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Reflections on establishing a network to strengthen leadership of learning and teaching in the creative arts

Abstract:

Continuous improvements in learning and teaching are now expected as higher education moves to a system of mass education. This requires increased institutional leadership in learning and teaching, and also presents the sector with the challenge of finding ways to enhance learning and teaching leadership, especially at the disciplinary level. Is the formation of a national strategic knowledge network for those in learning and teaching leadership roles in the creative arts disciplines a credible, convincing and achievable means to address this learning and teaching leadership challenge? In this paper, the authors reflect on an attempt to implement such a network for learning and teaching leaders across the creative arts disciplines of creative writing, art, performing arts (music, theatre and dance), architecture and design. We highlight the assumptions underpinning the approach and reflect on whether these have been challenged, or not, in the process of conceptualising, designing and developing the network. Based on our experience of leading this network initiative, we reveal fundamental characteristics that we believe need to persist, in order for a learning and teaching leadership network to take hold and thrive in the creative arts.

Biographical notes:

Associate Professor Barbara de la Harpe is Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching in the College of Design and Social Context at RMIT University. For over 15 years she has been involved in teaching and academic professional development in higher education. Her background is in science education and educational psychology and her fields of expertise include student learning; generic skill development; teacher professional development; higher education pedagogy (education for sustainability, studio teaching and learning environments) and university change management. Her PhD study was on student learning and she is widely published in learning and teaching.

Thembi Mason is a Senior Advisor, Learning and Teaching in the College of Design and Social Context at RMIT. Her background and experience are in the area of learning and teaching with a specialisation in educational technologies and blended learning. She has worked across all educational sectors, including secondary school education, adult education, VET, and higher education. Currently, Thembi is working as the project manager for *createED,* an Australian Learning and Teaching Council funded project that aims to strengthen learning and teaching leadership in the creative arts.

Associate Professor J. Fiona Peterson is Deputy Dean, Learning and Teaching in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. She has 30 years experience as a teacher and educational facilitator spanning high school, vocational education and training, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate higher education programs. Her background is in communication studies and she has a PhD on collaborative learning networks. Her research interests include strategic knowledge networks, virtual communities, global education and studio learning and teaching.

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Context

In response to the push for a more contemporary learner-centred, customer-oriented and efficient higher education system, by government, industry and learners themselves, universities now, more than ever, have to focus on ensuring high quality undergraduate and postgraduate programs within a context of diminishing resources (Marginson 2006; Marginson & van der Wende 2007). Leadership is high on the agenda as Australia's higher education system and indeed institutions globally, become increasingly corporatized. In this context, the creative arts disciplines face a number of unique and specific issues that require strong learning and teaching leadership, including, for example, sustaining the studio mode of learning and teaching with reduced budgets; advancing assessment of creative work; and increasing the scholarship of learning and teaching based on studio practice (Ehmann 2005; Eilouti 2006; Ellmers 2006). Caglar and Uludag (2006: 231) argue, for example, that 'architectural design education has become the focus of an extremely complicated set of issues and conscientious debates' that require resolution. Thus, the challenges facing the creative arts cluster is around survival of the disciplines and its positional power in university structures.

Issues faced by all disciplines in university contexts, from which the creative arts is not immune, has led to the emergence of specific roles to lead and support learning and teaching changes (de la Harpe & Radloff 2006). At the institutional level, central roles include variously Deputy Vice Chancellors and/or Pro Vice Chancellors, Learning and Teaching or Academic. These roles focus typically on the development of high-level institutional strategies, policies and procedures. At their best, they service the whole of each institution and develop university-wide policies, systems and procedures, and provide advice for implementing them in coordinated ways across the institution. At the local level of divisions, faculties, schools and departments, roles including Deans, Deputy Deans, Associate Deans and Directors of Learning and Teaching and focus on leading change projects and the implementation of institutional strategies, policies and processes, supported by academic developers who work with academics 'on the ground' (de la Harpe & Radloff 2006; Hicks 1999; Scott, Coates & Anderson 2008). Roles at the local level provide hands-on and operational support, since it is only at this level that 'academic tribes' and their 'unique ways of knowing' (Becher & Trowler 2001) can be supported and influenced most effectively, if and when necessary.

Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008: vii) point out that those in learning and teaching leadership positions play 'a central role in ensuring that their institutions not only survive but thrive in the new transnational, IT-enabled, volatile and competitive environment now faced'. However, research in the area of learning and teaching leadership has identified repeatedly how unsure those in learning and teaching leadership roles are about 'what they might best do to lead in such a context to ensure that essential change takes hold [that is] sustainable and consistently [applied] in daily practice' (Scott et al. 2008: vii). Findings also suggest that those in such roles often find themselves grappling with 'complex activities that take place in complex contexts'. Yet, despite this, their efforts in leading and bringing about positive changes in learning and teaching practices are frequently rejected or seen as

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'inadequate' by the very constituencies they aim to serve: academic teaching staff (Radloff & de la Harpe 2007: 132, 133). For example, at the school or departmental level, roles such as Learning and Teaching Committee Chair or Director of Learning and Teaching are 'rarely considered in relation to the issue of departmental leadership effectiveness' (Bryman 2007: 705). Andresen (1996: 38) points out that for those in academic development roles, '[i]nternally, the margins are indistinct and the spaces overlap; externally, the divide between it [viz academic development] and the rest of academic work is fuzzy and, at times, inchoate' and that those in the roles are the only ones who seem 'interested in the work or who place value on it.' Learning and teaching leaders can be likened to academic developers, who according to Manathunga (2007: 25) 'are very often disciplinary migrants, performing hybrid, liminal roles at the 'fault lines' between teachers and learners, between academics and managers, and between teaching and research. As a result, their identities [as scholars] can be described as 'unhomely'.

