Interfaculty collaboration for improving international mobility experiences: sustaining a dialogue across difference

Ange Fitzgerald, Graham Parr, Judy Williams, Rachel Wellam, Bethany Howard, Stavroula Zandes & Basia Diug

Published online: 07 Aug 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1457

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 5 View citing articles

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Interfaculty collaboration for improving international mobility experiences: sustaining a dialogue across difference

Ange Fitzgerald 🅾 [a], Graham Parr 🅾 [b], Judy Williams[b], Rachel Wellam[b],
Bethany Howard[b], Stavroula Zandes[b] and Basia Diug[b]

[a]University of Southern Queensland, Springfield, Australia; [b]Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions promote interfaculty collaborations in research and education projects, but few studies have examined the challenges of such collaborations. This case study investigates how a heterogeneous interfaculty group worked in a community of practice for two years curating an educational e-resource to support the professional learning of academic leaders of student international mobility experiences in their university. Focusing on the *journey* of working within this community of practice rather than the *destination* (the e-resource they produced), the study explores how the different members of the group negotiated the tensions and uncertainty associated with an interdisciplinary collaboration. Data in the form of reflexive 'critical incident' narratives written by all seven authors reveal the challenges of sustaining a 'dialogue across difference' in this cross-disciplinary collaboration. The study supports existing research that argues interfaculty collaborations are potentially rich and generative, but shows why success should not be taken for granted.

Introduction

The value of international mobility experiences (IMEs) in higher education is becoming well-recognised (Roy et al. 2019). For the purposes of this paper, IMEs are defined as 'for-credit programs of study for students involving travel to other countries (e.g. study abroad, overseas study, and international practica).' Research suggests that IME programmes can provide authentic learning and meaningful engagement for students; they help to develop and sustain international partnerships for students, academic mentors and institutions alike (see Fitzgerald, Parr, and Williams 2017). While numbers of IMEs in higher education are proliferating, concerns have been expressed about how well universities are preparing academics from different faculties and disciplines to lead these IMEs. Early attempts to address this concern have involved interfaculty teams collaborating to produce education resources that will communicate meaningfully across disciplinary boundaries. This case study investigates the educational work undertaken by one

interfaculty team who collaborated over a two-year period to curate a large-scale professional learning e-resource for leaders of IMEs in an Australian university and who researched the challenges of this work.

Like so many higher education institutions across the world, Monash University has a strong focus on internationalisation. The Monash website explains that internationalisation is one of four priority goals informing its strategic planning.

> [The] University's … embrace of internationalisation … involve[s] not only the movement of significant numbers of staff and students across national borders for the purposes of education and research, but also the movement of the institution itself into other higher education systems, initiatives to internationalise the curriculum and research endeavours from 'home', and community engagement activities. (4)

At the time of this study, Monash had developed a significant range of international mobility programmes for staff and students. However, the University faced challenges in sharing its knowledge about how to lead IMEs across and even within its faculties. The size and scale of this multi-campus international university had hampered its capacity to ensure a more even distribution of knowledge and practices in this area. And the protocols, structures and resources that had been developed by some academics with expertise in this area were not widely known or drawn upon by others seeking to develop or improve an IME in their department or faculty.

The co-authors of this paper secured funding for a two year project ('Leading International Mobility Experiences') to develop an electronically-based and centrally-located resource, in the form of an e-book, which would enable leaders of IMEs to more effectively plan, lead and evaluate these programmes. In Phase one of the project, an interfaculty team of five academics and one senior manager mapped best practices in IMEs across the world. At the same time, they scheduled a range of university-wide workshops, seminars and networking breakfasts, which enabled the archiving of stories, resources, protocols, advice and practices from past IME projects in multiple international settings. In Phase two, the team (with two additional professional staff) curated these stories and information in a dynamic and updatable e-book format, and contextualised this within the latest information and policies at Monash and beyond.

While the content and methodology of the IME e-book itself are worth researching, they are not the focus of this paper. Our focus here is on the individual and collective experience of the interfaculty team (including the professional staff) who worked together as a community of practice (CoP) for two years to produce the e-book resource and research this experience. Focusing on the journey of working as a CoP rather than the destination (the production of the e-book), the study provides insights into the challenges of collaborating across interfaculty boundaries on a multi-faceted educational project. We show what can be learnt from this experience, and how interfaculty collaborations can be best supported in universities.

The research questions informing this paper are:

- How did members of a diverse interfaculty team experience working in a community of practice to develop an educational e-resource and to research their own practice?
- What does interfaculty collaboration in higher education involve and how can it best be supported?

