Constructively aligning the curriculum of a “New Generation” Bachelor of Environments degree from a social realism perspective

Andrys Onsman

Abstract: This paper describes the process of constructively aligning a generalist undergraduate degree using a sociological structure of professional education. Drawing largely on the work of educational sociologists like Young, Winch and Muller, the process aimed to introduce the notion of recontextualization as the curriculum driver for the constructive realignment of the wide range of disciplines that collectively make up the Bachelor of Environments, one of the University of Melbourne’s “New Generation” degrees. Two factors were found to be crucial to the effectiveness and efficiency of the process. First, a practical framework for the task, agreed to by all participants, is essential to anchor the process. Second, participants must be willing to contribute openly and collaboratively to both the redevelopment and subsequent delivery of the proposed new curriculum.

Subjects: Architecture; Building and Construction; Education; Landscape; Planning; Property

Keywords: curriculum alignment; generalist degrees; educational sociology; social realist strategies

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrys Onsman is a Learning and Teaching advisor in the Melbourne Centre for Studies of Higher Education, attached to Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning. He holds PhDs in Educational Psychology and Representational Media. He has a long record of investigating how twenty-first century skills are learnt, taught and assessed in higher education. As disciplinary knowledge is increasingly accessible without filtration, critical and creative thinking skills, communication skills, investigation skills, project management skills have become core skills for all university degrees. How do we optimize increasingly more diverse cohorts’ acquiring those skills? In research that crosses disciplinary boundaries, Dr. Onsman calls on recent advances in a range of disciplines, including Cognitive Science, Pedagogy, Management and Sociology amongst others, to identify, analyse and promote best practice in evidence-based professional education.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This paper examines the development and maintenance of the curriculum of a multidisciplinary generalist undergraduate degree. The Bachelor of Environments is a generalist degree that serves as the gateway to both professional and postgraduate qualifications in Architecture, Urban Planning, Landscape Architecture, Construction and Property. Through a Bernsteinian framework, it examines how both objectives can be accommodated in a common curriculum, taught by staff from a wide array of disciplines with, at times, conflicting paradigms of practice and conceptions of pedagogy. The paper argues that the use of curriculum mapping as a fundamental phase of constructively aligning intended learning outcomes with graduate attributes is a key aspect of the international higher education sector. It demonstrates that an accurate curriculum map affords the ability to articulate in detail how the institutional and degree stated outcomes have been demonstrated by students during the course of his or her learning.
1. Introduction
The benefits of constructively aligning the learning objectives, the teaching and learning activities and the assessment tasks in a formally structured programme of progressive learning have been clearly articulated and substantiated as productive and beneficial (Biggs, 1996, 2003; Jervis & Jervis, 2005; Wang, Su, Cheung, Wong, & Kwong, 2013). A constructively aligned curriculum emphasizes two key aspects of learning to the students: what they are expected to learn and how they will be expected to make that learning evident. Hence, a constructively aligned curriculum requires that the assessment tasks be designed to unambiguously reflect the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) (Boud, 2010; McLoughlin, 2002). Paul Ramsden points out that “from a student’s point of view, the assessment always defines the actual curriculum” (Ramsden, 1992, p. 187).

Despite its wide recognition as being pedagogically worthwhile, there is a concern, most often from within the Academy, that casting intended learning objectives as required thresholds may discourage students from constructing their own, personally relevant objectives (Eisner, 1985; Polanyi, 1967). In short, the argument is that the articulation of institutionally sanctioned and prescriptive learning objectives may steer students away from acquiring unintended but nonetheless worthwhile meanings, understandings and capabilities. From a sociological perspective, how the curriculum that purports to facilitate professional education or expertise is structured is a fundamental element of the academic environment (Young & Muller, 2014). Ma (2015) asks how a curriculum can be structured to accommodate both intended and unintended learning outcomes:

If we incorporate both anticipated and unanticipated events ..., how unpredictable will the ultimate learning outcomes that ensue ... be? If learning objectives or outcomes are frequently or predictably derailed in unpredictable directions, how should these sessions be integrated into the existing curriculum? ... how does one enable disturbance ... to reflect authenticity? (Ma, 2015, p. 346)

Moreover, there is an equity issue in such a concern. Not all students may be capable of serendipitously acquiring unintended learning outcomes, and therefore, to include them in assessment is manifestly unfair. While not discouraging unintended learning outcomes, focus must be placed on the clearly articulated ILOs as the basis for formal assessment that articulates with professional requirements. Constructively aligning the components of a profession-oriented curriculum increases learner agency in the acquisition of professional knowledge by expressing unambiguously what needs to be learnt. Students then can make informed decisions about how they will individually and collectively strategize their learning.