This predicament is compounded by the nature of these roles. Rather than having clear management reporting lines within hierarchical structures, learning and teaching leadership roles are often situated within matrix organisational models that are underpinned by collaborative paradigms, which rely on the use of persuasion and trust in order to bring about change. To be successful in these roles, effective networking is often identified as critical (Fullan 1993, 1999, 2006; Hill & Lineback 2011; Scott et al. 2008). Yet, those in local level learning and teaching leadership roles often work in isolation within academic divisions, faculties, schools and/or departments, with little opportunity for the sharing of learning and teaching ideas. In addition, collaborating with others in similar disciplines on issues of leadership and change management are rare (Reid 2002; Elvidge 2004). Notwithstanding this, Marshall (2008: 7) points out, 'an essential part of the process of developing leadership capability in learning and teaching is to develop an active community of scholars to resolve dilemmas'.

For the creative arts there are few targeted forums, either physical or virtual, for those in learning and teaching leadership roles to network with colleagues, address contemporary and future-oriented challenges, or give voice to university learning and teaching leadership in national multi- and cross-disciplinary strategic alliances. This is despite the cluster's size and scope. For example, in 2009 the creative arts cluster in Australia had 61,196 students enrolled across higher education institutions, making this cluster larger than education (56,470), engineering and related technologies (32,474) and information technology (18,240), close to natural and physical sciences (73,823), health (79.499), and management and commerce (76,772) (Department of Education, Training and Workplace Relations 2010).

In order to respond to the lack of targeted forums to engage with the key issues in learning and teaching leadership, specifically facing the creative arts disciplines, the formation of a national network of learning and teaching leaders (*createED*) was proposed and funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) in 2009. In this paper, the authors reflect on designing and implementing *createED*, a national network for learning and teaching leaders across the creative arts disciplines. *createED* sought to bring together learning and teaching leaders in formal institutional roles as a strategic alliance to develop 'collective clout' and build leadership

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capability. Will such a network succeed? Will it generate discussion and collaborative activity to address issues that are of critical importance to educational practices within these disciplinary areas, rather than discussion occurring in isolated pockets and in ad hoc ways?

createED **network**

There was considerable support for *createED* at the project proposal stage, with extremely positive feedback from those who were contacted, with some 19 Senior Executive University Leaders (DVCs, PVCs or Deans) endorsing the project. In addition, enthusiastic support was received from the majority of those in 'formal' learning and teaching leadership roles in the creative arts at 30 universities, approximately 80% of those contacted. Three Deans of Faculties of creative arts, for instance, offered the following comments:

> This sounds like an excellent project and I'm happy to support it in any way I can. Let me know what I can do.

> For now, let me simply say that I am ready to support this initiative. Please let me know what we can do … It is an exciting proposal.

> The Arts Academy sees the proposal as a very positive step to encouraging collegiate support across the country and beyond.

createED was designed to be a national, multidisciplinary, cross-institutional, strategic knowledge network intended to forge and build ties between those in leadership positions across the creative arts disciplines, including creative writing, art, performing arts (dance, drama and music), architecture and design. The project was inspired by the pioneering work of the Deans of Business, who initiated the successful Australian Business Deans Council Teaching and Learning Network (ABDC T&L Network). The *createED* project sought to reinforce the importance of collaboration through enhancing the natural discipline links and fostering the fluidities forecast by the so-called 'Bradley Review' of Australian higher education (Bradley et al. 2008) to benefit learning and teaching within the creative Arts. Aims of the *createED* project were to strengthen learning and teaching leadership, to address contemporary issues of pedagogy and viability and to foster scholarship in learning and teaching.

The network initially focussed on the middle tier of leaders, the Associate Deans and Deputy Deans, given that at the heart of these 'learning and teaching leadership' roles is a strong mandate to lead the enhancement of learning and teaching practice in disciplinary homes (de la Harpe & Radloff 2006). Underpinning the network design and its implementation, as shown below in Table 1, was a view of leadership that encompassed both strategic and distributed models (Bolden, Petrov & Gosling 2008; Day, Gronn & Salas 2006; Lefoe & Parrish 2006; Marshall 2006; Muijs et al. 2006; Spillane & Diamond 2007). In line with Senge (1996) there was a focus on those who were in 'executive' leader roles (Deputy Deans, Associate Deans) as well as the design and implementation of the network embodying and enacting 'executive' leadership. 'Executive' leaders are those

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who provide support for line leaders, develop learning infrastructures, and lead by example in the gradual process of evolving the norms and behaviors of a learning culture … [they] can help in connecting innovative local line leaders with other like-minded people. They also play a mentoring role in helping the local line leaders to mature, to understand complex political crosscurrents, and to communicate their ideas and accomplishments to those who have not been involved (Senge 1996: 3).

