



## **Connectedness pedagogies**

### **Author**

Bridgstock, Ruth, Tippett, Neil

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## **Chapter 6**

### Connectedness Pedagogies

Ruth Bridgstock<sup>1</sup> & Neil Tippett<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Griffith University

<sup>2</sup>University of South Australia

### **Abstract**

This chapter considers the role that higher education can play in fostering learners' connectedness capabilities, examining the online and face-to-face learning experiences that can support professional connectedness. While transmissive pedagogic approaches continue to be dominant in many disciplinary areas, highly connected and networked learning experiences, such as work integrated learning, are becoming increasingly more common in higher education. This chapter explores the extent to which existing pedagogic approaches can be used to address connectedness learning needs, and how they could be adapted to do so more effectively. It sets out seven principles to guide pedagogic practice and outlines seven existing pedagogic strategies that have shown a demonstrated impact in enhancing graduates' connectedness capabilities. Finally, the chapter introduces four studies which explore how connectedness pedagogies have been integrated into higher education learning and teaching in different universities, and the impact that they have had on student connectedness and graduate outcomes.

*Keywords:* graduate employability, social networks, connectedness pedagogies, work integrated learning, connectedness learning, capstone courses

### Connectedness Pedagogies

#### <a>Introduction

The first section of this volume explored what connectedness capabilities are, characterising the connectedness of higher education students and graduates in different fields, and demonstrating some of the career and broader life outcomes that can result from an individual's ability to forge and then make the most of their social networks. This section starts to consider the role that higher education can play in fostering these capabilities, examining the learning experiences and pedagogic approaches that can support graduates' connectedness, both face-to-face, and via digital platforms including social media.

Pedagogic thinking in higher education has come a long way in the last few years. There is now widespread acknowledgement that students require more nuanced, and qualitatively different, pedagogic strategies in order to develop their capabilities so that they can live and work productively and meaningfully in an increasingly dynamic and complex society. The familiar transmissive lecture-tutorial model that has been the hallmark of many degree programs in higher education since the inception of the industrial age university has come under fire. However, evidence suggests that it is still the dominant approach used within much of the contemporary university, despite the widespread shift to blended and online modes of delivery that might be expected to disrupt it.

In part, this adherence to old models of pedagogy may be because educators now need to teach at scale. We have moved from elite models of higher education where only a select few attend university to massified and 'populist' models where hundreds, if not thousands, of students are enrolled in courses simultaneously. It may also be because the adoption of different pedagogies requires a significant shift in teachers' thinking about how teaching should be conducted, a process which must be supported through the development of new teacher capabilities; a significant challenge when considering the time-poor teaching context.

## CONNECTEDNESS PEDAGOGIES

In part, it may also be symptomatic of the teaching spaces and resources (both physical and virtual) provided by universities. Tiered lecture theatres and traditional learning management systems are geared towards promoting transmissive (learning through transmission of information), or at best transactional (learning through interaction with learning material), approaches to teaching.

Despite the persistence of the transmissive model, higher education has recently begun to see the rise of highly connected and networked learning experiences, such as Work Integrated Learning and the adoption of authentic, situated pedagogies, particularly within capstone courses. Industry, community, alumni and student consultation, and in some instances overt collaborative processes, are being employed to develop and deliver a more meaningful curriculum. By offering direct engagement and interaction with industry and community, including via professional events and social media, these pedagogies and practices are moving students beyond the physical and virtual walls of the university, fostering both their connectedness capabilities and their actual connections and networks.

This chapter explores current pedagogic approaches in higher education by considering how they align with graduate employability, and how they could be adapted to better support graduates in developing their connectedness capabilities. Building upon this, the chapter examines how higher education can use connectedness learning to support graduate outcomes, setting out seven principles which can guide pedagogic practice, and outlining seven existing pedagogic strategies that have shown a demonstrated impact in enhancing graduates' connectedness capabilities. Finally, the chapter introduces four empirical studies (covered in Chapters 7-10 of this volume), which explore how connectedness pedagogies have been integrated into higher education learning and teaching in different universities, and the impact they have had on student connectedness and graduate outcomes.

