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## TITLE PAGE

**The variation in academics' experiences of teaching in an intense, residential study centre compared with their traditional university settings.**

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# **The variation in academics' experiences of teaching in an intense study centre compared with their traditional university settings.**

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This article explores how teachers' experiences of teaching accelerated courses in a residential setting compared with their experiences of teaching in their traditional contexts. The article looks at how teachers responded to the opportunities the accelerated format provided and caused them to revisit not only what they taught, but how they taught. Teaching in an intense residential setting also allowed teachers to be more aware of their students as learners and caused them to revisit the purpose of higher education. Suggestions are made for how accelerated courses could be seen as part of an academic year as they offer advantages to both teacher and student..

## **Background**

This paper reports the outcomes of a study that explored the effect that teaching an accelerated course in a residential context has on university teachers' practice and how this compares with their practice in their traditional environment, teaching non-accelerated courses in a non-residential setting, at their home institutions. In this paper we focus on how the teachers approached their teaching but also explore how the change in context caused the teachers to reconsider a range of aspects of higher education.

A number of different names are given to courses where delivery is in a time-shortened format including block courses, summer courses or accelerated courses; for consistency we will use the term accelerated courses herewith. In this paper we focus on undergraduate courses and examine only face-to-face delivery and not online or distance courses.

Wlodkowski (2003, 6) describes accelerated courses as *'learning programs [that] are structured for students to take less time than conventional (often referred to as traditional) programs to attain university credits, certificates, or degrees.'* Burton and Nesbitt (2002) comment that these non-traditional courses take many formats; that while they retain the same numbers of contact hours and credit-value as traditionally-delivered modules (typically taught over 12 weeks), accelerated courses are 'taught' over anything from 5 days in 'one course at a time' (OCAAT) models, to 4 week courses and short residential retreats.

Seamon (2004) gives a useful overview of accelerated courses in the US context noting that they first appeared at Harvard University in 1869; they are not a new phenomenon. However, there are differing views on the volume of literature available researching accelerated programs, perhaps because there are many aspects to be covered. Seamon (2004, 852) suggests that *'there is a large literature base examining the instructional effectiveness of various course formats. However, the literature is non-committal, with few studies indicating significant differences between the formats.'* It is unclear what is meant by effectiveness in this context, perhaps it refers to some studies done in this area that have focused on the students' learning and experiences during these course, also noted by Kretovics, Crowe and Hyun (2005).

Kretovics, Crowe and Hyun (2005, 38) comment on the '*dearth of studies specifically addressing the teaching of compressed courses or how faculty balance the nature of these compressed courses whilst maintaining their academic rigour*'. This latter view echoes our examination of the literature and certainly there is a lack of evidence about the impact of accelerated courses on the teacher's approach. This study therefore contributes to the accelerated courses' literature. Additionally this paper not only examines teaching in accelerated modules but also the confluence of accelerated and residential contexts on the teacher's experience.

Accelerated courses are increasingly used in adult education contexts and are said to be transforming higher education and potentially destabilising some of the academic traditions around course delivery (Wlodkowski 2003; Scott 2003). Although uncommon, week-long courses do exist in the UK context. For example, professional postgraduate courses are often taught in week-long blocks and the Open University has for many years offered its students week-long residential courses alongside its core distance provision. However, shortened formats are not commonplace in undergraduate degree programs, although a few examples do exist (e.g. Crawford and Radcliffe, 2006)

At present, accelerated courses are cloaked in myth; whilst having staunch advocates, there is a generally held view of scepticism or concern about the quality of these courses. As Anastasi (2007, 19) states, '*faculty and administrators often believe that summer courses are less effective than the same courses taught during the regular semester*.' The scepticism surrounding accelerated courses centres on the following points;

- Inability to cover the material in the time given (Scott & Conrad 1991)
- Learning is crammed and undeveloped (Daniel 2000)
- Standards may be lowered (Scott 1995)

Anastasi (2007) goes on to explore how this belief seems logical given research linking retention of learning to be better in a spaced context compared with intensive and therefore accelerated courses would result in poorer student performance. The evidence base concerning the effectiveness of accelerated formats is still small. Much of the evidence related to student learning on accelerated courses focuses on retention of information and does not explore higher cognitive or affective aspects of learning. Accelerated programs may be ‘destabilising’ as Wlodkowski (2003) suggests, as they could alter the way the academic year is structured and could, in turn, alter the teacher’s role but that this should not preclude them from forming part of the students’ learning experiences and teachers’ teaching experiences.

