A Case Study of Student Engagement in Collaborative Group Learning in a Blended Community Based (Service) Learning Module

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Research title: A case study of student engagement in collaborative group learning in a Blended Community Based (Service) Learning module

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Abstract: A participatory action research case study employed mixed methods to examine student collaboration and engagement in a Community Based (Service) learning module. A quasi experimental testing of Coates (2007) typology of student engagement found low agreement between students and lecturers in assigning the terms, passive, intense, independent or collaborative to student postings to discussion fora. Evidence from this case study found greater student collaboration in discussion fora when linked to practical course activity. Qualitative analysis of discussion threads using conversation analysis provided evidence for collaboration in deeper knowledge construction when supported by lecturers’ contributions. Discourse analysis examined interviews with students and focused on their constructions of community revealing the beneficial role of developing multiple perspectives to integrate their learning experiences. A role for supporting facilitative communication in small group learning and the Zone of Proximal Development is suggested and an argument for the role of student centred approaches in Pedagogies for Civic Engagement in teaching and learning is made.
Acknowledgements: I am grateful to my supervisor, Vincent Farrell and the course Director, Marian Fitzmaurice, for their support and guidance in my study. I also am grateful to staff of DIT Postgraduate Studies Department and Library especially Roisin Guilfoyle and Diana Mitchell. I would also like to thank my fellow students and my colleagues Brian Hand, Caroline French and the students of the Fine Art degree course in the Wexford Campus of IT Carlow. My colleagues have been a valuable resource in sharing my ideas.
Research title: A case study of student engagement in collaborative group learning in a Blended Community Based (Service) Learning module

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem

Context

The context of the present study is the outreach campus of an Institute of Technology in the South of Ireland where I work as a lecturer on the degree courses in Early Childhood and Applied Social Studies. The Campus also provides courses in Business, Architectural Technology and Fine Art and is becoming a recognized access route to Higher Education for the local community. My background in psychology has prompted an interest in how students learn on their own and together and how they integrate learning from these experiences. My observations of learners in the Early Childhood and Social Studies courses that I teach have focused recently on the use of reflection to integrate theory and practice and I have found myself considering the role of reflection in developing critical thinking and metacognitive skills. My own experience as a learner on a problem based module which produced the pilot programme being examined here led to my own conclusions about information processing and reflection which relate to learning and teaching and the wider social and political context McGarrigle (2008).\(^1\)

Basically, I have learned that well designed courses involving face to face sessions and Asynchronous Learning Networks can support the deeper learning that comes from reflecting over a period of time on a learning activity. As a class is made up of different learners with a variety of individual responses to the activities that are provided for them we need to challenge our comfortable roles as people who merely stand up and transmit knowledge to passive receptors in formal traditional lectures to become more interactive facilitators of knowledge construction using a variety of means to engage students time and attention. I also feel that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) can have a dual role in engaging students’ collaborative learning and meeting the needs of socially disadvantaged groups in the community?

Barnett’s (2007) discussion of the ‘civic university’ suggests that there is a need to create new ways of being based on an ethical standpoint for students and institutions in a postmodern world. New ways of engaging with wider society may involve Information

\(^1\) As a student on the Diploma in Third Level Learning and Teaching (DIT)
and Communication Technologies (ICT). Barnett (2007) says: ‘The university – especially through modern technologies – can reach out to the wider world in new ways; can form new kinds of community; and it has barely begun on this enterprise.’ (p35) As I have come to Third Level teaching from working in the disability area and have made attempts to increase representation of minority groups in local community organizations, I am drawn to the area of Community Based or Service Learning and examining ways that higher education can connect with community. Perhaps I envisage a role for ICT in creating supportive networks of community groups collaborating and organizing their responses to attempts to marginalize their needs. Can Asynchronous Learning Networks facilitate busy community groups attempts to network? Can the Campus offer a valuable role in facilitating communication and collaboration through ICT? How can students become active citizens engaged in their own learning and the communities around them?

Some of these ideas informed my contributions as a collaborator on the DIT Postgraduate Diploma in Third Level Learning and Teaching which produced a blended learning module in Community Based (or Service) Learning. Using this template my colleague, Brian Hand², designed a module which was piloted with 3rd year students of the Fine Art degree course in the academic year 2008-09. The basic aim of this module is to encourage students to consider their own position in relation to working with community groups and any ethical issues that arise. The course involves both face to face sessions and discussion boards³ to support learners collaborating in their knowledge construction about working with community groups. As an experimental module it was intended to explore how ICT can be used creatively by art students to discuss, record and create together and represents a challenge to what is usually seen as the solitary activity of the artist. As I teach on courses from the Social Studies and Child Care and Education fields it may prove fruitful to Third Level learning and teaching to observe how students from the Fine Art discipline manage their learning. As Higher Education begins to use more collaborative approaches involving e-learning and blended learning then it seems pertinent to examine the processes involved in individual student learning while engaged in group projects such as this.

² Brian Hand, Course Director in Fine Art, also researching for M.A.
³ Blackboard computer system
Problem

At the outset I was interested in a number of inter-related issues arising out of the student experience on a blended learning module – how do they learn about community, reflection, online learning and role play? A primary concern in the design of the module rested on students examining issues of racism, discrimination, prejudice and how these operate in their community and in their own situations? A role play was thought a useful starting point for students to begin this examination and prepare them for going into the community. The course then required students to engage with ICT to discuss the role play from this first face to face session. Then students were supported in their efforts to engage with ICT in a computer lab session where they posted comments to an online discussion board forum. At this time, as I was formulating my specific line of enquiry I discussed with my colleague, Brian Hand, what would be the most useful way to research the course and mutually agreed that my focus would be on the student experience of the course and I moved away from a specific focus on reflection towards student engagement in learning, student collaboration and their ideas on community. As he was investigating the engagement with community partners then our joint efforts would compliment each other. It also continued the collaborative aspect of knowledge construction we had commenced earlier and also in a way modeled and mirrored the collaboration expected of students. My research would examine various aspects of how the students learned together and develop their ideas about community with a particular focus on their use of ICT in supporting their own learning.

Purpose

The purpose of carrying out this research was to learn ways to improve the learning experiences of students on similar courses by examining the factors that contribute to engagement in learning through ICT. It is hoped the knowledge gained from the experience of these students will benefit future similar courses in Social Studies, Social Work. As the use of a designed e-learning module for Fine Art degree students is a comparatively novel approach it seems elements of the case study approach are also relevant.
Research Questions

A number of related research questions arise out of this consideration of the student experience of ICT in this pilot module:

What factors facilitate or inhibit online collaboration?
Are there different stages to student engagement?
Are there predictable ways that students engage with online discussion?
Can knowledge be constructed collaboratively using online discussion boards?
What ideas inform students’ constructions of ‘community’?

Anticipated Outcomes

As Constructivist theory has informed many of the approaches to facilitating student learning its influence on online education has been growing in recent years. As Doolittle (1999) states: ‘constructivism acknowledges the learner’s active role in knowledge creation’ (p.1). The influence of Vygotsky (1978), (1986) has led to greater stress being placed on the social and collaborative nature of learning. With this perspective in mind it is intended to research how this collaborative process operates between learners and can be supported and structured by teachers. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development proposed by Vygotsky describes how a task moves from being achievable with the assistance of more knowledgeable others who may be teachers or other learners to being achievable alone. In this study, students’ active experiences concern their social interactions with each other and communities. Within these interactions there may be examples of the facilitation of ideas by more knowledgeable others – including students and lecturers. By focusing on how they collaborate with each other online it may be possible to explore links between information processing theory, learning theory and metacognition.

Research approach

Following Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), this study is based on action research where the researcher acknowledges his role as an active participant in the research process. It is recognized that action research is collaborative, participatory, self critical
and involves critical analysis leading to improvement of practice. Kemmis and McTaggart suggest that:

*Action research develops through the self-reflective spiral: a spiral of planning, acting, (implementing plans), observing (systematically), reflecting ...and then re-planning, further implementation, observing and reflecting.* (p.15)

At different stages in the research process it is necessary to take stock and evaluate the direction to take on the basis of what has been learned at each stage. Action research is responsive to evidence gathered and also to the knowledge that participants bring to research. Participatory action based research allows the participants to have a voice in deciding what is researched. As Taylor and Pettit (2007) argue it is necessary to ensure that our methodologies can challenge dominant discourses and power bases in higher education by ensuring that we involve disparate voices in the research process:

*Those who think and see the world differently find it harder to make themselves heard, whilst institutions that claim to advance teaching and learning in turn become purveyors of information and propagators of knowledge that fits within existing paradigms.*


They suggest that participatory action research can promote social change and quote the suggestion of Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) that:

*On the one hand, such research argues that those who are directly affected by the research problem at hand must participate in the research process, thus democratising or recovering the power of experts. Second, participatory action research recognises that knowledge is socially constructed and embedded . . . Third, participatory action research recognises differing ways of knowing, multiple potential sources and forms of knowledge.* (p. 74)

The current study acknowledged the democratizing nature of participatory action research and sought to include the participants at different stages of the research process by discussing the aims, methods and involving them in analyzing the data. It also recognizes the social construction of knowledge that can produce multiple perspectives. The above
quotation by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) leads to a consideration of power in research which is also a concern in teaching. It must be acknowledged that teachers and students are in different power positions in relation to each other and the recent shift in methodologies has led to greater consideration of this factor in Higher Education. Murray and Savin-Baden (2000) note that in order to implement more learner centred methods such as Problem Based Learning (PBL) there needs to be a change in the role of lecturer from teacher to facilitator of learning. Savin-Baden and Major (2007) note how such a move requires a change in control and authority where shared learning and partnership in learning is a possibility. In a similar way this research project attempted to collaborate with learners and challenge the privileged position of researcher/teacher within the limits imposed by the context. However, it is recognised that the research problem itself was generated by the researcher rather than the students and this limits the extent to which it can be called participatory. A truly participatory research process would allow for the research problem to be proposed by the participants. As this study arose out of the requirements for a M.A. in Third Level Learning and Teaching then a fear existed in the researcher’s mind whether the student/researcher partnership would generate a satisfactory proposal within those limits. Thus, I would feel that it is researcher led with a sincere attempt to encourage participation and engagement in the research.

**Limitations/Delimitations**

As this case study is set in a particular ‘temporal, geographical, organizational, institutional’ context then as Nisbet and Watt (1984) suggest there may be limited generalizability. (quoted in Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2001), p.182). Though case studies present rich descriptions that are easily accessible there is the danger of them being subjective. This study acknowledges the subjectivity of the researcher and has attempted to discuss with colleagues and other researchers different findings in order to validate the research. Patton (2002) suggests that using a variety of different sources of data and methods can strengthen a study through triangulation. The current study uses mixed methods, including questionnaires and interviews as well as quantitative data.

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4 A further discussion of different motivation of researcher and researched comes in a later section
analysis to provide triangulation. Also analysis of the researcher’s perspective is provided through my reflections/journal.

By locating the researcher as a reciprocal agent in the research process it is acknowledged that the research process cannot obtain purely objective data in the positivist sense and merely by choosing to research this group of participants their behaviour may be effected (see Draper (2008). I acknowledge the issue of contamination of the data by the researcher but feel that all data is contaminated and the goal of objectivity is a spurious one. I am led to consider the Hawthorne Effect. The Hawthorne Effect refers to a series of studies in the 1930s where alterations in working conditions resulted in increased output regardless of whether the alterations were good or bad. One would expect that production would increase with improvements in working environment and decrease where conditions were made worse. However, it seemed that any change resulted in increased output. Though there may be a number of alternative explanations I am drawn to the following as it may have resonance with improving learning and teaching. Draper (2008) suggests that one interpretation of the Hawthorne effect is the effect…

...simply of being studied. Aspects of this suggest that the effect did not depend on the particular expectation of the researchers, but that being studied caused the improved performance. This might be because attention made the workers feel better; or because it caused them to reflect on their work and reflection caused performance improvements, or because the experimental situation provided them with performance feedback they didn’t otherwise have and this extra information allowed improvements.(p.7)

I consider that as a teacher one takes advantage of any motivational components in the learning situation. If participants involved in this research reflect on their behaviour with similar beneficial results then it is taken as a bonus rather than something which might be controlled for as in a positivist study. A positivist stance might respond to separate out what aspects are down to research error and what are down to the effect being studied whereas my subjectivist position recognizes that behaviour is multifaceted. Indeed my epistemological perspective has moved to consider the researcher is no longer looking
down the microscope at other people’s behaviour but is both effecting and being effected
by the research, its participants and the context in which it occurs. Someone is looking
back up the microscope.

This brings into question the very nature of social scientific enquiry. What can be
generalized from specific concepts that are studied in specific situations? The debate
between positivist claims on knowledge and the postmodern notion of truth being
multifaceted has resulted in a divide which centres on the methodology for discovering
knowledge. There has been what is called the ‘paradigm debate’ which says that
quantitative and qualitative methodologies are incompatible approaches based on
competing perspectives (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, referred to in Niglas, Kaipanen, and
Kippar (2008). My own feeling in relation to quantitative methods versus qualitative
methods is that a postmodern position would allow for many versions of truth including a
positivist notion but excluding its claims to be a superior version. Much of our decision
making in modern society is based on quantitative methodology with statistical analysis
at its root. For instance, to assess the needs of society in catering for mental illness a
database of persons with mental illness is compiled in order to estimate how to provide
for their health needs. However, the criteria used for classifying mental illness are prone
to measurement error and our decisions have to be acknowledged as based on partial
truths. Our society tends to base its planning decisions on an assumption that the
quantitative data has more credence and this has led to a differential power relationship
between the two approaches. Possibly, the need to shift this power balance has led to
Critical Social Theory taking its oppositional stance to positivist research. If it is accepted
that both quantitative and qualitative methods can provide a multifaceted picture of a
phenomenon under study while maintaining a focus on the differential power assigned to
these explanations then a role for mixed methods research may be plotted.

**Researcher Perspectives**

At the start of the research I found myself questioning my own epistemology. I
studied psychology in the 1970s in the UK when behaviourism was the dominant
discourse and cognitive perspectives were emerging. It was being acknowledged that it
was ok to talk about what might be happening inside the black box. I graduated in 1979
and undertook a postgraduate qualification in primary teaching where the practical, integrated curriculum seemed to make sense as a natural way for children to learn and develop. After working as a detached youth worker in a disadvantaged area of Liverpool and then as a teacher of art in a vocational school in Ireland I again felt that learning is rooted in practical activities of interest to the learner. In my work with adults with mental health difficulties I recognized the social aspects of learning when group work takes place in a supportive framework. As I had returned to study psychology, therapy and special needs in the 1990s and now find myself teaching in Third Level the practical, social and emotional aspects of learning are just as relevant. I can also recognize that the learning and knowledge I accepted as truth in the 1970s can be questioned and challenged. Within psychology today the dominant discourse justifies its position by using positivist notions of a scientific psychology based on objective, testable data and seeks to undermine the more accepting approach that recognizes the multi-faceted nature of human behaviour. My interest in narrative psychology has meant that the impersonal, scientific truth has been given another personal dimension. This would lead the positivist to flavour their data with some human qualitative data while still believing that one version is more meaningful. In terms of social justice and equality, it is important to recognize how claims on knowledge are also products of a particular social, historical context. The different power base of the researcher and researched must be acknowledged in order to avoid unnecessary positioning within different camps. The quantitative versus qualitative divide may be overcome by accepting that there are different ways of knowing and acknowledging the power attached to each. However, I find myself with the quandary: do I still position psychological knowledge based on scientific methods as better than common sense? If knowledge produced in controlled surroundings is only true in those conditions then how can it be generalized to other situations? I was not sure how to resolve this dualism between objective reality and subjective experience and how knowledge is possible if all knowledge is relative. So my decision to use mixed methods was possibly a means to examine these conflicting ideas.

In saying that, I recognize that my decision to examine Coates (2007) model of student engagement was driven by a critical stance to the psychometric approach which appears to me to hide behind the illusory power of statistical methods in deciding truth.
Can constructs be measured without blurring their meaning? Does the evening out of error variance through large samples really get at anything more meaningful than a qualitative examination of what individuals say?

**Researcher Assumptions**

Social constructionist perspectives draw attention to the meanings we attach to terms in a society and how they are used. How does a Professor construct the meaning of ‘passive’ compared to a student? How might a lecturer or student conceptualize ‘community’ today? Crotty (1998) notes how ‘social constructionism emphasizes the hold our culture has on us: it shapes the way in which we see things...and gives us a quite definite view of the world.’ (p.58, quoted in Patton, 2002, p.97). He distinguishes it from social constructivism which focuses on meaning making in the individual mind rather than the collective transmission of meaning. I remain open to either interpretation as I feel that social constructivism is contained in the term social constructionism. Perhaps our societal focus on individual minds is a result of the way our society organizes itself and is culturally determined. Thus, social constructivism is a weaker version of social constructionism in the sense that its focus is narrower.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective at the heart of this study examines social constructivist theory which stresses the interactive nature of learners coming together to create an understanding of the world. Doolittle (1999) describes constructivism as a continuum going from cognitive constructivism to radical constructivism to social constructivism. They all recognize the active nature of constructing knowledge while the former emphasizes the development of information processing abilities to adapt to reality while the latter emphasizes making sense of experience and knowledge arising out of social discourse. They also differ in relation to a knowable external reality with the cognitive constructivist position being that it is possible to create an internal representation of the real world while the radical constructivist feels external reality may exist but is unknowable. Social constructivists feel that knowledge is created by social interaction and language within a specific social context. Doolittle (1999) quotes Bakhtin (1984):
Truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction (p110)

Cooner (2005) in the context of social work students argues that facilitating students to learn how to interact with diverse communities requires a collaborative dialectical constructivist approach. Making reference to Taylor (1996) he makes a link between the pedagogy of multiple perspective taking and students experiencing multiple perspectives in diverse communities (p.377). Later referring to the epistemology of Moshman (1982) he explains the dialectical constructivist perspective:

Here, knowledge development is seen as the interaction between the learner (internal knowledge) and the environment (external knowledge). Basically, learning takes place through a process of building internal models of external structures filtered through and influenced by one’s prior experiences, beliefs, culture and language based upon interactions with others and direct instruction. If knowledge in this instance is information about how to engage with a community to provide appropriate social work services, the dialectical constructivist position would mean that that information can only be obtained through the process of interaction with that community via dialogue bringing to the forefront language, culture and context (Dewey, 1896; Gergen, 1995; Vygotsky, 1986). In this instance knowledge cannot exist in the head of one person alone because it can only be born between people collectively searching for an answer. The resulting answer will be adaptive and socially determined in nature and difficult to be inappropriately applied to all within a given community, hence, potentially reducing the possibilities of negative stereotyping. (p.379)

In the context of the present study this process of dialectical constructivism seems analogous to the social construction of what community means to a student reflecting on their experiences in a collaborative e-learning environment. Thus, it is envisaged that as students engage with themselves and the communities they work with they will be
developing an awareness of issues related to community through discussion, debate, and personal reflection.

The module in Community Based Learning or Service Learning being piloted here is situated in social constructivist thinking and requires students to collaborate together sharing their ideas using both face to face discussion and online discussion boards. The notion of Asynchronous Learning Networks and the use of online reflection as a method for supporting collaboration between students exploring their ideas about working and supporting communities is a vital aspect of the module and an area that is the focus of this study.

**Definitions of Terminology**

As the title of this research project refers to ‘Blended Community Based (Service) Learning’ it would be useful to define these terms. Within the term there are 2 terms requiring attention: ‘Blended Learning’ and ‘Community Based Learning’. Oliver and Trigwell (2005) point out that there is an inconsistency in the many ways the term ‘blended learning’ has been used which has led to confusion or redundancy of meaning. The mixing of face to face learning with e-learning seems a reasonable interpretation but what is so different about sitting at a computer to learn? When people engage with computers the same dynamics operate as occur in face to face interactions. Reynolds and Brannick (2009) compared face to face with technological communication including computer based interaction and found that ‘The small amount of variance attributable to communication mode suggests that people matter more than the machines.’ (p.233). So does the term ‘blended’ have any use if it differentiates little? Oliver and Trigwell suggest that the term ‘blended’ may be redeemed if the focus is shifted from the teacher focus of course design to a focus on the learner’s perspective. It becomes important to recognize the variation in learning in students’ experience. They argue that constructivist learning theory suggests that:

...students will have different experiences of the same context. What it is that teachers intend their students to learn (e.g; through blended learning) may bear little relation to what it is that students actually experience...Actual blended learning would involve students learning
I sense that they are suggesting that we cannot expect students to learn the same thing and should embrace a variety of learning situations with their potential to produce different insights. Likewise, Moallem (2001) acknowledges the variety in knowledge construction by participants in web based courses and points out that ‘Most educators are in agreement that the information encountered and accessed on the web by the learner is not the same as the knowledge constructed’ (p.113). The variation in learning provided in this module involved a design that included a variety of media and spaces for learning including role play, online discussion, lectures, co-ordinating a group exhibition, e-portfolios and working in the community.

Just as the term ‘blended learning’ has been debated, so has the term ‘Community Based Learning’ indicating the contentious nature of the concept. In America and elsewhere the term ‘Service Learning’ has a long history as a location for practical activities carried out by students from all levels of education. A debate has occurred in Ireland recently as attempts have been made to engage students in projects with local communities and establish greater links between Higher Education and society. To discuss Community (Service) Based learning requires a discussion of highly contested terms such as ‘citizenship’, ‘community’ and ‘service’. If they generate such debate one may surmise that there may be underlying notions of conflict, power and identity lurking beneath the surface. My own beliefs see ‘community’ as the location for change and I was also suspicious of the term ‘service’ because of its marketplace origins and the use of ‘Community Service’ in the United Kingdom and USA as part of re-socialising young criminals (e.g; Charles Degelman, Doggett, and Medina, 2002). Boland and McIlrath (2007) suggest that we are in the process of localizing the pedagogy of service learning in the Irish context and promote the term ‘Pedagogies for Civic Engagement’ (PfCE) to avoid the discomfort felt by many academics over the terms ‘Service’ and ‘Community’. While I am persuaded by their arguments for PfCE I feel it is a bit unwieldy and perhaps there needs to be a wider debate to ensure ‘...reciprocity within the learning triad of student, academic and community partners.’ (p.86). In the current study, as one
aspiration was to explore student thinking around community then the term Community Based (Service) Learning was used though I will use all three terms in the text.

**Ethical Considerations**

As it is intended to work with participants and colleagues in my local work situation it is important to respond appropriately to any ethical issues that may arise. One reason for working with students from another course for me was to avoid possible conflict arising from assessment of reflective work. As I am analyzing other students work I can avoid issues arising out of confusion over the roles of teacher and researcher. As students were being assessed for reflection ethical considerations arose around the role of researcher and teacher which led to a decision to move my original focus away from reflection in the research. Cohen et al. (2001) provide useful guidelines in relation to ethical issues. The process of obtaining informed consent requires that participants are given a description of the stages of the research and what is involved and an explanation that their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any stage. Issues concerning the protection of students and any possible psychological harm arising out of the study may be discussed and steps put in place to meet any need arising – for example, access to a Student Counsellor if needed. The issue of anonymity is relevant to the reporting of the whole study since participants may be identified since there is only one course in Fine Art in the Wexford Campus though fictitious names have been assigned to participants mentioned in the text.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Purpose

As the present study is examining the student experience of learning on a pilot blended learning module in the area of Community based learning then a review of relevant literature would cover topics related to e-learning including Asynchronous Learning Networks, online reflection and collaboration as student engagement in learning. Community Based Learning/Service Learning and the theoretical basis underlying Pedagogies for Civic Engagement (PfCE) leads me to a brief discussion of ‘Active Citizenship’.

Conceptual Framework

a. narrative description

As discussed elsewhere the term Pedagogies for Civic Engagement (PfCE) suggests an approach that encompasses related methodologies that can engage learners in practical activities with each other and the community with the aim of creating active engaged citizens. The theoretical basis underlying Problem Based Learning resonates with the practical approach involved in PfCE. The use of the internet and online discussion boards to support knowledge construction assumes students will collaborate in the process and so it is useful to examine the area of e-learning and online collaboration. Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALN) have been suggested as a method to assist individual learners to construct their ideas in their own time from each others contributions to discussion boards. The conceptual framework for the study is shown in Figure 1 and indicates where I see connections between the different conceptual areas of the study.

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5 Definitions of terminology
b. graphic description

![Conceptual Framework for study](image)

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for study**

**Student Engagement**

In ‘The Case for Service Learning’ Zlotkowski (2007) argues that Higher Education can use Service Learning as a tool to harness students predominantly practical learning style to engage them more in their studies and facilitate greater connection with the wider world. He quotes Schroeder (1993) who found that 60% of students prefer a sensing mode of perceiving involving practical, concrete and immediate experience while 40% prefer an intuitive mode of perceiving. He suggests that as 70% of the population at large prefers the practical approach then higher education may be out of step with the majority. It seems that higher education may be forcing its own preferred learning style on learners who prefer a different approach? It may also be wrong for lecturers to attribute a concrete style as being a deficiency in the learner. The methodology of Problem Based Learning and Service Learning offer a pedagogy that can successfully
engage learners and facilitate students need to ‘literally get out of the classroom and begin to learn in unstructured, real-world situations’ (p.39). Problem Based Learning requires real-life scenarios or authentic situations to stimulate students’ enquiry. Reeves, Herrington, and Oliver (2002) suggest that authentic tasks arising out of constructivist philosophy can be designed for online use. Mennin (2007) says: ‘Problems are designed specifically to arouse and focus curiosity and to create a need to know upon which students will act collaboratively and individually.’ (p. 305). Working with real people in the community would seem to fit neatly into this pedagogy.