A decade ago, Bill Johnson and Aileen Watson suggested that higher education had moved from an “academic-led ‘supply’ model to an employer-led ‘demand’ model of higher education” (Johnston & Watson, 2004, p. 54) and employers they argued, demanded graduates have “key skills”. Their assertion reflects the growing focus on practical rather than theoretical knowledge being the basis for induction into the professions. More recently, sociologists like Muller (2012) have argued that theoretical knowledge ought not to be left to wither at the expense of practical knowledge, arguing that its generation, development and evaluation is ultimately profession-based, and, the learning objectives and assessment tasks of profession-based curricula should reflect both professional and pedagogic theorizing (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Payler, Meyer, & Humphris, 2007).

Concurrently, a number of studies have examined the relevance of constructive alignment to postgraduate courses and professional preparation programmes (Borrego & Cutler, 2010; Treleaven & Voolo, 2008; Walsh, 2007). Fewer studies have focused on generalist undergraduate courses that are designed as feeder programmes to specific and mostly profession-oriented postgraduate studies as well as serving as immediate employment preparation—as is the case with the Melbourne Model. Jackson, Sibson, and Riebe (2014) examined one specific institutional graduate attribute “working effectively with others” (WEWO) as it was perceived by employers to be in the graduate’s actual skill set. WEWO is a common graduate attribute and the University of Melbourne is no exception.
The ability to negotiate with and influence others effectively is widely acknowledged as a key “future-focused” skill (Fisher, 2011). However, it is also acknowledged as a skill that is difficult to teach (Callanan & Perri, 2006; Jackson & Chapman, 2012; Lang, 2009). Denise Jackson and her colleagues report that students generally accepted that teamwork was an important factor of employability in their fields, and generally considered themselves collegially capable. Significantly, students' estimation of their WEWO capacity has been found to be significantly at odds with that of their employers (Institute of Directors, 2007). Such findings are essential to the current study in that they “indicate the important role of constructive alignment in the development of employability skills at an undergraduate level, with empirical evidence linking student perceptions of developing WEWO behaviours with pedagogical practices of class activities and assessment items” (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 15).

Jennifer Rowley and her colleagues (Rowley, Scanlon, Laing, Smith, & Treleaven, 2014) found that the lack of constructive alignment is the single most influential cause of the (perceived) tension between institutional graduate attributes and professional standards and expectations. They also found that rather than being the result of impositions enforced by the institutional hierarchy, the tension is to a large extent caused by processes internal to individual faculties. In practice, these results indicate both the necessity and the difficulty of constructively aligning ILOs to both graduate attributes and professional standards, which in turn creates challenges for assuring the quality of learning.

One identified benefit of constructive alignment relates to what Anderson (2012) identifies as the “pressure [that] has emanated from international employers keen to recruit graduates who possess more than subject knowledge and professional skills” (Anderson, 2012, p. 9). There has been a growing “dissatisfaction with the attributions of the individuals they recruit from our universities” (Barrie, 2007; Bath, Smith, Stein, & Swann, 2004; Harvey, 2000; Hesketh, 2000). At a surface level, much of such dissatisfaction is the apparent disconnect between the attributes graduates display and those that the university claims they have acquired. Amongst the factors identified by Bath and his colleagues (2004) as contributing to the emergent emphasis by employers on generic attributes are the changing relationship between education and employment and the growing use of outcome measures as indicators of quality. To this end, universities are increasingly being required to assure employers that its graduates do indeed possess the skills, knowledge and values that are ascribed to them.