In contrast to Anastasi’s (2007) assertions on accelerated course, research to date indicates that accelerated formats are as effective as traditional formats in terms of learning outcomes and in some cases superior across a range of disciplines, for example education, economics and psychology (Anastasi 2007; Seamon 2004; Scott 2003; Daniel 2000; Van Scyoc & Gleason 1993; Lombardi, Meikamp & Wienke 1992). Studies indicate that contributing factors to the ‘success’ of these shortened formats from the student’s perspective are the necessity for teachers to be enthusiastic, motivated and flexible in their teaching and assessment practices and this results in a positive learning environment else the experience becomes ‘*painful for all*’ (Conrad

1996; Scott 2003). Burton and Nesbit (2002) note that some teachers have concerns about the learning outcomes on accelerated courses and go on to comment that ‘*when asked about their personal experience with intensive classes, all those interviewed thought that the actual quality of student results was equivalent, or better, in intensive classes*’ (Burton and Nesbit 2002, 4).

As noted previously, Kretovice, Crowe and Hyun (2005) highlight the lack of research focusing on what the teacher does in accelerated courses and their study focused on teachers’ approaches to teaching accelerated courses. This study has explored a similar perspective, however here we consider the variation of teachers’ experiences in an accelerated context in comparison to their traditional context. In this way we aim to elucidate and compare the two contrasting contexts.

The literature on learning in a residential format is sparse. Bersch and Fleming (1997, 52) have argued that the usual elements of curricula (e.g. design, participants and teachers) have an impact on the success of a residential course, but that crucial to the experience is that “individuals are able to detach themselves from daily realities and relax in an uninterrupted continuum of experience.” They contend that these two key aspects: detachment (both physical and psychological) and continuity are what makes residential learning a different learning experience from non-residential contexts. They argue that participants in residential settings “become more open to trying to understand another’s point of view, they value personal experience as knowledge, and they are touched by and connected with their surroundings” (Bersch and Fleming 1997, 52)) Residential study encourages students to form interpersonal relationships

with each other. It has also been suggested that by living and learning in the same locale the intensity of the learning experience is heightened (Bersch & Fleming 1997).

We start by describing how the current study came about and the rationale for its design, before describing its outcomes. Whilst the aim of this study was not to determine the optimal length of a course, nor did we presume to gather evidence advocating that all undergraduate degree courses should be shortened, we conclude by considering how the study's outcomes have led us to evaluate the opportunities afforded by accelerated courses from the perspective of the students' learning experiences, teachers' experiences and from an administrative viewpoint.

### **Context of study**

This study came about following the authors' experiences of teaching on accelerated courses. One of the authors (JP) had taught on a newly introduced 4 week summer term in 2004 (and subsequently in 2005 and 2006) at the International Study Centre at Herstmonceux Castle in Sussex (owned by Queens University, Canada). It appeared to the author that *something of interest* was occurring during the 4 week term in relation to both the teachers' approach to teaching and the students' approach to learning. Similarly JM had experience of teaching at an Open University residential school. As teachers, we both experienced these accelerated, residential formats as *different* to our conventional contexts and observed students' engagement with the learning process as distinct to the learning of our 'traditional' students. We therefore saw the accelerated residential format as forming a site of enquiry around learning and teaching and set out to explore their nature in this context and therefore based our research on the Castle summer term as this was available for exploration. We wanted



to discover what the ‘something of interest’ was that both authors felt was occurring in these contexts and illuminate this by grounding our experiences in research based on the Castle summer term.