Zlotkowski makes an argument that the positivist approach of traditional pedagogy has led to a consumer approach to education justified by the dominant discourse of free liberal economics. He quotes Sullivan (2000) contention that the reason education has become ‘a programme of instrumental individualism’ is that it rests on positivist views of knowledge ‘having accepted the argument that ‘real’ knowledge is independent of affect and value judgements’ (Sullivan, 2000, p.29; Quoted in Zlotkowski, 2007, p41). Sullivan also suggests that such positivist views of knowledge hold sway within much of the academic world. The implication is that Community Based Learning requires a radical shift to inclusive pedagogies that effect change in Higher Education as well as society.

As Pedagogies of Civic Engagement (PfCE) explore the link between communities and how students interact with them it implies a broader definition of the term engagement. The term ‘engagement’ can be applied to how a student engages with their study but also has a relevance in the notion of how engaged they are as citizens. If the content of PfCe is engaging with community then this involves a dynamic interaction with the process of learning and how engaged participants become at different stages in a course of learning. Can quantitative methods adequately assess developmental change in learners as they essentially capture data from a snapshot in time? Longitudinal studies of a qualitative nature that attempt to plot changes in students as they go through a course of study would seem to be a useful approach. However, Zlotkowski points out that large scale quantitative surveys of student engagement such as the National Survey of Student Engagement which emphasize traditional knowledge transfer approaches to learning seem to be the accepted methodology (e.g; Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, and Gonyea
Indeed, student engagement is narrowly defined as time spent on educational tasks and this is then causally implicated in student retention. Kuh, et al. (2007) make a distinction between social factors as relating to students leisure time and academic study with an untested assumption that the former contribute to disengaging from study.

These concerns arise at the institutional level but what is happening at the student level of engagement? Some researchers have attempted to devise models of ‘student engagement’ to describe the learner experience while still imposing an institutional perspective on the data. In a large sample of Australian students of higher education H. Coates (2007) employed quantitative methods and sophisticated statistical analyses to 1,051 responses to the Student Engagement Questionnaire Coates (2006) from 17 different lectures in 4 different institutions in 4 different areas of study. Arising out of this he proposed a model of online engagement that distinguishes ‘between the academic and the social dimensions of engagement’ and suggests there are four types of student engagement - intense, collaborative, independent or passive. These labels, he says, refer to styles or states of engagement, rather than to different student types or enduring traits (see table 1).

Yet he then goes on to describe the typical learner who uses an intense or independent style of engagement as the more academic in contrast to the collaborative or passive
student who enjoys the social side of student life. Coates then seeks to align his typology with a model from 1966:

*Although not direct antecedents, earlier university student typologies validate the current model. The very popular model proposed by Clark and Trow (1966, p. 24), for instance, characterizes four student subcultures as combinations of two variables: ‘the degree to which students are involved with ideas and the extent to which students identify with their college’. These broadly resemble the academic and social dimensions which underpin the current model. Furthermore, the academic, collegiate, nonconformist and vocational orientations which Clark and Trow (1966) propose broadly resemble the intense, collaborative, independent and passive engagement styles defined in the current study. The current model also shares a broad correspondence with the typologies of Astin (1993) and Kuh (2001)*

A continuing thread in this appears to be that academic and social are to be separated if students are to gain the deeper insights higher education hopes for. Is there an assumption that knowledge cannot be gained through social interaction or collaboration? There is a contentious linking of ‘vocational orientations’ with ‘passive’ learning style when these may be quite reasonable responses by students to the societal pressure to get a qualification in order to get a job (see Bryson and Hand, 2007). There is also an inconsistency in proposing an engagement style and describing the typical student using each one of them and denying that you are not trying to impose these traits on learners. Coates asks: ‘To what extent is there a tendency by researchers and practitioners to interpret identified styles as stable traits?’ (p.138). Quite a lot it seems when encouraged by large scale institutional research grants which conclude that students haven’t changed much since 1966.

So can we move the focus to the student learner? Bryson and Hand (2007) prefer to think of engagement as a continuum from engaged to disengaged and refer to the notion of alienation in regard to the latter in the work of Mann (2001), (2005). Perhaps the student exhibiting a passive style of engagement is alienated by the ‘foreign culture’ of Higher Education? They suggest that student engagement is multifaceted involving the
relationship between teacher and student, between student and peers, the context of learning and the perception of learning the student brings to study which can foster a sense of belonging and play a part in the developing identity of the learner student. Can we add to that the transformations that take place when a student concentrates on a topic to the extent that they are immersed totally? Work in the early years area has acknowledged this absorption in the task and Goldspink, Winter, and Foster (2007) refer to the role of involvement and well being in the theory of Experiential Education of Laevers (1994, 1999). These authors also note the relevance of Csikszentmihalyi (1990) ‘concept of ‘flow’ (which) has been adopted as the basis for engagement research by several authors (see for example Harmer and Cates, 2004). Flow is defined as the experience of total immersion in an activity because of the intrinsic rewards it offers.’(p.3) Solomonides and Reid (2008) make interesting connections between creativity and engagement in relation to design students and refer to a ‘sense of being’ as central to the development of their transforming identity as design students though engagement with the creative process in a design community:

Engagement and creativity are perceived as integral components of their commitment to transformative learning, to their production of objects and their identity as designers. Intuitively, the students support the notion that engagement and recognition of their creativity is situated within the community of designers (Wenger 1999) where they see themselves as active participants. (p.37)

These authors refer to the notion of liminality devised by Meyer and Land (2005) to describe the transformations that occur when a student is inducted into a subject discipline. These ideas resonate with Barnett and Coate's (2005) model of the engaged curriculum which involves three domains of knowing, acting and being (quoted in Boland and McIlrath (2007). The notion of ‘being’ seems a loose concept but one of value all the same due to its connection with the area of identity. As students move through their course there come about changes as they identify with the area of study thinking in the manner of the artist, engineer, teacher or whatever subject they are studying. At the end they have developed a sense of being an artist or whatever. This
process implicates notions of identity in student engagement and learning and also negates earlier conceptions of vocational orientations being passive forms of engagement.

The role of the teacher in facilitating this identity formation can be acknowledged in the Vygotskian sense of the expert other guiding and questioning the learner though perhaps it requires more of a movement in and out of expert and novice to encourage the students growing confidence with material. To be informed of a student’s researching into a topic requires a teacher to adopt an authoritative, questioning naivety to allow the student to teach what they have found out. Thus, the teacher’s own identity is relevant to engagement as are relationships and communication. Mottet, Matthew, and Myers (2004) note the communication style and approachability of teachers in student engagement:

Thus, one remedy for the disengagement of students from engagement with their teachers may be to encourage those teachers to produce more frequent and more emphatic verbal messages expressing such themes as personal recognition of students, humor, closeness or inclusiveness with students, self-disclosure, willingness to communicate, responsiveness, and caring or appreciation of their students. (p.121-2)

These interpersonal factors may also be operating in student relationships where they learn to manage conflict in communicating and collaborating together.

**Collaborative Learning**

A central tenet of constructivist approaches to learning is the role of students and teachers collaborating in knowledge construction. Innes (2007) summarises the tradition of active learning dating back to Dewey (1938) which sees… ‘useful knowledge as developing through cooperative inquiry in an authentic context within a community of practice. (p.1) As knowledge is seen as arising out of people talking about a shared activity in a particular learning context then dialogue between these participants is the focus of collaborative learning. Fitting in with Vygotsky’s notion that knowledge arises out of social interaction and that thought develops out of internalized speech we can see that collaboration involves a consideration of the interplay between language and social behaviour including group processes. Participants in a collaborative learning situation
will produce and interpret utterances in relation to the task and internalize some of these in their thinking. Some of this can be accessed in asking for reflection but I would suggest that what is produced is again subject to the same dialogic processes as the individual attempts to make sense of their experience. Dillenbourg (1999) says in attempting to define collaborative learning:

*The broadest (but unsatisfactory) definition of collaborative learning' is that it is a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together. (p.1)*

In considering the communicative and social aspects of collaborative learning we are drawn again to challenge the aforementioned distinction between academic and social forms of knowledge. This is highlighted in the following reference Dillenbourg makes:

"... research paradigms built on supposedly clear distinctions between what is social and what is cognitive will have an inherent weakness, because the causality of social and cognitive processes is, at the very least, circular and is perhaps even more complex" (Perret-Clermont, Perret and Bell, 1991, p. 50). Quoted in Dillenbourg (1999) p.2

I recognize a resonance with the developmental psychology I teach which acknowledges the interaction of cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional influences on development. Our education system still distinguishes the cognitive as being the more academic. Can collaboration between learners produce greater insight and deeper learning? Innes (2007) feels that high quality discourse is difficult to achieve and reported little evidence of dialogic communication in his study of a problem based group or of the kind of scaffolding from more knowledgeable learners. He notes that students may avoid dialogue as it takes too much time and refers to Mintrop (2004) who suggests that students are governed by the ‘ideology of efficiency’ and ‘tend to divide the task to get the work done quickly, rather than seeing the value of dialogic communication’ (p.4).

**E-learning**

Much of the pedagogy based on constructivist theory has also been used in the design of e-learning environments. Following from the previous discussion of social

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6 Many reflective templates propose this dialogue with self Hatton and Smith (1995)
aspects of learning it has been noted that the designing of online courses should incorporate what Volet and Wosnitsa (2004) refer to as social affordances. They note:

*Like in face-to-face learning settings, students’ engagement in online learning is enhanced by social affordances engineered by the teacher. In this context, social affordances would refer to any social elements of the learning design and environment that contribute to facilitating students’ learning.* (p3).

However, they question whether new meanings were negotiated in a social constructivist sense in their study of online collaboration between students in Australia and Germany. Using interaction analysis devised by Gunawardena, Lowe, and Anderson (1997) they analyzed asynchronous discussion and synchronous chat and noted that the level of interactions was limited to social interchange rather than negotiation of new meanings possibly because there were less disagreements to prompt them. Some of the Australian participants had expectations related to acquiring knowledge so were they primed to interact in this way rather than dialogue for new meaning? Tallent-Runnels, et al. (2006) report Kanuka and Anderson (1998) who also found little negotiated meaning or knowledge construction as the level of dialogue did not rise. Tallent-Runnels, et al. (2006) point to a difficulty with implementing Vygotskyian theory if the level of discussion does not challenge student thinking as ‘Students learn only when their current view of knowledge is challenged, reformed, and synthesized through their interaction with others.’ In their review of online courses they also found that:

*Asynchronous communication seemed to facilitate in-depth communication (but not more than in traditional classes), students liked to move at their own pace, learning outcomes appeared to be the same as in traditional courses, and students with prior training in computers were more satisfied with online courses.* (p.1)

The current study may provide data relevant to this vital aspect of learning theory in relation to supporting online knowledge construction. How can students collaborate in small learning groups and challenge and promote ideas in this way? Is it possible to create deeper learning?
Asynchronous Learning Networks

The term Asynchronous Learning Network (ALN) refers to the use of online learning communities where students can access discussion groups or Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) without the necessity of being in the same place at the same time. As modern life has many demands on time students can access learning material at times of their own choice or contribute to group learning in their own time. Hiltz and Wellman (1998) suggest that modern online communities can support social relationships without the requirement of geographical proximity. They feel that they are also useful in supporting collaborative learning:

ALNs are best at enriching educational options when they serve as a way to create the feeling of a true “class” or group of people learning together and to structure and support carefully planned collaborative learning activities that constitute the assignments for a course. Emphasizing group or cooperative efforts among faculty and students, collaborative learning stresses that the educational process occurs through the active participation of students and instructors in an environment that facilitates peer interaction, evaluation, and cooperation. (p.12)

These authors also note the arguments between those who are for or against Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and point out that many courses using CMC also take place in a specific locality and use face to face communication. Holmes (2005) reports that text based discussion boards offer opportunities ‘for educational researchers to actively analyse discussion threads in order to determine if deep learning is facilitated in this new learning medium (Meyer, 2004).’ (p.117) There has been some questioning of the effectiveness of online learning. Referring to research by Angeli, Valanides, and Bonk (2003) who report little evidence of critical thinking and found most contributions were social interactions, clarifications or unsupported statements. This contrasted with K. Meyer (2004) who reported 32% -54% of responses to be in higher order categories. Holmes (2005) herself found 50% of postings were of higher order using the SOLO taxonomy developed by Biggs and Collis (1982) and noted the important role of e-moderator (teacher) in promoting student engagement with e-learning environment.
Gerry Stahl (2006) in his book *Group Cognition: Computer Support for Building Collaborative Knowledge* synthesizes the ideas of the social construction of knowledge through online collaboration. He points out the dominance of individualistic approaches to thinking which dominate attempts to construct ideas through group cognition:

As much as the writings on situated action, distributed cognition, social constructivism, activity theory, social practice, and other theories have foregrounded the social nature of learning and thinking, it is still hard to overcome our individualistic conceptual traditions and come to terms with group learning or group cognition. (p.348).

Stahl (2009b) outlines how social chat including off task behaviour by some learners may contribute to a group solving of math problems even where it seems that one individual is more focused on the task. Drawing on the ethnomethodological approach of Garfinkel (1967) and the conversation analysis of Sacks (1992; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974) he devises a methodology for analyzing chat rooms of students working on maths problems. In examining the data his research team note how proposals are responded to by other group members and delineates between ‘expository narrative’ and ‘exploratory inquiry’ and their effects on collaboration which may be useful in relation to the analysis of discussion boards in this study. Stahl argues that the unit of analysis is not the individual but the small group and how it creates social order through temporal space, joint problem space and interaction space:

...we try to understand how collaborative experiences are structured as interpersonal interactions. Our focus is not on the individuals as subjective minds, but on the social group as constituted by the interactions that take place within the group. (Stahl (2009b) p.3)

In further support of his argument he makes a radical call for a new science of group cognition:

While answers to many questions in computer-mediated interaction have been formulated largely in terms of individual psychology, questions of collaborative experience require consideration of the group as the unit of analysis. Naturally, groups include individuals as contributors and interpreters of content, but the group interactions have structures and
elements of their own that call for special analytic approaches.... When
groups work well, they can succeed in accomplishing high-order cognitive
tasks—like inquiry, problem-solving, generalization and insight—as a
group.... We call this group cognition (Stahl, 2006b, p.4)

It seems to be a legitimate desire to acknowledge what individuals bring to collaboration
and examine what happens at the group level of analysis to maximize the potential for
learning together through online communities.

**Active Citizenship**

Online communities and communities of practice reflect changes in the way we
conceptualize community as well as our learning spaces. Much of the public debate about
changes in community in Irish society has been in the context of declining values linked
to the perception of rising crime and vandalism. R. Taylor (2007) points out that
‘citizenship’ is a highly contested term and has been interpreted according to the
dominant forces of the particular time. So far in Ireland our responses rested the solution
to social issues on the individual with an emphasis on volunteering rather than any
genuine desire to promote collective social change. At a recent conference in Ireland
Professor Michael Cuthill (2009) responded to questions from Irish academics
concerning students volunteering to work in community projects by saying that it is not
an effective student motivator based on his experience in Australia. Perhaps we should
not make assumptions that our students will automatically volunteer to make our society
better. It would be important to explore student ideas about community in Ireland. How
do they construct their ideas about community? Is volunteering part of their
conceptualization of community work?

As Prilleltensky and Gronick (1994) note within individual explanations in the
Social Sciences predominate in right wing conservative government contexts and could
explain this emphasis on the individual responses to community participation. Likewise,
the notion of *self efficacy* has situated poor academic performance within the individual
according to Elliott III and Sherraden, (2006) and perhaps there is a need to consider
*collective efficacy* of the Institution in terms of ourselves, the learners and the institution.
Carroll, Rosson, and Zhou (2005) examined *collective efficacy* and noted factors such as
age, education and extroversion interacted with activism, informedness and belonging in relation to citizen participation in a community development project. As a teacher and as a citizen I recognize the need to be active, informed and to belong. My efforts to encourage learners to be the same require a collective efficacy which includes both institutional support and coherent government policy. It may be useful to examine how individual students construct their ideas of community through their experience of learning in this module particularly in relation to collaboration with each other.

**Summary**

A review of related literature has highlighted the role of Problem Based learning and related pedagogies in Pedagogies for Civic Engagement (PfCE) and noted the dominance of positivist approaches to student engagement. The role of collaborative knowledge construction has been proposed for online learning environments but remains problematic as some evidence suggests that dialogue does not reach the more challenging levels required for knowledge construction. Links are made between active citizenship with its focus on the individual and the political and social context of Ireland with a call for developing collective efficacy. Of particular relevance to this study are issues around collaborative learning and how students’ ideas about community develop.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The current study represents an action research case study of the implementation of a new blended learning module in Community Based (Service) Learning on a Fine Art degree course in the Wexford Campus of the Institute of Technology, Carlow. As there is an element of novelty in the introduction of this course to a Fine Art programme it was anticipated that things will change during the course and tutors will respond to these changing needs. In that sense, the researcher intended to document what Adelman et al (1980) describe as ‘the study of an instance in action’ (quoted in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000. p. 181). As an active member of the team that designed the module I cannot describe myself as a detached observer. I would like to support my colleagues as they adapt to the situation and this suggests that an action research stance would be suitable. McNiff and Whitehead (2005) offer two reasons for doing action research: to improve practice and to generate theory and this study intended to contribute to theory on how students construct their ideas through collaborative learning group tasks (p.3). To that end it was planned to employ a cyclical process of data collection-analysis-action-review during three stages at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the module. My original aim was to examine dynamic changes in learning during a course of study. An attempt was made to make the research participatory and involve the students in analyzing their own data and sharing knowledge and insights gained at each stage. An outline of the research cycles is presented in the Action Research Flow Chart in Figure 3.
Figure 3: Action Research Flow Chart

Stage 1
Students rate own contributions to discussion board. Lecturers rate contributions. Results of inter rater agreement between lecturers and students.

Stage 2
Feedback results of inter rater agreement between lecturers and students. Discussion of student engagement face to face. Reflections of process.

Stage 3
Group analysis of later discussion thread to examine for more collaboration. Discuss any further ideas arising from learning experience.

Stage 4
Examine students understanding of service learning, community, online learning, collaboration, reflection, what they have learned in focus group session. Also tutor experience.
As the research proceeded it was decided to use questionnaires and interviews in stage 4 rather than focus groups to examine the students’ experience of the module for reasons outlined below. As the student group were busy with course work at the time the analysis of the later thread took place in stage 4 and was carried out by a tutor and independent lecturers.

**Overview of methodology**

The methodology included a quantitative investigation of online postings to discussion boards and an inter rater reliability of coding of postings between students and lecturers. A qualitative analysis of the discussion threads was also carried out to explore collaborative knowledge construction. A questionnaire was given to the students to get their views on a number of course related topics and this was followed up by more in depth interviews that focused on how they construct their ideas about working in the community. A quasi-experimental testing of Coates (2007) model of student engagement in a participatory framework allowed the student group to learn about the ways they engaged with discussion boards. Qualitative methods were employed in a participatory action research framework whereby results of data analysis were fed back to students and discussed in relation to relevant research on student engagement in the literature. These sessions were more information sharing sessions rather than the more formal structured focus groups as I was concerned with the difficulty of capturing the conversation especially when there was an imbalance of contributions with some who did not speak as much as others. Kitzinger (1994) noted in a review of 40 focus group studies the lack of reference to conversations or any quotations from what people had said.

Is this mixed methods research? Cresswell and Plano Clark (2007) define mixed methods research as ‘a research design with a methodology and a method...As a methodology, it involves collecting, analyzing and mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches at many stages in the research process, from the initial philosophical assumptions to the drawing of conclusions.’ (p.18). At the outset my approach could be called pragmatic in the mould of what Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) call the third movement in mixed methods research. Bergman suggests mixed methods research may avoid the straw men of the qualitative – quantitative divide by abandoning the
assumptions behind each without claiming ‘to bridge the unbridgeable gap between positivism and constructivism’ (p.19). As I reflect now I decided that the action research would dictate the pragmatism of my research decisions by allowing flexibility in the choice of appropriate methodology at different stages rather than a rigid, pre-planned mixed methods research design.

In using a study from quantitative research and analyzing it in a participatory action research framework I have chosen to apply qualitative methodology to quantitative data. In pursuing a quasi-experimental examination of the quantitative research on student engagement I have temporarily accepted the assumptions of positivist research. I adhere to the conventions of presenting data using numbers, charts and statistical data which can be interpreted by the reader, other researchers or the academic world in their own frameworks or worldviews. A conventional research procedure is to check inter-rater agreement to quantify how much credence to give to how items are rated by researchers. In the spirit of empirical inquiry I was interested to see if Coates (2007) typology is something that people agree on. Does that make me a positivist researcher? I was testing out a hypothesis true - though a more valid quantitative research design would have had a larger sample with experimental and control groups. In relation to positivist methods it is the error variance in measurement that interests me. That error variance is situated in both researcher and researched variables which are the things that a positivist study likes to control for. In this study error variance is located in the different ways that students and lecturers assign the terms passive, intense, independent and collaborative – the low inter-rater reliability. So this seems to be a qualitative perspective using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Can data produced qualitatively be evidence to contradict quantitative data? I have chosen to embed quantitative data in my qualitative study and invite other interpretations as well as questioning of my interpretation. The social constructionist philosophy informing my perspective allows me to accept multiple worldviews – to accept that there may be something in the experience of 16 people – and that I may perceive it and interpret it from my perspective as teacher/researcher. I may also miss other possible interpretations. I am at ease with variation in knowledge construction.
I find myself returning to the paradigm debate mentioned earlier and attempt to tease out where I stand. Niglas, et al. (2008) seek their route out of the dualism of a physical reality and socially constructed reality by noting the blurring of the boundary between ontology and epistemology. They argue for ‘a soft ontology approach which enables one to explore the reality, both ‘real’ and constructed, from multiple perspectives’ (p.178). My position is that epistemology is rooted in language which places constructions on my perception of the world so any analysis of what exists takes place in the framework imposed by language. Language, culture and social practice determine how we talk about what exists or does not exist and we can agree the rules to judging what is useful. In that sense, some data was produced as a result of social interactions on a research study which consists of verbal expressions either in discussion boards or in questionnaire data or in interview responses. In engaging with participants in the context of this research study a text of the conversation was produced which reveals our attempts to negotiate meaning from experience. My perspective accepts these discourses are representations of how some people view the world and may express commonality or difference with others sharing the same experience. My methodology allows me to explore and interrogate the data in relation to the social practices and cultural meanings it may contain. In the interviews with students I have chosen to examine how each individual talks about working in the community and attempt to understand how they construct their ideas about community.

**Demographic Data**

The participants in this study were 13 students, on the 3rd year of a B.A. (Honours) degree in Fine Art at the Wexford campus of IT Carlow, 2 lecturers and the main researcher. There were 6 males and 7 females with a majority of mature students (10:3). The first stage of the research involved explaining the purposes of the research and gaining ethical consent from participants. Some issues arose in the early meetings in relation to my presence influencing the research and I acknowledged this aspect and explained that in my view all research can be subjective and biased and the use of action research may help to improve the module in the future. After ethical consent was gained
from the participants the first stage of analyzing contributions to the discussion board took place at an afternoon lecture.

Method

1. Examining the model of online student engagement

As I wished to examine how students collaborate together throughout the duration of the module the 1st online discussion thread was chosen to look at and compare with a later thread. The 1st thread was produced at one of the early sessions where the goal was to get students to learn how to post a comment and to promote the social aspects of learning together. Having started the module in face to face sessions using a role play the content would be expected to relate to that and be more in the form of social chat with less in depth comments. By engaging the students in analyzing their own data there was an opportunity for them to become more aware of the content and also how collaborative they were – possibly influencing future collaborative behaviour and postings. Coates (2007) noted that asking students to think about their learning can effect their engagement when he says ‘As Kuh (2001) notes, simply responding to student engagement questionnaires provides students with an opportunity to reflect actively on university study.’ (p.135) In this case a classroom based activity related to their own learning may be a more engaging process than a 78 item, online questionnaire. Each posting was typed up on separate pieces of paper and made anonymous. A selection of 40 items was made and each statement was required to be placed in different categories: Independent, Collaborative, Intense or Passive. The floor was sectioned using large white tape and labeled as in Figure 4.

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7 See Appendix A
Figure 4: Floor layout for group analysis of 1st discussion thread

7 participants and 2 lecturers (a colleague and I) worked in small groups of 3 deciding where to place each statement according to the categories: collaborative, independent, intense, passive. The process itself was an attempt to create the conditions for collaboration and construction of meaning in the social constructivist sense. Some of the discussion that arose was noted in the researcher’s journal. After agreement was reached on the position of the items they were placed in envelopes labeled appropriately and taken away for the data to be recorded in an excel spreadsheet. To examine for the interrater reliability of the 4 categories 2 independent lecturers were asked to assign the postings using the same typology on their own without discussion. This took place in the researcher’s office and the data was similarly recorded. In an attempt to continue the participatory nature of the research a feedback session took place in the middle of the module with the students where results from this first thread analysis were discussed as well as related literature.

