Discussion

Within globalised health and social care and community sectors there is a constantly changing landscape in terms of practice and professional employment. With that in mind this project was designed to encourage students to think creatively about their professional contribution, to discuss strategies, to take risks and consider ways to manage levels of uncertainty and complexity in their professional practice (Ravasi & Turati, 2005; Gibb, 2007).

Evidence from developmental psychology suggests that significant learning and personal growth can occur when one is exposed to unfamiliar experiences or ideas (Hurtado, 2012). For that reason discomfort and conflict play a significant role in 'deepening the dialogic relating, expanding students understanding of the issues that build students' capacity to work through disagreement' (Dagda & Gurin, 2007). Intercultural learning can provoke anxiety, which may lead to students strengthening their defences and being entrenched. The ability to manage anxiety is therefore a crucial component of intercultural competence (Gudykunst, 2002). Similarly facilitators need to balance challenge with support in a carefully designed learning environment.

This project aimed to facilitate students' confidence as occupational therapists in a global context, considering contemporary mental health practice. The focus was therefore not only to enable the exploration of theory underpinning the current context, but to up-skill students with practical means of contributing to their future mental health practice.

Whilst students may be aware of multiple perspectives and disciplinary lenses, they require opportunities to develop the skills and understanding necessary to actually apply this learning in specific contexts. Engaging in this multicultural teaching and learning project therefore required a focus on course content as well as how it would be explored across the international partner groups, with recognition that knowing and communication are dynamic and complex.

Engaging diverse points of view facilitates not only critical thinking but also intercultural attitudes and skills such as valuing diverse perspectives and managing one's anxiety. Setting

up the international online forum, whilst innovative and creative, involved a great deal of work led by Coventry but agreed across partners. Asking graduates to donate complex scenarios from their first year of work provided students with first hand content from the world of practice, which was clearly valued. Working in international groups offered students opportunities to interact with other students' cultural models, which lead to the disruption of their respective ways of thinking, and to the generation of new discourse. Unfortunately both the UCT and PXL Limburg programmes could only offer optional engagement from students. Of the 50 students who opted to engage from Cape Town only 29 enrolled, and despite difficult and time consuming reorganisation of groups, some of those enrolled did not engage, resulting in some forums only having Coventry students. It was expected that this would be reflected in mid module and end of module evaluations, which was the case.

Notwithstanding that a number of discussion forums were not as internationally diverse as planned in terms of students, having international scenarios to focus upon still required students to consider a globalised perspective of practice. As such students were prompted to explore themselves as occupational beings, which will ultimately enable them to facilitate client's occupational exploration with an innate depth of understanding. The entrepreneurship element of the students' respective summative assignments also facilitated the student's vision for professional practice in a wide range of areas.

As the students engaged with one another and encountered difference in fellow student perspectives and epistemologies it was at first challenging for them to generate active dialogue or to reach productive consensus. The module leader at Coventry monitored all international discussion forums online, contributing where little discussion was being facilitated. Through facilitating purposeful opportunities to interact, students were provided with opportunity to communicate, listen, and negotiate across complex cultural, experiential and epistemological perspectives. For example, as none of the PXL students were native English speakers, and some of them were not very skilled in reading, understanding and writing English texts, the students' expressed initial trepidation about being able to participate in the online conversation. However, as the module progressed and certainly at the end, most of the students indicated that their fears were unnecessary, although they acknowledged they had sometimes felt lost when reading the texts/questions that were presented each week. The PXL OT staff worked with students to help problem solve this issue by organising a participant meeting on Mondays so that students could express their difficulties, in a supportive environment, and could encourage and help each other to engage in the new issues proposed.

Technology enhanced learning continues to be a priority for further development educationally and professionally, with higher education needing to explore and embrace a range of learning platforms and methods that will enhance and invigorate learning to ensure currency, interest and diversity within the curriculum. The international discussion forum sought to provide students with a real world opportunity to consider professional issues from a global perspective. Where students have done well they clearly grasp the notion that the profession needs to be viewed within a local, national and international context.