In line with Spillane (2005)

rather than viewing leadership practice [only] as a product of a leader's knowledge and skill, the distributed perspective defines it as the interactions between people and their situation … From a distributed perspective, leadership is a system of practice comprised of a collection of interacting components: leaders, followers, and situation. These interacting components must be understood together because the system is more than the sum of the component parts or practices (144, 150).

A summary overview of the purpose, approach and outcomes of the *createED* project is provided below.

CreateED Strategic Knowledge Network		
	Collaborative Learning (CoP)	*Strategic Leadership*
1. Purpose	Improve and shape *individual* practice in learning and teaching leadership in own discipline area	Influence and change *collective* creative arts learning and teaching leadership capability *across the HE sector* to influence and impact practice systematically
2. Approach	Philosophy – *social constructivist approach,* collaborative; flexible; discussion oriented; collective problem-solving; experimentation; innovation; creativity; just-in-time and just-for-me; peer learning; action learning; mentoring; trust building; focus developed collectively through *participatory design* Communication – *blended learning environment* (face to face and online), synchronous and asynchronous – regular local state/territory network meetings, online disciplinary and cross-disciplinary discussions	Philosophy – *strategic approach*, specific and agreed actions around areas of critical significance and importance to learning and teaching leadership in the creative arts disciplines Membership – *defined* those in L&T leadership positions in the creative arts from universities across Australia, strategic focus through issues of national and *strategic significance* Communication –*targeted* with professional development in areas of strategic need
3. Outcomes	Enhanced leadership and change in practice in *individual* university contexts Strengthened *identity* and learning; increased energy and enthusiasm for ongoing network participation Dissemination of *findings* to community of scholars through voluntary *SoTL(L)* publications on learning and teaching leadership	New knowledge and innovation (transdisciplinary) *across sector* Completion of 2 key national projects (pedagogy, viability); *strategic alignment* with ACUADS, ASPERA, NACTMUS, Ausdance, AAWP, AIA and the Deans/PVCs/DVCs *Ongoing* self-driven network; lobbying and strategic communication with decision-makers, policy makers, sponsors; presentations at National network events

Table 1. createED Strategic Knowledge Network
Summary overview showing purpose, approach and outcomes

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The assumptions made, in terms of the conceptualisation, design and development of the network are highlighted and explored below.

Assumptions

At the conceptualisation and design stage *createED* sought to establish a strategic knowledge network, a specific type of network that combines the benefits of both communities of practice and strategic alliances. The network was intended to provide national leaders of learning and teaching with an opportunity/mechanism to come together and develop a shared strategic intention to enhance leadership practice, both individually and collectively. At this stage it was assumed that those in formal learning and teaching leadership roles responsible for the creative arts disciplines would be keen to join such a network, given their geographical dispersion and possible isolation (Assumption 1).

Such a network would allow the practices developed to be transferred into wider systemic practice through conversation, collaboration and publication. It was thought that it would be an active site for the creation of new knowledge for innovative applications and would shape, influence and/or create new professional practice (Peterson 2004). Collaboration, both online and in local contexts, was seen as the key to the development, adoption or adaption of actions of critical significance and importance to learning and teaching leadership in the creative arts disciplines. Thus, mechanisms for both online and face-to-face communication were included in its design. A real benefit of the network was seen as the opportunities for professional development and 'the expansion of knowledge derived from working in a multidisciplinary [or interdisciplinary] group and learning other disciplines' perspectives and methodologies' (Marton 2005: 184). It was also assumed that opportunities for professional development and working in multi-, cross- and transdisciplinary ways would be embraced by network members. Active engagement and collaboration would occur spontaneously, naturally and enthusiastically on the site, given the geographical dispersion and possible isolation of network members (Assumption 2).

The network would be relevant for and responsive to member needs, and would be 'owned' by the network members. The use of participatory design was seen as a way for all to participate in the design process, resulting in authentic and strong collective thinking and informed directions. In addition, adopting a participatory design approach was seen as a way for 'technologies and social systems [to] evolve together' (Ma & Agarwal 2007: 43). In fact, in line with O'Reilly (2007) the site was to be in 'perpetual beta' mode, with updates happening regularly based on rich user feedback and input. In addition, it was assumed that the purpose of and direction for the network would be collectively determined and would emerge through the use of a participatory design methodology (Assumption 3).

Finally, it was assumed that both disciplinary and local level leadership would be required for the design and success of the network. Thus, a number of leadership roles

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were included. Discipline-specific leadership roles would facilitate online disciplinary and cross-disciplinary networking, while local state-based leadership roles would be important for face-to-face networking. Social capital would emerge as a key contributor to promoting learning and intellectual growth, with the network being regarded as important 'site[s] of organizational learning and the main place[s] where knowledge develops' (Cohen & Prusak 2001: 55) (Assumption 4).

Overall, as described above, at the outset four core assumptions, grounded in contemporary research and educational theory, were implicit in the conceptualisation and design of the *createED* network.