To see if more collaboration took place later in the course, it was decided to examine a later thread selected from the period in the middle of the module. The 2nd discussion thread was selected from a number of different topics and contained 20
postings that took place over a period of 5 weeks\textsuperscript{8}. The criteria for choosing this thread was that they would come from the middle period of the module as I was interested in seeing dynamic changes in contributions and also to select a discrete topic from the selection of threads available. The students were also contributing to a variety of other discussion topics at the same time as can be seen in Figure 9. As the students were engaged in other course work it was not possible to replicate the group analysis and so a lecturer who was delivering the course and 2 independent lecturers rated the postings on their own using the same categories: Independent, Collaborative, Intense or Passive.

2. Feedback with students

As students were in face to face and online learning situations I provided feedback through the blackboard discussion boards and in class sessions on the progress of the research. After analyzing the data and producing the results of the analysis of the discussion boards outlined above a feedback session was held with the students to discuss student engagement. As well as presenting this information the researcher discussed related research including a comment on Coates (2007) by Bryson referred to in Morosanu and Den Outer (2008) and an article about the role of being and student engagement in art and design students by Solomonides and Reid (2008). It was intended to involve the students in recording the main points of this session as a focus group. However, as the discussion developed the researcher invited the participants to post the major insights to the discussion board. Three students did this and their comments can be viewed in Appendix E. The data for these sessions also includes the field journal notes of the researcher.

3. Questionnaire to examine the student experience of course

As it was intended to examine how the students experienced the course and some of the class discussions were dominated by a few students a questionnaire was compiled and administered at one of the afternoon sessions. The questionnaire was completed by 6 participants – a 46% completion rate and a summary analysis is presented in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{8} See Appendix B
4. Interviews to explore further the student experience of the course

At this stage I returned to the subjective nature of my research and how can I persuade the academic community of the benefits of this type of module. I found that to stand up to the academic audience required a self-questioning and discipline to ensure that I interviewed the students who had engaged less or been negative as well as the more positive students. The extract from my journal indicates my reasoning in moving away from using a focus group to interviewing participants:

_I am conscious of a skeptic questioning the research so considered what would it take to convince them of its validity. As my perspective admits to my own personal bias is this enough? I am interested in reporting the module going well and students engaging – what about the problems issues and students who do not engage? This makes me consider Popper’s refutability principle – I should interview students who do not take full part in module._

(extract from journal 17th March, 2009)

Having made this decision as a result of reflecting on the observations gained so far, I carried out interviews with 7 participants ensuring that I included those who had openly expressed negative views. The interviews took place in a private office and lasted from 25 to 40 minutes and used the questions presented in Appendix C as a base to explore ideas in an open-ended conversation. A particular focus for my enquiry was how the students had developed their ideas about community as a result of the module.

Analysis and Synthesis of data

The data produced by the study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature consisting of statistical data relating to discussion boards, researcher’s field journal, questionnaire responses and thematic content analysis of interviews. Qualitative data is provided by the researchers field notes journal, questionnaires and interview transcripts. It is intended to present the findings in 5 areas:

1. Data in relation to the first stage of analyzing student engagement in discussion boards will enable conclusions to be drawn about how the terms collaborative, passive, independent and intense are assigned meaning by students and lecturers. The data related to coding of the discussion threads using Coates (2007) typology will be presented in
terms of how many items were placed in different categories by the student group and by the independent lecturers in the 1st thread. Inter-rater reliability will indicate how much agreement there is in assigning these terms to discussion board postings. Data related to the 2nd thread will indicate how they were coded by lecturers. Descriptive statistics will show the total amount of postings in relation to the type of topic. This data and analysis will inform conclusions about how student engagement typologies are interpreted by students and lecturers and whether collaboration developed.

2. Qualitative exploration of the discussion threads will examine the notion of student collaboration and construction of meaning and knowledge. Following Gerry Stahl (2006) an attempt to apply an adapted version of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1992; Sacks, et al. 1974) and Discourse Analysis will explore how group members construct meaning through their online postings. Bryman (2008a) describes the main aspects of Conversation Analysis which examines in detail how speakers establish social order in their interactions. Its focus is on the here and now context of speech which helps speakers to extract meaning from what has been said and requires analysis of the detailed transcripts including pauses and false starts. Focus is placed on turn-taking, adjacency pairs, preference organization, accounts and repairs when communication breaks down. In the discussion threads the detail that Conversation Analysts require is not available as these are not ordinary conversations. However, my purpose in using a modified version of Conversation Analysis is to see if there are any factors which contribute or inhibit online communication and collaboration. I also feel that the context includes other sociocultural factors which Conversation Analysts exclude in their focus on the immediate speech context. The participants can see each others names when they are posting - their knowledge of each other and how they interpret what they say or do not say may be influenced by that. It is also worth noting that participants in verbal exchanges do have awareness of such things as gender, age and social position (see Yates, 2001, for a review of the role of gender in Computer Mediated Communication). I find it hard to agree with a methodology that excludes this from research.

It seems that certain aspects of Discourse Analysis would seem useful to augment my approach. Discourse Analysis fits within a social constructionist perspective as it recognizes how language is used to construct a view of the world and the methods
employed to persuade others to accept it. Gill (1996) points out that the ‘rhetorical nature of texts directs our attention to the ways in which all discourse is organized to make itself persuasive’ (p.143) As I construct my view of Discourse Analysis with the aim of persuading the reader of my interpretation of the data the next sentence does not help much: ‘It is much easier to explicate the central tenets of discourse analysis than it is to explain how actually to go about analyzing discourse.’(p.143). I would like to avoid the danger Bryman (2008a) alludes to in the overuse of the term ‘discourse analysis’ where it ‘becomes too broad to be meaningful’ (p.511). My purpose here would be to pragmatically select aspects of both Conversation Analysis and Discourse Analysis that enable me to highlight what is going on in the data I have collected and relate it to my research question. This would involve attending to such things as the interpretative repertoires employed by communication partners, the action involved in using language, the purposeful uses of language including the rhetorical and persuasive intent as well as what is happening in the actual conversation exchange.

3. Fieldwork journals with feedback sessions will provide qualitative data about ideas generated in group discussion with students and explanation of research decisions.

4. Questionnaire data analysis will provide information regarding the student experience of the module and involved the researcher collating responses under various headings.

5. Though the interview transcripts regarding the student experience of the module produced rich data on a variety of topics (such as reflection, blogging etc.) I decided to use my hybrid version of Conversation Analysis/Discourse Analysis to examine how the student participants constructed their ideas on ‘community’. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe ‘data reduction’ as the ‘process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data’. (p.11). They acknowledge this does not necessarily mean quantifying data and Patton (2002) describes the use of ‘substantive significance’ instead of statistical significance where the analyst makes an argument in presenting their findings and the reader can judge how coherent it is (p.467). As a social constructionist I am interested in how different perspectives emerge and I am ‘more interested in deeply understanding specific cases than in hypothesising about generalizations across time and space’ (Patton, 2002, p.546). Nunkoosing (2005)
debates the problems with interviews such as power and consent and notes there is a continuing performance where the self is being defined by both interviewer and interviewee:

In the interview, the self is also engaged in a performance. However, this performative act has no beginning or end; it is a continually changing ontological state for the creation-destruction of competing discourses and desires, in which selfhood is artfully transacted into being. Because each interview is a unique event, this selfhood, for both of the actors in the interview drama, is constantly being created and recreated. (p.706)

Attention is drawn to the notion of identity being defined in the interview process through positions being argued for and justified. I am forced to recognize how my own identity is defined as I argue and justify my own social construction of ‘community’. The social context of making these interviews as an active promoter of Community Based Learning means I cannot avoid ‘the interview being swamped by the interviewer’s own categories and constructs’ (Potter (1998) p.135). I do not see this as a problem as my questions in conversation analysis terms are proposals inviting responses and can be subject to the same analysis. A fitting methodology would examine how I, as an interviewer, negotiate meaning with the interviewee. I am very much part of the interview which is a contrived social situation recognized as such by the participants. To focus on the detail of how speech was formed as in pure Conversation Analysis seems to me to emanate from another perspective located in positivist assumptions derived from other areas of psychology and seems inappropriate. I am interested in the arguments made and the words and phrases used by the interviewee and myself in this co-construction of meaning. Thus these transcripts were prepared with attention to the words spoken with detail such as pauses, intake of breath omitted.

Using this Discourse Analysis approach the interview transcripts will be explored with a focus on the student’s ideas about working in the community. As a researcher I am particularly interested in how these ideas may be transformed by learning experiences in collaboration with other students and by practical experience.
Issues of trustworthiness

Transcripts from interviews and questionnaire responses as well as the researcher’s field notes journal are available for verification in the Appendices.

Limitations

The current study has a specific focus on a small group of students (n=13) on a pilot programme located in a specific context and may produce valuable qualitative data which may be difficult to generalize to the wider context of Higher Education. Widmer, Hirschi, Serdult, and Vogeli (2008) highlight the small n problem of case studies and they note the investigation of longitudinal phenomena through ‘case studies dealing with a process defined as a sequence of interrelated events in a given context’ (p.151). As this study aimed to focus on the dynamic processes of students’ learning and engagement in a specific context then this longitudinal aspect is a merit when compared to point in time examinations of how students engage in learning. Is there anything to be learned in this specific context that can be generalized to other similar situations? Optimistically, Stahl (2009a) notes:

*The analysis of unique case studies can result in the description of social practices that are generalizable (Maxwell, 2004). The methods developed in specific situated encounters are likely to be typical of a broad range of cases under similar conditions. (p.3)*

The criteria for generalizability should not rely on the quantitative argument that a large number of cases will support an interpretation as Popper (1959) drew attention to a skeptical approach in framing research inquiry and the value of finding the cases where general rules do not apply.

Participatory action research: methodological issues

The nature of action research requires adapting to changing circumstances and directions caused by the messiness of research in the real world. In the current study it was intended to use quantitative methods to test the validity of Coates (2007) model of online student engagement in the first stage and then use focus groups to explore qualitatively how students learned on the module. In reality this changed as the involvement of students in analyzing their own data led to interesting discussions that
were difficult to formalize in a structured focus group session. At two different stages in the research I asked the students to post any ideas and thoughts they had during the feedback sessions up on the discussion board as a way of capturing this data but this was limited to three postings after the first stage and one posting later. I had hoped for more interaction and sharing of ideas but it seems that these students were less interested than the researcher in learning different methods of the research process. In fact, I began to question the notion of participatory action research as a result of reflecting on different motivations of students and teachers/researchers as this extract from my notes indicates:

**Competing goals:** Though I planned to collaborate with participants I question how participatory my research is in actuality. If I reflect on the matter it seems that there are different goals between the postgraduate student researcher and the undergraduate student participants:

**Limits to participation:** As I have a more in depth knowledge of the topic of learning and teaching and am producing research into specific questions that interest me then there is a limit to the level which I can describe the research as participatory. I am drawing them into a body of knowledge and sharing the research results as they occur to assist their own insight into the ways they learn.

The students have different goals – to complete their course of study – which compete with the researcher’s goals – to examine how they learn though I am aware of the role of metacognition in learning students are still in that process of discovery.

**Motivation and time:** The students are less motivated to become involved in this research since their interests concern their art course and the benefits of this research knowledge are not immediately apparent. Consequently, student participation in the research has been influenced by motivation, time and their own interest.

*(Field notes journal, May 29th 2009)*

I think a consideration of the different expectations and motivations of participants is also worthwhile when students are asked to work with groups in the community. It is a goal to
create participatory frameworks where different synergies can work to their own mutual benefit. The student motivated by course requirements may need to adjust their expectations of commitment from community participants who have other goals. Awareness of motivating factors for students should influence our course design in this area.

**Summary**

The mixed methods approach adopted in this participatory action research case study was outlined as well as the planned stages of the research and the research decisions made. A description of the data analysis to be employed detailed the production of descriptive statistics on how the terms passive, intense, independent and collaborative are assigned to online postings by students and lecturers. A modified Conversation Analysis/Discourse Analysis of qualitative data from discussion threads and interview transcripts will be used to examine student collaboration to achieve deeper learning and how students construct their ideas of community.
Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

Purpose

As I struggle with deciding how to present the findings in the most understandable form I am encouraged by difficulties experienced by others in the field. Cresswell and Plano Clark (2007) suggest that findings from mixed methods research should be presented in a way that integrates findings from both qualitative and quantitative parts of a study. As explained earlier my research design prefaced action research over the requirements of academic conformity. Indeed does the academic community actually do what it says. Bryman (2008b) performed a content analysis of a selection of mixed methods research and found the presentation of findings was integrated in only 47%. He notes that the difficulty may occur ‘…because the quantitative and the qualitative components do feel as though they are either like different levels of reality or are answering somewhat different research questions’ (p.99). I share the difficulty in presenting the results from different parts of this study and hope to tell the story of the research to allow the reader to critically examine my research decisions and interpretations.

Research Directions

At the beginning of this research I intended looking at reflection, community and how students responded to a blended module involving collaboration in both online and face to face interactions. As I became interested in online learning I decided to explore the usefulness of Coates (2007) model of online student engagement with a small group of students. Does his large scale quantitative study have validity in the everyday experience of individual learners? If the constructs ‘passive’, ‘intense’, ‘collaborative’, ‘independent’ are shown to have validity when extracted from questionnaire data by sophisticated statistical procedures such as cluster analysis, discriminant analysis and statistical modeling, then do they have construct validity in the context of student learning? Do they describe students’ online behaviour? Do they make sense to students themselves? In a sense this study attempts to test out the model in a small study to see if these terms make sense to individual learners. At the same time as a researcher I was interrogating my own position in the research. If I believed in the social construction of
knowledge through collaboration could that take place between researcher and participants? There was also a playing around with roles as the authority of researcher was eschewed and invitations to share research decisions made. My background in psychology directed me to examine inter-rater reliability in how these terms are assigned as it is a common practice to validate use of a term. A high agreement between users of a term indicates the term has a shared meaning – so is there a shared meaning attached to these terms? Do students share that meaning with lecturers?

Findings

1. Model of student engagement
The results of the group analysis of the postings to the 1st discussion thread are presented in Figure 3 in comparison to the ratings of 2 independent lecturers. The data represents the number of items placed in each category: passive, intense, collaborative or independent.

![1st thread: Number of items in each category](image)

**Figure 3: 1st thread comparison of group to independent lecturers**

Visual inspection of the data in Figure 3 indicates that the category collaborative was assigned more than other categories by all raters. The student group assigned the independent category next and the passive least. There was a similarity between the ratings of the student group and one lecturer in the number of items placed in each category.

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9 Raw data on the 2 discussion threads is presented in Appendices
category. As these refer to the number of items an attempt was made to see how much agreement there was between ratings made by the group and those made by independent lecturers. In other words did the group of students place the same items in each category as the independent lecturers? To reach a percentage figure on agreement between raters the number of items placed in the same category by each was divided by the total number of items to be rated. Comparisons between the Student Group and Lecturer 1, Student Group and Lecturer 2, Lecturer 1 and Lecturer 2, and between Student Group and both lecturers are shown in Figure 5.

![1st thread Inter-Rater Agreement](image)

**Figure 5: 1st thread Inter-Rater Agreement**

Visual inspection of Figure 5 indicates that though the independent lecturers agreed with each other in 33% of cases there was wider variation between each individual lecturer and the student group. One lecturer showed higher agreement with the student group (35%) while another lecturer agreed with the student group 18% of the time. This data indicates that there is the possibility for misunderstanding between students and lecturers in the use of the term collaborative and also less shared meaning of the terms independent, passive and intense.

In order to examine later threads to see if online collaboration increased as the module proceeded a selection of 20 postings were taken from a later discussion board forum and rated in a similar manner by a tutor involved in the course delivery and 2 independent lecturers working individually.
Visual inspection of Figure 6 indicates a broadly similar pattern of assigning the terms collaborative, passive, independent and intense with again collaborative being the highest. Though it appears to be slightly higher it would be wrong to conclude from this data that there was a higher rate of collaboration in the 2nd thread. As the conditions for rating the 2 threads were not the same caution is required when comparing and the use of statistical testing for significance is not justified.

**Figure 6: Comparison of 1st and 2nd threads**
Quantitative analysis of discussion boards

As it was noted that students were more engaged collaboratively with online discussion boards which involved a practical activity such as organizing the exhibition in the community then a quantitative analysis of discussion board activity was undertaken. A total of 646 postings were made to 7 different topic areas as represented in Figure 7.

![Total Number of Postings (n=646)](chart)

Figure 7: Total postings to different topics

Visual inspection of Figure 7 shows that just under half of the postings were to the 3rd year Professional Practices Exhibition forum and a quarter were to the Community Based learning/Ethics forum. It seems that collaboration was highest when students were engaged on a practical task. This is strong evidence that significant student collaboration can be promoted by relating it to practical activities that are meaningful to students.

2. Qualitative Analysis of 1st discussion thread

Having explored the discussion threads using Coates (2007) typology and found some indication of collaboration but with a low agreement on the terms used a qualitative examination of the data may reveal more of what is going on. As I examine the 1st discussion thread the preponderance of social chat can be noted. This was expected as the postings took place at the induction session in the computer lab where students were

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10 See Appendix A
being familiarized with how to post. Thus some of this dialogue was produced synchronously in a computer lab session and resembles the conditions for chat rooms though some offline communication was taking place as they were also in the same location. The social aspect of online learning has been well documented and the course was designed to facilitate social interaction using the computer in the first stage of the course. As a major criticism of online learning is the difficulty of collaborating to construct knowledge it is intended to focus my examination of the postings on the collaborative aspect and how meaning is negotiated. In the context of higher education where debates around surface or deep learning abound, is it possible for group discussion to be pushed to develop insight? If we create the conditions for students to communicate, dialogue, debate, construct can they do it?

Stahl (2006; 2009a, 2009b) proposes a methodology for analyzing disembodied data such as appears in these discussion threads which combines activity theory of Engeström and Toiviainen (2009; Kaptelinin and Nardi (2006), the ethnomethodology of Garfinkel (1967) and conversation analysis of Sacks (1992; Sacks, et al. 1974). As his approach was devised to make sense of chat room dialogue around maths problem solving which have a finite solution it may or may not be applicable to the discussion fora of creative artists discussing more open ended topics. However, it seems useful to explore this approach in this context as it shares the same concerns with collaborative knowledge building. By focusing on discrete aspects of how social order is created and maintained in online interactions it allows the examination of social practices operating in small groups. One line of enquiry is to focus on adjacency pairs and note proposals and how they are responded to by others in the discussion thread. The activity theory proposes that group activity is strongly ‘object-oriented’ and task driven and so a proposal by one member invites others to engage in a particular task and responses can accept, reject or ignore it. Sometimes breakdowns in communication occur and attempts to repair are made.

Let us inspect the first few postings in the 1st thread. The first post seems to fit into the category of a proposal to do a task:

One thing I found about doing the role play was that I tended to ham it up too much. I also did find that I could identify the different characters easily enough. What do people think about trying it again? Any ideas?
Firstly, there is a positioning of the speaker as being inexperienced in role play by admitting that he hammed it up too much and then a sharing of knowledge about identifying the characters followed by a proposal to the group to engage in a task. Interestingly this post was agreed by students and independent lecturers to be a collaborative post and was also the first one also made by the course leader, Brian. The response to Brian’s proposal by Quentin is ‘No never’ which could be a rebuttal of the proposal but could also be a comment on the ‘hamming it up’ phrase in an ironic manner. Quentin does not post again to this forum. The third post by Vera comments on Quentin’s non acceptance of the proposal and offers hope to Brian by referring to hamming it up and a more positive acceptance of the task: ‘Spoilsport XXX! You sure you not hamming up your opinion? I missed it so would like to be there for another run.’ However, Brian is already responding to the negative response of Quentin with a reformed proposal ‘why do you think it would be better to do another discussion? At this stage Orla enters the discussion with a reformed proposal: ‘why not do another role play through this discussion board? all in agreement say ay!!’ which receives a positive response with a more developed proposal about deciding the content from Vera: ‘ay!! What should it be about’.

As Stahl suggests the focus is on small group analysis we can stop to make some observations on this short interchange. In his analysis of chat rooms other socio-cultural factors are less relevant or unknown but in this piece each participant is aware of their social relationships to each other as they can see the name attached to each posting. Stahl suggests we should avoid resorting to explanations that refer to these extraneous aspects such as gender, social position and examine how meanings are negotiated. In this case a new proposal based on the original one is being offered and responded to within 6 postings that took place in the space of 4 minutes. One person has attempted to maintain contact with other chat members - even one who is rejecting the proposal. It seems a negotiation of a task between 3 out of 4 participants in the exchange has resulted in a new proposal and agreement from another. This exchange is observed by others who enter the discussion gradually. Using Stahl’s approach to focus on the group interaction rather than individual members in it I would attach the term collaborative to this section of the
discussion thread. It is collaborative in its effect as well as its intent for this small sub group of 3 individuals.

Stahl also refers to how participants in a social exchange can position themselves as lacking knowledge which invites others to respond with ‘situated expertise’ thus providing for the sharing of knowledge in the manner of the Zone of Proximal Development according to Vygotsky’s theory. In entering the discussion Noel offers himself as an inexperienced group member and asks: ‘what was the role playing as i was not here for it last week’. The effect of this is to position himself as less knowledgeable which could be a tactic to gain admittance to the already established group conversation. It also serves the function of inviting more knowledgeable others to teach him. This invites what is called an ‘expository narrative’ more often found in cooperative learning. Stahl (2009b) explains that there is:

...a distinction between expository narrative and exploratory inquiry (Mercer and Wegerif, 1999). In conversation analytic terms, this is largely a difference in turn-taking methods. In exposition, one person makes a bid to “tell a story” about how they solved a problem. The other group members offer the expositor an extended turn at talking (or posting). The expositor dominates the discourse, providing a sequential account across several unusually long turns. The other group members listen (read) attentively, provide brief encouraging exclamations, pose questions and provide an audience. (p.8)

By responding to Noel, Orla accepts him into the discussion and tells the story of the role play:

the role play was basically us all makin eejits out of ourselves!! no, really, we were all given slips of paper and on each one was a different personality type, ie. 'the clam', this was followed by a short description of that particular personality ie. 'the clam' is a very shy person who only speaks when directly spoken to. we each had to act out the personality type we were given and engage in a discussion as that personality

She positions herself as spokesperson for the group by using first person plural and colloquial language (‘no, really’) and then describing what happened in the third person
while other members of the group contribute more clarification on what the role play was about. An interchange between Vera and Orla displays their differential positioning in relation to expertise using humour:

_Sorry I missed it, making an ejit out of myself is my special talent._ (Vera)

_well then you didn’t miss out too much, since ur already an expert!!_ (Orla)

_Everyones gotta be an expert in somthing!_ (Vera)

The familiarity in this exchange indicates a mutuality which the other group members may not have access to and their entry into the discussion is through Noel’s question about the topic of role play so Karen, Letitia, Eva join in. Their contributions are summarized by Orla and she offers some proposals for further thinking about the issues raised. I feel I can attribute the term cooperative to this section as there is a sharing of experience without agreement on another task to go further. The sharing of information is informing and teaching another member who was not present for this part rather than constructing new knowledge.

As with communication in larger groups some discussions are ended abruptly and opportunities for response are cut off as Eric poses a different question: ‘_is it ethical to codify ethics? 😊 ._ ’. This proposal is to take discussion to another topic to which Cynthia positions herself as lacking knowledge by asking what it means to which Eric replies with a factual response in the role of the more knowledgeable other. His answer reveals that his original question was rhetorical with the purpose of gaining entry to the discussion in the role of an equally knowledgeable expert. In the following interchange Orla and Vera divert Eric using humour in an attempt to challenge his authority to join as an expert. He tries to return them to the topic with ‘_so anyway, back to my original question...remember, about ethics?_ ’ The times of these postings indicate that this was the end of this class session and I posted a further question on ethics later to which some students responded asynchronously over the next few days. My question adds authority to Eric’s topic about ethics but ignores his original enquiry about ethical codes and attempts to broaden out the topic to interest students of art. Vera responds with a serious response
that offers a lot of opportunities to broaden discussion but Eric or other students interestingly do not respond.

My comment on this section is that opportunities to collaborate can be missed or misconstrued by communication difficulties and social factors that mediate entry to group discussion. I would feel that this section seems to show minimal cooperation or collaboration. If students can learn to accept each other moving between the role of less knowledgeable or expert and can ask questions and respond to them then there is the opportunity for collaboration. It seems obvious but agreeing a task between group members is more manageable in smaller groups. Also non contribution and silence require further examination.

3. Qualitative Analysis of 2nd discussion thread

The first point to note about the 2nd discussion thread is that it contains 2 topics that contributors seem to stick to – the first is about a class activity on problem solving and the second is a broader discussion about genius and art. The second point to note is that the final post in the selection by Frances was agreed by all raters (lecturers) as being collaborative:

*I personally see all art as a form of communication, you communicate your thoughts, feelings, perspectives, opinions etc., everything you do in your art has a reason whether you’re completely aware of it or not. I believe you never just see something and paint it just because ‘it's nice’ - there has to be something in what you see that you are relating to and you choose to communicate that through your art. If something is not communicating something, or trying to communicate something, either to the artist or viewer, then I do not think it is art. If someone is not experiencing an 'artwork' - sight, touch, sound etc. then it cannot be communicating anything and cannot be art until it is experienced.*

(Frances)

What happened before to create this collaborative and insightful observation? As Stahl (2009b) points out in his analysis of maths chat rooms we may as educators focus on the problem solver or the end point of a discussion and ignore the vital role of other members
in leading to that point. I would argue that the preceding contributions to this discussion thread would have played a vital part in this construction of knowledge and it seems to be strong evidence for a group of students collaborating to construct ideas of a deeper nature.