The Castle provides predominantly liberal arts-based courses and law options for students across all years of the undergraduate degree. Students can obtain credit for studying courses at the Castle that are recognised by their home institutions; in the summer term this amounts to two half credit courses. Kretoivics et al. (2005, 38) outline the reasons students enrol in a summer term,

*‘..the summer session [in north America] is seen as an extension of the academic year schedule, to take additional courses beyond degree requirements, to take courses enabling one to graduate in less than the typical 4 years and to take courses than allow them to lighten their load during the academic year.’*

In terms of the Castle (and other residential schools), students may also be motivated to enrol for the experience of studying out side their home environment. Students at the Castle are for the most part from Canada, however increasingly other nationalities are represented including, the USA, Mexico and China. The Castle provides a unique setting both for the teacher and learner. With the exception of two full-time staff members the teaching staff are all transient to the Castle. All the transient lecturers also teach in their universities either in the UK, USA or Canada, Mexico and elsewhere. Students and staff live, eat and socialise in close proximity as the Castle is in a rural setting with its own dining hall (for staff and students) and its own pub.

While most courses are similar to those taught at the teaching staff's home institutions, some are unique to the Castle's accelerated term.

One notable aspect of the Castle environment (aside from the castle and the moat and being in England!) is the mixed disciplinary backgrounds of the student population; students who attend the Castle are majoring in engineering, art, sociology and commerce amongst other subjects. Another aspect is the use of field trips to support the face-face delivery with each course having an average of two field trips (normally involving going up to London or surrounding area). For example, students studying an Opera course attend performances at Glyndebourne and the Astronomy course visit the Greenwich Observatory.

Prior to undertaking the data collection part of the project we received ethical approval from the Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow and secured funding from our line manager to support the travel and accommodation costs for the second author to carry out the teacher interviews over three days as the second author was unknown to the teachers at the castle.

Whilst the aims of this study did not aim to explore what the appropriate length of a module is, nor did we set out to advocate that all undergraduate degree courses should be shortened, we will look at how the study's outcomes lead us to look to the opportunities shorter format modules afford from the perspective of the students' learning experiences, teachers' experiences and from an administrative viewpoint.

## **Method**

Our research question for this study was:

*'How do teachers' experiences of teaching vary in the context of an intense study centre in comparison with their experiences of teaching at their home university?'*

In order to explore this we adopted a phenomenographic approach to analyse interviews with teaching staff, followed up by an email questionnaire for all interviewees. A phenomenographic approach allows the researcher to capture the qualitatively different ways people describe aspects of a phenomena (Marton 1981; Marton & Booth 1997). These variations are then captured and grouped into categories of description. The categories of description are all interrelated and the overall result is an outcome space that reflects the character of the way a group of people describe and make sense of various phenomena.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted by JM (as the author was unknown to the teachers) with six out of a possible 11 teaching staff. The interviews varied in length, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. In keeping with the phenomenographic approach the interview transcripts provide a pool of descriptions of ways in which interviewees describe a particular phenomenon, the description of certain phenomena not being ascribed to the individual. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The authors independently undertook the reading and a first analysis of the transcripts, identifying recurring themes and cutting supporting quotes from the transcripts to provide the essence of the category and thus variations in ways the category were described. The authors

then brought the initial categories alongside each other for comparison and discussion. Several iterations of discussion and re-reading of transcripts followed to ensure that the final categories of description were robustly located within the data and consensus was reached. An outcome space consisting of four qualitatively distinct categories of description was then constructed which meaningfully reflects the data.

Akerlind (2005) notes that reliability in qualitative research of this nature can be arrived at by coder-reliability checks and dialogic reliability checks:

1. *Coder reliability check*, where two researchers independently code all or a sample of interview transcripts and compare categorizations; and
2. *Dialogic reliability check*, where agreement between researchers is reached through discussion and mutual critique of the data and of each researcher's interpretive hypotheses.

(Akerlind 2005, 331)

In this instance we adopted a combination of the two, starting out with coder and moving to a dialogic model to enhance the reliability of the outcome space, noting that the final outcome space reflects the authors' analysis of the interviews within their own frameworks.