Assumptions challenged

Each of the core assumptions in the original proposal has been challenged as the project moves towards the end of its two-year lifecycle in October 2011. Below is an outline of how each of the original assumptions has been challenged in the design and realisation of the network through the authors drawing on their own reflections, informal participant/member feedback, analysis of survey data and network site metrics. Reflections are situated in the literature, including on academic leadership capability development and participatory design methodology. The result is a reflective piece combining both qualitative and quantitative sources.

Assumption 1. Those in formal learning and teaching leadership roles responsible for the creative arts would be keen to join the createED network, given their geographical dispersion and possible isolation

Those in formal learning and teaching roles across the 38 tertiary institutions that include the creative arts in Australia, as indicated by their title on university websites, were contacted to join the network. These titles included, for example, Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching); Deputy Head (Learning and Teaching); Director Learning and Teaching; and Learning and Teaching Committee Chair (in colleges, divisions, faculties, schools or departments). It was assumed that those in such roles were formally responsible for learning and teaching leadership in the institution.

Of the 57 learning and teaching leaders who were initially contacted, 16 (28%) immediately joined the network. The remainder either forwarded the invitation to those in discipline and program leadership roles, or did not respond. Responses, therefore, varied from enthusiastic acceptance to '*I am the L&T Chair in the Faculty (*thus, have the formal learning and teaching leadership role in which creative arts is located) *but I am a Philosopher/Educator/Geographer/Lawyer/etc … I know nothing about the creative arts. You need to speak to …* [typically refers to Head of School, discipline leader or course/unit coordinators]' or silence. At the time of publication, the number of learning and teaching leaders who have joined the online network has increased to almost half, 28 (49%). Figures are not exact given the continuous movement of people in and out of the roles and changes to university structures.

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The original assumption has been challenged and the tentative assumption now is that about half of those in formal learning and teaching leadership roles responsible for the creative arts disciplines are keen and enthusiastic about joining a creative arts strategic knowledge network and that it will take further work to encourage the others to join.

Some reasons for this may be:

1. The network activities and what membership offers may not connect/resonate with all of those in learning and teaching leadership roles and their everyday practice, which may be much more specific and immediate, grounded at the local operational level, rather than at a more globally strategic and change management one.

2. The initial purpose and audience for the *createED* network (only those in 'formal' senior learning and teaching leadership roles) may not have been clear and, therefore, its purpose has become blurred.

3. The way learning and teaching leadership is formally structured in universities may make it difficult for leadership that is specific to the creative arts disciplines to unite, especially when these disciplines are rarely co-located and are often dispersed and embedded within, for example, the humanities, social sciences, engineering, sciences, built environment disciplines, etc. making them appear invisible.

4. Those in formal learning and teaching leadership roles may not see themselves as leaders of learning and teaching in the creative arts specifically, but rather as supporting university administrative and general tasks; for example, managing new program proposals, overseeing the collection of student feedback data, chairing appeals and complaints panels, setting up program evaluations, overseeing benchmarking activities, implementing policy from the top down.

5. Joining a creative arts group may be seen as particularly challenging and even threatening, if the incumbent has no previous experience or knowledge of the creative arts disciplines and lacks confidence in the area.

6. The creative arts may not have a distinct identity and pedagogical direction, which a learning and teaching leader can represent, because of the variety of disciplines involved and their distinctive pedagogies.

7. It may just simply be that more time is needed for the reputation of the network as a collaborative community for those in learning and teaching roles to build gradually over time.

That said, having half (50%) of those in formal learning and teaching leadership roles as members of *createED* is, a positive outcome and is in line with the seminal work of Rogers (1962) indicating that this percentage would typically include the innovators (2.5%), early adopters (13.5%) and early majority (34%); leaving only the late majority (34%) and laggards (16%) to join. In addition, the overall membership of *createED* has grown to well over 200, and continues to grow steadily and daily. Members span a doctoral student to an Executive Dean, with many discipline heads

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and program directors also having joined the network. There is growing activity on the site and members have generated approximately 21,251 hits over the past eleven and a half months, with 58% of the members visiting the site in the last two and a half months. The continual visitation suggests that those who have joined are finding it worthwhile.

Assumption 2. Opportunities for professional development and working in multi-, cross- and transdisciplinary ways would be embraced by network members. Active engagement and collaboration would occur spontaneously, naturally and enthusiastically on the site, given the geographical dispersion and possible isolation of network members

createED was designed to focus on leadership development activities that were based on sound pedagogy and current research, responding to participant needs (Scott et al. 2008; Marshall 2008). In line with best practice academic leadership capability development, the approach was to be 'flexible, responsive, active, problem-based, [and use] "just-in-time, just-for-me" learning methods' (Scott et al. 2008: xvii). The approach was to include 'role specific, practice-based, peer-supported and self-managed learning [including informal mentoring], rather than the more usual one-off, formal and generic workshop-based types of professional learning' (Scott et al. 2008: xvii). At the outset it was assumed that members would have the technology skills to use Web 2.0 tools; be keen to use the site for collaborative sharing to overcome their disciplinary and geographical dispersion; and, have enough in common to share. Groupsite proprietary software was chosen as it offered discussion forums and blogging, file and media sharing, a shared calendar and the ability to send out mass emails, ideal functionality for building an online network.