This discussion thread represents Asynchronous Learning as people can read and post comments at times that suit them. In relation to the first topic in this 2nd discussion thread we can note that 6 different people including one tutor contributed. The thread was started by a student Karen on 12th December and received a response on 16th December by a tutor followed by other students on the next day. The discussion explores the original proposal of Karen about the competitive element of problem solving with a variety of different opinions expressed. The second topic was started after the Christmas holidays and the postings span a 5 week period. This time a tutor (Brian) proposed a theoretical discussion of genius as myth to which the same student (Karen) responded with a contribution of more knowledge gained from her reading of a related article which she attached to her post. A week later I posted a response to her and to Brian to which he replied. A week later 6 students contributed their thoughts on the discussion about art. Why did it take this long for students to respond to the thread? As a researcher using Conversation Analysis I am required to stick to the data yet the Action Researcher in me is interested in what was going on. As this was in the middle of the module it may be that there was a drop in motivation as there was no assessment required. To me the data does not answer fully why students respond or don’t respond to proposals from students or lecturers.

So going back to other data were they contributing elsewhere? As Figure 7 shows the most postings were to the 3rd year Professional Practices Exhibition discussion forum and I was led to check back to the original forum. I noticed that during this same period a large number of postings discuss the name, location, publicity and title of the exhibition that the students were busy organizing in the community with a great amount of collaboration. They decided to call their exhibition ‘Stone Soup’ based on a story about communities learning to share in hard times. What do I learn from this? If I based my conclusions solely on my choice of discussion board to analyze then it might not represent the full range of experience. It seems that students are collaborating elsewhere
on the practical task of organizing and exhibition. However, I chose this discussion thread to examine whether students can construct ideas together. If I am to put a strong argument for collaborative learning what can I learn from this discussion board? First that students can dialogue together if supported by tutors who prompt, encourage and support their dialogue. It takes time also. It also needs to be around their area of interest – in this case art. Are they as interested in Community? Actually they did post a variety of ideas on different aspects of community and I noticed some similar ideas surfaced later in the interviews. I also feel the practical nature of the task is important as the exhibition forum was based on a task that gave the group of students a practical focus. It may have been easier for all students to respond to this forum than the more intellectual questioning their lecturers were asking for. However, the collaborative aspect is apparent in debating the topic on genius and art with the posting by students of relevant links to other material for sharing. Possibly the experience of sharing responsibility for organizing the exhibition and producing their exhibits fed into their more abstract thoughts about art. The sense of doing art becoming an artist and thinking about the artistic process may have been going on at this time.

4. Feedback sessions with students

The feedback session provided useful discussion of the Coates typology which included comments about the artificiality of the process. It was noted how taking the comments out of context effected their meaning and interpretation. It was also felt that students move in and out of different styles of engagement to suit their purposes and one student offered the term ‘adaptive’ to add to the typology. After this session I asked the students to post any comments on the process to the discussion board11. Cynthia responded with:

I think the process of analysing data together was an interesting experience. It created new ways of looking at things and prompted me to think about and analyse not only my responses on the discussion board but how I learn or communicate with people in general, whether it's online or face to face. It raised questions in my mind about not only myself but the

11 See Appendix E
people around me also. Do we respond in the different ways to suit the situation or the people we are surrounded by? Or are people predominantly intensive, passive, independent or collaborative? (Tue Dec 2, 2008 5:45 pm)

I interpret this as evidence of learning from the group exploration of engagement styles. Another feedback session was held in the middle of the course where the data analysis of how students and lecturers rated statements from the 1st discussion board was provided. At this session discussion I also brought in related papers about engagement C. Bryson and Hand (2007) and design students by Solomonides and Reid (2008) and the concept of flow from Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Again I used the discussion boards as a way to keep everyone informed and asked for feedback which one student, Orla, provided:

well i think we all agreed that it was unfair to label a student who works well in collaboration with others as 'below norm', academically speaking.....also, there was some contradiction in the definitions for each category, ie. the 'intense' student is considered the opposite end of the scale to the 'collaborative' student, yet one of the positive attributes given to the 'intense' student was to be collaborative? talk about confusing!! i think that the lack of clarity and common understanding among students and staff about what defines each category(in general, not specifically in our class) could be a problem when gathering data - how can you trust in the resulting statistics when students seem to be answering questions with a different understanding of what they mean to the one intended. i don't mean to be critical of john's research, but i do question how the student engagement styles are defined in coates explanation....(Mon Feb 9, 2009 10:20)

I am pleased that she chose to comment on the student engagement styles of Coates as it allows a student voice to be heard in this debate. Her comments also are a useful interpretation of the low agreement between students and lecturers of these terms.
5. Questionnaire analysis

The questionnaire produced responses to different aspects of the course which are summarized here. These were also followed up in the interviews but as the focus of this study is student engagement and the social construction of ‘community’ they are produced in a summary here:

Experience of course:

*Generally quite accessible…an element of fun throughout* (Eric)

*Not very well…I am very slow reading and spelling…collaborating with classmates can be the blind leading the blind …I am still very confused about the module* (Karen)

*Really enjoyed it …I always liked discussions and the practical side of things eg role play* (Eva)

*Mainly good. I have enjoyed my community work in one of the local schools. I have found most of the discussions very interesting. I have been uncomfortable with the role play in class* (Vera)

*I have enjoyed most of the course especially the games where we come together as a group but I wasn’t too fond of the role plays…it has opened up an area which before I wouldn’t have ever even considered* (Noel)

*Ok – its going in a direction I don’t want to go. I still don’t see the need for the module in connection to an art degree. I know it’s a relaxed way of teaching learning but I don’t enjoy things like role playing* (Quentin)

Computers:

*No problems* (Eric)

*I am much more ok with the internet now but sometimes I lose my way* (Karen)

*Frustrating – felt overloaded so much so that didn’t go near Blackboard etc.* (Eva)

*I was able to use computers prior to this* (Vera)

*Easy enough* (Noel)

*When I leave college if I don’t see another computer for the rest of my life it will be too soon* (Quentin)

Usefulness of blogging:
By actually verbalizing my thoughts, and having them written in front of me I was able to read through them at a later date and view them from a different perspective than when I had written them (Eric)

I did not blog (Karen)

Great a good experience (Eva)

I was unfamiliar with blogging myself...not something I would see my self continuing with...simple to go through process of putting up the blog... (Vera)

Found it hard to edit blogs...so I stuck to writing in a journal (Noel)

I’m a private person – I keep to myself so having to put my thoughts in print anywhere is difficult (Quentin)

Reflection:

By allowing time to reflect, I found that I was able to gain a more in depth insight and to consider different aspects of what we were learning about (Eric)

I kept a reflective journal and it was useful (Karen)

Good – made things clearer made me realize had learnt more than I thought (Eva)

Useful however I did not do it probably as regularly as I should have. This was not due to lack of interest but time. (Vera)

Found it hard at first but got easier as I got into it (Noel)

Hard. I would have spent a lot of time analyzing things that were said and done previously (Quentin)

Discussion boards:

People who would not necessarily speak out in class may feel more comfortable with this method (Eric)

A waste of time as too much chit chat and not enough facts presented by all of us (Eva)

Good they are useful because sometimes people are more forthcoming than they would be in class (Vera)

Easy to use after a few go’s but at times annoying as they failed from time to time and you couldn’t see what people said (Noel)
Learning together:

I can’t think of any significant difficulties (Eric)

Arguing – everyone had their own agenda and strange opinions (Eva)

Everyone had their own opinions and it was hard to come out with a conclusion (Noel)

Listening to too many opinions – especially when you know some of the opinions given are unbending (the person is always right - they think) (Quentin)

Community:

I refreshed my knowledge and learned more about African Community (Karen)

Give the people power. You facilitate and guide but they come up with ideas and solve their own problems (Eva)

There are many different types of community and that we can make assumptions about each other (Vera)

Class sessions/ face to face

I am sorry but I did not find any of it useful except the discipline of attending something that I could not relate to (Karen)

How to deal with different/difficult people and cultures etc. (Eva)

It helped me to open up and become more reflective about myself (Noel)

Improvements:

e-portfolio requirements seemed really vague…do more community work as a class more ….more practical applications of the material covered (Eric)

I like order so would have appreciated a program of the course…Maybe I am just too old. I did not appreciate the idea of volunteer work as I wanted education that I could access in college (Karen)

A list of organizations who are prepared to use students for the practical side. Students then choose who they want to be with. (Eva)

With regards to the community work – as far as I know not everyone did it. It seems unfair that some of us gave up an entire half day to it whilst others did none… (Vera)

Make it more fun to get more people coming to class and more involved (Noel)
6. Interviews to explore how ‘community’ is constructed by students of the course

The original intention of the interviews was to supplement the ideas from the questionnaires and to allow for more opportunities to communicate. During the face to face sessions there may have been occasions where some people talked a lot and others very little. As I face these interviews now there are a number of areas that can be pursued but my focus will be on how ‘community’ is interpreted by the students and how their own identity as artists is developing. I am also interested in evidence of students developing new ideas out of their experience of the module. The interviews took place after the students had their exhibition ‘Stone Soup’ and this must have contributed to their developing sense of themselves as artists. I was interested in connecting these ideas of ‘being’ to experience and action and how they interact with notions of community. My original choice of asking about their art was as a way of relaxing them but I realise that it may have more significance in the development of the students’ self perception.

As a method of analyzing the interviews I employed a method I discovered used by Potter (2008) where a text is searched for the mention of a word and these passages are selected and further examined. Thus, after reading and re-reading the interviews and making notes, I collected references to ‘community’ from all the interviews and pasted the passages into a word document. Having read through the interviews and made notes I was aware of pieces that interested me and toyed with the idea of just selecting one or two interviews. However, while reading through one selection I asked myself the question how does this person draw these things together to justify their course of action or what they are saying? I saw connections between parts of what was said by each individual and decided to map out a rough concept map for each interviewee to help see the way they connect things – their theory of community. I am trying to see the way concepts connect together in the interviewee’s responses to indicate how they view the world. This would then indicate how they come to justify a certain action or response – how their discourse connects, makes contrasts or adds support in order to put forward their position. Is this an interpretative repertoire? Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) noted how scientists use an empiricist repertoire to publicly explain their work while resorting to a contingency repertoire in private for the actual practice which is less ordered (in Bryman,
I am not interested in typifying a group of students as having a particular repertoire but I hope to elucidate how each student constructs their own particular repertoire to support their actions. In particular, as I was interested in how the practical task of working in a community project related to their ideas of community. My focus was on how they formed ideas about community and how they attempted to justify a particular course of action (or inaction). Some of these students did not do work in the community and others did so how did they talk about this? Was one more coherent than another? Did the practical experience link with the class work?

Using a large sheet of paper I mapped out the key ideas in the interviewee’s discourse about community and tried to understand from their perspective how these ideas informed their behaviour. Taking these broad concepts I used the brainstorming diagrams from the Microsoft Visio program to map out rough conceptual frameworks for each interviewee. As I have already intimated I made a deliberate attempt to interview participants of the course who had expressed negative perspectives as well as those who had been positive in their response to the course. In reading these accounts I am reminded about the danger of generalizing from individual accounts which are not representative and I am anxious to avoid such theorizing. I wish to give my best attempt at extracting the students understanding of ‘community’ or ‘working in the community’. As social scientists we have terms like ‘concepts’ and ‘theory’ which relate to established theory in the literature but what I am arguing is that each one of us has our own theory of the way the world is that we use to lead our everyday lives which undergoes constant revision by experience. We have vague ideas, notions that sometimes get refined into rough concepts. We argue for our point of view and justify our view of the world in discourse. These rough concept maps are my way of understanding what Corbin and Strauss (2007) call in vivo concepts – the concepts the participant holds: the way they see things. They may appear vague or disconnected as they have occurred in a dialogue which sometimes goes in different directions and sometimes they are more coherent as the interviewer and interviewee establish more joint understanding. I am not attempting to elucidate some grounded theory from this data – merely trying to see how the participant puts ideas together, uses different strands or themes to support their position. I am locating themes that run through the discourse that seem to represent the person’s position on community.
An example is presented in Figure 8 which shows my attempt to see how Roger constructs his view of community. The map indicates how ideas were connected by Roger in the interview as a response to my questions. Early in the interview I asked him: ‘So what did you feel about being asked to work for the community?’ To which he replied: ‘I didn’t do any work with the community.’ (p.2). Thus, my purpose in making the rough concept map is to see how he organizes his ideas to justify and defend his course of action and this statement. It seems to me that he makes a distinction between talk and action where he sees himself as a practical man of action who does things. He describes plans for a communal exhibition day which exemplify his doing side:

Well we’re going to get some bicycles and weld them together and then we’re gonna get everybody to have paints and brushes and get people to put their mark on it and try and make a painted sculpture out of the
bicycle and then there’s other people in our class who are doing a painting. (p.7)

As can be seen from the rough concept map his conceptualization of community work is a mix of volunteering, charity, hospital visits and Tidy Towns. He felt there was enough to do on the course without the extra load of volunteering:

ROGER: You know, its just I have a hard enough time keeping up with everything that’s going on in school without going and joining some charity. Plus I do some community work in my own way like I do hospital visits, I don’t know if that’s community work but that’s what I do.

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: For somebody out near where I am, I go see them once a week. So that takes up a lot of my time. (p.3)

Pressures of time are used as part of his reasoning for not becoming involved in community work in Wexford and another barrier he experienced was being asked for a background check to work with the Travelling Community:

JOHN: Who wanted to do a background check?

ROGER: You have to when you’re volunteering with these travelling community people. (p.3)

So the practical man of action is stopped by bureaucracy from doing voluntary work in the community though he admits ‘I’m not really a community person’. (p.4) Later he places ‘talk’ in opposition to ‘action’ as in this extract where he reasons that he would rather do things than sit around talking:

ROGER: Ah no, no like it’s always nice to volunteer for things doing things, I don’t mind doing that. You know I’d do that. You know visiting somebody once a week in a hospital takes a lot of your time too.

JOHN: Yeah, do you feel that your idea of community then it’s about volunteering then?

ROGER: My idea yeah, its more about finding something you want to do and then just helping out which I do. I help the Tidy Towns about scuffling weeds and cleaning up the village and that’s my idea of
community or going to visit someone in a hospital that’s community to me. 
 … Community is just you know everybody has their own interests you
know. You know you might be involved in a committee. I have no interest
in committees you know. I don’t mind helping out but I have no interest
in you know talking about things or whatever, you know what I mean. I’m
more of action, you know more action orientated just do it, don’t talk
about it. (p.5)

It is possible to see these links between action and talk with frustration about time and
how it is used. The claim to be action orientated appears inconsistent not only with his
inactivity but also his later suggestion to have the experts in the community come into the
campus to talk about their work since he would be required to be inactive and listen to them:

So I mean there must be people here who can come in and talk to you
about volunteering. I didn’t see anybody like that. You know that’s what I
call practical. You know what I mean about practical? (p.8)

The purpose in examining these ways of constructing ideas is to understand how the
person uses linguistic devices to persuade another human being of their viewpoint. As
interviewer I also wanted to clarify what the module was about:

ROGER: I’m not absolutely clear about what it is at all, you know,
what are ye trying to do, create a community? Are ye trying to get people
to work with community or is it trying to create a community?
JOHN: You’re supposed to engage with the community and as a
student to have an experience of working with the community.
ROGER: Oh sorry. That’s what you were trying to do.
JOHN: I think the idea is that a lot of the time academia is within
closed walls and then we’re living in a community aren’t we, so what are
we doing with the community that connects the academic world with the
world of the local community. I think that’s the idea behind it. (p.8).

The phrase, ‘Oh sorry. That’s what you were trying to do’ serves a dual function of
shifting responsibility from him with the use of ‘you’ and apologizing for not
understanding. My explanation represents a response to the challenge of his previous question and interestingly makes reference to action through the use of the word ‘doing’ contrasted with academia. So as interviewer I am justifying my position and my view of the world also using similar contrasts as Roger: action versus talk.

Another mature student, Karen, found herself justifying her reasons for not doing any community work through a contrast between herself as an older woman from another part of the country compared to young students from Wexford:

*KAREN:* ..... I’m sure the young people who would have gone out to the art project and I mean they were right and I didn’t bother doing that because I said ah sure you know I don’t see myself you know going to work like that and even down here I wouldn’t its just as well to let the Wexford people make the connections with the people down here. Now that’s my excuse maybe but anyway I didn’t do it you know sort of like but … (they were) I mean that wasn’t really community in my opinion. .. but I tend to think of community as being people in need of help .... (p.8)

![Figure 9: Karen's concept map of community](image)

In this passage Karen admits that it’s her excuse she didn’t do work on an art project in a school because she didn’t see herself doing it. So her ideas of herself seem wrapped up in
being an older person which sets her apart from the younger students. She sees her art degree course as personal development and her conception of community work involves an idea of people being in need of help. In her discourse she contrasts paid and voluntary work and she talks about someone’s comment on her picking up litter in a train station that she could be doing someone out of a job. When finding out that a girl in the park who she praised for picking up her dog’s litter was from another country she concludes that Irish society has a long way to go as foreign people seem to have more respect for the environment:

**KAREN:** You know and then she turned out she was a foreigner you know sort of like so I said we have a long way to go.

**JOHN:** Well do you think then we have a long way to go with our idea of community then do you think in Ireland or what do you think?

My choice of using her phrase ‘we have a long way to go’ in my question could have facilitated her response which contrasts the nosey spinster watching young peoples behavior and the new fashions of individualism where discipline has gone out of fashion. The connections Karen makes are between nosey people serving a function in society by keeping a control on morality through discipline:

**KAREN:** But I mean they were the people who kept the morals of the country you know sort of like sort of straightened out but that’s gone now and I mean even you don’t correct anybody or do anything so you know sort of like you know its em individualism gone mad you know sort of like I mean that’s what it is, isn’t it?(p.7)

This rambling account which refers to Karen’s past experiences outside the course to justify her position of not working in a community project and makes vague connections between litter and voluntary work, and changes in society provides a challenge to the researcher as well as the teacher. How can this student be involved in small group collaboration? Are there ways to facilitate her contributions to group discussion allowing a movement between more knowledgeable and less experienced other? This will be discussed in the next chapter.
As I look at the rough concept map of another mature female student, Eva, I see that some connections are made concerning the content of the module and her experience working in the local community (see Figure 10). Eva experienced frustration that the empowering perspective she learned on the course doesn’t seem to be happening in the local groups that she has worked with who seem stuck in old ways of thinking. From what she says it appears she has learnt ideas about participation and allowing communities to decide for themselves from the course which has helped her to accept different views. However, this broader perspective is sometimes found wanting in the parochial, traditional approaches she has experienced out there in the community. As she took the opportunity to work with a multicultural group she was able to combine this active experience with the theoretical learning from the module but experienced frustration that the local community is still working from old school agendas.

![Eva's Rough Concept Map of Community](image)

**Figure 10: Eva's Rough Concept Map of Community**

The way Eva constructs her ideas involves contrasts between Africa and Ireland and between old, traditional conservative ways and the new perspectives that she gets from
the course. These contrasts continue as she sees the style of delivery of the course as similar to how things are done in South Africa and also in contrasting the open society of South Africa with the conservative, private, closed society of Ireland which she links to recent prosperity. She feels these cultural differences influence and flow into the environment that people live in:

JOHN: Yeah do you think we have a narrow perception of what community means?

EVA: I think so. I don’t mean to criticise Ireland but eh its very, I can understand it because things have changed a lot you know. In fact just from hearing the way people have begun to prosper the whole community has died and disappeared. People are very conservative, very private and whilst in Africa ones’ homes are open and people come and go so there’s a more openness to community and I mean that’s just in the sort of environment of where you live and because of that openness it then sort of overflows into the bigger community. Whilst because everything is very private and very closed and very conservative and very protective of their little areas I find that actually flows into the community as a town or a village you know without them even knowing subconsciously that its happening. (p.4)

As she has travelled she feels she has always appreciated different cultures and different ways and she found herself more amenable to the freedom the course offered which she contrasts with the difficulties of some of her fellow students:

JOHN: Em so what do you think your first reaction was to this module, can you remember?

EVA: Well yes I was excited because in South Africa our method of teaching has been like this course, this section so I was used to it and I know that a lot of my class have reacted because they’re just not used to the freedom and not used to such an unstructured set up but I came out of that so for me it was yeah at last they’re grasping it, it’s something new you know! (p.3)
As she was prepared for this method of learning she found reflection enjoyable though she prefers the handwritten type to the online version. She also found that she was able to cope with racist views that have told her to go back to Africa by bringing in her thinking from the course about different viewpoints:

JOHN: Yeah so that's different perspectives again which you have come to understand. You might have understood before but you've understood the module has helped also intellectually I suppose?

EVA: I think the module has helped me yes. Not to get upset and not to react if somebody tells you to go back to Africa. That's his problem you know. I think that's what the course has really taught me just to relax and say it really doesn't matter. Don't take it personally you know. They've just got a different viewpoint a different attitude. (p.7)

These ideas about developing a broader perspective in class are brought together when she discusses the frustration of meeting non responsive traditional approaches in the community. Interestingly she makes a proposal for a workshop to discuss these issues with community organizations so that they can be aware of the way the course is designed to promote a different way of working with communities.
In a similar way the tolerance of different views occurs in the concept map of Cynthia where she uses the idea of difference to examine her experience. In coming to the course she says that she expected to meet people with the same interests but found a variety of opinions and she also makes contrast related to age as she sees herself as a young person amidst a lot of older people:

they are a lot different in their opinions and ideas and I found that interesting to meet people all from like different parts and different walks of life than me and the different age groups as well because do you know a lot of people in my class were older than me so I found that really interesting. (p.1)

Her use of the word ‘interesting’ in relation to herself and older people may be a euphemism for challenging perhaps when faced with an older person like myself interviewing her. The idea of difference occurs again where she feels it is a good thing for a community to allow people to be different. My question about where she is from leads her to explore the difference between her home where a lot of people commute and the close knit community of Wexford where everyone knows each other. This prompts me to explore ideas around changes in society and her response is to accept rather than evaluate it as good or bad. Some of these ideas were explored in some of the discussion board fora so I sensed that she had linked these in to our discussion. Certainly, examining my ill-formed question and her balanced reply indicates that she sees change as something that can be both good and bad. There is also a sense of seeing where my questioning was leading and making sure another more open meaning was constructed.

JOHN: And do you think our society is changing, that the demands are you know say in community or whatever it may be does that help or hinder or .....?
CYNTHIA: I don’t know I think that things are constantly changing. You can’t say if it’s good or bad that’s its just kind of the way life goes. Like to be looking back and saying oh community was great and you know
I think that’s nostalgic. I… there’s good elements with both and if people can just strike the balance to try and have both. (p.3)

The willingness to debate these ideas is a benefit in the construction of knowledge and seems to require confidence to disagree and challenge. The idea she presents of just accepting change fits in with accepting difference and multiple views. Her idea that learning for children should be fun found conflict with what she found in the schools art project she worked on. So the idea of contrast and difference occurs again where she places a lot of silly rules in opposition to her feeling that learning for children should be fun. She found herself in a position where she wanted to quit because it was very formal and not the way she wanted art to be taught but she works out a reason to stick it out based on a connection between multiple views and change:

JOHN: Okay so in terms of things you were learning in class about how to work with communities it wasn’t matching up with the reality.

CYNTHIA: No and at first like I wanted to quit, I didn’t want to be part of that teaching young children those ideas but then I realised that I suppose I got a reality check that when you go into work in a community group not everyone will have the same ideas and values as you and its trying to work properly around that and to try and change it I suppose and you can only do that from being involved in something so I decided to stick it out. (p.4)

Instead of retreating into her own comfortable space where her views will not be contaminated by different ones she resolves to work to change things. As a practical researcher/teacher this construction is pleasing to see in a young student since I note links between action to bring about change and managing conflict to bring about learning.
Figure 12: Vera's Rough Concept Map of Community

The conceptual map of community for Vera indicates that she sees a connection between pressures on her time and working in the school and her own art work. In order to be a student and learn she has to manage and pay for childcare so that time becomes a precious commodity. Her priority is her art work which comes above the course needs of doing such things as role plays and working in a school art project. Her response to role play is to say it was not for her but maybe useful for other people as she ‘...found myself a few times, I’d be sitting there thinking like I’m sitting here paying so much money to kids so I can play you know?’ (p.3). These external pressures, such as being a mother, being an artist; influence her response to the course and justify her mixed response of doing community work but mindful of the time involved and how her own priority is her art:

JOHN: Yeah, yeah okay. Em so that was the first reaction so eh I think I’ve asked you that, has it changed?
VERA: I thought on the whole it was good and I think going out doing the community work was good. I found that was really really good. Em the only thing is the one I was doing it was sort of like it was a whole
morning a week which did take up quite a lot of time which then maybe left me a bit under pressure to get maybe other work done but I still think it was good.(p.5)

In this she makes a distinction between actually going out and doing community work as being a good idea and the time involved to do so. Her experience in the school is evaluated in terms of this time aspect rather than in relation to the activities involved. Her priority is her own art work which needs the most time. Vera outlines that her ideas about community developed over the course from ‘just the people around you’ or ‘people on the fringe’(p.2) such as travellers to a broader perspective that encompasses a wider definition of community as any group you are involved in:

JOHN: Yeah what do you think then of the idea of community these days then or what have you learnt about the idea of community or…?
VERA: Well I guess that there’s lots of different types of community like you can have an online community or em. I mean that you can be a member of loads of different communities at the same time. I guess that’s really what I meant.(p.2)

As she outlines her view now includes her own position in a community as can be seen by the use of ‘I’ in her descriptions so her conceptualisation has changed from looking at community externally to recognising being a member herself of a community:

VERA: Well yeah I guess I would have just thought community before was predominantly just the people who lived immediately around you. I wouldn’t really have thought of other groups as community or else I would have thought of maybe community groups as being maybe like travellers or you know I really would have thought of people on the fringe as being sort of referred to as community groups.
JOHN: Okay, yeah.
VERA: But not necessarily just any group you’re involved in anyway can be community groups. (ps.2-3)
It seems that a change in Vera’s conception of community has involved recognising her own position in relation to how she functions in the things she does – whether that is learning, art or community work.