Interfaculty collaboration as 'educational work'

Twenty five years ago, Appadurai (1996) predicted that globalisation would 'induce' fields which had rarely spoken with each other to collaborate in new ways. Higher education has proven him correct, judging by the proliferation of IME programmes in universities that enable students to collaborate across geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries (Marginson and van der Wende 2007). A burgeoning literature has conceptualised this collaborative, intercultural learning, using theorists ranging from Bourdieu (Findlay et al. 2012; Tran 2016) to Giroux (Parr 2012; Townsin and Walsh 2016) to Bakhtin (Killick 2012; Williams, Parr, & Fitzgerald 2017). A sub-field of literature has investigated the ways in which academics who guide and mentor students during an IME have developed the distinctive knowledge and expertise required to work across these boundaries in their own faculty. But few studies have examined the challenges faced by interfaculty collaborative teams to develop educational resources and to undertake research into their practice that can speak to academics from disparate disciplinary contexts. This study addresses the gap in the literature by investigating the journey of one interfaculty team of 'education workers,' who developed an e-resource for leaders of IMEs in multiple disciplines, and who researched the experience of developing this resource. We classify the hybrid work of curating the e-resource and researching the experience as 'educational work,' in alignment with an emerging body of work in this field (e.g. Kraus and Sultana 2008; Seddon 2016). First, though, we situate the notion of educational work within the overarching concept of community of practice.

Wenger (1998) uses the concept of 'Community of Practice' (CoP) to broadly characterise a group of people coming together with a shared interest or passion to interact with each other and learn from that interaction. His framing of CoP prioritises belonging, or 'mutuality,' where there is a strong imperative to develop mutual trust amongst members of the community, and where all community members can experience a sense of contributing to the whole. Wenger also emphasises the importance of self-awareness, such that community members can reflect on and learn from their community's repertoire of shared practices and the concepts, language and tools they use together. This collegial approach to working and learning, he argues, 'enables a community to understand its own state of development from multiple perspectives, reconsider assumptions and patterns, uncover hidden possibilities, and use this self-awareness to move forward' (Wenger 2000, 230).

Wenger's conception of 'community of practice' (CoP) emphasises two equally important dimensions: participation and reification. 'Participation' encompasses the dialogue and negotiation that community members engage in as they interact with each other and learn from each other (Wenger 2000). The other key dimension, 'reification,' draws attention to the fact that CoPs almost always produce an artefact to enable further learning, such as the e-resource the authors in this study curated. Barton and Hamilton (2005) argue that the artefact is not just an additional by-product of the interaction, but that the institutional and identity politics around producing the artefact powerfully shapes the nature of the interactions and the community. As we will go on to show, this was certainly the case for the 'Leading IMEs' project.

Those who 'belong' to a community of practice invariably encounter boundaries, where the knowledge and practices of some community members appear to be in tension or

conflict with others' in the community. These boundaries may arise from different histories, different cultures, different ways of communicating, or different capabilities of individuals. Wenger warns that although 'these boundaries are often unspoken, [it] does not make them less significant' (232). He goes on to say that boundaries are not something to be avoided or overcome, but are a necessary part of the negotiation and dialogue of learning in social contexts:

> There is something disquieting, humbling at times, yet exciting and attractive about such close encounters with the unknown, with the mystery of 'otherness': a chance to explore the edge of your competence, learn something entirely new, revisit your little truths, and perhaps expand your horizon. (Wenger 2000, 233)

Wenger-Trayner and colleagues (2014) develop Wenger's metaphor of individuals' 'expanding horizons' to propose the more expansive sociological concept of *landscapes of practice*. This concept makes it clear that a single community of practice typically connects and interacts with many other communities of practice, and that any community is situated within a wider 'landscape' of interconnected practices.

Kraus and Sultana (2008), Seddon (2016) and Newman et al. (2014) build on this more explicitly dialogic notion of interconnecting landscapes of knowledge in their use of the term 'educational work.' They prefer this term to describe the activity of a heterogeneous group of higher education academics and professionals, with expertise in different disciplines, who come together to collaborate on a project to 'enable learning' (323), both theirs and others unknown to them. As with CoPs, so too in educational work, the production of an artefact is key to this enabling. Typically, the individuals in such a group are able to make different contributions to the educational work they are engaged in, and the educational work that is undertaken by the group is enriched by the heterogeneous educational disciplines and identities that the individuals bring to it. However, the challenges of heterogeneous groups collaborating on educational work should not be underestimated. The intercultural 'spaces of orientation' (Newman et al. 2014, 323) where the educational workers come together invariably involve difficult negotiations as colleagues from different backgrounds and disciplines seek to develop what Wenger (2000) had termed 'a shared repertoire' of resources and practices.