Six months after the interviews an email questionnaire was administered to the teachers now back in their home institutions to capture any reflections or 'hangover' effects from the Castle experience. All six interviewees responded. The questionnaire asked six questions, related to the broad themes of the semi-structured interview

protocol, focusing on the teaching at the Castle and whether it had impacted on their teaching back home. The validity of the outcome space developed from the interview data was verified when the questionnaire data was brought alongside. It became apparent that the categories of description as originally defined from interview were substantiated by comments made in the questionnaires. Illustrative comments from this data set have been positioned alongside the interview utterances to illustrate the categories as detailed further in the results section.

## **Results**

The outcome space comprises four inclusive hierarchical categories of description representing the qualitatively different ways teachers described aspects of their experiences of teaching on a residential, accelerated course compared with their experiences of teaching non-accelerated, non-residential courses at their home institutions. These are:

<b>Category A</b>	<b>Teacher recognises opportunity</b>
<b>Category B</b>	<b>Teacher reconceptualises teaching</b>
<b>Category C</b>	<b>Teacher reconsiders students</b>
<b>Category D</b>	<b>Teacher reconsiders university</b>

Within the phenomenographic tradition each category of description (aspects of the phenomena) can be described by two interrelated aspects, the *how* and the *what* (Marton & Booth 1997) of each category. For example, in terms of category A ‘teacher recognises opportunity,’ the *how* aspect of this category is that the teachers realise they have dedicated time for teaching in an interdisciplinary community where

members have teaching in common rather than their discipline and their research. The what aspect of the category is that the teacher, through being removed from their normal context and being placed in the context of the Castle, has the *space* to concentrate on their teaching.

<b>OUTCOME SPACE</b>	<b>HOW (the process) ASPECTS</b>	<b>WHAT (the outcome) ASPECTS</b>
<b>A Teacher recognises opportunity</b>	Teacher recognises time and cross-disciplinary community	Teacher has space to teach
<b>B Teacher reconceptualises teaching</b>	Teacher responds to environment	Teacher as explorer of teaching
<b>C Teacher reconsiders students</b>	Teacher gets to know students as learners	Teacher sees students as explorers
<b>D Teacher reconsiders the university</b>	Teacher reflects/questions the purpose of Higher Education	Teacher re-examines their role

Figure 1. Outcome space showing the *how* and *what* aspects of each category

***Category A: Teacher recognises opportunity***

The first and lowest category in the outcome space is that while teaching at the Castle teachers recognised that this offered them an opportunity to practice in a different way. In this category the focus is on the qualitatively different ways teachers recognised this opportunity compared with their normal academic practice context. The process (or *how* aspect) through which the teacher recognises this opportunity is elicited through teachers valuing the cross disciplinary community within the Castle-context, not only in relation to how this influences their teaching, but their social

relations with fellow teachers and students. Teachers do not experience and are unable to experience this level of cross-disciplinarity within their traditional setting where the department or discipline is the normal organisational unit of the university. In terms of the *what* aspect of this category, the teachers describe how the Castle context gives them space to teach, either in terms of time away from their research and administrative duties or in terms of space to consider the process and content of their courses.

<b>A Teacher recognises opportunity</b>	<b>How: Time and the cross disciplinary community</b>	<b>What: Space to teach</b>
	<p>'I'm head of my department so I can't afford to take off more than just a few weeks at a time. So the compressed summer term gives me that opportunity because in the longer term I couldn't do that'.</p> <p>'Whereas at [home institution] if I, it was to be eh [talking with other disciplines], you know, I meet resistance to do that, but over here there is not such thing, so that's great'.</p>	<p>'What happens is I tend to be bogged down with things in my office: administrative things; people coming to see me ... and so it [teaching] comes in these little discrete chunks during the week and eh, I find that a little unfulfilling'.</p> <p>'I was coming in with this belief that all the traditional methods of my teaching had to be thrown out the window and I'd have to try new things, which to me was kind of exciting'.</p>