The focus on mental health practice scenarios opened students' eyes to issues and challenges occupational therapists face in multi-agency team work, prompting them to think about how their core skills of occupational analysis, critical reflection, therapeutic reasoning and creativity are required. Further, they were able to examine socio-cultural-political challenges impacting client and community empowerment. They were required to consider their role in promoting issues of social justice, social activism and advocacy with, and on behalf of people and communities. They appreciated their need to be ever resourceful as practitioners, to articulate a robust evidence base for their practice, and to enhance the quality of life for those within whom they work through the power of meaningful occupation.

Items of Good Practice

- All students engaged in the project had opportunity to examine and discuss globalised perspectives of mental health occupational therapy practice through the international

graduate scenarios. In recognition of its excellence as a learning medium, the modules will continue to use such scenarios

- The project was short listed to the final three for a Teaching Excellence Award 2014-15 at CU from over 80 nominations
- Coventry University awarded the project OIL status (Overseas International Learning) which is used as an item of good practice
- The potential for transferable skills in preparation for and during first post employment
- Effective mechanisms for partnership working, with regular module team meetings for on going discussion, problem resolution and support.
- Partnership working with UCT and Erasmus partners PXL Limburg (PXL Limburg students participate in the whole module as part of an Erasmus exchange)
- Graduate contribution for mental health practice scenarios
- Graduate facilitation (supported) international online discussion forums

Recommendations

Planned project/module developments

The suggestions for improving the module are in response to feedback and suggestions from the participating students:

Graduate preparedness for practice

- Maintain the project focus as students really appreciate the exchange and the insight they gained in how OT's have to work differently across other cultural settings

Graduate scenarios and question prompts

- Graduate scenarios will continue to be used and improved upon. Improvements will include providing more information on the broader context in which the scenario was based as well as considering the socio- political climate, policy frameworks on both a national and international level and challenges of the country and effect on the working environment. Scenarios will also focus on one specific challenge, which will make the scenarios more specific and focused. This will improve quality and ensure consistency
- Ensure appropriate topics and questions to prompt discussion and enhance transition to practice whilst improving intercultural competence.
- Question areas / prompts linked to the scenarios will be simplified and focused
- Place more emphasis on the exchange of literature to construct evidence-based answers and to enable exploration of different interpretations of the evidence (considering different socio-cultural realities).
- Continue to have graduate facilitation and have graduates train next year's graduates

Moodle development

- This has already started with easy to follow sections on the site.
- The Moodle page will be neat and tidy, not over-populated, combining materials to avoid duplication and information overload
- Each partner institution will review and refine links between host modules and online forums to ensure a smooth academic passage for students that is continuous and coherent, leading to their assessment.
- On going liaison with module, course and international colleagues will occur to ensure timely delivery across all universities routes.

Communication – international exchange

- Plans are underway regarding how to facilitate online language barriers and their translation and how to facilitate and encourage students to contribute when they are not familiar with contributing to online discussions (UCT students where new to this)
- Guidelines for contributing to the discussion forum will be created for students
- Guidelines for facilitation will be created and graduates who facilitated last year will help training of new facilitators with a view to expanding this practice where possible

- Early orientation and communication with students around the process of enrolling on and engaging in online discussion forums to ensure those students with an 'opt in' give a commitment to enrolling on and participating in the discussion forums.
- Maintain weekly meetings to support PXL students communication and ability to engage in a new issue and support research into associated evidence based literature
- Present more than two graduate scenarios to provide a more diverse view of one another's professional contexts. Provide more background information on the context that the scenario was situated in order to create a greater appreciation of the clip.
- Where possible (regarding time differences) use virtual meetings (e.g. Skype) to help build understanding and a feeling of being part of a team

Assessment

- To ensure that students participate from all countries students summative assessment will be linked to the engagement and learning from the online discussion forum
- Problem solve ways to develop and embed cross-institutional formative (and summative) assessment strategies (for example, students will include screen shots of their contribution as appendices for their assessment)

International partnership

- Involvement of another international partner, Nanyang Polytechnic, Singapore this next year, 2016 (80 students), which will increase international student involvement in each seminar group with a view to expanding collaboration further the following year.