The main concepts that arise in considering Eric’s construction of community are having a sense of wellbeing from socialising in a community and engaging socially with his fellow students.

He highlights the positive aspects of socializing with colleagues with the negative perception of the town portrayed in the local paper where it occupies the top position in relation to violent assaults, litter and also the least number of atheists. The connection between these is not spelt out but a logical conclusion might be that more atheists in the community will solve its problems. My questioning tried to see how he perceived these reported facts and his responses were located in personal, individual stories about a friend who was involved in fights or in his comparison with another town he visited. His perception of community is dominated by this idea of socialising as his later proposal links leisure pursuits of lobbying for a skateboard park to counteract bored youth:

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**Figure 13: Eric's Rough Concept Map of Community**

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ERIC: ...I remember thinking it would have been cool if we had like a collaborative community based project where we all go out and actually actively do something in the community (Ok) All together and try or either try get something achieved because even if you don’t do it still grand you know. Maybe try and lobby for something like a skateboard park because I think the whole recreation and socialising is important that’s probably what Wexford needs more of because theres feck all to do here really so people just end up going drinking up on the rocks (ps. 8-9)

In talking about subcultures Eric was aware of broader perspectives which I thought may have originated in discussion threads and may explain my thinking aloud about a community of one:

ERIC: Well one of the things, remember when we were coming up with themes for the symposium well I suggested ‘the importance of socializing within a community’ and I think that’s really important and I think this course brought in that social aspect by getting us to even engage with each other.

JOHN: Ok yes. Its interesting some of the comments like a community of one or whatever. So engaging with each other. (p.4)

Eric seems to focus on the socializing aspect and reports how the module has benefitted the class in getting to know each other better as a community of students. However, as Eric did not engage with a community project though he did apply to work in Oxfam and spoke about wanting to work with the homeless he could not report any practical experience to link with the ideas he learned in class.

Another young male student, Edwin, did work on the school art project and was able to compare the class discussion and ideas with his work in the community. He had accepted that community had a wider meaning before going out to work but found that children don’t go into things in that depth. Here I am not sure whether I got at his construction or mine as this extract shows:
JOHN: Okay yeah. So you talked about culture in class and different aspects of it I presume and then was any of it relevant or?

EDWIN: Well I think with kids you know they don’t sort of delve into everything or much detail, they kind of just accept things which is interesting.

JOHN: Yeah it is an interesting idea yeah. So eh yeah it’s very much yeah at face value.

EDWIN: Yeah that’s it and they just kinda get on with it.

JOHN: That’s an interesting perspective isn’t it?

EDWIN: Yeah.

JOHN: Like academia seems to delve into things in such a depth?

EDWIN: Yeah, yeah. (p.4)

As he had spoken about the benefits for him of discussion boards as it gave him more time to contribute his ideas compared to class discussion I can see my questioning moves onto my own concerns about academia rather than following his perceptions of children.
This highlights an issue about teaching as well as about interviewing – how do we cope with silence or less rounded contributions? There is a need to observe ourselves and use a variety of methods to support the quieter student. Some of what Edwin did say indicated his learning from the course:

JOHN: Okay, so your idea about community, was that changed as a result of this module?

EDWIN: Yeah well I guess a lot of stuff has been said on it like you know wouldn’t have been stuff that I would have sat down and thought of myself. But yeah it makes you realise that things have changed.(p.2)

Edwin presents the idea that he has reflected on class discussion about his views of community and learned from others around him. To me this represents the potential of opportunities to learn from each other in a variety of class activities including online and face to face.

**My summary interpretation of the interviews**

At the outset I outlined that I would limit my interpretation of what the students say in relation to community to presenting each student’s individual perspective. As I interviewed each participant I was aware of some ideas that had arisen elsewhere in class or online discussions and as I read through these constructions I can see some interesting themes emerging so perhaps I may allow some observations across the interviews. Firstly, I am aware of an omission – what would my rough concept map of community look like? How coherent would that be? If I am to question myself I would say it is still developing. It is less certain than it was at the start of this study. It is located in action, time, social interaction and multiple perspectives as outlined earlier and which also arose in the interview transcripts. It is also multifaceted and amorphous and challenging to both practical action and abstract description. What I have learned from the students is the challenge to create a supportive student community involves including all the voices so that we can debate, discuss, teach and learn from each other. Creating the conditions for accepting different views without positioning oneself is vital for both student learning.
and working in the community. That is the same challenge in dialoguing with the community.
Chapter 5: Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

Subjective analysis

As part of the presentation of findings involved interpretation then the purpose of this chapter is to draw together the various elements of the research in relation to the major foci of the study – student engagement and their construction of ‘community’. The heading is a misnomer it is all subjective until it is read by someone else.

Related to research question

At the start of this research these were some of the questions asked:

Is there any credence to the terms passive, intense, independent, and collaborative in terms of student engagement?
Do lecturers and students agree on the meaning of these terms?
Can students collaborate in their learning?
Can collaboration on discussion boards lead to deeper learning?
How do students construct their ideas of community?

My reading of the data in relation to Coates (2007) typology of student engagement is that these terms make more sense in the abstract rather than in any real practical sense of describing actual student behaviour. As there is little agreement in applying them to student’s actual online contributions they lack the validity they claim. There is more opportunity for misunderstanding in their application than agreement and they limit our perception of actual learning. The low inter-rater agreement between students and lecturers indicates that there is little agreement on their meaning. There exists a danger of typifying particular student behaviour without any relation to how the student sees it. A broader range of engagement is indicated to encompass the range of ways that students engage in learning. As students indicated these may include the addition of adaptive to the list as students will change their engagement to meet the demands of the situation.

The distinction between social and academic styles in relation to this typology is also unwarranted as the qualitative analysis of discussion threads demonstrated that social discourse plays a role in student collaboration. Further examination of the type of discourse indicates that by learning to post proposals and responses in the early stages
these can influence later discussion through the practice of cooperative and collaborative communication. This analysis also showed that the deeper learning and knowledge construction in an online discussion forum can be produced by collaborative learning if supported by lecturers. Such knowledge construction requires collaboration over time and with stimulating input from lecturers that challenges student thinking. A vital aspect of student learning supported by the findings is the emphasis on practical learning being a focus for engagement. Thus, the greatest activity in the discussion boards was found when students collaborated to plan an exhibition.

The ways that students construct ‘community’ in interviews with the researcher are also collaborations in knowledge construction between the researcher and the interviewee. Was it possible that I was talking out loud my ideas of community just as much as the students in these dialogues? Nunkoosing (2005) alerts us to the cumulative effect of interviews in developing the interviewer’s understanding of a topic.

*It seems to me that only grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1968; Strauss and Corbin, 1991), in its principles of theoretical sampling, acknowledges that the process of successive interviews has the capacity to change the knowledge of the interviewer.* (p.706)

My concept map of ‘community’ has developed through these discussions with students and it feels that I have a different construction that respects the variety of student perspectives. As these students had varying degrees of engagement with a variety of learning experiences they use different ideas to produce their understanding of community.

**Related to other methods and literature**

There was evidence that some students had developed an acceptance of different viewpoints through discussion and practical experience in working in community projects which shows that the aims of the module can be achieved. These students could act as the expert other in the Zone of Proximal Development and facilitate other student’s learning. As Paulus (2004) discovered in her study being uncertain and willing to accept alternative viewpoints has a vital role in knowledge construction:
However, in this study it became clear that initial uncertainty was as important as certainty. Members expressed their uncertainty about an issue or simply identified the possibility of different viewpoints, utilizing functional moves such as eliciting feedback, asking questions and responding to questions. Members valued such expressions of different opinions and diverse perspectives. (p626)

**Figure 15: A rough concept map for supporting student learning using the ZPD**

As Stahl (2009a) has suggested the small group provides the greatest potential for collaborative learning I produce a concept map combining four individual student maps with indications of potential discussion points for students to explore their understanding of community (see Figure 15). Rather than focusing on challenge and conflicting views as a way to promote further learning as highlighted by Gunawardena, et al. (1997) our efforts as teachers should support openness to explore different views in our learners. Completing the quote from Paulus (2004):

---

85
Thus, the manner in which members socially constructed knowledge did not fit the Gunawardena et al. (1997) model. The emphasis is not on creating arguments and justifying one's own position; rather, together through interaction groups sought connection with each other (p.626)

In the concept map above there are a number of topics to explore so that each student can contribute to their developing understanding of community by seeking ways to understand each other’s viewpoints rather than sticking to rigid preconceived ideas. As a teacher I would seek ways to enable Karen to explore alternative viewpoints proposed by others in the group of students to enable movement to a broader perspective. Perhaps what is required is to allow each group member to question and challenge each other with respect that being critical is useful and refers to a person’s statements not the person uttering them. As a teacher I have to enable each student to feel comfortable leading and following discussion, both asking questions and seeking to provide answers. This requires active listening by us all.

**Synthesis**

In drawing together the various strands of this research I feel I can make a strong argument that student engagement is multi-faceted and requires an examination of the procedures we use to assess it as well as how we construct it in the context of Higher Education. A learner focused approach as presented in this participatory framework has found qualitative evidence to counter superficial, institutional driven quantitative evidence for a student typology. A strong argument for collaborative learning is supported by qualitative analysis of online discussion and a supportive learning framework has arisen out of conceptual analysis of the social construction of ‘community’ by a group of students in a Community Based (Service) Learning module.
Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

For the institute

The experience of these students indicates that the meeting of student and community partner is at the coal face of Community Based Learning. It is here that the societal perceptions, frustrations and conflicts are manifested. It’s not easy. The difficulties that students face in relation to managing their time and study requires a flexible response that acknowledges the motivation of students is more linked to their course of study and its assessment than volunteering in the community. Thus, creative ways of linking student learning outcomes to community participation can recognize the challenging nature of this type of work. The pedagogy demands innovative approaches where both staff and students receive institutional support for making connections in the community. That is not easy either. Perhaps there is a need to look at ways to promote ‘collective efficacy’ and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

For teachers and learners

This study has focused on student engagement and found that students can respond to prompts to engage collaboratively if supported by lecturers. The benefits can manifest themselves in deeper learning, more fun, and greater satisfaction as students support each other in their learning. Outside the scope of this study is the engagement of teachers and I can imagine our response if a typology of lecturer engagement was developed from our online responses to a questionnaire. I think from my perspective I will feel more satisfied if I am engaging my students in their study and I relate this to continually researching my practice. The Hawthorne Effect can work for me as I will make my lectures and learning more interesting when my own teaching is the focus of study. To that end I hope to continue this work next year by implementing a research module with a PfCE perspective in the Applied Social Studies degree. I also feel that a more facilitatory approach to teaching and participatory role requires patience and acceptance of the demands on student learning.

Collaborative learning

The development of my understanding of collaborative learning from this study will continue also as I design my courses to maximize the potential of this pedagogy. The
role of communication in the Zone of Proximal Development in small group learning will be a focus for my future practice. As well as the collaboration of students I have been collaborating with colleagues in IT Carlow and the collaboration with Brian Hand for this module will continue. A number of areas for future study arise out of this research. Firstly the small group learning highlighted group interactions as vital in knowledge construction and out of this study certain areas of investigation are suggested. The current study found that the quiet student can express themselves better through online discussion while some participants prefer face to face sessions. How can course design promote participation in small group learning to maximize the potential of different communicative media? An area highlighted by this study is in relation to facilitating students to join discussion – how can they support each other to move in and out of being a leader one minute or a follower the next in order to promote collaboration? The social factors that influence these transitions such as gender, age, and facilitating the social interactions of mature learner and young student learner also require further investigation.

For myself

The overriding conclusion I make from this study is that collaborative group learning can support knowledge construction and student engagement. The focus is the same for any learning situation – online or offline – students are motivated by tasks that challenge and that they can relate to their own experience. The use of ICT in supporting community development is more complex and multifaceted than I first thought as it must first meet the needs of the learning community. The Pedagogies for Civic Engagement offer a way forward to the learner, teacher and the communities we serve.

( word count 25585 approx.)
Bibliography


Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of Focus Groups: the importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health and Illness, 16*(1), 103-121.


rretrieved from http://www.viddler.com/explore/cadaad/videos/2


### Appendix A: 1st discussion thread items

<table>
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<td>C</td>
<td>C</td>
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<td>Quentin</td>
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<td>I</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Vera</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>3:31 pm</td>
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<td>3:42 pm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>Thu Oct 9, 2008</td>
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- **One thing I found about doing the role play was that I tended to ham it up too much. I also did find that I could identify the different characters easily enough. What do people think about trying it again? Any ideas?**
- **no never**
- **Spoilsport XXX! You sure you not hamming up your opinion? I missed it so would like to be there for another run.**
- **why do you think it would be better to do another discussion?**
- **why not do another role play through this discussion board? all in agreement say ay!!**
- **ay!! What should it be about**
- **Dear XXX there are online role play activities which I could provide a link YYY**
- **i think we should try them out, it could be interesting to see how personalities can be expressed purely through text( as in we dont have facial expressions or gestures to express particular personality types in a non-verbal way) do actions speak louder than words?!**
- **what was the role playing as i was not here for it last week.**
the role play was basically us all makin eejits out of ourselves!! no, really, we were all given slips of paper and on each one was a different personality type, ie. 'the clam', this was followed by a short description of that particular personality ie. 'the clam' is a very shy person who only speaks when directly spoken to. we each had to act out the personality type we were given and engage in a discussion as that personality

Sorry I missed it, making an ejit out of myself is my special talent.

well then you didn't miss out too much, since ur already an expert!!

Everyones gotta be an expert in somthing!

Hi XXX We did a number of exercises which looked at the role play of a artist who applies to create a new work and wants money from the community group

XXX the roll play was just that we all pretended to be different people. Do you think it is a good idea?

it seems like it was a good idea.

Because it was such a laugh, I think everyone relaxed as we got used to the idea

Haming it up can help to emphasize the subject.
Hi XXX, The argument is that role play is not supposed to be about acting and that it gets confusing if acting takes over. It is supposed to be about what spontaneously comes into your head once you are in the role, in a sense these surprise you and confront you with certain stereotypes and accepted wisdom. Which bit did you like the best? YYY

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<td>25</td>
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<td>I</td>
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well obviously the chicken had to come from an egg, following the logic of evolutionary theory, technically it was a creature which was very similar to a chicken, only with slight genetic alterations ps dinosaurs came from eggs too, smell o rage

genetically modified chicken! Yum

i don't think you're taking this very seriously xxx♥

sorry xxx i did miss the meeting thats obv why i am so flippant

says mister 'smell-o-rage'!! paa!

so anyway, back to my original question...remember, about ethics?

Is this ethical? To ask someone to take off their clothes for:1. an art class 2. a psychology experiment

Hi I guess it is ethical if they are doing it of their own free will and not because they are under pressure to do it for whatever reason. Also vital that only an adult who is fully compus mentus (sorry i'm sure that is spelled wrong!)is asked or is allowed to volunteer.

Hi all, I am at home now and my question is...How was it for you?

hi XXX I thought it was good to get it started and for us all to get used to it. looking forward to lively discussions
We should prob move all discussions about ethics to the ethics forum.

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<td>36</td>
<td>Vera</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Good idea perhaps XXX will be able to do that.</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>JOHN</td>
<td>Sun Oct 12, 2008 8:53 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>just to say I enjoyed the class last Thursday, wne we had to figure out who wrote what(furniture, person you would like to meet, and fav. Tv programme) while it was highlighting stereotypes and the assumptions we make, it was pretty cool how well we did guessing the right person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Orla</td>
<td>Mon Nov 10, 2008 10:32 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I agree - it was fun and interesting. I agree XXX, Ithink we do make lots of assumptions on how people look and dress. But also by the way they speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>Tue Nov 11, 2008 9:41 am</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes xxx I think it would make it very interesting and also a bit risky as we would have to make assumptions on completely different terms and it would be quiet interesting to explore what they would be. I am supposing that the assumptions would be made solely on how people look. But in the class there were a lot of other factors involved in making our assumtions. But i think in the real world we base a lot of our assumptions on how people look. I know i was not very familiar with people in that class and was interested in how i made certain assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I agree - it was fun and interesting. I agree Caroline, I think we do make lots of assumptions on how people look and dress, but also by the way they speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vera</td>
<td>Tue Nov 11, 2008 1:20 pm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I think it was fun but imagine what it would be like if none of us had ever met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>Mon Dec 15, 2008 9:47 am</td>
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Appendix B: 2nd Discussion thread items

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<th>Lect1</th>
<th>Lect 2</th>
<th>Tutor</th>
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<tr>
<td>The experience of us five students working on the puzzle together on Thursday (or as it turned out not together) was a good lesson in the importance of talking things through. It seems the human condition is to compete rather than to cooperate. How did the rest of you find it? Oh I am sure I did the puzzle all by myself too. Did you work it out too?</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>12-Dec</td>
<td>Ind</td>
<td>Ind</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The question: &quot;is the human conditioned to compete rather than cooperate&quot; is interesting to consider in relation to group problem solving. Is our motivation to solve problems in groups still very individualistic, do we want to say &quot;I&quot; solved the problem or can we say &quot;The group&quot; solved the problem together. Are groups of problem solvers or individual creative genius problem solvers more effective? Most people believe that many minds are better than one. There have been studies to that show the exact opposite, and that the reason for slow moving committees, governments etc in problem solving is that the human politics and compromises kill the best possible answer. On the other hand it can be said that the presence of others can improve performance in group problem solving through motivation because we believe that our behaviour is under scrutiny. What are your thoughts on the reality of problem solving in groups?</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>16-Dec</td>
<td>Ind</td>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Int</td>
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<tr>
<td>it depends on the person as everyone i feel wants to say that they were the one who solved it but they may just keep it quiet. Where some may want to say they soved on their own to please theirselves. everyone is happy when they solve something but others get it quicker they can fell dissapointed and to please themselves they same they completed</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>17-Dec</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Ind</td>
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</table>
Hey, I think it depends on the person some people don't mind the group taking credit for a result even if they were the person who solved the problem. As far as I am concerned I think that the most important thing is getting a result and it doesn't matter who gets the credit once the task is completed and the job gets done.

Now it seems to me that the first step is ground rules. Then every discussion must be put to a vote and the majority rule. But this process makes committee work very slow. So on the other hand get a chair person a leader who holds the power. But the problem with that is they are left with all the work and worry. Some one please clear my thoughts.

I thought it was very interesting how the different people reacted when we where given the task. I know I only treated it as only a game, but once those envelopes were opened you could the competitive light switch on in some people. Even though it was a minor task IT HAD TO BE DONE.

Hi there I was reading a reference to Howard Gardner's book 'changing minds' 2004 he distinguishes between creative genuises who strike out to make big changes at one pole and at the other "teachers, parents and storekeepers who are satisfied with lowercase mind change". I am not sure that such a distinction is fair, geniuses in my understanding of history never succeeded in isolation, they were always bound to the society, despite their claims. The pursuit of artistic genius is a myth supported by many. Anyway this is just a thought, I think that context always determines the specifics of the problem, so I would disagree with the views expressed that it depends on the
individuals. Anyone agree or contest this?

Howard Gardner is interested in changing peoples mind set. "These levers include reason, research, resonance, real-world events and resistance. He applies these levers to six possible" I must say only as a parent have I been interested in influencing how a prison thinks. But I am not a "Creative Geniuses" Gardner seems to be assuming all people do think about things. I some times think people just lets the mind wonder. I should read more of the book. (word document posted also)

Hi XXX, I sense you see a difference between thinking and letting your mind wander - maybe that is being creative and making connections between disparate things. Is there a difference? Letting your mind wander may be part of a journey to well developed thoughts. I think of genius as something we are all capable of if allowed to use our creativity to its full potential. Some people are denied by experience or circumstance opportunities to develop. Elsewhere Gardner has tried to move the way we think of intelligence away from narrow 'intelligences' that are based on language and maths/science to allow for intelligences to do with art, music, dance, physical expertise, sport. How do we value these in our society?
Hi Brian, Your posting prompted several thoughts to wander into mind for me: are the impressionist painters a product of their time and need to be understood as framed by that epoch? How do they appeal to later generations? Do they say something significant to us today? Is the process of creating art as important as the end product? Then art movements seem to be referring to/critiqueing/developing/challenging previous art. Then do we think of art as moving towards something anyway or is that historical interpretation? Are there art movements? Is dada to be understood in terms of its historical context? Does it challenge the very notion of development of ideas? Can artistic expression step outside of its moment in time to make universal? I would be interested to hear the students thoughts and maybe they will be tempted to critique/challenge/develop mine. statements about human experience?

Hi John and class, This is all a set of deep questions about epistemology or how we know what we know and how much we wish to acknowledge the forces that mould our thoughts. I believe reality is constructed and that the environment creates consciousness and not the other way around, so I am on the constructivist end of the spectrum, this puts me at odds with those who think there are truths independent of circumstance, history, culture etc, independent objective universal and true. So for me art movements are always historically specific and my reading of works made in the past is likewise specific to my time. Most art movements and aesthetic philosophies have given up on universal truth claims since the abandonment of beauty as something to worry about in European philosophy about 200 yrs ago. Art is never independent because for art to exist it needs an exchange with an other it needs a reader, receiver, listener or a viewer. Does anyone agree or disagree?
Human nature will always provide the artist with a viewer. For the artist to make a piece of work he has to few it so even if it doesn't go out into the public sphere, it has been viewed by the artist himself.

| Hi Edwin Interesting comment, Could you expand on what you mean? thanks Brian |
|-------------------------------|----------------|---|---|
| I agree, the art doesn't really exist without someone to view it, and even if that art attempts to transcend the boundaries of time, its viewer can't.....you can't control the viewers experience of the work, and I think that this experience is influenced in part by time.....the accepted notions and ideas of a particular time, the experiences of the individual would all have an impact on how the viewer perceives the work. Also, I think that often, in hindsight, we see similarities in artworks made around the same time period that may not have been so obvious at the time, so they are framed by there context.....the artist may claim the art to be independant, but often the work can have certain attributes that allow us to place it in a specific movement, or context, or place in time, therefore, the work is of its time and inevitably a product of it |

Hiya, I have difficulty with the concept that for art to exist it needs another, a viewer or listener etc. What about if an artist makes a piece of work but does not show it to anyone. Is it not art? A piece that springs to mind is Bacon's 'Study after Velasquez', 1950. This was withdrawn from exhibition and put away, not to be discovered until after his death. Does that mean that the painting was not art for all that time and only became art once put on display? For anyone not familiar with this here is link that you might find interesting. http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/media_releases/2397.aspx
if something isn't art until it is experienced by
an audience then surely a tree falling in the
woods with no one around to hear it wouldn't
make a sound, unless of course, your
definition of art requires an audience...like,
Duchamp said that the viewers interpretation
made up part of the work (read his essay "the
creative act"
http://www.iaaa.nl/cursusAAandAI/duchamp.
html ) and i'd tend to agree with him. It is an
interesting notion though and a good one for
discussion. What do the rest of you think? i'd
think of an artwork without someone to
experience it as being like a car without a
driver, it still exists, its just not going
anywhere

<table>
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<th>Eric</th>
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<th>Int</th>
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a tree falling in the woods with no one around
to hear it does make sound - it just doesn't
make noise.

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<th>France</th>
<th>3-Feb</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>P</th>
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I personally see all art as a form of
communication, you communicate your
thoughts, feelings, perspectives, opinions
each, everything you do in your art has a
reason whether you're completely aware of it
or not. I believe you never just see something
and paint it just because 'it's nice' - there has
to be something in what you see that you are
relating to and you choose to communicate
that through your art. If something is not
communicating something, or trying to
communicate something, either to the artist
or viewer, then I do not think it is art. If
someone is not experiencing an 'artwork' -
sight, touch, sound etc. then it cannot be
communicating anything and cannot be art
until it is experienced.