Kraus and Sultana (2008) identify three areas of difference that typically complicate educational work projects such as the one that is the focus of this study:

i Disciplinary difference
  • Participants from a heterogeneous education group are accustomed to teaching and researching in different disciplines, with contrasting curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices.
  • Although participants share some knowledge and experience in the educational work project, their understandings of the topic need to be filtered through different language and discipline lenses.
ii Epistemological difference
  • Assumptions about what constitutes knowledge vary acutely depending on the different disciplines from within which participants come to an educational work project.

- Academics coming from social sciences in higher education tend to consider truth as socio-culturally mediated, and that educational work involves ongoing management of uncertainty. They consider almost all truth and knowledge to be provisional. Participants coming from natural or 'hard sciences' tend to put a higher premium on certainty, control and objective truth, when generating knowledge.

iii Difference in educational spaces

- Higher education workers are accustomed to working in different academic and administrative spaces in their familiar spaces. They become habituated to particular ways of operating, and tend to take different things for granted in those operations.

Rather than framing such differences as obstacles to educational work, Kraus and Sultana (2008) urge education workers to see difference as potentially enriching. Newman et al. (2014) also note the richness of knowledge and learning that can emerge as heterogeneous educational workers 'grapple with learning new tasks and identities in new places … in collaboration with others' (322). Bauman (2000) goes further to argue that difference is a necessary precondition of what he refers to as 'liquid modernity,' and he advocates collaboration across borders as vital for addressing new and emerging problems and issues in a globalising world. We use the Bakhtin (1981) concept of 'dialogue across difference' to characterise the interfaculty team's efforts to collaborate across such borders in this study.

Dialogue across difference in interdisciplinary educational work

The more one reads literature about globalisation, the more one gets the impression that the inducement to collaborate across cultural boundaries to solve educational problems is a new phenomenon. In fact, Dewey's conception of education from over a century ago saw the richest knowledge as that which is created across social and cultural spaces, and that education should be a process of both generating and sharing knowledge between diverse people in an ongoing dynamic of dialogue. He contrasted this form of knowledge with what he described as the 'static, cold-storage ideal of knowledge,' which be believed to be 'inimical to educational development' (Dewey 1916/1961, 158). Unlike the cold-storage notion of knowledge, which is assumed to be unproblematically transportable across cultures, contexts or disciplines, Dewey saw the most useful knowledge as responsive, flexible and context-dependent. It was this kind of knowledge that was required in the 'Leading IME' project if the e-resource was going to be able to support academics from different faculties working with their students in unfamiliar international contexts. Thus, it was important for our interfaculty team, during Phase one of the project, to dialogue with diverse academics and professional staff from across the university about their experience of leading IMEs. Even at this stage of 'mapping' existing knowledge, our team's heterogeneous disciplinary and professional backgrounds shaped the ways we were interpreting the diverse stories we were hearing about leading IMEs.

A prominent researcher in school-based education, James Britton (1970), explains how 'in a good conversation, the participants profit from their own talking … , from what others contribute, and above all from the interaction – that is, the enabling effect of each upon the others' (239–240). Britton appreciates how important this

interaction is in all forms of education, and yet he explains that such an 'enabling effect' is challenging to develop, fragile to maintain and requires constant monitoring and nurturing. It is rooted in a dialogic understanding of language, where dialogue means more than the to-and-fro of two people talking to each other. This links to Bakhtin's (1981) understanding of dialogue, in which a flexible, multi-voiced language can accommodate the sharing of diverse ideas, discourses, experiences, values, and cultures. The dialogue can occur between and within individuals (in the form of reflection), within or between disciplinary fields, and between or within communities or social groupings (Bakhtin 1981). It was the promise of such dialogue – with all its potential richness, but also its possible tensions and uncertainties – that drew us to this interdisciplinary educational work of developing an e-resource for leaders of IMEs and researching this experience.

Research design

Case study design is well positioned to facilitate interdisciplinary research (Repko, Newell, and Szostak 2011). It offers a 'bounded' but flexible space for investigating the complexities and tensions of working in an interfaculty group, allowing us to scrutinise different individuals' perspectives as well as a sense of the collective experience. Our study draws on narrative traditions of representing and analysing educational experiences from particular situated perspectives (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Parr, Doecke, & Bulfin 2015). Critical incident narratives (Tripp 2012), written by all authors at a writing retreat for the interfaculty team positioned the authors as both participants and observers in this case study. Their reflective texts provided personal and sometimes contrasting perspectives on the journey, enabling us to generate nuanced insights into the challenges and rewards of working within that interfaculty team.