Conclusion

Professional development cannot occur through staying in one place, to support occupational therapy graduate preparedness we must disrupt our learning environments to bring students into intercultural encounters that productively challenge existing ways of thinking and behaving. Pedagogy should not be purely led by content knowledge but through consideration of how to generate inclusive classroom conversation around ideas and concepts that are authentically open to individual and group interaction and interpretation. This study explored the role of education in preparing graduate occupational therapists for the field of mental health and beyond. As evidenced in this project, when challenges in engagement and learning occur, is it important to interpret them and respond in ways that can deepen students' learning. More needs to be understood about how best to prepare graduates with strategies and skills to promote professional visibility, agency and be responsive to opportunities to extend professional reach in mental health. Significantly, this study has revealed that more opportunity is needed within the curriculum to enable students to wrestle with uncertainty, risk and educational challenge, and to replace their feelings of doubt and insecurity with improved agency, in order to be able to manage the 'not knowing', to tolerate complexity, and be resilient.

Dissemination Plan

Research papers (minimum two, to include WFOT Bulletin, deadline 31st Dec, 2015)
 Conference presentations (minimum two; ENOTHE, 2016; WFOT, 2018)

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Appendix 1

Excerpts from the Open Moodle User Guide

Accessing OpenMoodle

To access OpenMoodle, please type the following URL into a browser path

<https://openmoodle.coventry.ac.uk/>

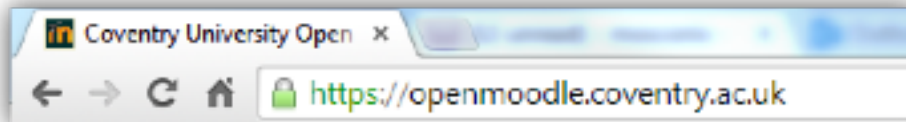
Depending on which browser you are using, you can include the log in page among your favourite sites so that you can access OpenMoodle with a shortcut from the browser's bookmarks.

- On Chrome, Firefox and Internet Explorer, you can click on the star icon that appears on the right hand side of the URL path to bookmark the page

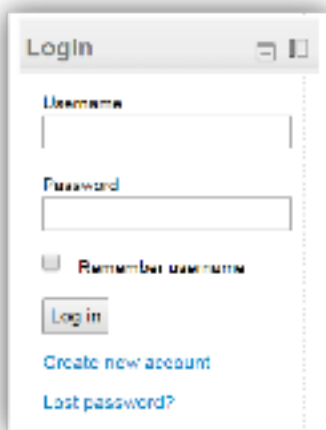
Creating an account

Once you have opened the initial OpenMoodle page, the site will ask you to log in.

Here is where you can create an account where you can set up a username and password that you will then use to log in to Open Moodle.



NOTE: If you are a Coventry University student, you will NOT need to create an account as you will be able to use your normal university log in. In this case, skip to “Enrolling onto the Forum” on page 5.



Upon clicking “Create new account”, you will see the new account page where you will need to fill in the required fields (the ones in red with the star) as well as the random security word/number in the *reCAPTCHA* field.

NOTE: Please use your university email address to register and check your emails regularly. You will receive a notification email from OpenMoodle with a link that you will have to click to confirm your registration.