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I hadn't read what he said before - it makes interesting reading and there are several points of discussion. The sound of a tree falling without someone to hear it is at heart of some scientific questions - science would say we could put a recorder in the forest and capture evidence for its existence. An artist could play the sound to an audience with a title such as 'lonely tree dying'. Are you saying that an artist can have an exhibition and keep everyone out and it will be art. Not sure whether that is on lines of what you are saying and I would have to re-read Duchamp.

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<th>Lecture</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>5-Feb</th>
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Appendix C: Questionnaire
Please look back over your experience of the Community Based Learning Module and answer the following questions. Please think of how the module has assisted your learning and any problems or difficulties you experienced. As the aim is to improve the course your feedback is valued.

1. How has your experience of the module been so far?

2. Have you enjoyed this method of learning?

3. How have you found learning using computers?

4. What was your experience of using blogs?
5. How did you find reflection?

6. How did you find the discussion boards?

7. What difficulties did you encounter in learning together?

8. What did you learn about community?

9. How were the class sessions useful to you?
10. Were there any aspects of the course that you would change?

11. Are there any suggestions you have for future courses?
Appendix D: Interview questions

Having reviewed the questionnaire the following questions acted as a guide to complement the questionnaire allowing the interviewer to follow different topics as they arose in the conversation.

Tell me about yourself – your interest in art etc.

Has your thinking changed during this module?

In what way?

How did you feel being asked to work with the community?

How would you think about community now?

What do you think of the community of Wexford?

Can you remember your first reaction to the module?

Has that changed?

Have you noticed any changes in your way of learning at different times during the course of the module? Beginning/ middle/end.

Did you enjoy working with others?

Did you enjoy working with computers?

Was reflection useful to you?

Do you have any comments on the way this course was delivered?

Are there any changes you would make to the course?

Have you any other ideas/thoughts to add?
Appendix E: Student responses to participatory research

**Current Forum:** Responses to role play and class activities  **Date:** Thu Nov 27, 2008 4:51 pm  
**Author:** John  
**Attachment:** [coates_typology_collaborative_results_sheet_27_11_08.doc](31744 bytes)  
**Subject:** Our Participatory Research

Hi all,

Thanks for taking part today in analysing your comments on the discussion board. I thought we had an interesting session looking at the data. Some of the discussion was most useful and I wish I had tape recorded it. Hopefully you can remember some of the ideas and put them up. Perhaps you might look at some of the following prompt questions:

1. What did you think of the process of analysing data together?
2. How did we define the terms used: intense/passive; independent/collaborative?
3. Do you have any ideas to improve the process?
4. Did you become aware of any ideas that would influence your work on the module?

I will look at the data we have allocated to different categories and maybe we can use the same approach in looking at the next discussion board later. I have attached the blank recording sheet with the categories so that those who weren’t in can get an idea of what we did today. I have just had a thought - it would be interesting to see if they come up with the same analysis.

thanks

John

---

**Current Forum:** Responses to role play and class activities  **Date:** Tue Dec 2, 2008 5:45 pm  
**Author:** Cynthia  
**Subject:** Re: Our Participatory Research

I think the process of analysing data together was an interesting experience. It created new ways of looking at things and promted me to think about and analyse not only my responses on the discussion board but how I learn or communicate with people in general, whether its online or face to face. It raised questions in my mind about not only myself but the people around me also. Do we repond in the different ways to suit the situation or the people we are surrounded by? Or are people predominantly intensive, passive, independant or collaborative?

---

**Current Forum:** Responses to role play and class activities  **Date:** Thu Dec 18, 2008 6:49 am  
**Author:** Quentin  
**Subject:** Re: Our Participatory Research

I thought it was interesting the way the answers were spread out when we were in our smaller groups, but then when the whole group got together it completly changed.

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**Current Forum:** Responses to role play and class activities  **Date:** Fri Dec 19, 2008 10:32 am  
**Author:** Noel  
**Subject:** Re: Our Participatory Research
i felt that it would be easier to be critical to others writings rather than your own. and i would find it hard to try think about those five points when i am post up on the boards what dose anyone else think???

Current Forum: Responses to role play and class activities  Date: Thu Feb 5, 2009 9:18 pm
Author: John Attachment: coates_model_of_online_engagement.pdf (291521 bytes) Subject: Update on research

Thursday 5th February 2009

Today was a very interesting session discussing the research of how the course is going. I fed back the results of the group analysis of the role play discussion board. As this was at the beginning of the course maybe later discussions will show different dynamics. We used Coates (2007) typology of student engagement with 4 types - passive, independent, collaborative, intense - and I compared our decisions with 2 independent lecturers. The results found that there was more agreement between students and lecturers on collaborative than the rest and there were more in that category. It was also interesting to observe that there were less in the intense category and there was less agreement between students and lecturers on this category. Does this mean that we are talking about something different when we refer to ‘intense’ form of engagement with learning?

We read through the description of Coates and some discussion focussed on our interpretation of these ways of engaging in learning. We seemed to disagree with the narrow interpretation as it was felt that we move in and out of these styles and one student would like to add ‘adaptive’ to list.

I also showed other ways of looking at engagement as a term and one from a design course in UK. They came up with the importance of "a sense of being" that students felt helped them become engaged with their course (Solomonides and Reid, 2006)

I referred to the concept of ‘flow’ by Csíkszentmihályi to refer to being engrossed by creative process. Is this part of being engaged in learning?

These are attempts at striving towards a more detailed conception of student engagement. I felt that there was a range of ideas expressed today and ask you to put some of them down to record them for documenting the research. Would you write down some of your thoughts on student engagement resulting from today and any other ideas that have come to you about the ways we learn. You can post them here or send them to my email mcgarrij@itcarlow.ie if you prefer.

I attach the 2 articles I referred to today.

Current Forum: Responses to role play and class activities  Date: Mon Feb 9, 2009 10:20 pm
Author: Orla Subject: Re: Update on research

well i think we all agreed that it was unfair to label a student who works well in collaboration with others as 'below norm', academically speaking.....also, there was some contradiction in the definitions for each category, ie. the ‘intense’ student is considered the opposite end of the scale to the ‘collaborative’ student, yet one of the positive attributes given to the ‘intense’ student was to be collaborative? talk about confusing!! i think that the lack of clarity and common understanding among students and staff about what defines each category(in general, not specifically in our class) could be a problem when gathering data - how can you trust in the resulting statistics when students seem to be answering questions with a different understanding of what they mean to the one intended. i don't mean to be critical of john's research, but i do question how the student engagement styles are defined in coates explanation....
Current Forum: Responses to role play and class activities Date: Tue Feb 10, 2009 9:10 am
Author: Noel Subject: Re: Update on research

i feel that it is harder for you to put yourself into one of the boxes rather than the rest of the group to and as well as that you would be some of them at different times of your life.

Current Forum: Responses to role play and class activities Date: Thu Feb 12, 2009 12:37 am
Author: John Attachment: campus_engage_june_09_abstract_12_2_09.doc (22016 bytes)
Subject: Re: Update on research

Thanks Orla and Noel for your comments. They are really useful. I hope some more of your fellow students can add to them to get a cross section of opinion for my research.
I suppose I am aware of great energy taking place in organising exhibition etc. I find I have to keep up with what you are doing - I just noticed you have put together a website! That is really amazing. I think there is an interesting piece of learning for us all and hope you feel free to contribute your thoughts. I am putting together an abstract to submit to a conference in Croke Park in June where we can present the research. Please let me know if there are other aspects that you have found in the module. As this is still in progress and I have to submit this by the end of the week i would appreciate your comments today. I attach the abstract for your comments.
Appendix F: Interviews
Interview with Karen

KAREN: Right hello how are you?

JOHN: So, thanks Anne for coming in em just before just to relax into it eh and if we have to go at a level we’ll see how we are if you want to finish up later okay.

KAREN: Okay.

JOHN: So just tell us a little about yourself eh and your interest in art and .......

KAREN: Oh about me, oh I didn’t realize I thought this we were going to talk about the course that we had been on. I mean I’ve been obviously interested in art since I was a kid and you know since like when I did leaving cert I wanted to go to the Grafton Academy. I got in but of course my father wouldn’t pay for me so that was it so I ended up sort of working in an office all my life and eh just eh went and got the job you know since like I was 15 and that was it. I em went back to VTOS and I wouldn’t be here only for VTOS really, you know sort of like I didn’t I would never have seen myself going to college you know sort of and the thing of going to college was the big thing for me and the only thing that I could do was art.

JOHN: Yes, yeah, yeah.

KAREN: You know sort of like you know.

JOHN: Yeah, yeah so that’s eh, and you’re working now in your third year and have you enjoyed your student life so far?

KAREN: Oh yes I mean its only now looking back I realize how stressful the first year was, I mean the first year was dreadful but you know sort of it was like yes I’ve enjoyed it and its eh definitely I mean it has personal development for me, I’ve got to know myself which I didn’t at this late stage of my life just in case whoever is listening I’m quite an old woman.

JOHN: No this is just eh and it will be anononised and your name so and then I’ll type up the thesis and I’ll show it to you and you can take out pieces that
you don’t want in it so you can edit it so its just to have a conversation about your experience of the module your on.

**KAREN:** Yeah well now you know sort of like I’m dying to talk about this module because you know sort of like I have the curriculum here in front of me, you know sort of like and it says the course covers painting, sculpture, digital media, art history and cultural studies. Now the first two years we were on the course we did cultural studies and I enjoyed it you know sort of like really em and I mean the art history they would have been my two most enjoyable subjects you know sort of like you know in that that the others I was, well I enjoyed the working of it but I was a bit confused but these two I understood and I enjoyed and I worked hard at them, I mean I worked hard at everything but now I really feel this is the one that I floundered with you know sort of like you know because at the start I’m saying to myself is t his personal development? That’s what I thought the course was. You know sort of like you know, then I thought is it drama? You know sort of like you know and then the discussion board you know I mean I remember early on you know sort of like then I thought this is to get us into media you know sort of like which I suppose is what it was. I still don’t know what the thing was about. Then you know sort of like you know em then I sort of said were we just sort of helping you with your research you know sort of like you know now eh so eh yeah were we facilitating your research you know sort of like eh then eh yeah perhaps I didn’t participate well enough in it. I only missed one class you know sort of like you know but a lot of it you know I maybe it was me I hated it from the very beginning because I didn’t understand where I was going.

**JOHN:** Okay.
KAREN: You know sort of like you know eh again you know now maybe this is
because it was so modern and I wasn’t up with it and maybe I mean the
discussion board thing to me was a lot of rubbish

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: You know sort of like you know because eh now I mean where I’m
coming from you know the dyslexic problem that maybe had I had my
own laptop and had access to the internet all day and all night....

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: You know sort of like and had a reader and I know you tried to help me
with that and I balked.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: Do you know what I mean.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: So I’m taking responsibility for that myself, you know sort of like you
know and I can see now that that would have been helpful

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: And again I mean I have done all sorts of charity work you know sort of
like through my life and I wasn’t going to go out and do it again.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: So I didn’t do that you see so you know sort of like em I mean I’m doing
the reflective thinking on it and I’m just using my own history,

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: You know sort of like you know for it so you know sort of like so I really
didn’t feel that again I mean the discussion board to me was students
leading students, the blind leading the blind.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: So I didn’t have the confidence in it. I know that Brian and yourself put in
stuff and I did try to download them and read them in a sort of like you
know and eh again you know sort of like with the thing I had it was just you know too much and I didn’t see it was relevant to me.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: Do you know what I mean?

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: So that was where I was coming from.

JOHN: Yeah, yeah so do you feel that at the start then a clearer outline of what the course was about would have helped you then?

KAREN: Yeah now and that’s maybe I mean I know a lot of our work has been done I mean down with Brian you know that we’re only drip fed little bits to get it step by step, I do understand that that’s part of it.

JOHN: Yeah, yeah.

KAREN: You know but for me personally I need to know where I’m going to make a plan for myself.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: That’s just the way I …. you know like you know and again I mean I used to even say – did I miss the first class? You know because I sort of felt like that you know and I just never knew where I ….I know you did explain but but what I took out of the explanation was that you were doing extra studies and this was to facilitate that so you know so I’m sorry but that’s the way I felt about it that we were just facilitating you. I didn’t feel you know … now I know and even at this stage I am sorry I didn’t make an effort and try and put a blog on because I’d know how to do it now and I don’t. Do you know what I mean, so maybe there wasn’t enough encouragement or you know sort of like maybe I didn’t push myself enough I don’t know, you know sort of like you know?

JOHN: Okay so more support to every student to help them with an ITC piece?

KAREN: Well the thing is you see I mean I’m sure the younger people wouldn’t need it and also the conditions up in that tiny little room, I can still
remember it the heat in it and the whole thing you know it was horrifying to me, you know sort of like you know because I didn’t want to be there and I wasn’t even physically comfortable because it was too warm.

JOHN: Which room was that?

KAREN: Up in the tiny little room upstairs you know sort of like you know at the very beginning when you were doing the discussion sort of you know so that you know I don’t know

JOHN: The computer lab?

KAREN: Yeah, you know.

JOHN: Em yeah, okay so just em do you think you’ve changed your thinking as a result of doing the module or eh ........

KAREN: Eh well I suppose I can say that maybe I have learned that I should try and you know even if I don’t like the thing and you sort of that I should put more effort in I mean that’s maybe all I at this stage I could regret that I didn’t eh you know sort of like you know but em you know I’m sure now I’m going to go home and try and get this language thing and see if I can sort myself out because I do feel that I’m more in tune with the internet now you know sort of like you know and eh maybe I’ll just use it for looking up to see what’s in this.

JOHN: Yes, yeah, yeah.

KAREN: That’s another option I don’t know but at least you know sort of like you know that has been em you know using it you know that’s I mean I think after all this course is over maybe that’s the only thing I’m going to have is that I’ll be more familiar with the technology that’s out there you know sort of but I have learned an awful lot of things about myself and one thing and I still I can’t see that its going to change at this stage I don’t like getting help, I don’t like looking for help.

JOHN: Okay, yeah.
KAREN: You know I’m not good at asking you know this thing and I mean like Brian kept saying all the time on the courses that you know your students friends and some of them show you and all this sort of thing you know I don’t you know speed out to that you know sort of like and ...

JOHN: Yeah, but in relation to that like eh you don’t enjoy working with others or you know the aspect of that working with others collaborating with others you didn’t enjoy that so much?

KAREN: No because it like you know because eh you know you know I’m not good at contradicting the people you know I mean I mean really its interesting you know you look back and you think you know the way you were reared you know sort of like you know and I was reared not to be a nuisance you know sort of like not to cause bother just to be quiet,

JOHN: Okay

KAREN: And I think I still have you know that so that you know sort of like if your doing the thing one way and I don’t like the way your doing it, it just irks me but I won’t tell you,

JOHN: Okay yeah.

KAREN: You see so just bad for my you know sort of like you know thing and I mean I would feel that em you know all my thing I have just got through working for myself you know like independently so you know sort of like you know and ..... 

JOHN: Well do you like you mentioned community there so what do you think eh how do you think about community then what do you think about being asked to work with the community then?

KAREN: Yeah well I mean I presume if I’m like the reason I was here is because I cant bear being at home doing nothing you know sort of like so I’m sure when I go back out I’m going to have to try and make my way into something in the community, I mean I have done voluntary work before I worked for 12 years you know sort of like you know on a you know sort
of like eh book keeping but it was like voluntary but em so em I had a very old Aunt who said anybody who does something for nothing is a fool.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: You know sort of like you know and I remember you know sort like at that stage I was so long and she was chatting about that so you know I mean that’s the one side of it but I do feel that there is a lot to be gained if your out I mean it makes a richer life for yourself than sitting at home in your own four walls you know even if you were out picking papers on the street you know your you know I do think there is a benefit to be had from it but there is an attitude and I mean in my reflective thinking I was just of the thing you know sort of like you know at a railway station do I clear off the table and put the stuff in the bin you know sort of like as we were doing one day myself and my husband and then another man said your doing someone out of a job. You see and I mean but you think that’s funny but like I mean we would always sort of we’d tidy up anyway but it made me wonder you see and I have no answer to it you are we doing someone out of a job you know sort of like and there is that thinking there I mean it just hurts me to get on the train even at 7 o’clock in the morning and there is still a cup sitting on a table that somebody wouldn’t put in a bin beside them you know I mean like that’s sort of living in the community you know

JOHN: Yeah, yes

KAREN: And I mean their simple little things you know sort of I mean again sort of I was walking through our own park at home and this girl you know sort like you know was looking after her dogs mess you know sort of like you know and I congratulated her

JOHN: Yes, yes ....
KAREN: And she said oh but we’re supposed to do it in a foreign language she wasn’t Irish and because I was very surprised because she looked Irish you know and I thought well I must congratulate this girl for doing the right thing

JOHN: Yes, yes ..... 

KAREN: You know and then she turned out she was a foreigner you know sort of like so I said we have a long way to go.

JOHN: Well do you think then we have a long way to go with our idea of community then do you think in Ireland or what do you think?

KAREN: Oh well its gone I mean it used to be there you know sort of like I mean eh the thing of you know sort of like the nosy auld sort of like spinster who criticized the house across the road because there was lads coming out of it in the early morning but I suppose that’s gone completely out of like you know fashion

JOHN: Yeah ...

KAREN: But I mean they were the people who kept the morals of the country you know sort of like sort of straightened out but that’s gone now and I mean even you don’t correct anybody or do anything so you know sort of like you know its em individualism gone mad you know sort of like I mean that’s what it is, isn’t it?

JOHN: Okay and did you feel you learned things in relation to that as a part of this module or were you already aware of them?

KAREN: I was already aware of all that.

JOHN: There’s nothing, do you feel that this module is doing anything to em in relation to those attitudes or not?

KAREN: No I mean no there was none of that hardcore, it was all very polite and very nice but there was no straight talking in it you know sort like you know that was my thinking on it you know and I mean I’m sure the young people who would have gone out to the art project and I mean they
were right and I didn’t bother doing that because I said ah sure you know I don’t see myself you know going to work like that and even down here I wouldn’t its just as well to let the Wexford people make the connections with the people down here. Now that’s my excuse maybe but anyway I didn’t do it you know sort of like but you know sort of like eh they were I mean that wasn’t really community in my opinion you see again now again I know that’s wrong I know I’m saying that wrong now but that’s my you see I’m going back into my own thing I know you were saying community is right and it is but I tend to think of community as being people in need of help ....

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: You know sort of like and I mean okay in need of education and I know that’s probably I mean that the schools that picked out some of them were disadvantaged and they could see I did hear them discussing you know sort of like you know different attitudes that they were picking up and I suppose that’s but I mean I would be aware of all that anyway ....

JOHN: Yes, yeah ...

KAREN: So you know sort of like you know as far as I was concerned that class was a waste of time for me you know sort of like eh .......

JOHN: You got together though as a group of students and you put on an exhibition?

KAREN: Yes.

JOHN: Is that ...

KAREN: Do you know what we were told about that?

JOHN: What?

KAREN: You know sort of like eh you know I mean we were all told we were going to fight. We didn’t fight really, I mean there was a bit of fighting at the beginning but we didn’t you know sort of like you know and the thing just came together and somebody said that was because we were all a bit
apathetic and we weren’t eh sufficiently eh pushy about our own position or what we wanted ....

JOHN: Yes, yeah ......

KAREN: We were happy you now we ......

JOHN: Yes, yeah ....

KAREN: So you can’t win but yes we did put on then ....

JOHN: You did collaborate together as a community of students didn’t you?

KAREN: Well we did you know sort of like you know ...

JOHN: It’s called stone soup isn’t it?

KAREN: stone soup yeah but I mean it was interesting in so far as there was two groups well there was I mean there was a leader who got anxious very early on, now not an elected leader there was no elected anything. It was a but you know sort of like panicked and gave out and caused bother you know sort of like you know got exhausted and did nothing you know sort of like you know or maybe was told to shut up and sit down you know sort of like and then people you know sort of like people with heads on their shoulders came in in the middle you know sort of like you know and did what they had to do you know sort of like you know now I mean had we listened carefully to Brian when he said there’s a group doing this and a group doing that and a group doing the other eh and taken you know sort of like had we done that it would have been better.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: You know sort of like you know but in the end it was a free for all you know sort of because some people weren’t doing anything at all and I was one of them to start you know sort of because I didn’t see the point and I was letting all these people that were ...... you know ....

JOHN: Right ......
KAREN: You know but I mean it came together on the night but granted there was a hell of a lot of help from Alanna and Fergus in the end to drag some people into order but you know that’s my opinion.

JOHN: Okay that’s fine. Eh Just to I know you’ve got to go now em do you think your way of learning or you’ve learnt has changed from the beginning to the middle or the end have you noticed different parts if you look back over it? So when you got clearer now after the beginning, you weren’t too sure at the beginning of what it was about.

KAREN: Now you’re talking about your course?

JOHN: Yeah this is this particular course yeah.

KAREN: Em, no I’m still I still actually eh don’t feel that I’ve learnt anything. But then I came in with knowing a lot of it.

JOHN: Okay.

KAREN: So you know I would hope that some of the young people .....you know that’s the point, that’s the difficulty isn’t it with the age thing, do you know, now maybe I’m being very facetious there I don’t know.

JOHN: I don’t know, okay eh so I think we’ve covered everything here like em.... the reflection part, do you think that’s useful to you?

KAREN: Well again I was just ...yes I suppose like I must say now like I’m dreading going home having nothing to do you know sort of like you know when all this is over and you know I was saying like well at least I will have the reflective writing that I could do you know sort of like you know to keep you know sort of like to sort of analyze things and to see you know sort of like to step back ...

JOHN: I see ....

KAREN: Yes I do think Brian at one stage I remember him talking about the thinking, you know sort of like the reflective thinking thing was you know sort of like was eh something that I knew of it but you know it’s the
actual doing of it I mean like I would have done more of that, that’s the only thing that I sort of really did.

JOHN: Okay so you find that reflection is useful?

KAREN: Yeah, yeah I mean even sort of like for your own you know sort of like sorting the thing out in your head writing it down you know does clear it in your head, you know sort of like and even it makes you aware of when your bottling away. But the discussion board I mean my impression was like it was just you know people were writing just to jump through the hoops, now that’s my impression of it you know sort of like and a lot of it was all too short and anyway I didn’t expect to be learning from you know from my fellow students.

JOHN: Okay so you feel maybe each could have developed their thread a bit longer developed the ideas a bit longer their too short. That’s an interesting point alright.

KAREN: Well you see when we were writing about the exhibition that was getting work done you know sort of like you know that was useful, the thing had a use. Now I’m very much into things having use, you know sort of but the other it didn’t except for just to try and get your name on the board, well maybe that was where I was coming from. So there we go.

JOHN: Thanks very much Anne, thanks a lot. I’ll type these up and then ......

KAREN: I’m sorry for being so brutal but you know sort of like you know there’s no point in me being nice.

JOHN: Okay, thanks then Anne, thanks.
Interview with Roger

JOHN: So just get relaxed now Roger just tell me about yourself your interest in art and things like that.

ROGER: About myself oh well I’m into video art at the moment um we just put on our show our exhibition down at the Selskar Centre to rave reviews.

JOHN: Very good what sort of reviews did you get then?

ROGER: Oh we got some good ones a lot of people thought it was a very good show. Did you oh you seen it didn’t you?

JOHN: I saw it yeah. I was quite impressed yeah.

ROGER: Were ya what was impressive about it?

JOHN: I was very pleased to see the audio visual stuff I quite enjoyed it.

ROGER: A lot of audio visual a lot of people were doing audio visual stuff you know.

JOHN: Did it take you a while to get your piece together?

ROGER: Oh months about 6 weeks I’d say.

JOHN: And the ideas did any of the ideas for it come from this module or some thinking around that?

ROGER: I suppose I’m kind of fuzzy what this module was about for me you know I guess we went through some kind of process. I wasn’t sure there was no clear outcomes or you know there was nothing. I was just going to class and whatever happened in class there was always something, there was always something varied and lots of variety in the class and some of them I found very interesting you know like the Augusta Boal I liked that the theatre of the oppressed where people were talking about ideas trying to work out things

JOHN: How did that impress you? What ideas did that throw up for you?

ROGER: Oh I can’t remember now but I mean it’s like you have to talk about things it’s no use if you want to change something you start by talking if
you want to change anything you have to start by talking to people. Discussing it, which is something I don’t think goes on here very much. I don’t think there is very much communication between there and down here. I mean they have a thing that goes out now they sent out. You’re supposed to fill in a form on the internet but sure what’s that, that’s very distanced isn’t it?

JOHN: Yeah.
ROGER: Their not actually getting to talk to people.
JOHN: That’s QA forms is it?
ROGER: Yeah. Rubbish.
JOHN: You’d prefer to actually talk physically to people rather than fill out forms on the internet?
ROGER: Yeah, Yeah give them a piece of my mind yeah.
JOHN: And what sort of mind is that then? Anyway that’s beyond the scope of this research. But that’s the process you’re saying between communication between the IT Carlow Campus and you as a student?

ROGER: Yeah. I don’t know your here, your being taught different modules but they don’t ask for feedback. Even like down at the school now there’s nobody looking for feedback. They give you lots of feedback and lots of ideas but they don’t really ask you for your feedback.

JOHN: Yeah okay. You feel a bit more its one sided?
ROGER: Yeah it’s too one sided yeah. They think they know everything and we know nothing.

JOHN: Okay, so eh I’ve sort of well I could talk to you more about that but I’ll bring it back to the community based module that you’ve been doing. So do you think you’re thinking has changed during this module?