Numerous opportunities were provided to contribute through the network site including responses to email blasts, online surveys, weekly discussion topics, featured ALTC discussions, strategic projects, professional development activities, and so forth. The reality, however, is that members have been very slow to engage, communicate, collaborate and/or share online. Of the issues posted for discussion, the demise of the ALTC attracted 5 passionate responses/posts and attracted 56 views and the development of the discipline standards for creative arts attracted 7 responses/posts with 78 views. There have been 19 responses or posts to 5 ALTC forums. One forum had the majority of posts with 6 people contributing the 10 posts. Interestingly, statistics from the site show that these posts have received 207 views. In addition, whilst leadership development activities were principally designed to take place at the face-to-face state-based meetings, the offer to undertake the 360 degree feedback survey online was not taken up and recently there were only 4 people who responded to the offer of free registration to attend an online conference (Follow the Sun). To date, not one member has taken up the standing offer to join a strategic multidisciplinary project team.

The original assumption has been challenged and the tentative assumption now is that engaging in online professional development activities and in multi-, cross- and transdisciplinary project groups may not be a priority for all members and that an

online network, as originally envisaged, is not yet being embraced by the majority. Active engagement, collaboration and sharing does not occur as naturally, spontaneously or 'virally' as it was thought or hoped it would with this group of people. Rather, there is much 'lurking' taking place (that is, reading without contributing), which suggests that members are at least embracing the opportunity to access information. More than half the membership (141 out of 218) has visited the site in a three month period (March to May), see Figure 1.
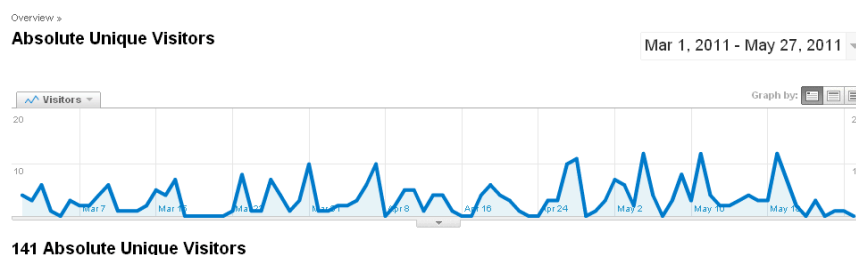
Figure 1. Unique visitors to the *createED* network over a three-month period

Some reasons for this may be:

1. Leaders in formal roles may not have the time to spend on learning and teaching leadership professional development activities or to actively engage and collaborate in the network, on top of their heavy workloads and administrative duties. Rarely are these leadership roles full time, with 0.2-0.5 FTE being the norm.

2. Pressures to undertake and rewards for research may be perceived as stronger than those for engaging in learning and teaching leadership professional development activities.

3. More time may be required before sufficient trust is built within the group and the site becomes more dynamic and used by members for active engagement with peers, rather than only visiting the site or receiving content via email.

4. Members may be anxious about or concerned that posting items in a public forum might come back to 'haunt' them; in fact, the atmosphere in academia may not be one that is as collegiate and supportive as anticipated. Cross-university open collaboration may not be possible, given hostile cultures and competition for students, research funding, and academic jobs.

5. Members may not be as much at ease with an online networking environment as they are with telephone or email communication, as indicated by members through informal discussion and feedback. The use of online technology may be sufficient for only a minority (to date). For the majority, face-to-face interaction may still be critical and for them technology remains supplemental to personal, face-to-face contact. When the use of online technologies and social media, including for professional networking, become more integrated into the everyday working lives of academics, the nature of interactions on the site may change.

6. There may be a lack of sufficient alignment between members for them to have any meaningful discussion. A large and diverse membership could be precluding more senior/strategic level learning and teaching leadership discussions.

7. The project design may have relied too heavily in the initial stages on devolved leadership and the community being self-generating, without the resources to provide sufficient one-on-one relationship management and 'working the room' to make connections, encourage engagement and then gradually fade support as impetus developed.

8. There may be no need for active online discussion, collaboration and sharing for a network to be deemed successful; as long as the network 'activity' is aligned with what members want and value, the site should be deemed successful and fit for purpose.

That said, professional development is taking place through strategic projects and a member-determined professional development activity will be included as part of the formal face-to-face bi-annual meetings. In addition, many of those who are regular visitors to the site have said that they are gaining from reading the weekly posts or watching the embedded videos, both providing relevant information on the leadership of learning and teaching with links to investigate the issues further. A significant number have viewed the exchanges (up to over a third of the membership). In addition, there have been two requests to create project spaces on the site and more recently a school has asked to use the site for strategic discussions. Finally, active contact between members may be happening outside the *createED* network site and offline, which is hard to quantify.