Beyond the validation of certificated graduate attributes, there is a growing concern that what is being taught in universities as professional expertise is increasingly limited to quantifiable items, simplified notions of theoretical and practical knowledges. Winch (2014) argues that today’s professionals need much more than simply a base level of knowledge, a base level of skill and an ability to use both purposefully in situ. That knowledge, those skills and that capacity needs to employed with a consideration of its effect beyond the task and occupation. This, Winch argues, is essential in a curriculum that seeks to inculcate profession-based expertise.

2. Context
The structure of the University of Melbourne’s so-called “New Generation” degrees demands a carefully designed articulation between a broad-based, generalist undergraduate degree and a specialist, discipline-specific postgraduate degree because each undergraduate degree can form the basis for a number of postgraduate degrees located in disparate faculties. One example is the Bachelor of Environments (B.Envs), an undergraduate programme that serves as a springboard to Master degrees in School of Design; School of Engineering; Graduate School of Land and Environment; Graduate School of Information and the Graduate School of Education. Of those, only the School of Design is part of the Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, which is the home faculty of the B.Envs.

Adding another layer of administrative and pathway complexity is the fact that individual subjects in the B.Envs may be taught out of the Melbourne School of Land and Environment, the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Science as well as the Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning. In effect, this results in different providers assuming responsibility for individual Majors in the B.Envs.

Further, there are various undergraduate pathways to some of the Master’s degrees. For example, a place in the Master of Geomatics degree programme can be attained by way of either a B.Envs or a Bachelor of Science. However, the entry requirements for the Bachelor of Science is significantly higher than that for the B.Envs, particularly in regard to pre-tertiary Mathematics, and consequently the failure rate in the common subjects is substantially higher amongst the B.Envs students than the Bachelor of Science students. To add to the complexity, the Master of Geomatics programme is not delivered either by the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning or by the Faculty of Science, but by the Faculty of Engineering.

While the above is an abridged outline of the structure, it serves to indicate the point that to accurately map the B.Envs curriculum is a complicated process. However, it is also an essential exercise for two major reasons. First, feedback from students, employers and other key stakeholders indicates that there is a lack of clarity in terms of perception of what the B.Envs actually is. The term “Environments” has created confusion, especially where it is equated with environmentalism and activism. Second, the lower entry requirement has created the notion that it is an “easy” pathway into a university that prides itself on its high standards. A detailed curriculum mapping can go some way to addressing these issues in that it allows assurance that development is sequential, that delivery is consistent and importantly that students recognize and value that the course in which they are enrolled is meeting industry expectations.

3. Aligning graduate attributes
The paper proceeds with an analysis of documents that articulate ILOs at the institutional, degree and subject levels. As a first step, the graduate attributes of the B.Envs (University of Melbourne, 2015) were plotted against the University’s (University of Melbourne, 2014) to allow a comparison between the two. Table 1 indicates that there is an obvious constructive alignment in that the latter articulates with the former as a subset. Each of the University’s nine undergraduate degrees have some leeway to articulate how their individual interpretations of the institutional graduate attributes are evident in their own. The accordance in this case sees the degree’s graduate attributes to be the contextual manifestation of the institutional graduate attributes: the B.Envs unsurprisingly focuses on the global physical context with a predominance of skills and profession-related competencies. As such, it makes evident the link between pedagogic theory and professional practice, a point that becomes more obvious later.

In brief, the graduate attributes of the B.Envs were conceived to reflect those of the University in the specific context of further study or employment in professions that are concerned with the built and natural environments. By way of illustration, the assertion that Melbourne University graduates “are adept lifelong learners who generate bold and novel ideas by critically evaluating alternative possibilities and viewpoints” becomes more specific as a B.Envs graduate as someone who “well versed in the traditions and norms of their discipline, [embraces] the creative and entrepreneurial opportunities afforded by blue-sky and green-field thinking”. Moreover, although the characteristic is now focused on the Environment, it remains broad enough to be interpreted more definitively for a particular major within the B.Envs degree. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, the graduate attribute of a B.Envs graduate with, say, a Landscape Architecture major is articulated as “... committed to continuous learning and research to inform the planning and design of open spaces towards increased social and ecological wellbeing locally, regionally and globally”. The cascading structure seeks to ensure that there is an articulation of the very specific undergraduate degree with the set of very general institutional outcomes.