Home → Log in → New account

~ Choose your username and password - (Use your email address as your username)

Username*

The password must have at least 8 characters

Password* Unmask

~ More details - (Coventry users should not use their university email)

Email address*



Email (again)*

First name*

Surname*

City/town

Country

reCAPTCHA  

Enter the words above

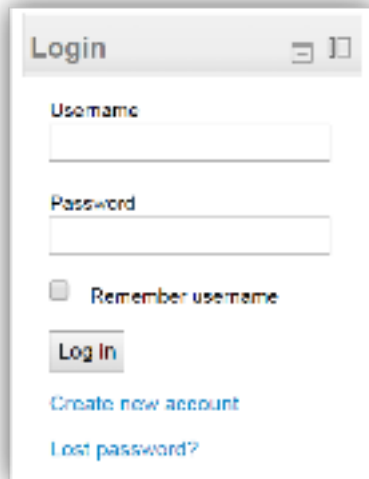
[Get another CAPTCHA](#)

[Get an audio CAPTCHA](#)

NOTE: Please note that you can tick the “Unmask” box next to the Password field to be able to see your password being written to help avoid any typing mistakes. Once you are happy you have entered the correct password, you can tick the box again to mask the password.

If you forget your password, you can always click on the “Forgot password?” link on the log in page and go through the process to reset the password.

Once you have created an account, you will have to log on into your University email system (that you will have used to register) and confirm registration by clicking on the link sent within the email.



Login

Username

Password

Remember username

[Create new account](#)

[Lost password?](#)



NOTE: Sometimes the confirmation email has a link URL that is not active. Please select this link by highlighting it with the cursor, copying it and pasting it into the browser window and press “Enter/Return” on your keyboard.

Once you have confirmed your registration, you should be able to log into OpenMoodle and enroll onto the Forum.

Appendix 2
Example Certificate of Recognition for Graduates CPD



Recipient of the Thelma Cardwell Research Award

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
International Occupational Therapy Curricula:
preparing graduates for practice in an uncertain
world

This is to confirm that

(Name)

Contributed an excellent learning scenario to the international discussion forum offered within BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy, Coventry University, PXL Limburg, Belgium and University of Cape Town. This will enhance graduates' preparation for future practice and provide a global perspective. This discussion forum is supported by WFOT for its international development and research.

Imogen Gordon

.....
Imogen Gordon
Senior Lecturer Occupational Therapy/International Discussion Forum
Lead, Coventry University

Appendix 3

Example section from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

(Developed by Chen and Starosta 2000)

Sometimes when we communicate and interact with individuals from cultures different to our own we can feel a range of emotions. These emotions and feelings might surprise us or be just as expected. These feelings are neither right nor wrong.

Human beings are often naturally attracted to people similar to themselves and can find it easier to work or get along with them – perhaps because shared interests, values, beliefs or other commonalities give us a foundation to build from. But it is extremely likely in today's world that each of us will necessarily work with people very different from ourselves.

The questions below are a self-assessment of attitudes and behaviour toward intercultural communication for interacting effectively with people from a cultural background different to your own.

Using the scale below please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank column before each statement:

- 5 = strongly agree
- 4 = agree
- 3 = neither
- 2 = disagree
- 1 = strongly disagree

There are 24 items in total. You should work quickly and record your first response by indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

No.	Statement
	I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures
	I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded
	I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures
	I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures
	I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures
	I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures
	I don't like to be with people from different cultures
	I respect the values of people from different cultures
	I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures
	I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures
	I usually wait before forming an impression about people from distinctly different cultures
	I often feel discouraged when I am with people from different cultures
	I am open-minded to people from different cultures
	I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures
	I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures
	I respect the ways people from different cultures behave

	I try to gather as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures
	I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures
	I am sensitive to the subtle meanings expressed by people from different cultures during our interaction
	I think my culture is better than other cultures
	I often give positive responses during my interaction with people from different cultures
	I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct people
	I often use verbal or nonverbal cues when interacting with people from different cultures to show my understanding
	I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between culturally-distinct others and me

YOUR FEEDBACK WELCOME

We would greatly value feedback on your experience in completing this questionnaire:

Please indicate which questions, if any from 1-24, you felt were:

Offensive	
Informative	
Unpleasant	
Surprising	
Confusing	
Unacceptable	

Thank you for your participation ☺