Assumption 3. The purpose of and direction for the network would be collectively determined and would emerge through the use of a participatory design methodology

A model of collective and transformational leadership underpinned the design and formation of the *createED* network. Based on the literature this would involve collegial agreement of priorities and directions. The purpose and intent would be influenced by the mutual agreement and sharing of knowledge, practice, and reflections; engagement in real-world projects; and peer-review of scholarship outcomes (Bolden, Petrov & Gosling 2008; Day, Gronn & Salas 2006; Lefoe & Parrish 2006; Marshall 2006; Muijs et al. 2006; Spillane & Diamond 2007). In reality, gaining 'buy in' has been challenging. Many attempts were made to elicit feedback from members and to engage them on the site. A post was featured prominently on the site for weeks inviting contributions for the purpose and directions for the site. This, however, did not elicit one response/post or email. An individual and personalised email was also sent to members. Each network member (*N=127* at the time) was asked what he/she wanted on and from the *createED* network site. Thirteen members responded (10% response rate). Responses were analysed using the '9 Community Orientations' developed by Wenger, White and Smith (2010). See Table 2 below for an overview of the nine orientations.

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1. Meetings	Enabling regular meetings
2. Open-ended conversations	Supporting communication since rarely meet e.g. blog, discussion board, email
3. Projects	Facilitating collaboration on projects to solve problems or produce artefacts
4. Content	Creating, sharing and providing access to documents, tools, and other content that is valuable and well organised
5. Access to expertise	Posing and answering questions, fulfilling request for advice or engaging in collaborative just-in-time problem solving
6. Relationships	Getting to know one another personally, networking, trust building and mutual discovery
7. Individual participation	Offering different levels and modes of participation and individual customising for self. Network welcomes, supports and thrives on this diversity (loose self-organisation and unplanned evolution)
8. Community cultivation	Reflecting on the effectiveness and health of the community to make things better, join with a willingness to work on developing community. High level of ongoing attention to process and content
9. Serving a context	Finding value in creating connections across organisations, outward-facing focus serving a specific context which becomes central to the community's identity and the ways it operates, can be cross-organisations

Table 2. The 9 Community Orientations proposed by Wenger, White and Smith (2010)

As shown in Figure 2 below, analysis of the feedback revealed that orientations that focus on collaboration, communication, connecting or building relationships were not rated highly by those members who responded; with community cultivation the least wanted aspect. In contrast, content followed by individual participation were the aspects most wanted. The facilitation of meetings was not raised at all.
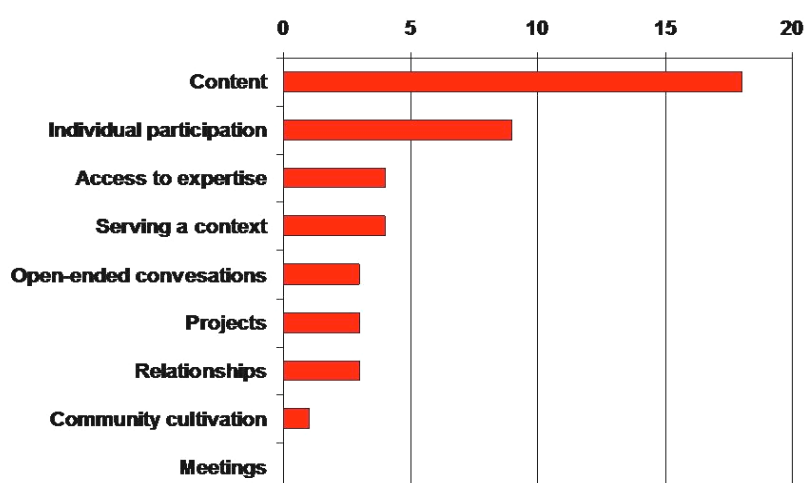

Figure 2. Most wanted aspects of the network site

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Typical comments from members included:

> A resource section with discussion papers, position papers, key posts from discussions that have had an impact *[Content]*
>
> A place that links all the many events, T&L scholarship and happenings within the ONE creative arts arena *[Content]*
>
> Interests/needs could be emphasised as people are informed/aware of the possibilities of such a network for their own needs to be met/extended *[Individual Participation]*

Therefore, the purpose and direction that is emerging for the network at this stage is one that is content focused and underpinned by a philosophy that is mostly 'just-in-time' and 'just-for-me'. This stated preference for content, rather than knowledge sharing, collaboration and active co-construction of knowledge, might have been different if more members had responded and/or if the envisaged roles of discipline and state-based leaders had been realised as originally planned (see Assumption 4, below) particularly in terms of the development of trust, social and intellectual capital through local face-to-face meetings.

In this case, the original assumption has been challenged and the tentative assumption now is that using a participatory design methodology to collectively determine and develop the purpose and direction for the network is more time consuming, complex and challenging than initially anticipated. Some reasons for this may be:

1. Members may not have the time available to reflect on, formulate and then post a response. Rather, they may be more concerned with meeting pressing local needs.

2. Members may be experiencing information overload and community of practice fatigue.

3. Members may lack confidence in posting their thoughts and ideas publically, or are reluctant to do so where trust-based relationships are yet to be developed; which is a conundrum, given the participatory design approach was being used as a way to develop trust.

4. A collective purpose or direction may not be visible to members. Rather, they may favour an individual intent underpinned by 'what's in it for me' over serving a larger community underpinned by an ethic of other-centredness.