The paper now moves to discuss how that process might be made manifest in practice.
4. Realigning the B.Envs curriculum

Much has been reported about the problematic nature of developing effective curricula of multidisciplinary degrees, particularly in the professions targeted by the B.Envs (Caporali, Catelani, Manfrida, & Valdiserri, 2014; Falcone, Sanchis, Lopez-Martín, Milagros, & Alejos, 2014; Marti, Feliu, & Varga, 2014; O’Byrne, Dripps, & Nicholas, 2015). However, two aspects are crucial. First, a rigorous and convincing

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**Table 1. Alignment of institutional and degree graduate attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Bachelor of Environments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic distinction</strong></td>
<td>A Melbourne degree provides graduates with in-depth knowledge of their specialist disciplines and skills in examining issues with multiple disciplinary perspectives. Melbourne graduates are critical, creative thinkers with strong reasoning skills. They can apply knowledge, information and research skills to complex problems in a range of contexts and are effective oral and written communicators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using techniques, approaches and knowledge from Science, Engineering, the Social Sciences, the Humanities and the Arts, graduates of the Bachelor of Environment degree have developed a broad view of the global physical context. They are able to approach crucial issues such as global warming, urbanization and construction in a considered and measured manner, based on rigorous analytical and research skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active citizenship</strong></td>
<td>Melbourne graduates have engaged with contemporary local, national and global issues and developed an appreciation of the Asian region. They have a high regard for human right, social inclusion, ethics and the environment. Melbourne graduates are aware of the social and cultural diversity in communities and can work collaboratively with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In particular, they have an understanding of and deep respect for Indigenous knowledge, culture and values.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bachelor of Environments graduates are well placed to contribute pro-actively and beneficially to the natural, human and constructed environment at the local, national, regional and global levels. They have a genuine appreciation of cultural, biological and geographical diversity in communities, with a practical regard for human rights and social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrity and self-awareness</strong></td>
<td>Melbourne graduates are motivated, self-directed and well-organized, with the ability to set goals and manage time and priorities. They are able to work effectively both independently and in groups. They are also highly self-aware and reflective, with skills in self-assessment, and place great importance on their personal and professional integrity.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.Envs graduates have demonstrated a capacity to complete tasks, briefs and projects efficiently and effectively, by working individually and collaboratively; by being self-critical, self-disciplined and self-directed and by retaining the integrity of the purpose, process and the product throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The opportunities offered by the Melbourne experience</strong></td>
<td>The opportunities offered by the Melbourne experience help prepare graduates who are enthusiastic, self-assured and confident of their knowledge, yet flexible, adaptable and aware of their limitations. Melbourne graduates are willing to explore, experiment and learn from mistakes. They have empathy and concern for the welfare of others and can manage their own well-being.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They set clear, agreed goals and proceed purposefully to achieve them. They communicate effectively in a range of media that includes oral, written and graphic.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B.Envs graduates are well prepared as pro-active community members and citizens, and to assume leadership roles in their professions. They are also well prepared to continue to postgraduate study in a wide range of professional fields.</strong></td>
<td>B.Envs graduates have a respect for Indigenous knowledge, cultures and values, based locally on an informed understanding of its pre-eminent place in Australian history, geography and contemporary culture, and globally on the respectful and informed consideration of individual contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B.Envs graduates have a respect for Indigenous knowledge, cultures and values, based locally on an informed understanding of its pre-eminent place in Australian history, geography and contemporary culture, and globally on the respectful and informed consideration of individual contexts.</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B.Envs graduates are confident and self-assured in their skills and knowledge base, they are enthusiastic and willing in their professional practice and they are empathetic in their dealings with others.</strong></td>
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framework for the task must be constructed and articulated clearly to the participants. Second, participants in the design, development and delivery of the curriculum must be willing to contribute openly and collaboratively (Biggs, 2014; French et al., 2014; Pearce & Edwards, 2014; Roberts, 2015). In practice, the willingness of participants to contribute purposefully to the process was more problematic because exogenous factors that centred primarily on concerns about professional autonomy and authenticity outweighed the number of pedagogy-based contributing factors. The two aspects will be discussed separately.