Participants

The interfaculty team originally consisted of six members from three Faculties – Arts (1), Education (3), and Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (1) – and one senior manager (1), who had overall responsibility for all of the University's student IME programmes. However, during the two-year timeframe of this collaboration, there were changes in team membership, as colleagues moved between roles and institutions, and new professional staff joined the team. The seven co-authors of this paper include five from the original interfaculty team, and two additional members who joined the team in the second year of the project. The current team includes academics and professional staff from two Faculties – Education (3) and Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (3) – and one senior manager from the Global Student Mobility Office (See Table 1).

Data creation

Participant narrative writing is now widely used in qualitative educational research more to provoke critical dialogue about the experience being researched than to objectively capture the experience being studied (Parr, Doecke, & Bulfin 2015). The critical incident narratives that constitute the main data source for this study (about 4,000 words in total)

Table 1. Interfaculty collaborators and their backgrounds

Team member name (in alphabetical order)	Employment role	Institutional background
Author A	Academic	Faculty of Education
Author B	Academic	Faculty of Education
Author C	Academic	Faculty of Education
Author D	Senior Manager	Global Student Mobility
Author E	Educational designer	Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Science (MNHS)
Author F	Project manager	Faculty of MNHS
Author G	Academic	Faculty of MNHS

were written during a writing retreat toward the end of the second year of the 'Leading IMEs' project. The structure of the retreat was as follows: a brief update on progress in the project; an explanation of the narrative writing that individuals would be asked to do; 45 minutes for individuals to write; sharing of narrative writing; and, finally, initial reflections on the narratives. (The seventh member of the team provided her narrative to the group electronically.) The focus of each narrative was a 'critical moment' identified by the team member, which helped to shed some light on an aspect of his/her own particular experience of participating in this interfaculty collaborative project. While the final discussion confirmed many issues that all of the team had been aware of prior to the retreat, it also identified some issues that had *not* been articulated before the retreat.

Data analysis

In effect, analysis of the data began during that discussion, as we identified common ideas in the otherwise diverse narratives, and recorded these on a whiteboard. We then linked these common ideas to key concepts from critical readings (Kraus and Sultana 2008), which were shared prior to the retreat. These links were also recorded and initial analyses of the narratives were shared amongst the group via email. In the week following the retreat, all participants finalised their narrative, and identified three or four themes/ideas that they believed to be significant. These themes/ideas were shared electronically via a Google doc. The first three lead authors then collated the themes suggested by colleagues, and consolidated these into three themes that were broadly aligned with findings from the literature – i.e. tensions, dialogic collaboration, and problem-solving – although they remained receptive to themes that did not feature in the literature. A more nuanced version of these three themes was proposed for deliberation amongst the group, and after a further period of dialogue, the following themes were agreed upon:

(1) Tensions arising from different paradigms of knowledge
(2) Challenges in sustaining dialogue and a shared vision
(3) Problem-solving in the face of uncertainty

Findings

Analysis of the narratives revealed multiple challenges, tensions and opportunities over the course of the two-year collaboration. We structure the following account of our analysis on the above three themes.

Tensions arising from different paradigms of knowledge

It was clear from the diverse narratives written and shared during the retreat that members of the interfaculty team brought different expertise and different practices from working in different disciplines and paradigms of knowledge. While the team welcomed this diversity in theory, it also provoked tensions in a variety of ways. Many narratives referred to the experience of encountering an 'other' practice or paradigm of knowledge as a kind of 'threat' to their own familiar practice or paradigm. The literature offers a range of metaphors to describe situations like this where 'other' practices or paradigms are encountered: 'zone[s] of contact' (Bakhtin 1981, 345); 'spaces of orientation' (Newman et al. 2014, 323); and 'boundary encounters' (Wenger 1998, 112). Wenger, like Kraus and Sultana (2008), emphasise the need for complex negotiation to 'broker' such encounters, whereas Bakhtin (1981) and Newman et al. (2014) emphasise the significant 'struggle' that should be ongoing. All of these authors characterise the encounters as productive tensions rather than obstacles to be overcome.

The different authors situated their accounts of these encounters from their own perspectives. Author E's perspective recognised the short-term challenges, while appreciating the longer-term positive opportunities: 'It's challenging in a lot of ways to bring people together from many disciplines. Things can take much longer. But that process can bring about new knowledge in the ways that we view and do things.' She also noted that such 'processes' are, indeed, 'what international mobility experiences are for – to experience diversity and to emerge the better for it.' Others in the team also compared their experience, as part of an interfaculty team, to the experience of IME leaders engaging with 'difference' overseas in an IME. In particular, they cited the challenge of operating outside one's comfort zone, and needing to engage with and respect difference in that unfamiliar zone.