### <a>Teaching for connectedness

Until relatively recently, most university students enrolled in conventional degree programs would have been offered few opportunities to form meaningful professional connections outside of their institutions prior to graduation. Any connections formed inside the university, such as with fellow students or teachers, were largely incidental to educational experiences, which focussed primarily on developing disciplinary skills and knowledge. The extent and development of students' connectedness capabilities were not a focus of university learning, and, for the most part, were left to chance. As a result, proactive, career-engaged students, and those with prior career experiences, tended to be more capable networkers and thus were advantaged in their careers. School leavers with little or no career experience, and those from diverse backgrounds without access to existing family-based networks, were at a disadvantage.

Traditional university pedagogy is typically classroom-based. There are exceptions to this, particularly for degree programs where 'hands-on' skill development is required (often for professional accreditation), such as health practice, teaching, and the arts. However, for many disciplines, there has traditionally been relatively little explicit and authentic connection to the world or people outside the classroom. Under this pedagogic model, opportunities for students to develop their interpersonal communication, teamwork, and collaborative skills are largely limited to group work involving other students (Rossin & Hyland, 2003). This form of collaborative learning corresponds with the *working with connections* capability of the Connectedness Learning Model, however, such experiences can lack authenticity and are often unpopular among students. Furthermore, being able to work with connections is only one subset of the connectedness capabilities that graduates require in the world of professional work. Tailoring these learning experiences to offer 'real life'

## CONNECTEDNESS PEDAGOGIES

industry/community linked problem-based learning tasks, while at the same time ensuring diversity of group members, including diversity of disciplinary background, could provide students with greater opportunities for connectedness learning. Furthermore, such authentic collaboration would also support students in *making and strengthening connections, building a connected identity*, or becoming *social network literate*, however, these core connectedness capabilities are often overlooked in student group work scenarios, and in higher education learning and teaching more generally.

Universities are only just starting to recognise the important role that social connectedness plays in education, life and work, however, some of the pedagogies that they can use to support it are already in place. The rise of the graduate employability agenda in higher education has led to many universities already embedding connectedness pedagogies within their curricula, as these approaches are also known to foster students' employability skills more broadly. Authentic learning – that is, learning that focuses on real-world, complex problems and their solutions, addressed in real-world ways (Stein, Isaacs, & Andrews, 2004) – is a key principle that underlies these pedagogic approaches. Part of the authenticity in this type of learning can be the development and use of social connections for work and career related activities.

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is one type of authentic learning. It brings together learning and productive work with theory and practice through the use of learning that is situated within the act of working (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010). This includes work which is performed in service to the community. WIL has become ubiquitous in higher education, particularly in capstone courses, but also distributed throughout the curriculum and in co-curricular programs (Jackson, 2015). It encompasses a range of pedagogic approaches (Gannaway & Sheppard, 2017), which include:

## CONNECTEDNESS PEDAGOGIES

- *Work Placements / Internships*: Students undertake short or long-term placements in a relevant place of work (including public sector agencies, professional bodies, industry partners and community organisations).
- *Projects*: these may be commissioned through clients, developed by industry or community partners to meet a specific need or problem, or designed by students themselves as a way of solving problems or creating new knowledge.
- *Entrepreneurship*: Students undertake specific activities that develop their own intellectual property, business or social enterprise in order to address a need or fill an identified gap in the current market.
- *Field observations and study tours*: Opportunities in which students are exposed to a professional working environment or other location outside the university, allowing them to observe the application of theory into practice, and in some instances apply their learning to practice.