4.1. Developing an analytical framework for the curriculum of the B.Envs

As indicated above, the process adopted a “social realist” (Shay, 2013) perspective, drawing on Bernstein (2000, 2003), Brandom (1998), Winch (2014) and Young (2014) amongst others, to emphasize that any curriculum that purports to prepare students for a profession needs to be based on the recontextualization of professional or vocational knowledge in an institutional setting as preparation for professional decision-making designed to progress over the length of the course in what Winch has termed the “ascent of learning”. Hence, the degree's ILOs are most often cast as higher order skills and competencies rather than theoretical knowledge sets, with an implied understanding that those skills will be learnt and examined in the context of the relevant profession-based knowledge sets. This reflected at the discipline major level of ILOs, at which stage the learning outcomes include a greater distinction in theoretical knowledge and profession-specific skills. In terms of constructive alignment, the disciplinary majors’ ILOs are couched as subsets of the degree’s learning outcomes.

A social realist analytical structure also reflects the proposition that a curriculum designed to prepare students for a profession ought to focus on ILOs and aligned assessment tasks by way of which those learning outcomes can be observed rather than simply didactically presenting and testing specified content in an unrecontextualized structure. As Kotzee (2014) demonstrate, adopting a social realist perspective affects the recasting of a professional curriculum. In summary, curriculum renewal requires not only a reconsideration of ILOs away from content to competence, but also readjustment in terms of professional capacity.

In order to begin the process of recasting the learning objectives of each of the disciplinary majors of the B.Envs, a set of degree specific learning outcomes was devised as a subset of the institutional learning outcomes (University of Melbourne, 2015). Each year, the degree course is internally reviewed and over the decade of its existence as a New Generation degree, it has also been externally reviewed three times. Further, each disciplinary major is subject to profession-based scrutiny and reportage. The degree’s learning outcomes are an amalgamation of each of those sources, articulated in the same manner as the University’s generic learning outcomes. Table 2 presents the two sets of learning outcomes in tabulated form.

Basing the re-alignment process on a social realist perspective provided a stable framework for the degree’s curriculum scan. Subsequent to a short but intense workshop on creating learning-based learning outcomes, programme coordinators were asked to provide a set of disciplinary majors’ learning outcomes expressed in the same form. Maintaining the course’s adherence to professional guidelines, coordinators were asked to recast ILOs from a learner’s perspective. It was interesting to note that discipline majors that had largely theoretical knowledge-based learning outcomes had greater difficulty in recasting them according to those criteria that those that had largely competence-based learning outcomes. However, as a further record of the process, it was also noted all but one of the disciplinary majors completed the task.

Table 3 presents one example of a disciplinary major’s recasting of its ILOs. Reflected in the ILOs of the disciplinary major is the subtle but significant change of theory or “knowing that” to systemic knowledge, the pool of theoretical knowledge that Urban Planners and Designers are assumed to have access to. The skill-based learning outcomes are designed to show functional competence in accessing, using and creating profession-based systemic knowledge. In social realist terms, the focus is not on any individual knowledge structures bound by set disciplinary borders, called singulars by
Table 2. Alignment of institutional and degree learning outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Bachelor of Environments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne’s graduates have demonstrated:</td>
<td>As well as the attributes generic to all University of Melbourne alumni, Bachelor of Environments graduates have demonstrated that they:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• an in-depth knowledge of their specialist disciplines;</td>
<td>• have a broad and interconnected knowledge of the built and natural environments;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• skills in examining issues with multiple disciplinary perspectives;</td>
<td>• have a deep knowledge of one specialized area of study;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• critical, creative thinking skills and strong reasoning skills;</td>
<td>• are qualified to pursue further study or employment in a range of occupations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• expertise in applying knowledge, information and research to complex problems;</td>
<td>• can select, combine and apply effective problem solving skills to a range of tasks;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• highly effective oral and written communication skills;</td>
<td>• work efficiently both individually and collaboratively;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the ability to engage with contemporary local, national and global issues and developed an appreciation of the Asian region;</td>
<td>• can communicate clearly in a wide range of contexts, in written, oral and graphical formats;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a high regard for human rights, social inclusion, ethics and the environment;</td>
<td>• are committed to continuous learning;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• awareness of the social and cultural diversity in communities;</td>
<td>• are committed to ethical practice and the social justice implications of the built and natural environments; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• skills in working with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds;</td>
<td>• have a meaningful respect for Indigenous knowledges, cultures and values;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• an understanding of and respect for Indigenous knowledge, culture and values.</td>
<td>• accommodate in praxis the complex frailty of environmental systems that may be affected by the results of urban planning and design.</td>
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</table>