It is important to note that not all boundary encounters were written about as negative experiences. Rachel had a senior management role in Global Student Mobility and thus was not aligned with any particular faculty or discipline. When she first encountered academics from different faculties in this interfaculty group, she remembered thinking 'how serendipitous it was to have stumbled across a group of passionate and experienced program leaders who were capable and curious, as well as interested in solving the same sorts of problems I was.' Author C valued the unexpected boundary encounters she experienced with Author D, when they co-presented at the 'International Education Association of Australia' conference:

> I was exposed to information and knowledge that are foundational to IME but that I had not been exposed to in my [work] in the Faculty of Education. I realised that there were so many more people involved in supporting student learning through IME, but that I had been in a sort of bubble.

The narratives revealed different views *within* the group about how best to curate the wealth of narratives and information in the e-resource, or how best to achieve project outcomes. These appeared to be prompted by differences in our knowledge backgrounds. For instance, some group members were keen to put down foundational building blocks of the e-resource, to 'achieve outcomes,' early in Year 1, while others preferred to explore other perspectives first. Authors A and B wanted time to accumulate different knowledge from

across the university, and for unexpected knowledge about IMEs to emerge from that process. Toward the end of the first year of the project, the funding body and some members of the team wanted to see more concrete progress on the e-book. One member recalled a conversation with a colleague:

> We were sitting in front of the computer screen looking at a bunch of text on the screen. 'Is this all they've done? They've been working on it for a year!' 'It definitely needs a lot of work' … . 'Can I change it all?' 'They haven't been doing anything so we need to make something.'

These comments raise questions about the ways educational knowledge was perceived by different members in the group. Some members measured progress in terms of the *process* of convening multiple cross-faculty workshops, and the body of stories and resources that had been archived throughout the first year. Others focused on the (lack of) concrete progress on the e-resource *product*. The pointedness of the recalled observation, 'They haven't been doing anything,' highlights the tensions within the team, with sub-groups demarcated by the language of 'us' and 'them.'

There were also differences in the way team members understood leadership in the project, with some feeling distressed by the uncertainty that came from a distributed model of leadership. Initially, Author A had taken on a coordinating role, with different colleagues taking responsibility for different aspects of the project as it evolved. However, after intervention from the funding body, pressure was applied for a single leader to be identified. Author G had felt that 'the several changes in project lead were really surprising and distressing to me as it is really uncommon within our faculty.' For her, 'Bringing on Authors E and F, and setting some deadlines, was a refreshing relief.' On the other hand, Author A, who by the time of the writing retreat had left Monash to take up a position in another university, also felt some distress:

> I felt disappointment in myself for not moving the team to be more productive, and then I felt a little cross in the system, the need to generate a set something in a set way to a set time-frame. Our inquiry-based approach to the process was all in the original design we had put to the funding body. It was a co-generative/collaborative approach that we didn't try to hide or shy away from at any point …

Challenges in sustaining dialogue and a shared vision

Wenger (2000) argues the importance of collaboration and developing a shared vision in a newly formed CoP, and notwithstanding the tensions referred to above, the narrative writing revealed widespread agreement amongst the team about this. Author D observed that, for her, the most compelling aspect of the project was 'knitting together academic faculty expertise with professional services.' For Author G, the experience of collaborating in this interfaculty team had 'taught [her] more about teamwork than any previous project.'

Key to building collaboration was the initiating and sustaining of dialogue with difference, not just difference within our team, but also with other academics and professional staff across the University. Thus, in the first year of the project, the team hosted a series of interfaculty workshops and networking breakfasts. Participants at these events were keen to participate in an interdisciplinary conversation about IMEs at Monash, and to share what they believed to be the knowledge required by leaders of IMEs. Author B

remembered the excitement of multiple dialogues across different faculties in the first of these workshops.

> The room was abuzz with people sharing personal and professional experiences. Some spoke about the resources they had found valuable … , others enthused about how transformative IME experiences can be, or recounted disturbing stories about what could go wrong on an IME.