***Category B: Teacher reconceptualises teaching***

The second category in the outcomes space is that through their Castle experience teachers reconceptualised their own teaching. Within this category the *how* aspect is captured by teachers describing how they respond to the Castle environment in terms of what they teach and where they teach. What they teach has come into focus as they explain how they cannot do what they traditionally do in a 12 week course and are caused to reflect on what is it they really want their students to learn. This leads on to a consideration of the rationale for the traditional 12 week long course format. Also,

the environment of the Castle is very different to their home environment as resources are limited and access to books, papers and the time for students to read is very limited. However, they see benefits in being compelled to adapt to the new context and question if their home institutions' practices are appropriate for supporting learning. The teachers describe being *efficient* with some of their materials and devolving greater responsibility for learning to the students and not just being the 'talking-head'. So time, or the lack of it, has encouraged the teacher to engage in the characteristics of reflective practice in a very immediate way. Changes to their teaching are rapid and responsive to take into account both the context of the students and the 'risks' the teacher is willing to take.

The *what* aspect of this category is that the teachers perceive themselves to be more experimental or exploratory with their teaching; they try out new methods and approaches in the classroom and alter the ways they assess student learning. This is not just in response to the smaller classes, the field trips and the perceived lack of time but because the new environment and space has made them more aware of their approaches to teaching.

<b>B</b> <b>Teacher</b> <b>reconceptualises</b> <b>teaching</b>	<b>How:</b> <b>Responding to environment</b>	<b>What:</b> <b>Teacher as explorer</b>
	<p>'What is difficult, is re-packaging what I do, for these totally different circumstances: the small class, the three hour blocks mean that I can't, I have to curb the tendency to be a talking head that I normally have. And em, so I've had to find different ways of, doing it',</p> <p>'But here, I'm saying I'm scaling back the content because I can't do it in four weeks.</p>	<p>'When I taught here last year, I thought of quite a few different, eh approaches to things, and I thought, I must do that at home and I keep a little sort of notebook in which, I, I anything that pops into my head, I sort of scratched a note, and I've incorporated some of those thoughts into what I did at home last year and I think I benefited a lot as a result'.</p>



	<p>But what am I gonna give them? Well I'm gonna give them skills to think about issues in particular'.</p>	<p>'We are operating in a tyranny of time. We really don't have the time. But I think that, eh, that is really conducive to bringing innovations. That we wouldn't do when we do have time'.</p> <p>'Em, there is also interesting pedagogical experiments and I've always wanted to try, but the term is just too busy'.</p>
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### ***Category C: Teacher reconsiders students***

The third category in the outcome space is where teachers reconsider their students and their learning. In the category the *how* aspect has been identified as teachers knowing their students and the *what* aspect as seeing students as explorers. Whilst the teachers' experiences vary in relation to the Castle experience relative to their experiences at their home institution, the teachers describe how they have a greater sense of knowing the students and their learning. This is brought about not just through the elements of the learning environment that bring teachers into closer proximity with their students. The smaller classes and field trips make different types of in-class activities possible. Similarly, teachers adopted a broader range of assessment approaches than they would in articles their normal contact including oral exams, poster presentations and reflective essays. Additionally teachers talk about knowing students' names and backgrounds, all of which results in teachers describing a greater sense of knowing their students more holistically and not just seeing their students' learning as a cognitive process. As well as being more aware of their students and their learning, the teachers describe the way that their students appear to be more exploratory and take more risks with their learning at the Castle, both in terms of the courses they take and in the learning processes they undertake. The teachers described this risk-taking with some respect. This goes hand in hand with teachers reconceptualising teaching seen in Category B.