5. There may be too much reliance on the community being self-generating, without providing sufficient one-on-one relationship management and 'working the room' to make connections, encourage engagement and then gradually fade support as impetus developed.

6. The original design may have been idealistic in assuming that members will come up with a purpose for the network through participatory design, or it may be too ambitious a task at this early stage of collaboration and/or through only online communication.

That said, while feedback and the statistics from the site reveal that few in formal learning and teaching leadership roles, indeed members overall, have embraced the

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participatory design approach. Work is now underway to set up bi-annual face-to-face meetings for those in 'formal' institutional learning and teaching leadership roles. The aim is to work with this sub-group to build trust and then to identify a common purpose specific to these leaders, using a participatory design approach. The project team remain optimistic that input gathered through face-to-face contact will make a difference and that once members see that the site is serving their needs they will want to add to it and change it, so that it serves them better.

Assumption 4. Both disciplinary and local level leadership would be required for the success of the network

The project was designed to include discipline specific leadership, as well as local level leadership. This was based on the literature that points to the importance of relationship management in facilitating the success of communities of practice and/or strategic knowledge networks (Peterson 2004, 2009; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002). It was envisaged that discipline and local state-based leaders would take a pivotal role in fostering the growth of social capital between and among members and the project leadership group. It was assumed that the discipline leaders would co-ordinate online specialist disciplinary activities and that the state-based leaders would hold face-to-face meetings with members to help with local contextualisation of professional development activities. In particular, state-based and discipline leaders would co-lead and bring together the network's cross-disciplinary projects on *pedagogy* and *viability,* using a transdisciplinary and action learning approach.

An expression of interest (EOI) process for seven discipline leaders (one for each of the disciplines—creative writing; art; performing arts (music, theatre and dance); architecture; and design—was implemented. An EOI process was also undertaken for a local network leader in each state/territory. The call for expressions of interest was sent out via email to all those identified in 'formal' learning and teaching leadership positions. In addition, the project leadership group recommended people whom they thought would be suited to the disciplinary roles. These recommendations were followed up via a personal email to those nominated asking whether they would be interested in leading a particular discipline in the *createED* network, as they had been selected based on a recommendation from a member of the project leadership group. Eight responses were received for the eight state/territory-based leadership roles and seven for the seven discipline roles. Unfortunately, this match was not sustained. Six of the initial discipline and state-based leaders subsequently withdrew from the position because of competing work pressures.

Currently, there are 4 discipline leaders (creative writing, art, design, and performing arts—dance) and 5 state-based leaders (New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) are without a representative). Western Australia has had a number of successful state-based meetings and continues to do so; South Australia and Queensland have had one each and in Victoria there simply was not enough interest in a meeting, despite the state-based leader attempting to organise one. Because all States or disciplines did not have leaders, those in these positions were asked to work together on the strategic projects. The absence of State and disciplinary

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hubs may have diminished the wider social capital and 'buy-in' of the network and may have had consequences for its success. Overall, feedback indicates that it takes extensive effort and energy to get people together.

The original assumption has again been challenged and the tentative assumption is that at this stage of the network's evolution, it may not be critical to have specific and separate discipline and state/territory leaders for the network to be successful. Some reasons for this may be:

1. We may have underestimated how difficult it is to bring people together, not only from the same, but also from different disciplines, even if they are adjacent/allied areas in the creative arts. The academic tribe of 'dance' may be too different from the academic tribe of 'architecture' or 'art'; in fact this may even be so within disciplines, for example, in art, 'sculpture' may be seen as quite different from 'painting' or 'printmaking'.

2. The network design may be overly complex to support an evolutionary approach. Differentiating state and discipline leader roles may have been unclear and/or there were insufficient signposts for participants enlisted in these roles, possibly resulting in them feeling unsure or uncomfortable about their part in shaping the network.

3. We may have underestimated the need for more formal national face-to-face network meetings early on, rather than relying on the devolved state- based, face-to-face meetings to fulfil this component.

4. We may have assumed naively that the lure of working together and the prestige of being involved in an ALTC project would be inducement enough to volunteer to take on additional unpaid roles above their own jobs. We may have been overly optimistic about the extent to which discipline and state-based leaders (and members) would recognise 'what of me is in it [the network]?' (belonging/identity) as well as 'what is in it for me?' (reward).

5. Disciplinary groupings may already exist through professional bodies such as the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) and National Council of Tertiary Music Schools (NACTMUS).

6. There is also a question about the state-based idea itself. Do some creative programs have more in common with other states than within their own? There may be a tension between the perceived advantages of local face-to-face meetings and the realities of being local competitor institutions. There may also be a tension if members believe that a 'contrived' local disciplinary link is at odds with existing and preferred disciplinary links across state borders.

7. Finally, this was a very ambitious project given the dearth of any networks, local, state-based and national. Probably, such networks need nurturing locally and then building to state and national.

That said, there has been enthusiasm for national face-to-face network meetings as indicated through discussions with those in 'formal' learning and teaching leadership positions from universities in South Australia, Queensland, ACT and NSW. In

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addition, there has been active participation in three strategic projects by the discipline and state-based leaders who are working successfully in both virtual and face-to-face settings, including progress reporting and sharing in teleconference meetings.