And yet, despite such moments of rich 'dialogue across difference,' this did not ensure a sustained harmony of purpose across the team. Author G wrote about how impressed she was by what had been achieved by the team when she was recruited as a project manager at the start of the second year, but by then tensions between group members had begun to emerge. The level of tension can be gauged by the language used by some team members who wondered what 'they' ('others' in the team) had done 'the whole year.' This seems a long way from Wenger's 'shared language' of a collaborative CoP. Bakhtin (1981), on the other hand, argues that harmonisation is not the optimal outcome of dialogue across difference. As Author E reflected, 'I love the idea of tension being potentially generative for a hybrid collaborative group. It's so true. All the touchstone points [of our IME project] can be mapped in retrospect, but at the time it didn't seem that way to some of us.' Interestingly, what brought the team together again was the immediacy of looming deadlines: we had to finish the project. There was no time for difference to distract collaboration; there was no alternative but to recommit to dialogue.

The writing retreat toward the end of the project brought to everyone's attention the need for respectful dialogue and reflection between members of the team. We needed to identify and learn from the tensions. This notion of reflective dialogue across difference was unfamiliar to some members of the team. It had the potential to exacerbate rather than ameliorate tensions. However, Author E spoke for many when she wrote about the value of this dialogue for better understanding her role in the project, and for sharing knowledge beyond the e-book:

> Today [the writing retreat] has been a really enjoyable experience. Everyone has been very open and honest. I can see how my way of thinking has helped to shape the eBook … to cull unnecessary fat and let the content shine. It's what was needed for the second phase. But it wouldn't have worked as a starting point. The process of interviewing and creating partnerships [in and beyond Monash] was integral to this project. And just as much as the e-book artefact, perhaps even more so, these will continue to bear fruit.

Problem-solving in the face of uncertainty

The two-year duration of the 'Leading IME' project was itself likely to present a number of challenges. While team members agreed that the original project design had been clear about the project aims, uncertainty soon began to emerge about how some of the aims would be achieved, particularly in relation to the production of the e-book. For some team members, it was difficult to visualise the final form of the e-book, while others had a very clear vision based on extensive experience developing e-books for their own teaching contexts. Many of our regular meeting times during the first year were dedicated to discussing such issues. No doubt, the uncertainty associated with negotiating these issues was frustrating to some who wanted to see quicker outcomes. While recognising

these potential frustrations, Author A evocatively described a 'team of strangers united over a common cause' but 'not really knowing each other or how the other works.' She noted the 'tentativeness' prompted by uncertainty, and how it 'can lead to more openness … . [But] you need to listen differently and to negotiate and navigate for a shared meaning. You have to work a bit harder because assumptions might not be shared or agreed with.'

One area of uncertainty was in the changing membership of the team over the two years. In the first year, one member of the team began extended long-service leave, and as previously mentioned two members (including Author A) left Monash to take up positions in other institutions. In part to counteract these changes, but also to assist in coordinating the production of e-book content, Author G joined the team with strong credentials as a project manager. And yet she had little knowledge of international mobility. Author G recalled being 'intrigued as to what international mobility was all about as I had never heard of the term before.' This prompted her to 'reflect on [her] current skills and abilities, [her] strengths, but also what [she] would need to develop as an effective leader.' Author G recognised she didn't have all the answers or understandings needed to turn the vision of the project into the deliverables it had promised. As she explained, 'I got there in the end by asking questions!' Represented in this statement is a sense of what bound the team together and kept the project on track – recognising the challenges that we collectively faced and valuing dialogue and a problem-solving mindset. Yet there would be one more significant problem that the team needed to negotiate.

With three months of the project remaining, Monash announced it would shut down the online digital repository in which the team had been constructing its e-book. This came at a time when the project had gained significant momentum and was making progress towards completion in a timely way. Once more, the team had to grapple with uncertainty over how to proceed. However, the renewed sense of a supportive collective that had emerged from our dialogue across difference on the writing retreat prompted all members to express confidence that a solution would be found. The emotions and learning tied up in this uncertainty were captured by Author G, who had worked extensively with and was an advocate for the original digital repository:

> Seeing a final product come together [toward the end of the second year] was very exciting. However, this made the repository shutdown more disheartening. … I appreciated that this situation was out of my control and could not have been predicted but felt I had let the team down. The team's support again was critical in ensuring that the work was saved and would be used as intended. As I work on a solution I am really grateful to have learnt to see problems from the perspectives of different faculties and grown my own communication skills.

Discussion

The narratives composed during the writing retreat identified a number of challenges of undertaking educational work in an interfaculty team project from different individual perspectives. Collectively, they show how such educational work can be a positive experience, and can generate new knowledge and artefacts. As Wenger (2000) points out, while boundary encounters within a CoP can be destabilising and full of tensions, they can also be where '[new] perspectives meet and new possibilities arise' (233). When the participants in this project came together, and at various points in time throughout the two-year project, there was a need to build trust and to acknowledge that different paradigms

of knowledge, expertise and practice were shaping the group's knowledge creation. Although differences sometimes threatened to fracture the group, they ultimately contributed to a focused and rich e-resource artefact, and the reflective conversations around the writing retreat helped to generate new research knowledge about working in an interfaculty collaborative team. However, there is no denying the fact that the journey we travelled was far from smooth.