<b>C</b> <b>Teacher</b> <b>reconsiders</b> <b>students</b>	<b>How:</b> <b>Knowing students</b>	<b>What:</b> <b>Seeing students as explorers</b>
	<p>‘I get a much better sense of what they are and are not latching on to. At home I’ve got this, wall of faces in front of me, and it’s very hard to get students in that environment to ask a question or interrupt and so on and so often I feel I’m lecturing into a vacuum’.</p> <p>‘It’s knowing their learning styles, yes. When I say “learning the students” that’s what I mean. I mean, I mean it’s both personally knowing them, but also about learning how they, knowing how they learn and knowing ‘em, where their strengths and weaknesses are’.</p>	<p>‘When I deal with these students they are, they are far more willing to take chances because, because anything they do will be taking a chance. So they, eh, the only way I can describe it is that em, that they are brave because they don’t understand the fear or the consequences’.</p> <p>‘So these kids, they don’t play safe. Not because they think they are playing fearlessly, but because they don’t know that they are taking these quantum leaps’.</p>

***Category D: Teacher reconsiders the university***

The final category of description at the top of the hierarchical structure is where teachers reconsider what the university is and should be. The *how* aspect of this category is seen where the teachers start to consider the functions and purposes of the university. The *what* aspect is referred to as the teacher reconsidering their own role in Higher Education. Teachers adopt a different role at the Castle in terms of their relation to students and colleagues and this has stimulated them to think more deeply about the nature of the educational experience. What this means for ‘teachers reconsider university’ is that the change in teaching context has resulted in teachers reviewing the purpose of higher education and questioning what this means in their home institutions. Teachers describe their experience at the Castle as causing them to question aspects of Higher Education and the structure of higher education institutions. They comment on the range of courses available to student at the Castle and access to a multi-disciplinary community for themselves has impacted on their

notion of what the university should be like; the Castle is described as the ‘ideal university’ causing a revitalisation in the experience of teaching in this context which contributes overall to a different and qualitatively better student learning experience.

<b>D</b> <b>Teacher reconsiders the university</b>	<b>How:</b> <b>Questioning the purpose of Higher Education</b>	<b>What:</b> <b>Questioning the teacher’s role in Higher Education</b>
	<p>‘I found when I was here at lunch, in coffee time, and I’m sitting around with other people who are from a variety of backgrounds I hear about Shakespearian, eh plays, I hear about the geography of Britain, I hear about Women’s Studies I hear about Opera, all of these things, which is what a university should be like, of course, and at home I sit in my Physics Building all day long’.</p> <p>‘What I don’t know, is just how much of the learning they’ll remember, but you know in a lot of ways, that isn’t really the critical point. I think we, in a lot courses people tend to over-emphasise content rather than sort of developing your ability to think and understand things and that’s the way I feel about it’.</p>	<p>‘I didn’t realise just how much opportunity there would be to talk to these other academics – it took a long time to get over that. So, I went back really, super-charged. and I thought it was great’.</p> <p>‘My role as a teacher is different, here it’s just sort of an orchestra leader. At back home its more of a “feeder” of information’.</p> <p>‘So, to me, you know, it’s a case of not letting your schooling getting in the way of your education. There’s a lot of opportunity for students to learn outside of the classroom. And I think this place allows that’.</p> <p>‘Traditional boundaries are broken down, which I think are good. Need the this is what university should be like quote here’.</p>

## Discussion

Rowland (2002) highlights the importance of giving academics the opportunity to engage in critical debate about teaching with colleagues. He also contends that teachers must ground and situate their practice within their own beliefs about the purpose of HE. In academic development courses for new academics one of the most frequently described benefits is the opportunity to talk about teaching with members of other disciplines (Barlow & Antoniou 2007). Staff at the Castle recognised the opportunity the inter-disciplinary environment at the Castle allowed them the freedom

and almost permission to discuss teaching not just in terms of content but in terms of process as well; for many this was an unusual event. This raises a question for institutions. How can we create environments where meaningful conversations about teaching can happen outside formal academic development courses?