Table 3. Alignment of B.Envs and “Urban Planning and Design” intended learning outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended learning outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As well as the attributes generic to all University of Melbourne alumni, Bachelor of Environments graduates have demonstrated that they:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have a broad knowledge of the built and natural environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have a deep knowledge of one specialized area of study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are qualified to pursue further study or employment in a range of occupations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can apply effective problem solving skills to a range of tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• work efficiently both individually and collaboratively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can communicate clearly in a wide range of contexts, in written, oral and graphical formats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are committed to continuous learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• are committed to ethical practice and social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• have a deep and demonstrated respect for Indigenous knowledges, cultures and values based on understanding and empathy.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Bernstein, but on the integration of relevant structures into the regions that collectively form the field of Urban Design and Planning in practice. Regions are conceptualized as sources of present and future profession-specific knowledge. The third group of ILOs addresses the notion that accessing, using and creating knowledge has consequences. One of the defining characteristics of a profession is that it has within it a code of ethics, and acceptance of social responsibility beyond the internal knowledge structures of its own region.

4.2. Overcoming faculty reluctance

Oliver (2013) argues that an institution’s aspiration to and achievement of excellence is captured in its graduate attributes, with the correlation that they enhance employability in terms of having appropriate skills, knowledge and values that make graduates “more likely to secure employment and be successful in their chosen occupations to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2006, p. 8). However, as Rowley et al. (2014) point out, aligning ILOs and evidentiary assessment tasks with both graduate attributes and professional standards is currently not standard (or common) practice, despite the weight of evidence that confirms the strategy as beneficial in terms of quality assurance of both learning and teaching.

The most obvious obstacle to constructively aligning the B.Envs curriculum is the entrenched attitudes to change exhibited by senior members of the academic staff. This was not entirely unexpected because academics have a tendency to characterize the quality of their teaching in terms of professional expertise and achievement in their individual discipline rather than in terms of learning outcomes or institutional goals and obligations (Erisman, 2009; Koslowski, 2006). However, Erisman (2009) maintains that resistance can be overcome with pro-active, interventionist leadership, educational outreach efforts and broad-based faculty involvement in all stages of the process. Nonetheless, she also acknowledges that some staff are chronically resistant to any idea of institutional oversight of quality assurance processes for learning-centred accountability purposes, often maintaining that the autonomy, authority and authenticity of the disciplines demand a specificity in the ILOs that cannot be accommodated in institutional graduate attributes. Erisman contends that they are not mutually exclusive.

The strategy adopted in this case was to make all participants aware that education has its own extant pool of professional knowledge, because the coordinators of each of the disciplinary majors initially conceived themselves as being members of their profession, as indeed most are. As such, their initial standpoint was defensive: the guardian of their course’s accreditation by their relevant professional bodies. The underlying purpose of meetings, workshops and conversations was that each coordinator recognized the benefits of recontextualizing professional knowledge for the purposes of devising a curriculum that supports the epistemic ascent of professional learning (Young & Muller, 2014).