As Newman et al. (2014) point out, educational workers from diverse epistemological spaces tend to focus on different aspects of a shared task. They see things differently. The narratives generated in the retreat showed that different participants became acutely concerned about how the project was progressing, about what constituted leadership and 'work done.' Kraus and Sultana (2008) refer to such situations as differences in 'culture,' where people bring 'different meanings, practices and tools of discourse' (60) to a collaboration. They describe contrasting 'tribes' in a cross-disciplinary group who have 'developed their own specific ways of generating, valuing, validating and legitimising meaning,' and their own "codes' and 'languages'' (65). The narrative writing retreat drew attention to stark differences between 'tribes' in our group, differences that may have derailed the project if a shared understanding could not be negotiated. Fortunately, while there remained a commitment to working in the boundary spaces or 'zones of contact,' and while divergent views could be identified and discussed in the spirit of a 'dialogue across difference,' the team was able to refocus. This as much as anything enabled us to 'struggle with ambiguity and ambivalence' (Newman et al. 2014, 323) and to negotiate a way forward.

One significant issue that was a focus of internal tensions in the group was leadership, and this might be related to different understandings of knowledge and knowledge creation. Through the first year, one tribe appears to have been comfortable with a more distributed model of leadership, while the other tribe felt more traditional leadership would bring certainty in processes and more tangible evidence of progress on the e-book product. According to Wenger (2000), a CoP needs 'multiple forms of leadership' and 'these forms of leadership may be concentrated on one or two members or widely distributed, and this will change over time' (231). And yet the writing retreat showed that in our project the disciplinary backgrounds of some in the team had pre-disposed them to be distinctly uncomfortable with distributed forms of leadership. While this discomfort had not previously been articulated, the opportunity to write, share and reflect upon our respective positions in the writing retreat was critical in uncovering these differences and negotiating a way forward. The writing, and the accompanying dialogue across difference, enabled us to work at the boundaries of our respective paradigms, resulting in a new level of awareness and understanding amongst the group.

While the writing retreat revealed the extent of the differences in team members' beliefs, practices and paradigms of knowledge, it also illustrated the importance of a respectful dialogue across difference in educational work. It reaffirmed the importance of dialogue as an 'enabling effect' (Britton 1970) in the hybrid project of (i) curating a resource about leadership of IMEs and (ii) researching the challenges of interfaculty teams undertaking educational work. In both instances, the enabling effect was not just to overcome an obstacle, but to enable the creation of knowledge that was flexible and responsive to multiple voices and paradigms. One significant enabling effect of the dialogue across difference was to show how reflexivity and self-awareness were needed to create new knowledge

within our interfaculty team. As Wenger (2000) maintains, 'being reflective on its repertoire enables a community to understand its own state of development from multiple perspectives, reconsider assumptions and patterns, uncover hidden possibilities, and use this self-awareness to move forward' (230).

Conclusions

Through close analysis of reflexive narratives written and shared by all participants in an interfaculty team who worked together on an educational project, this case study has theorised and represented the challenges inherent in interdisciplinary collaboration. Our team was pursuing a particular project to improve the academic leadership of IMEs, but there is much to be learned from our journey of educational work that can be applied in different higher education contexts. At the core of these learnings is the importance of initiating and sustaining a dialogue across differences. Our narrative methods of representation and analysis have shown how this dialogue is difficult to develop, fragile to maintain, and how it needs constant nurturing. If interfaculty educational work is to be valued in higher education, a shift is required from a resolute focus on the educational product or deliverable to enabling the processes of dialogue across differences. While this might seem logical and straightforward to achieve, the narratives shared in this paper highlight the importance of not assuming or taking the processes for granted.

The narrative data in this study provide multi-perspectival evidence that the educational work of developing an e-resource for diverse academic colleagues in different faculty contexts can be rewarding and productive, but there are challenges aplenty. The tensions and uncertainties experienced at different points of our journey required a willingness to dialogue across difference. When this dialogue did not happen effectively, differences loomed as obstacles. Alternatively, when the team was able to identify and dialogue about these differences – such as in the writing retreat – then difference became an enabler for the curating of rich, multi-voiced, educational artefacts and the generating of valuable cross-disciplinary research knowledge.