Staff at the Castle describe the richness of being able to hear about courses across the disciplines; all those interviewed conceded that this was a practice that on the whole was absent from their home institutions. This cross disciplinary learning for staff appears to have created a renewed sense of their academic role, the lecturers at the Castle were there solely to teach and their conversations were wholly about teaching and learning. How can we encourage and foster cross disciplinary communities that will enable academics to engage in critical engagement with issues related to learning and teaching. The model of the Faculty Learning Community (FLC) offers one approach. FLCs have existed on many US campuses for many years (Cox, 2004) and offer academic staff the opportunity to meet regularly and work in mixed disciplinary groups for a period of a year to consider some aspect of academic practice. FLC members have consistently reported both personal benefits and enhancements to their practice (Middendorf 2004; MacKenzie et al.2010). Similarly, McNay (2005) describes how large campuses which are broken down into smaller colleges demonstrate a stronger sense of community and he suggests that we should aim to develop 'academic villages' within the large scale institutions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Staff during the Castle summer term experienced a feeling of freedom in relation to their teaching that caused them not only to question how they teach and assess students but also what they teach. Notably the teachers in this study talked of being

challenged by the awareness that students had less time to read during the Castle summer term than they would have liked that they had to consider what it was they wanted their students to learn – the *essence* so to speak - of that programme/module. Anastasi (2007, 22) suggests that alternative course schedules (accelerated courses) have advantages for both teachers and students and that they have ‘*equivalent or greater academic outcomes*’. Certainly the teachers interviewed described wanting something different for their Castle students. They wanted their students to develop a passion for the subject they were studying, to have a sense of curiosity and enquiry about the topic and they talked of wanting their students to think critically in that context. Robertson (2007) writes that the articulated purpose of a university to create critical thinkers and to enhance citizenship is at odds with the traditional learning and teaching environment and is also at odds with the teachers’ articulation of the purpose of higher education. He notes that: ‘*There is a dissonance between the rhetorical objectives of the (liberal) university and the reality belief and practice at a local, disciplinary level.*’ (Robertson 2007, 552). The participants in this study describe variations in experiences of their role at the Castle compared with their home and seems to have brought the dissonance (or fault line to adopt Rowland’s language (Rowland 2002)) with their experience at their home institutions to the fore. The teachers in this study appear to be questioning the way they design learning opportunities and questioning where and what is learnt in their curricula.

Rowland (2002) refers to ‘fault lines’ as being essential to enabling academics to reflect on their role and identity. He goes on to suggest that academic development (and from this educational/academic developers’) attempts to create an environment where academic practice is seen holistically and not as being made up of discrete

functions allows these fault lines to come to the foreground and encourages a consideration of the bigger picture of Higher Education: its purpose. This is reflected in the descriptions of the participants in this study of how they experience the variation in their work environment at the Castle compared with home. Rowland argues that opportunities to consider the purpose of HE and academic identity are critical in engaging in discussion around teaching and learning and what is learnt when the context has not been articulated. The top hierarchical category of conception in this study indicates that the Castle experience offers academics to experience the ‘fault line’ first hand and causes those who experience it to re-evaluate the purpose of HE and their place within it. And perhaps in order to offer our academic staff such opportunities we need to re-consider traditional academic practice where study leave and sabbaticals for research purposes are common place; is there a place for ‘teaching sabbaticals’ to encourage a new sense of engagement in our academics, with teaching, learning and learners?

If, as staff commented, the summer term offered staff an opportunity to glimpse the ‘ideal university’ then perhaps we can look to engender this within a wider context and restore, as Robertson notes, (2007, 542) a Humboldtian concept of the university being *‘a community of learners (teachers and students) working together in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge.’*

Kretovics, Crowe & Hyun (2005) suggest that institutions should consider offering a variety of scheduling formats for all students, something that also seems to be suggested by our study. Scott (2003) also considers alternative formats to be of future interest but with the caveat that we need to undertake further study into the

appropriate learning and teaching approaches in these context and how these compare with traditional approaches. While the suggestion of altering the length of courses is met with concern rooted in wider non-pedagogical higher education issues. Davies (2006) appears to support this latter suggestion in his review of the accelerated programmes literature and indicates that the concerns are not based on accelerated courses providing ‘poorer’ learning experiences but appear to be related to the changing nature of higher education and one can surmise the potential ‘threat’ to the academics role.

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