ROGER: I don’t know. Its hard to know if you’re thinking has changed. About what like?
JOHN: I don’t know. I’m just opening it for you to interpret. We’ll come back to that if you like?

ROGER: Yeah.

JOHN: So how did you feel about being asked to work for the community?

ROGER: I didn’t do any work with the community

JOHN: Okay yeah.

ROGER: You know?

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: I don’t know I just feel like we had enough to do.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: You know, its just I have a hard enough time keeping up with everything that’s going on in school without going and joining some charity. Plus I do some community work in my own way like I do hospital visits, I don’t know if that’s community work but that’s what I do.

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: For somebody out near where I am, I go see them once a week. So that takes up a lot of my time.

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: But I didn’t really do any Art. Do you mean Art projects?

JOHN: Well it was a community based module so what was your understanding of that aspect of working with the community from the module.

ROGER: I didn’t really do any, did I?

JOHN: Okay, I don’t know.

ROGER: I didn’t. I mean I didn’t, some people might have worked with the Art Alongside and different things like that but I didn’t do that.

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: You know?

JOHN: And that was because of time constraints?

ROGER: I think more and more time constrains yeah.
JOHN: Rather than you didn’t want to or?
ROGER: I had thought about joining the St. Vincent De Paul.
JOHN: Okay.
ROGER: But I don’t know if they wanted you to do art or if they wanted you to do was it just you could join any organisation to help out. So I thought about the, I was actually going to join up with the travellers you know in the travelling community in Carlow but then they wanted to do a background check and like I’ve been in so many places all over the world you know to list all the places I was in over the last 30 years is just impossible.

JOHN: Who wanted to do a background check?
ROGER: You have to when you’re volunteering with these travelling community people.

JOHN: So you approached to do that did you, you did think about it?
ROGER: Oh I went and talked to the girl yeah.

JOHN: Okay so you did do something?
ROGER: Yeah I did I went and talked to her and she said that anybody who was working with children or adults or whatever they had to have a police report.

JOHN: Oh the Garda clearance, so that’s to work with children isn’t it?
ROGER: Yeah but I had no intentions of working with children but anything to do with them you need a Garda clearance it seems to me.

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: So I went to the Volunteer Centre in Carlow but eh you know they gave me forms and you know I had to fill out every place I’d been since I was 16.

JOHN: In order to work with them?

ROGER: Work with them yeah. I had to give all the addresses I’ve been at.

JOHN: You went through that?

ROGER: Huh?
JOHN: Well you decided that was too much?

ROGER: It was too much yeah. Jesus I mean I haven’t been in Ireland for 30 years. I’ve been all over the place, America, India everywhere, you know. So it was just you know too much for me. So I just kinda gave up on that one. That kinda put me off.

JOHN: Put you off, yeah ok. So you made some attempts to do something?

ROGER: I made an attempt yeah, I gave it some serious thought.

JOHN: I mean em so how would you feel about the idea of community anyway in Wexford or is it Carlow you’re from?

ROGER: Carlow. I’m not really a community person.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: I help out you know with the Tidy Towns and stuff like that but I’m not really into committees or getting involved in that kind of way you know, although Vincent de Paul I would probably you know, I’d think about it over the summer, I don’t know. Is this module finished now or is it carrying on next year.

JOHN: Well you just do it this year I think.

ROGER: Oh it’s only a third year you do that and it just doesn’t go after that?

JOHN: I think it’s for the third year. Well that’s Brian’s decision yeah. Why you’d like to carry on with it?

ROGER: Ah no, no like it’s always nice to volunteer for things doing things, I don’t mind doing that. You know I’d do that. You know visiting somebody once a week in a hospital takes a lot of your time too.

JOHN: Yeah, do you feel that your idea of community then it’s about volunteering then?

ROGER: My idea yeah, its more about finding something you want to do and then just helping out which I do. I help the Tidy Towns about scuffling weeds and cleaning up the village and that’s my idea of community or going to visit someone in a hospital that’s community to me. I don’t really get
involved too much in any of these other things. Community is just you
know everybody has their own interests you know. You know you might
be involved in a committee. I have no interest in committees you know.
I don’t mind helping out but I have no interest in you know talking about
things or whatever, you know what I mean. I’m more of action, you
know more action orientated just do it, don’t talk about it.

JOHN: Em, I’m just going to go onto, we talked about com munity. Just looking
back over the course of the module that you’ve been involved in, can you
remember what your first reaction to it was?

ROGER: Yeah I was like a lot of people, what has this got to do with art?

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: You know we didn’t understand that, a lot of people couldn’t get their
heads around that, does it have anything to do with art you know. Why
are we doing this you know. This is just something we’re forced into
doing or just put upon us or you know. Nothing to do with you or
anything but you know why are we doing this?

JOHN: Okay. Did you get an answer to that as you went through?

ROGER: I don’t know. I don’t know. Why were we doing it anyway? You know
like did I get an answer to that. It just seems to me, I think Brian had an
idea that okay get people involved in community, get them out there you
know, trying to bring art to the community and involve the school down
there in community. I think that’s what he, I don’t know that’s what I
thought.

JOHN: It sounds right to me yeah.

ROGER: I think that’s what he thought he was trying to do you know?

JOHN: Yeah, and do you think he ....

ROGER: And pushing the blogging and all that stuff, I don’t like that blogging and
stuff, you know what I mean?

JOHN: The internet stuff you found difficult did you or you don’t like it?
ROGER: No interest in it. I’ve no interest in putting blogs up or personal information about anything you know? I’ve no interest in that.

JOHN: Yeah and so the process of reflection?

ROGER: Reflection oh God that’s another story.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: I didn’t do much of that.

JOHN: Okay yeah. What we’re doing now, is that like reflection?

ROGER: I don’t know it’s like what we’re doing now, I suppose it is in a way yeah.

JOHN: Yeah do you find it difficult to do that on your own to reflect on it?

ROGER: Reflecting? I wasn’t thinking too much about it you know, I wouldn’t be you know. Their all into this deep thought and reflecting and art is some kind of reflective thing and you have to be thinking very deeply about it which I think is a load of cobblers to be honest with you. You know art is just I feel like they have turned art into some kind of academia, you know where its like this - everything is stacked on the academia side and skills are not, you know like we have 7 or 8 tutors down there and I don’t think any of them really have any skills, not practical skills you know what I mean except maybe Brian. Like if go final ......pro or anything you know or anything you have to teach yourself this that and the other or go to film courses or things. Their not really interested in showing you the physical side of things it’s more mental and I felt this was more mental too you know? Not really practical.

JOHN: You felt there could be a more practical side to it then?

ROGER: To this?

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: Yeah.

JOHN: What do you think of then?
ROGER: Practical side? Well one of the things that’s coming up you know is this eh, this thing that’s coming up this month, is it the end of this month or early next month? That’s kinda practical isn’t it? Its involvement isn’t it?

JOHN: You feel more involved in that?

ROGER: Yeah yeah, I think so yeah.

JOHN: Tell us a bit about that then.

ROGER: Well we’re going to get some bicycles and weld them together and then we’re gonna get everybody to have paints and brushes and get people to put their mark on it and try and make a painted sculpture out of the bicycle and then there’s other people in our class who are doing a painting.

JOHN: Who’s this with then?

ROGER: Caroline.

JOHN: The public are coming to this are they?

ROGER: Yeah she has two or three different classes going on here. So their all kinda coming together.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: It’s for the community but we’re doing it. So it’s gonna be a full day.

JOHN: So more practical activities you feel would help?

ROGER: Yeah more practical things, more involvement you know. More involvement yeah. Well I guess that’s what he wanted us to do and we all go and get involved with a community organisation you know. There was just too many things to do. You know I don’t know how that man thinks but its like I think he could be going 24 hours a day. A lot of us can’t you know.

JOHN: Okay. Needs a lot energy.

ROGER: Needs a lot of energy, a lot of time you know.
JOHN: So, eh did you notice any changes in the way you were learning from say the beginning, the middle and the end of the course do you think? No just out of interest yeah.

ROGER: Like what?

JOHN: I don’t know em....

ROGER: The way I was learning?

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: Well no I don’t know. I don’t know the answer to that.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: Did I notice any difference in the way I was learning?

JOHN: Say at the beginning you weren’t too sure about the programme. You’re still not too sure but maybe you have answered me I think accurately as to what it is. So maybe at the beginning you weren’t too sure in the middle. Were you still not too sure or is it making it clearer now or do you feel....

ROGER: I’m not absolutely clear about what it is at all, you know, what are yee trying to do, create a community? Are yee trying to get people to work with community or is it trying to create a community?

JOHN: You’re supposed to engage with the community and as a student to have an experience of working with the community.

ROGER: Oh sorry. That’s what you were trying to do.

JOHN: I think the idea is that a lot of the time academia is within closed walls and then we’re living in a community aren’t we, so what are we doing with the community that connects the academic world with the world of the local community. I think that’s the idea behind it. So do you feel, how do you feel about learning about this way of learning, you know.

ROGER: Well I suppose it can be useful yeah.

JOHN: Okay.
ROGER: To get people involved. But I think you’d need to bring in more people from the outside.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: There was a couple of women there now, they came in to see us down at the college, they were working with voluntary organisations around, you know they need to bring people in to have a chat instead of you know – go find something to get involved with you know. So I mean there must be people here who can come in and talk to you about volunteering. I didn’t see anybody like that. You know that’s what I call practical. You know what I mean about practical?

JOHN: Yes, yeah.

ROGER: You know where, its like getting grants, you know, like Brian down there he can get grants like that but he doesn’t teach anybody how to get them. He gives you a form and go fill it out but that’s not really how you get it. There’s a practical, do you understand what I’m saying?

JOHN: Yeah okay yeah.

ROGER: There’s a know how to doing things like that. That’s what I call practical.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: Somebody who’s done it, knows how to do it. It’s like somebody out there who’s volunteering, working in a community who’s done it, who knows how to do it and can you know come and talk to you and see if your interested in doing it, not just oh go on out there and get something and write about it.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: That’s what I feel is being practical.

JOHN: Right oh. Em, you’ve given a very interesting conversation thanks very much. So what about working with other people, other students other.......how did you find that?

ROGER: Here in the class?
JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: That was alright. There was no problem there.

JOHN: Did you see the idea of collaborating with others? What did you think about that?

ROGER: Collaboration? Like the .....what did we do in collaboration?

JOHN: I suppose the discussing boards on the module itself. The discussion board where you make a comment and someone comments back. That was some form of collaboration.

ROGER: I didn’t do very well on that.

JOHN: Okay. Is that because you don’t like that particular thing?

ROGER: No like there was one thing you were doing in there you know people are different. You know you had some kind of a circular and some people were in certain categories you know. I was looking at it and I was thinking now I’m more in that, I’m not really interested in communicating with people that way, you know online or you know...

JOHN: Face to face?

ROGER: I’m more face to face, I’m gonna communicate with them face to face but not I don’t you know online or you know this kind of stuff you know?

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: I just felt that was for, I don’t know It was just another one of these things to get you to discuss things, em removed, you know this kind of thing?

JOHN: Yeah.

ROGER: Or what do they call it? There’s a name for it.

JOHN: Detached.

ROGER: Detached yeah. You know that source of networking like that. I don’t have any involvement with any of those sites, you know?

JOHN: Okay.
ROGER: You know I can go and talk to you but I’m not really into you know – they say something and then you say something back and they say something. I’m not really interested in communicating that way you know?

JOHN: Okay. You can see it as a way of forming knowledge and understanding jointly? No?

ROGER: No.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: Maybe I just didn’t have time to do it you know. I mean I wasn’t that interested. I fell into some kind of box there. You know some people are really interested in that. I think it’s younger people are more interested in that but it’s like I don’t even have a mobile phone. I mean I’ve no interest in a mobile phone. I don’t want people to get me 24 hours a day or I’m at the end of the line whenever they want. It’s the same with all these other things you know they just, I like privacy. I like to have my own space.

JOHN: Do you have the internet yourself at home or......

ROGER: Just the basic 56k modem. I don’t have Broadband or anything like that you know, but it’s just a basic thing but I don’t really communicate. I e:mail a few people in America or some places you know but I wouldn’t spend a lot of time on it now, you know so eh computers, I suppose you could say computer based discussion boards doesn’t really interest me that much or blogging doesn’t really interest me. You know some people can get on and blog and blog and blog and rattle on about different things. I have no interest at all in it you know I just like the peace and quiet.

JOHN: Could you see it being useful to you to help just collect together your own thoughts in order to make the reflections?

ROGER: The reflections that’s another touchy subject.

JOHN: Yeah cause you’re required to do that aren’t you?
ROGER: I suppose cause they want to be able to quantify it you know? You know you have to reflect and I try and do a bit of reflecting but ......

JOHN: But how do you think they could assess your ....

ROGER: My contribution?

JOHN: You’re work on....how do you think they could assess .....

ROGER: I don’t know.

JOHN: Okay. How would you assess it yourself then?

ROGER: How would I assess it? Well I enjoyed the role play. I enjoyed the classes. The discussion boards I had no interest in. What else were we doing? Community you know going out and getting involved with community. If it was easier to go out and get involved with the community maybe you know but it just seems like everybody wants a police report.

JOHN: But you see what your saying is useful for you to complete the requirements I think of the course. If you write that down as your reflection, all those different things you’ve got an interesting reflection of your experience. So that can be assessed, do you know what I mean. Its not whether, okay so you had difficulty with getting to work with the travellers say, but you recording that is important.

ROGER: I should write that down yeah.

JOHN: Do you know what I mean?

ROGER: That’s reflecting yeah, that’s reflecting yeah.

JOHN: Do you? You know I think Brian did give a power point on the different ways of reflecting.

ROGER: Ah I know but it was fairly .....

JOHN: Yeah but you have to do it don’t you? You have to hand something in later.

ROGER: Ah yeah, we have to a neat portfolio and we have to have reflections.
JOHN: Well if you have to do that reflection piece the things you’ve been saying today are the things you can reflect on.

ROGER: Write about yeah.

JOHN: You know what you were saying about the difficulties, you have to have all the clearance and stuff, that’s important for you to write down and think about and there’s a guideline on how to do that reflection that will help you with that. Do you know what I mean? So rather than forgetting about it you’ve got an opportunity to complete the ..... 

ROGER: Yeah I will do that yeah.

JOHN: You know and I think the things you’ve been talking about are the basis of your reflection.

ROGER: Yeah.

JOHN: Is that...?

ROGER: Yeah, that’s what I’ll do yeah yeah reflecting on the course.

JOHN: Those different pieces there you’ll have to check with Brian exactly what he wants but there’s probably questions to ask yourself and in that asking that’s the process of reflection.

ROGER: Yeah, I’ll do something with that over the Easter just to get it out of the way you know to get it done.

JOHN: Okay, I think you’ve covered everything. Any other ideas come to you as we’ve been talking?

ROGER: Well I think you could make it clearer to people what it’s about from the very beginning.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: I don’t know I might have missed a class in the beginning I’m not sure.

JOHN: Okay.

ROGER: But I think it could be clearer you know not just throwing them in and then seeing what they come out with

JOHN: Okay.
ROGER: You know well you know the idea of why we’re doing this and why is that happening and what’s the idea behind the course. I don’t know maybe you did that, but I don’t know you see, you know it wasn’t clear I don’t know at all if it was clear to me. Anyway you’ll find out more when Anne and all of them come in and give you their piece.

JOHN: Okay. Well thanks very much then.

ROGER: Ah your welcome, your welcome. Okay I will. I’ll write that down over the Easter and just reflect on it.
Interview with Eva

JOHN: Hi.

EVA: Hi.

JOHN: I’ll take the names out and make them anonymous afterwards okay. So just tell us a bit about yourself and your interest in art and eh.....

EVA: Em well I’ve always loved art I’ve done it since I was little but eh I love painting and I really thought I was coming to do the course on painting. You know its great that they get you doing all sorts of other things and em really realised that even when I was a child I loved doing photography so I’ve been going more towards photography and video than I would have but because I did drama all my life I’ve sort of gone into performance as well yeah. It’s quite interesting to see how everything intertwines and links up.

JOHN: Yeah so in the third year of your course do you feel your art has developed in a different way or...?

EVA: Well I think I’ll probably use all of it. It has opened up more doors definitely and it’s made me, it’s stretched me. You know before I just used to think of painting and I’d paint it and now its opened up new doors and I can go on hang on a minute I can relate it to photography I can do video I could do performance. You know it really has broadened your outlook.

JOHN: Okay and do you think the .. has this present module you’ve been on has that contributed to your thinking?

EVA: I think its given me more confidence you know and its really sort of instilled even more it’s confirmed for me even more that really because of all the different cultures and all the different countries I’ve lived in, I’ve always loved culture so for me the social studies and the culture and identity and globalisation for me has it’s really coming out of my world which is really quite interesting.

JOHN: Okay and eh your thinking has that changed during this module this community based module?
EVA: Em I think the community it’s confirmed because I’ve always been involved in community em I think for me it’s just reinforced because it’s so easy to go back into the old system. The old system was that you stood up there and you did everything whilst community participation is getting the others to think for themselves to empower themselves to get involved more. You become more the mentor rather than the leader you know so there had to be a shift because 20 or 30 years ago you were the leader in the community and you got everything organised and done and you had all the responsibility but now it’s shifted which I think is healthier. It’s shifted more to empowering the people giving them the responsibility letting them come up with the ideas. I find that particularly interesting.

JOHN: Yeah and have you been involved in eh community.

EVA: Yeah.

JOHN: Yeah and did you have to go and do some work?

EVA: Yeah I did I tried to get involved with a group in Wexford that helps organise a multi cultural group but em it’s been a bit disorganised and everytime I go she says like I don’t think you can do this you can do that and then nothing actually ever happens but its been interesting. I’ve learned about the group if nothing else.

JOHN: Okay yeah and eh are you documenting that yourself.

EVA: Yeah I’ve got a blog up and going and I’ve also got a website up and going.

JOHN: Do you find that interesting?

EVA: That’s been very interesting. I’ve really enjoyed that.

JOHN: Yeah okay and em so the process of reflection then is it feeding into that?

EVA: I think yeah I enjoy the reflection I do. I far enjoy that more than the Discussion Board. I hate the Discussion Board. On the computer I don’t like doing it in class.

JOHN: Okay.
EVA: I don’t know why there’s such a block there I think I was saying to Brian I think it’s just that by the time I’ve got home, I’m a single parent and there’s just so much work at the college I forget to just sit there and you know and then sometimes the Discussion Boards have been very long and lengthy and I’ve just got halfway and thought this is crazy I don’t have time for all this long lengthy stuff. Em I think the Discussion Board it’s good for some people to be able to hide behind it they can say what they want to but I’m not used to that I’d prefer one to one. See the person, see how their reacting and being able to discuss and talk things through. With the Discussion Boards you can say anything and it’s misunderstood and the people get upset and then it brings its complications and you know.

JOHN: And so you were saying, did you like reflection before this course or ...?

EVA: Yes I’ve always written in journals at home and done things like that and reflections, writing and that sort of stuff so.

JOHN: And so the eh the blog did it support you doing that or?

EVA: It was exactly the same but doing it online in a different method rather than just handwriting it in a book or something.

JOHN: Yeah so you see the value of reflection?

EVA: Yes I love it because you can look back. It can encourage you. It makes it clearer where you’re going wrong, where you need to improve. To me it’s very good. You can’t become more critical on your work you know.

JOHN: And did you eh some of the stuff the reflection that Brian talked about the different ways, did you learn?

EVA: Yes I found that very interesting. I can’t remember half the categories but it was very interesting.

JOHN: Em so what do you think your first reaction was to this module, can you remember?

EVA: Well yes I was excited because in South Africa our method of teaching has been like this course, this section so I was used to it and I know that a lot of my class
have reacted because they’re just not used to the freedom and not used to such an unstructured set up but I came out of that so for me it was yeh at last their grasping it, it’s something new you know.

JOHN: Right that’s fascinating. So say having your own ideas about community what ideas did you form about community as a result of this project?

EVA: Well because I was involved in the community with it being multi national in Wexford I think there’s something like 80 different nationalities or more that are represented in Wexford and so it was interesting to see that things are being done you know. Often you don’t realise that there are organisations out there helping em so that’s been a real eye opener.

JOHN: And would they be eh interested in doing something here?

EVA: I think they’d love to and ??? she really would it would be great to have the support of a centre here you know, this could be an ongoing thing that each year two or even one person goes to help her and I think as the years go she would get more organised you know.

JOHN: Em so what do you think of community in Wexford then? Are you living in Wexford then?

EVA: I’m in the Rosslare area so I’ve always helped in the Rosslare area.

JOHN: Okay so your idea of how community works in this area?

EVA: Em I think its quite difficult to you know you understand the new exciting methods but everybody is still in the very old traditional methods and its trying to bring that gap between the two. You know when I was doing some art courses with Active Retirement I kept trying to bring in new ideas and things but they were so set in their ways it was actually very difficult to get them to break away from the old school type where you stand up and you do everything and they just sort of follow along. So I think somehow and even if it could be done in a section of the course of how you get a group that is so set in their ways to break away from that and for you to be able to then bring them the new things.
I think the younger people are far more, they find it easier to adjust to the new system.

JOHN: Yeah do you think we have a narrow perception of what community means?

EVA: I think so. I don’t mean to criticise Ireland but eh its very, I can understand it because things have changed a lot you know. In fact just from hearing the way people have begun to prosper the whole community has died and disappeared. People are very conservative, very private and whilst in Africa ones homes are open and people come and go so there’s a more openness to community and I mean that’s just in the sort of environment of where you live and because of that openness it then sort of overflows into the bigger community. Whilst because everything is very private and very closed and very conservative and very protective of their little areas I find that actually flows into the community as a town or a village you know without them even knowing subconsciously that its happening.

JOHN: That’s interesting because a few years ago people would have said so and so’s door would be open and you could just walk in. Maybe that’s changing.

EVA: I think, I spoke to one or two people in the neighbourhood and they said it was because it was the other extreme, they’ve gone from one extreme to the other. They first started off with everybody knew everybody elses business. I said but you don’t have to you know. Em so that all the younger people and that younger generation that have come up have said we don’t want that, we don’t want to go down that road so they’re becoming very protective and very insulated.

JOHN: Yeah okay. Do you think you’ve noticed any changes in the way you’ve learned as a result of this from going say through the beginning to the middle or the end of this or is it?

EVA: Yeah I think it’s opened up and made me realise that there’s no, I was always sort of right and wrong, white and black you know. It’s made me relax more and realise that there’s different ways of thinking, different ways of doing things. Em working to the cultural side I have always accepted that but I think more on the
intellectual side it’s opened up a whole new way of thinking you know which has been great.

JOHN: So you feel that say knowledge is no longer black and white there’s different ...

EVA: No no definitely there’s different angles and different ways of thinking and different methods and we’ve been taught in the articles that there’s different meanings in one piece of art its no longer just one meaning which is far more exciting than just the stereotype of whatever subject it might be. There’s different angles and different thinkings and different theories and that’s been very exciting to discover.

JOHN: Yeah, very good em so working with computers how was that for you?

EVA: Computers have been fine because, there again in South Africa I mean they teach you well not in my generation everybody is very very into computers I mean the kids when they came into Ireland were teaching the teachers in school how to programme how to do all these things because they had been doing it all their lives. Everything all the secondary schools for example everything is done on the computers. Nothing is old fashioned handwriting which their still doing here.

JOHN: So this way of learning is familiar to you.

EVA: Very familiar and for me its exciting and its also it prepares you for third level. I don’t think I would have coped if I hadn’t had my computer skills and you know I’ve been a secretary as well so I knew Word and I knew Powerpoint and all these other things that we’ve had to use so its been much easier for me in that way. Some of them I don’t how they’ve coped in the class because they’ve hardly been able to type. They type with two fingers and you know it’s been much harder for them.

JOHN: Yes and working with other people on this module?

EVA: I’ve always worked with other people. I love working with people so that hasn’t been a problem em I think sometimes the difficulty has been trying to understand the Irish for Irish/English the Irish culture. I mean they say things like
Stone Soup and I’m going what what’s that you know and they’ve had to explain to me. Sometimes I’ve said things because I think South Africans are very open and honest you just voice your opinion and a lot of people they’ve got upset and don’t like that so you then have to sort of apologise or backtrack and be careful what you say.

JOHN: It’s interesting, you’ve spoken a lot about the cultural differences and that’s interesting. What do you feel then about say someone, this idea of culture being part you know the outsider observing being part of it you know. Has that been part of your experience then?

EVA: Yes I think so very much. I’m waiting to adjust you know. I don’t think it’s been, I think it’s even harder for the Irish because I’ve travelled around. I learned to adapt and adjust very quickly but for a lot of Irish it’s all new and they really find it harder to adjust to the new cultures that are there and you know.

JOHN: Yes cause there’s been one view of the world being insular and being located in the one place but having seen different experiences from different viewpoints, different cultures.

EVA: Yes but they don’t have to be a threat you know that we can all live together and live in harmony and have our different cultures and Identities individually but at the same time we can all be one. We’re all going to end up being Irish. Its going to be a real mixture eventually.

JOHN: Yes there was some discussion on the Discussion Board about identity wasn’t there Irish identity. Did you see that?