This study offers several recommendations for working in an interfaculty team on an interdisciplinary project. At the individual level, we recommend that participants in an interfaculty collaboration: prioritise an ongoing dialogue across difference with all team members and all stakeholders; schedule regular times to debrief and reflect, as individuals and as a collective; and be prepared to see difference as potentially an obstacle but also an enabler of rich educational work. At an institutional level, we urge educators in higher education to value the human and social investments required for achieving a range of often unquantifiable goals in educational work. Interfaculty collaborations are potentially rich and productive, but their success relies on an understanding of the dangers as much as the deliverables. Higher education institutions need to invest time and resources into educating academics and professional staff about the challenges of interfaculty collaboration, as part of their promotion of IMEs and other interdisciplinary education and research projects.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Ange Fitzgerald http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8010-2215
Graham Parr http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5173-9839

References

Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Vol. 1). Minneapolis, MA: University of Minnesota Press.

Bakhtin, M. 1981. "Discourse in the Novel." In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, edited by M. Holquist, (Translated by C. Emerson, and M. Holquist), 259–442. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barton, D., and M. Hamilton. 2005. "Literacy, Reification and the Dynamics of Social Interaction." In *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, Power and Social Context*, edited by D. Barton and K. Tusting, 14–35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bauman, Z. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Britton, J. 1970. /1993). *Language and Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Clandinin, J., and M. Connelly. 2000. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dewey, J. 1916/1961. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York: Macmillan.

Findlay, A., R. King, A. M. Findlay, J. Ahrens, and M. Dunne. 2012. "World Class? An Investigation of Globalisation, Difference and International Student Mobility." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37 (1): 118–131.

Fitzgerald, A., and G. Parr. 2017. *Narratives of Learning through International Professional Experience*. The Netherlands: Springer.

Killick, D. 2012. "Seeing-ourselves-in-the-world: Developing Global Citizenship Through International Mobility and Campus Community." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 16 (4): 372–389. doi:10.1177/1028315311431893.

Kraus, K., and R. Sultana. 2008. "Problematising 'Cross-Cultural' Collaboration: Critical Incidents in Higher Education Settings." *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies* 13 (1): 59–83.

Marginson, S., and M. van der Wende. 2007. *Globalisation and Higher Education. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 8*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Newman, S., B. Niemeyer, T. Seddon, and A. Devos. 2014. "Understanding Educational Work: Exploring the Analytic Borderlands Around the Labour That Enables Learning." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 12 (3): 321–335. doi:10.1080/14767724.2014.916609.

Parr, G. 2012. "Leading an International Teaching Practicum: Negotiating Tensions in a Site of Border Pedagogy." *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 40 (2): 97–109. doi:10.1080/1359866X.2012.669824.

Parr, G., B. Doecke, and S. Bulfin. 2015. "Stories: A Common Currency." *Changing English* 22 (2): 135–141. doi:10.1080/1358684X.2015.1026187.

Repko, A., W. Newell, and R. Szostak. 2011. *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Roy, A., A. Newman, T. Ellenberger, and A. Pyman. 2019. "Outcomes of International Student Mobility Programs: a Systematic Review and Agenda for Future Research." *Studies in Higher Education* 44 (9): 1630–1644. doi:10.1080/03075079.2018.1458222.

Seddon, T. 2016. *Liquid Modernity and Educational Work: Boundary Politics in Global Transitions*. London: Routledge.

Townsin, L., and C. Walsh. 2016. "A new Border Pedagogy: Rethinking Outbound Mobility Programs in the Asian Century." In *Handbook of Research on Study Abroad Programs and Outbound Mobility. Advances in Higher Education and Professional Development*, edited by D. Velliaris, and D. Coleman-George, 215–247. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Tran, L. 2016. "Mobility as 'Becoming': Bourdieuian Analysis of the Factors Shaping International Student Mobility." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37 (8): 1268–1289. doi:10.1080/01425692.2015.1044070.

Tripp, D. 2012. *Critical Incidents in Teaching: Developing Professional Judgement*. London: Routledge.

Wenger-Trayner, E., M. Fenton-O'Creevy, S. Hutchinson, C. Kubiak, and B. Wenger-Trayner. 2014. *Learning in Landscapes of Practice: Boundaries, Identity, and Knowledgeability in Practice-Based Learning (1st Ed.* New York: Routledge.

Wenger, E. 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E. 2000. "Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems." *Organization* 7 (2): 225–246.

Williams, J., G. Parr, and A. Fitzgerald. 2017. "Monash University International Professional Experience Program." In *Narratives of Learning through International Professional Experience*, edited by A. Fitzgerald, G. Parr, and J. Williams, 1–13. The Netherlands: Springer.