WIL can be an effective approach to foster both students' connectedness and their connectedness capabilities in an authentic way (Billett, 2009). Several studies have shown that undertaking WIL with an employer can be a pathway into employment with that employer (Brooks & Youngson, 2016; Jackson & Collings, 2018), in part through the development of a trusting work relationship during the WIL experience. A range of work relationships can be established and developed when the student goes on site to undertake a placement or internship, but industry partnered projects and enterprise activities can also be opportunities to foster connectedness.

WIL is not the only way that students can start to develop connections beyond the university. Industry mentoring programs, professional networking events, guest lectures and opportunities to interact with industry active teaching staff are all ways to make connections

## CONNECTEDNESS PEDAGOGIES

that can then be strengthened through further interaction and collaboration. Co-curricular opportunities such as student leadership roles and volunteering can also grow connections and associated capabilities, as can paid work. Students-as-partners initiatives are one type of student leadership role that can be used to foster *working with connections* capabilities, while at the same time developing other employability skills (Cook-Sather, Bovill, & Felten, 2014). In these initiatives, students work with one another and/or with university-based collaborators to enhance learning and teaching, develop curriculum, and strengthen the broader student experience.

Social media and ePortfolios represent another important set of opportunities to connect students into much wider networks. As Bridgstock & Tippett discussed in Chapter 1, digital networks can expand the reach of students' learning, career development, and work activities by helping them to form and maintain weak and indirect ties online. LinkedIn is a particularly useful tool in supporting the development of social network literacies and professional branding, providing stellar opportunities to make connections and weak ties. Although strengthening connections and getting to know people well professionally is still primarily the purview of face-to-face interaction, digital networks can nurture students' ability to form, maintain and use social networks (Bridgstock, 2019a). Through using social media and ePortfolios, students also learn how to represent themselves, their capabilities and their work online, and become familiar with using digital tools to find and learn about others (Pozzi, 2015). From this, they can practice building and using their wider digital networks in an authentic way, opening up digital platforms as an important source of formal and informal learning (Ito et al., 2014). While concerns are often raised about the risks to privacy and safety resulting from student learning activity on social media, being able to manage these risks is part of being social network literate and should be included in connectedness curricula (Bridgstock, 2019a).

### <a>Connectedness pedagogies

Based on this evidence, the Connectedness Learning Approach outlines seven key pedagogic approaches which represent the differing ways in which universities can foster learners' professional networks and connectedness capabilities. These connectedness pedagogies were initially synthesised from the findings of a series of in-depth interviews with higher education graduates and teachers, along with a review of the literature (Bridgstock, 2019b). The implementation of each pedagogic strategy should be undertaken to maximise the development of learners' connectedness capabilities, bearing in mind that each pedagogic strategy has different strengths, and that for optimal results they be implemented as part of a complementary suite of strategies. The seven connectedness pedagogies are:

1. *Work-integrated learning*: learning that occurs at the intersection and engagement of theoretical and practice learning – for-credit learning that incorporates key elements of the workplace, including:
  - internships and work placements, practica;
  - industry/community-partnered projects;
  - collaborative student projects (particularly cross-disciplinary);
  - enterprise and entrepreneurship learning, start-ups;
  - study tours.
2. *Industry teaching and engagement*: direct industry teaching into programs, including industry guest lectures and seminars, career mentoring programs, face-to-face and online networking events and fora, sessional teaching by industry-active staff and informational interviewing programs.