Although overall the strategy achieved reasonable results, there were two aspects that warrant the reconsideration of its appropriateness. First, the collaborative/explicative process was very labour-intensive and time costly. The aim of the strategy was to ensure that all stakeholders made the decision to work collaboratively for the success of the project on the basis of conceptual understanding of the social realist framework of curriculum renewal. Accepting that concept, however, was idiosyncratic and unpredictable, resulting in widely scattered achievements over an unacceptably long period of time. Whereas some coordinators grasped the point of the exercise very quickly and recast their learning outcomes in accordance with the strategy, others were less open to change, which brings up the second aspect. One coordinator simply refused to cooperate, claiming that the intended learning objectives of all the subjects in his course were, and had always been, adequate as they were—despite some of those subjects consistently receiving the lowest student satisfaction ratings, particularly for organizational issues. Such intractable resistance may take generational change rather than individual change (see Douglass, Thomson, & Zhao, 2012).
5. Conclusion

The strategy of using curriculum mapping as the initial phase of constructively aligning ILOs with graduate attributes has become a key aspect of the international higher education sector (Crosthwaite, Jolly, Brodie, Kavanagh, & Buys, 2012). An accurate curriculum map affords the ability to articulate in detail how the institutional and degree stated outcomes have been demonstrated by the graduate during the course of his or her learning. Whereas other perspectives question the focus of curriculum mapping on outcomes (Wang, 2014), the social realism framework adopted for this analysis recognizes the distinct, primarily profession-based knowledges as well as the common generic skill set that graduates of the B.Envs are expected to have evidenced.

To emphasize the importance of recontextualization as a practical strategy in curriculum renewal, not only do professional institutes require detailed information of learning, the Australian Universities Quality Agency also requires that graduate attributes be embedded in curricula (Barrie, Hughes, & Smith, 2009). Seen in the context of development rather than remediation, “[t]esting how and where employability-related learning is incorporated into a course curriculum, and that this is far more effective than focusing on what occurs in individual units (subjects or modules)” (Yorke & Knight, 2004, p. 10) reduces overlap and confusion and increases coherence in the degree (Freeman, Hancock, Simpson, & Sykes, 2008). It also serves as a means of providing equivalency of learning (Jackson, Watty, Yu, & Lowe, 2006) for mobile students. In order to avoid a discrepancy between the ILOs and the institution-sanctioned graduate attributes (Treleaven & Voola, 2008), a focus needs to be maintained on the opportunities provided for students to demonstrate the intended outcomes.

Most academic staff accept that it is important to both the university and the students that graduate attributes should be embedded in the curriculum (Radloff et al., 2009), but in practice “there is, to some degree, a lack of ‘buy in’ by academic teaching staff in Australian universities” (Barrie, Smith, Hughes, & Thomson, 2009, p. 14). From that perspective, a variety of hurdles stand in the way of the implementation of the process: ranging from understanding how to articulate meaningful learning objectives to seeing the exercise as a threat to professional autonomy or authority (Oliver, 2010; Radloff et al., 2009). In a multidisciplinary undergraduate degree like the B.Envs, there is the suggestion that the broad commonality of the degree means that it isn’t until students complete the disciplinary major’s capstone subject in the final year that graduate attributes ought to be evidenced.

The current study has replicated the earlier findings. However, it has also found agreement with Owen, Davis, Coper, Ford, and McKeough (2009), who reported that the use of a template for alignment purposes proved successful in getting (nearly) all contributors to provide scans that facilitated clear analysis. Adopting a social realism framework for professional learning allows the focus of pedagogic analyses of multidisciplinary undergraduate degrees to be on the observed learning outcomes that result from constructively aligning the curriculum. The analysis of the B.Envs indicates that the framework does not “distinguish the intra-subject re-contextualisation ... from ... the professional re-contextualisation” (Young & Muller, 2014, p. 9) in terms of disciplinary knowledge, either in application or theory. Finally, much remains to be done in developing the extent to which professional knowledge, especially in terms of practice, is to be theorized and standardized. At the same time, there are numerous aspects of professional education that require further analysis and more practice-based substantiation in terms of its professional efficacy.

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Note

1. At the time of writing, the University of Melbourne is ranked 1 in Australia and 44 in the world according to Shanghai Jiao Tong.

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