The strategic projects are:

> *Project 1 Engagement (industry and community)* — Industry and community engagement for creative learning, professional practice pedagogy project examining VET/HE/Industry integration with a focus on WIL and professional practice.

> *Project 2 Curriculum innovation* — Industry perspective on studio practice, comparing industry studio practice with contemporary studio models in education.

> *Project 3 Sustainability/Viability* — Being creative with resources, mapping models, promoting the place of creative arts within knowledge, creativity and the innovation economy.

Synergies between team projects have been identified and welcomed. This has engendered a sense of shared purpose and an expectation of meaningful collaborative outcomes. These team projects are modelling success in terms of the original strategic intent of the *createED* project, albeit at a beginning stage of collaboration. The team projects are in line with the priorities identified as important and strategic by senior university leaders (Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Pro-Vice Chancellors, Learning and Teaching, and Deans and Heads of Schools in the creative arts) via an email survey, where responses were received from 16 Australian universities (37%). Strategic priorities identified by these senior leaders (fig. 2) included equally research and curriculum innovation, followed by industry and community engagement and then viability.

A key strength of the collaboration on the three projects is that it models multi- and interdisciplinary ways of working. The collaboration not only facilitates synergies within and between the creative arts disciplines, but will also maximise the reach of the projects to include the associated professional organisational networks such as Ausdance and the AAWP. Working in multi- and interdisciplinary ways is now well accepted as the ideal form of collaboration in a dynamic educational environment. By joining forces in the projects, the network will demonstrate that innovation and solving of shared problems is possible when teams work together and co-operate across disciplinary boundaries.

Realisation

As shown above, the implicit assumptions that underpinned the conceptualisation and design of the network have been challenged as the project has unfolded. Along the way in our attempts to realise the network we have modified our assumptions in the light of our experience. Where our initial assumptions were challenged, we have reflected upon possible contributing factors, which include the issues of 'time', 'trust',

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'confidence', 'design' and 'technology' as recurring themes. In revising our assumptions we have recognised the diversity of the creative arts disciplines themselves, and of the different ways in which learning and teaching leadership roles in these disciplines may manifest in universities across the sector. This has posed a significant challenge to our original aim to harness a particular group of leaders in the network.

In addition to the challenges created by broadening membership in an inclusive approach to respect the diversity of learning and teaching leadership, the participatory design process has posed challenges as the membership has hierarchically dispersed roles and widely differing needs. Where members (10%) did respond to a call for preferences, they said that they wanted content that is delivered just-in-time and just-for-them. Looking ahead, in terms of the technology, we remain committed to a site that is database driven and able to accommodate sophisticated content manipulation, search and retrieve functionality and such like, as this appears to be what many of the members report they want.

The original questions posed were: Will such a network succeed? Will it generate discussion and collaborative activity to address issues that are of critical importance to educational practices within these disciplinary areas, rather than discussion occurring in isolated pockets and in ad hoc ways? We are unable to offer definitive answers at this point. What we can say is that the *createED* network will continue to be developed through further discussion with both 'formal' and 'informal' learning and teaching leaders. Its full potential in strengthening learning and teaching is still emerging. It remains to be seen if it will be realised principally as an Information Network or if further projects and the formation of a self-sustaining blended forum for those in 'formal' leadership roles, with communication and collaboration for knowledge sharing, will put it firmly in the Strategic Knowledge Network category. What we have learned is that the fundamental traits that need to persist for the project to continue from strength to strength include:

Managing aspirations and staying positive

Having realistic expectations is fundamental, since many members may not be as confident as we had imagined; we need to learn to accept the value attached to information and the act of 'lurking'.

Accepting that variety is the spice of life

A purely online network may be a generation away, so at this stage we need to offer a blended solution with both face-to-face and online components.

Challenging time as the enemy

Adopting the 'slow' movement philosophy by embracing 'slow' design, 'slow' engagement and 'slow' learning may be the way forward, since most things seem to take twice as long as expected.

Keeping things simple

'Less is more' and it is better to focus on quality rather than quantity—in terms of goals, design and activity—as a measure of success.

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Persisting

The development of trust takes time, and staying committed and focused is important even if 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people. Similarly, it is critical to resist the urge to just build it expecting that users will come.

Conclusion

In this discussion, we have interrogated the core assumptions that underpinned the *createED* project. We have shown that developing a community around learning and teaching leadership is challenging, but at the same time exciting. We have highlighted issues testing *createED* in this initiative such as the disparate nature of the creative arts disciplines, the lack of agreement on and uniformity in the roles of learning and teaching leaders, the tentative uptake and use of online networking in a professional forum, the reluctance of some to take on unpaid roles in State and disciplinary leadership, and a lack of a collaborative climate across universities, to name a few. However, rather than seeing these as insurmountable, *createED* will continue to work to build a network and forum for learning and teaching leaders in the creative arts. We remain convinced that it is through connecting with others that learning about change and learning for change can flourish. *createED* will continue to offer a 'go-to' place for information, as well as a place to build leadership capability and 'collective clout' and in so doing, strengthen the leadership of learning and teaching in Australia.

Acknowledgements

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