## CONNECTEDNESS PEDAGOGIES

3. *Alumni teaching and engagement*: teaching approaches, as for ‘industry teaching and engagement’ above, with a specific emphasis on program graduates or broader disciplinary area.
4. *Co-curricular activities*: facilitation, support and recognition (formal or otherwise) for activities undertaken by students outside the formal curriculum, such as volunteering, student leadership roles, community engagement and service learning, and paid work.
5. *Student partnerships*: students work with one another and/or with university-based collaborators to enhance learning and teaching, the broader student experience or other university functions. This includes ‘students as partners’ initiatives, clubs and societies, university ideas jams and student representation of the program/faculty/university at external events. These collaborations may or may not be included in co-curricular support and recognition schemes.
6. *Social media and ePortfolios*: developing and maintaining a professional online presence, e.g., through ePortfolios, LinkedIn and other social media platforms. Through individual development of social media profiles and ePortfolios, students can evidence formal and informal learning and capability development and provide artefacts in support of this.
7. *Connected learning*: online and face-to-face learning through open, industry authentic collaborative and social mechanisms and networks (e.g., blogs, Twitter). Connected learning is learning that occurs through communities of enquiry and practice, and also distributed online and offline networks. Connected Learning is often based in inquiry, problem-solving, creativity, communication and collaboration.

## CONNECTEDNESS PEDAGOGIES

Underlining the implementation of these strategies, the Connectedness Learning Approach also sets out seven key connectedness learning principles which guide higher education learning and teaching in effectively supporting students' connectedness capabilities. These principles are:

- The learning is authentic and occurs in real professional contexts, involving professional activities and interactions with professionals. This could involve use of open, industry-authentic tools and technologies.
- Students co-design a learning experience that is meaningful for them.
- Industry/community partners provide input into designing a learning experience that is meaningful for them.
- Partners are carefully selected for alignment with student and program needs and will benefit from/find value in the partnership themselves.
- Appropriate just-in-time resources and learning activities are provided to help students connect with networks effectively.
- The program is tailored to partner, learning context and specific student needs.
- Students maintain the connections they have made and continue to benefit from them, including having ongoing engagement with the program (e.g., as alumni).

This volume includes four chapters that focus on connectedness pedagogies, their implementation, and the outcomes of this across three universities.

Chapter 7 evaluates an attempt to integrate connectedness learning into a third-year careers and employability course within one Australian university. Using LinkedIn as a pedagogical tool to support career identity development and connections with professional networks, Brown et al., report that students were able to recognise the value that

## CONNECTEDNESS PEDAGOGIES

connectedness could offer for future employment. Using digital social networks to connect with others, reflect on employability strengths and weakness and establish career goals were all identified as positive outcomes of the program. The authors outline a series of recommendations for both educators and careers and employability specialists through which connectedness learning can be embedded within courses to support graduate employability.

In Chapter 8, Radoll et al., explore the cultural interface in connectedness learning by considering Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to knowing, learning and connecting. Connectedness, with people, places and things, is a core component of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and pedagogy. Applying Yunkporta's (2009) 8 Ways of Learning within three undergraduate subjects, this chapter explores ways in which contemporary modes of university learning might be beneficially adjusted by blending with Indigenous ways of learning and connecting. Drawing parallels between the Connectedness Learning Approach and Indigenous and non-Indigenous pedagogy, the authors discuss how the outcomes of this pilot project could be further applied in developing a genuine cultural interface for connectedness learning that could be adopted across the higher education sector.

In Chapter 9, Goodwin et al., consider how connectedness learning can be applied through the use of capstones: final year units which aim to consolidate students' learning and orient them towards future work or study. Discussing the redesign and re-imagining of a selection of final-year capstone units in the Bachelor of Arts program at the University of Melbourne, the authors describe five principles for creating an authentic, connected capstone experience. The chapter explores the challenges and insights encountered throughout the redesign process, and provides advice and practical recommendations to support educators and learning designers in changing their own capstone programs to offer students an authentic, connected learning experience.

## CONNECTEDNESS PEDAGOGIES

In the final case study within this section, Chapter 10 documents a university-wide initiative to transform curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices within the University of Wollongong, with a view to providing students with learning experiences that support the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century employability skills. Focusing specifically on the pedagogical aspects of the model that align with connectedness learning, namely first-year experience, blended learning, e-Portfolios, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary learning, and capstones, Bedford et al., explore how this model has been implemented across the institution, and provide a preliminary consideration of its impact in supporting students' connectedness capabilities.

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