EVA: Yes, I think it’s shifting and changing and it’s hard for some people to accept that. Possibly with others it’s easier and I think it is getting easier and easier. It’s like racialism you know. I think a lot of Irish say no we don’t have racialism but there is a racialism here. It’s not everybody you’ve got to realise that.

JOHN: Yeah so some of the discussions on that were ....?

EVA: There again I didn’t really get involved. I probably should have.
JOHN: I think there was something in class though was there, some face to face exchanges?

EVA: Yeah well in second year I was told to go back to Africa.

JOHN: Oh right okay, no I meant in this module there was some discussion but you experienced some racism?

EVA: You know you’ve just got to let that go.

JOHN: Yeah so that’s different perspectives again which you have come to understand. You might have understood before but you’ve understood the module has helped also intellectually I suppose?

EVA: I think the module has helped me yes. Not to get upset and not to react if somebody tells you to go back to Africa. That’s his problem you know. I think that’s what the course has really taught me just to relax and say it really doesn’t matter. Don’t take it personally you know. They’ve just got a different viewpoint a different attitude.

JOHN: And some of the experiences at the start the role plays were to do with that.

EVA: Yeah I found that, that I really enjoyed it as well because em I was given one where you had to be very quiet and silent. I didn’t find that easy at all and I had to be in a sort of neutral place and I’m not like that. I am very you know everybody knows exactly where they stand with me and I have my opinions and sometimes their probably too strong for a lot of people but that’s just the way I am.

JOHN: So your overall ideas about the module?

EVA: I’ve really enjoyed it I really have you know. I know a lot of people have just what on earth is this all about but for me I have enjoyed it. It’s been great and its interesting and its been a different way but I’ve always been like that for me discussing doing role play doing different activities is far easier than actually sitting and writing and just listening to one person and then reading and all that.

JOHN: Is there anything you would do to improve the course or changes you’d make?
**EVA:** I was just thinking I think anyone who has difficulties I think we all battled with it but go out and try and find an organisation that could help and allow you to do work. I think you know as the course goes on its going to be easier because you will have learnt from the first year from us and then you’ll be able to enter it and people will be able to find it easier. You’ll be able to say you know there’s this organisation go and speak to whoever you know it will be easier.

**JOHN:** Do you think the different perspectives on community eh also come up to the difficulty you know say a limited view of what it means.

**EVA:** Yes I think so even with going and joining an organisation and you’ve been taught a very broad spectrum and then you go into the real world and there are a lot of people that are thinking the old way and you’ve got to be very careful and very sensitive to just fitting and that can also bring frustration because your very excited about this module and you think that you have learnt but you can’t actually put them into practice because you’re not in charge and your going into a system or into a stereotype of community work you know. That’s where I think the frustration is coming for me. There isn’t that freedom. If you were running the thing yourself you could do it completely different. You know if I’d known I was going to come up against that I would probably have gone back to the Rosslare community with Ray Flynn and he knows me and I’ve done work for him and I probably would have launched something on my own and worked with the community in a totally different way and done it the way we’d been trained which would have really been exciting a nd different but its fine.

**JOHN:** That’s very interesting to hear then that you feel trying to empower go from eh a listening and support empowering rather than an imposing sort of way but then the communities themselves are constructing it ....

**EVA:** The old way, well that’s what I’ve found.

**JOHN:** Okay that’s important, that’s very important to hear isn’t it.

**EVA:** I don’t know maybe something needs to be done really to have a workshop and invite these community organisations em with a student and to say that you in a
subtle way are teaching various groups to work with the students in a closer way and a better more effective way.

JOHN: Yeah I suppose if art is about creative ideas and imagining other ways the sort of way to create in other ways to construct the community you know in other ideas but there’s not pigeonholing one traditional view one stereotype view that there’s multiple. That would be maybe a workshop discussion yeah that would be useful yeah.

EVA: But even with the finances and things we were talking about doing a sort of fashion show with the different cultures and I said look it doesn’t have to cost lots of money and anyway we’ve got to do it big and we’ve got to get money coming in, get a grant or something and I said you don’t have to. Actually do something very creative get the African women to come and sit them down get their ideas. It could even be just the clothes that they have in their cupboards at home that are traditional and do a whole fashion show just on the different cultures and the different you know and inviting people and it does not have to cost an absolute fortune. There was an absolute blockage, there was a totally different way of thinking, different way of doing things and you know there again it was the old school that the government and organisations must give you money to you know. It will come. It will come especially with governments cutting down on finances. We’re all going to have to be more creative and bringing them finances for these different things for the community, for the arts.

JOHN: Yeah you’d rather get the thing done than get bogged down in all that ....? 

EVA: They’d drive me mad. Absolutely mad.

JOHN: Em well so I’ve asked you everything yeah. Any other thoughts or ideas that have come up since we’ve been talking?

EVA: No I don’t think so.

JOHN: So I mean I’ve asked you what changes you’d make, you’ve been fairly favourable to the course.
EVA: Em I’ve really loved it, its been great. It’s been super. It was a nice break from all the other heavy, probably because it was more practical you know. I’m a hands on person and I really like to just get involved and communicate and em that’s probably why I’ve enjoyed it.

JOHN: Okay, thanks very much.

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**Interview with Cynthia**

**JOHN:** Em so just tell us a bit about yourself and your interest in art.

**CYNTHIA:** I don’t really know where to start em well I’ve always been interested in art and I’ve always wanted to go to art college and em but I was surprised when I came here like it was very different to even what I imagined and meeting other people like who are interested in art as well. Like you have this perception you know that you’ll get on with everyone cause they like the same things as you but its interesting coming that you realise that do you know even if you did like the same things as people that they are a lot different in their opinions and ideas and I found that interesting to meet people all from like different parts and different walks of life than me and the different age groups as well because do you know a lot of people in my class were older than me so I found that really interesting.

**JOHN:** And are you from locally or ...

**CYNTHIA:** No I’m from N in County K. It was interesting to meet like a variety of people. It broadened my mind I suppose to light and art.

**JOHN:** And what’s your development of your art then?

**CYNTHIA:** Em I’m interested in mixed media at the moment. At first I thought like I started to do a painting in the first year now for my last part I’ve used film and photography. I like collage and text and I don’t like to confine myself to one medium. It depends on what project I’m doing and I’ll find the medium to suit that really but a lot my stuff is black and white so that’s really the one kind of concept within it.

**JOHN:** Yeah its interesting a lot of the stuff is black and white at that exhibition isn’t it?

**CYNTHIA:** Em there was my piece and em and a slide show.

**JOHN:** I thought there was a few?
CYNTHIA: ??? was black and white.

JOHN: Which one was yours then?

CYNTHIA: Em the film at the very end you know going down the stairs?

JOHN: Going down the stairs?

CYNTHIA: Yeah,

JOHN: Oh yeah I liked that yeah. Yeah that was .. and the music went well with it didn’t it yeah. Are you pleased with it?

CYNTHIA: Yeah I was happy with it. It was great seeing it up there you know. You can see the results kind of.

JOHN: Yeah. Em the audio visual stuff was you know very interesting in a lot of ways. Do you find this module itself, this community based module did that help, did it stimulate any ideas or is it just?

CYNTHIA: Well I’ve always even in my own work been interested in you know in human beings and their behaviour and me like society in general so that’s all, I’ve always been kind of interested in this and we’ve been talking about it in class so it was nice to have the class like you know just ... I really enjoyed it like.

JOHN: And eh the aspects of learning say face to face or going online. Which did you find ....?

CYNTHIA: I definitely don’t really like the online. Its just like I’ve tried it and its just not something that I would choose if I had the choice. I think for some people though it is like it can be beneficial you know but for myself I wouldn’t but I am glad that I have had the experience and tried it like.

JOHN: And your idea about community and that, has that changed or?
CYNTHIA: I don’t think so. I think it’s just reaffirmed like that about like having space for everyone even if their different like in the community and have room to be different and not just all be one thing.

JOHN: Okay and do you feel .. noticing the idea of what’s community like in Wexford?

CYNTHIA: Its very different even than where I come from at home like it’s a very small close knit place and everyone knows each other which is nice in some ways. Em but em its very different like at home very different you know. People commute a lot to work and their not always in and there’s a very good sense of community down here.

JOHN: And do you think our society is changing, that the demands are you know say in community or whatever it may be does that help or hinder or .....?

CYNTHIA: I don’t know I think that things are constantly changing. You can’t say if its good or bad that’s its just kind of the way life goes. Like to be looking back and saying oh community was great and you know I think that’s nostalgic. I... there’s good elements with both and if people can just strike the balance to try and have both.

JOHN: Did you have to do a project with the community?

CYNTHIA: Yeah I did Art Project you know the Primary Schools with a sixth class group? I can’t remember the name of the school but em I was really shocked when I first went into that because I had this idea that community and this project especially was trying to teach children art outside of the classroom you know more kind of free and a fun experience and it was totally different than I expected, it was a bit like disappointing em but it was just exactly like in the classroom. A lot of rules and you know ground rules about like using a marker as opposed to paint. Stupid stuff in my opinion you know that doesn’t ....I know children need discipline and rules but like and it was very em derogatory like, the woman who ran it was very derogatory to people who did it from like social economic backgrounds and felt that children from like less well off backgrounds couldn’t be as capable in art and couldn’t use
the same materials as children from well off backgrounds. She felt they were disadvantaged like not only in financial terms but like mentally and everything which I totally disagreed with and I thought the idea of inclusion was just in fact it was very exclusionary like when I went in there.

JOHN: Okay so in terms of things you were learning in class about how to work with communities it wasn’t matching up with the reality.

CYNDIA: No and at first like I wanted to quit, I didn’t want to be part of that teaching young children those ideas but then I realised that I suppose I got a reality check that when you go into work in a community group not everyone will have the same ideas and values as you and its trying to work properly around that and to try and change it I suppose and you can only do that from being involved in something so I decided to stick it out. Like I really enjoyed working with Sara and doing art with them in the class, I really enjoyed that part.

JOHN: Do you think there’s a way of doing that?

CYNDIA: Changing it?

JOHN: Yeah what do you think you could do?

CYNDIA: I think sort of like the only way of changing it is really to go out there and deal with what you believe and show a more positive way for people to ....

JOHN: Do you think it’s possible to go into a school, like if you were to go tomorrow do you think its possible what your saying?

CYNDIA: Em yeah definitely I do, I think its all about people’s mindsets and if you teach children that they can’t do something they’ll never do it so if like you have a positive attitude like I think you can tell you know.

JOHN: Thank you. How do you feel the work could evolve in the class ?
CYNTHIA: Well first of all the projects weren’t really, they didn’t have much of an input into what they were doing. It was very like the teacher, not the teacher the artists told them what they were doing and they had to do it. Whereas I think if children are involved and feel like their partaking in it they’ll value and respect it and they’ll want to like partake in it and be a part of it and em I’d like a lot more like ?? material like not talking about there’s a right and a wrong art for life.

JOHN: Did you have that idea before you did this module?

CYNTHIA: Yeah I always felt that because I hated school myself. I always felt those negative attitudes myself that’s why part of me wanted to do this project in a school because sometimes I think the way art is taught is not great.

JOHN: Very good. So did I ask you (I’ve done so many asking these same questions) did I ask you what your first reaction was to this module. Can you remember what your first reaction was?

CYNTHIA: I was excited yeah I was really interested in it.

JOHN: Yeah okay and do you feel you’ve enjoyed the experience?

CYNTHIA: I have done like lots of different things each week. Like I’d prefer to do one module rather than having lots of separate things going on at once.

JOHN: Within this module itself?

CYNTHIA: Yeah they grouped in all mine and then some other. I’d prefer myself if like we had it online and then moved onto something because they felt they could never get deep enough into it or really progress because we were chopping and changing. I have enjoyed it like doing loads of different stuff. It wasn’t just thinking all the time.

JOHN: And did you do the learning blogs and did you enjoy doing that?

CYNTHIA: Yeah it was a bit weird at first cause writing on the internet but em I made it private because I didn’t feel comfortable with people reading em
but I think its a good way to reflect and then when you go back and read them after a while your attitudes change.

JOHN: I found that myself. I kept mine private because I think you can just blurt it all out and you don’t have to worry about what you’ve done. Then at the end of it I realised sure what am I hiding. So you found the process of reflection useful?

CYNTHIA: Yeah. I found more and more as I was doing the online stuff that you do become less self conscious. I think it’s just at the start your a bit paranoid about people seeing what you think but then it’s okay.

JOHN: So did you notice any changes in the way you were learning from the beginning to the middle to the end or .....?

CYNTHIA: Not really I think I still feel more impassioned. I probably learned more about the community.

JOHN: And working with other people. How do you feel about that?

CYNTHIA: Yeah I like working with other people.

JOHN: Yeah and you always have done is it?

CYNTHIA: Em well it depends what I’m doing like for my own work I like doing it by myself. For other things like this I’d ..... 

JOHN: Did you enjoy getting the exhibition together?

CYNTHIA: Not really I found it very stressful.

JOHN: Okay.

CYNTHIA: I think if it wasn’t my own work I might have enjoyed it and been prepared for it. I was just worried about finishing my thesis and that people would see it. I was more concerned about that than actually taking the time to enjoy it.
JOHN: Yeah. Looking back now what do you think?

CYNTHIA: Em I’m really glad I did it and it boosts your confidence to actually show stuff.

JOHN: So it’s quite a big achievement for you. Do you think it’s a big achievement for a lot of your fellow students?

CYNTHIA: Yeah definitely I do yeah.

JOHN: And what was the sense then?

CYNTHIA: I think the mood in class was really like boosted them and there was a good atmosphere after things were put together and a sense of achievement.

JOHN: Yeah. Okay I’ve asked you all these things now. Any comments on the way the course was delivered.

CYNTHIA: Not really I enjoyed it. I felt there was a lot of variety and kind of something that everyone could take from it whether like conversation or....

JOHN: Any other ideas come up while we’ve been talking?

CYNTHIA: Em nothing I can think of. After I’ve left it might come back to me.

JOHN: Well thanks very much, thank you.

CYNTHIA: Okay.

....................................................
Interview with Edwin

JOHN: So just tell me a bit about yourself, your interest in art.

EDWIN: Em, yeah I like lots of different things, em ... I have kind of looking a bit this year more at photography, but I have been lookin at it like in the exhibition like more in the sculptural context.

JOHN: Ok yes..

EDWIN: I don’t know if you have seen the exhibition upstairs, the light box?

JOHN: Yes, yes.. The pictures were of Barntown, were they?

EDWIN: Forth Mountain.

JOHN: Yeah and there were 4 sides to it yeah?

EDWIN: Yeah.

JOHN: And the thinking behind that, how did it evolve?

EDWIN: Well I was bringin it to its past present and it’s future because I thought the area was kinda rich in history.

JOHN: Yeah.

EDWIN: Yeah it was a border area sort of along the ....and there was also 1798 as well.

JOHN: Ok yes.

EDWIN: And the landscape itself has been through, kind of been scarred by man like, but the kind of thing I was getting at is that nature regains itself.

JOHN: Ok yes and how did the ideas evolve? Did they evolve during this module or have they been evolving over a long period of time?

EDWIN: Well I kinda started fresh on this one cos I wasn’t too happy with the work I had done previously this year.

JOHN: Right. And have ideas risen from this community based model that you have been doing, discussion boards and stuff. Has it generated any ideas that may help your art? Any thoughts? Like ideas about the past and nature being changed by man?
EDWIN: Yeah like there is the references from some of the stuff we have been talking about like the way things change an all.

JOHN: Okay, so your idea about community, was that changed as a result of this module?

EDWIN: yeah well I guess a lot of stuff has been said on it like you know wouldn’t have been stuff that I would have sat down and thought of myself. But yeah it makes you realise that things have changed.

JOHN: And do you think that arose from students talking to each other? Do you think the discussion boards were useful for debating ideas?

EDWIN: Well yeah it was a different way of working. It was one thing having it in conversation but having it written down was a useful point cos you could go back and reference.

JOHN: Okay so you enjoyed interacting with the computer on this course, you enjoyed that side of things?

EDWIN: Yes it was natural enough.

JOHN: You come with experience? So you find that way of learning quite useful?

EDWIN: Yeah yeah.

JOHN: And the blogging and all that stuff, did you have a go at that?

EDWIN: Yeah, I actually have a few more blogs to put up I just haven’t put them up yet.

JOHN: And is that your own private blog or is it open to anyone?

EDWIN: No it is open, you just put stuff up it I haven’t stuff up yet.

JOHN: Yeah it will be interesting to see what each other thinks. Ok can you remember what your first reaction to this module was?

EDWIN: It was a bit like ........oh hell that’s different.

JOHN: Right and do you feel that you have enjoyed doing it, do you feel it has been useful or do you feel its rubbish or whatever?
EDWIN: Em...it was interesting to do something different like. I wouldn’t be one way or the other against it like.

JOHN: Ok. The positive sides for you then would be what?

EDWIN: Well I did think it was a good idea to have a bit more discussion about stuff rather than you know reading about things and then doing an essay. Yeah it was a good idea.

JOHN: Yes and you found discussion easier for you on line or face to face?

EDWIN: On line. I wouldn’t be straight off the mark with.........

JOHN: And the benefits of doing it on line then for you?

EDWIN: That you do have time to come up and think of your answer properly rather than ...

JOHN: In class time sometimes the ideas don’t come for you?

EDWIN: Yeah definitely I would be a bit slow on that front like.

JOHN: Ok right em ...... so what did you learn about community as a result of the model do you think? (tape runs out)

JOHN: So you were just saying eh ..... 

EDWIN: Yeah em well like I had kinda already accepted like you know that communities aren’t just like a community where you live just like em general uni groups and associations and all sorts of things like.

JOHN: Yeah and eh what do you think of the local area, this idea of community, what do you think of community?

EDWIN: Yeah it’s probably a good idea to get the college and like get the art course out there...even though were here a few years time ......(sound of motorbike outside!)

JOHN: Okay and eh did you have to do anything with the community on this module or .......

EDWIN: Yeah I like to do work with the school sort of like just sort of like craft stuff and that. I started doing it like around em Christmas.
JOHN: Okay yeah. So did those ideas connect up with the ones that you were talking about in class you know about you know on this module? You know did the actual reality of what you did with the school ....?

EDWIN: Em, it was different working with kids... like they were sort of cut throat.(or cut through)

JOHN: Okay yeah. So you talked about culture in class and different aspects of it I presume and then was any of it relevant or?

EDWIN: Well I think with kids you know they don’t sort of delve into everything or much detail, they kind of just accept thing’s which is interesting.

JOHN: Yeah it is an interesting idea yeah. So eh yeah it’s very much yeah at face value.

EDWIN: Yeah that’s it and they just kinda get on with it.

JOHN: That’s an interesting perspective isn’t it?

EDWIN: Yeah.

JOHN: Like academia seems to delve into things in such a depth?

EDWIN: Yeah, yeah.

JOHN: Yeah, okay. Em did you enjoy some of the discussions then online then? Did you enjoy those?

EDWIN: Yeah some of them were interesting.

JOHN: Did you feel that they were a bit, did it get fully to the point or did it get to really in depth analysis or?

EDWIN: Em, I think sometimes some of it just kinda turned into kinda conversations.

JOHN: Okay. Then in parts of it though well I thought looking at some of them it was really getting interesting yeah. Okay em do you think your way of learning changed from the beginning to the middle to the end or ......?

EDWIN: Not necessarily.

JOHN: Okay yeah em and did you enjoy working with other people can I ask you? Did you enjoy working with other people?
EDWIN: You mean like kids......in a class like?
JOHN: No eh in a classroom
EDWIN: Oh yeah well like you know I’m sort of used to doing different types of things.
JOHN: Okay so eh collaborations, you enjoy doing it or do you ....?
EDWIN: Em no I wouldn’t say I enjoy or hate it you know I just kind of accept it you know. It’s very kind of standard basis for working with people.
JOHN: What’s your next pieces of work then, what ideas have you got for those?
EDWIN: Em I don’t know. I would like to sort of do more things like Forth mountain thing
JOHN: Okay.
EDWIN: When we come back now we’re going away for a week. So we’re going to Duncannon to make art out in that area and then we’re going to do some sort of publication afterwards. Interesting to see what happens
JOHN: So that’s working with the community then is it?
EDWIN: I’m not sure exactly what we’re doing.
JOHN: It sounds like it if your going down to Duncannon to do some thing ...
EDWIN: Yeah cause Esther was talking about em getting called back for some group to do activities.
JOHN: Oh right yeah. There’s a place down there yeah they have archery and that.
EDWIN: Basiltown?
JOHN: No there’s a ?? I think it’s the same place that I’m thinking of em groups come out and do archery or they do orienteering or they you know do eh, if its the same thing, maybe its different. So that would be interesting.
EDWIN: Yeah.
JOHN: Your work then revolves around man and nature then or what how landscape changes historically?
EDWIN: That’s what was kind of going on this term and previously it kind of sort of about colour kind of em sort of like.... There was another thing that kind of interested me sort of like harbour?? And kind of em any drama that sort of .....?? I like colour as well.

JOHN: Yeah so you’ve moved away from the drama side of things?

EDWIN: Yeah.

JOHN: Okay yeah.

EDWIN: So if I want I’ll go back to it.

JOHN: So is there any ideas for a change in the course the community based module do you think it could be improved or any ideas about changing it?

EDWIN: No, I can’t think of any no.

JOHN: Okay, well if there are any ideas come up and you want to send them or post them on or whatever e mail me or put them onto the Discussion Board I’ll type up this stuff and check with you exactly what you ....

EDWIN: The interview?

JOHN: Yeah

EDWIN: Oh yeah.

JOHN: And then hopefully be able to analyze it and bring out the major points. Okay? Thanks very much.
Interview with Eric

JOHN: So just tell me a little about yourself and your interest in art.

ERIC: Oh, well it's kinda all over the place, it mainly on music these days, but I would like to be able to incorporate the two of them.

JOHN: So you are on the third year of your art course. How was your you say that your interest in art has changed you said?

ERIC: Well at the start of the year I wasn't interested at all, I was just fed up with it all but then when I started working on stuff for the exhibition I got into it.

JOHN: Your work for the recent exhibition that you had last Friday? Tell me about that. How did that piece of work come about? Were you influenced by the module you were on?

ERIC: Em I don't think so. I just wanted to try animation. I just went for it and while I was doin it I didn't analyse it.

JOHN: So the animation piece is your piece so do you think it has encouraged you more in your art?

ERIC: Yeah well it is something I would like to work on more, go in more directions, mixed processes is really cool working that way.

JOHN: And how did you do it then? Describe that.

ERIC: Well I had like a big board set up about 7 feet long maybe, that was the size I was workin on. So I would just draw on that, take a picture and go
back to it, draw a little bit more and take another picture. And then 
sometimes I would be working on 4 different things at the one time doin 
a bit here and a bit there. It was a bit frantic tryin to remember what is 
what.

JOHN: you have an idea of the end visual ?

ERIC: No.

JOHN: It was just going to see what was going to happen ?

ERIC: Yeah it was kinda just a stream of consciousness. It was interesting while I 
was doin it cos I wasn’t goin to be able to predict what was goin to 
happen 5 minutes on Sometimes like there’d be this kinda tension and I 
wouldn’t know what I was goin to do. Am I gonna mess this up. It was 
kind of cool.

JOHN: Ok. Is there any artist that relates to in your mind?

ERIC: Well I got the idea of technique off em you know William Ketteridge, he 
does like charcoal drawings , its mostly figures he does. I got that for the 
technique but em I don’t know, stream of consciousness thing is a lot to 
do with surrealism. I am kinda interested in that aspect of it. I originally 
wanted to do stop motion because I just like that idea of inanimate 
objects and non living things coming to life through this process and I just 
like the aesthetic of it as well

JOHN: What, with 3 D pieces ?
ERIC: Yeah but even with animation I would like its kinda cool to see things.....you are aware that its little pieces broken up but then joined together.

JOHN: When you were saying streams of consciousness I was thinking of like Jackson Pollack and just he was capturing dripping paint all over the floor, that moment but yours is an extended moment interestingly enough, photographing ..........

ERIC: Yeah but also ............... 

JOHN: You probably...the technique, you cant get into the moment of that because you are stopping to become a technician to do it.

ERIC: Yeah its kinda interesting in that way, that’s the way I feel, very different from what Pollack was doin cos he would just go mad............... 

JOHN: Yes so you got lots of instances of getting lost............... 

ERIC: Yeah it was really interesting workin that way cos you go and then you have to stop so you constantly have to just like cos sometimes you would be tempted to make a big massive line across but then that might mess up the flow of the piece.

JOHN: Ok so you did have consciousness of it developing in a way

ERIC: Yeah like I couldn’t keep to it the stream of consciousness, like tapping into the unconscious like probably not...........

JOHN: Well the module you have been involved in like has your thinking changed much as a result of it?
ERIC: Em, yeah there were a few things that came up like your man Boal. I thought that was fairly interesting but em I suppose it just kinda help me start thinking about the notion of community and realising that I do think its important to have you know just to have general well being, you know to have that kind of feeling.

JOHN: Tell me a bit more about that.

ERIC: Well one of the things, remember when we were coming up with themes for the symposium well I suggested ‘the importance of socialising within a community’ and I think that’s really important and I think this course brought in that social aspect by getting us to even engage with each other.

JOHN: Ok yes. Its interesting some of the comments like a community of one or whatever. So engaging with each other.

ERIC: I just think that its really important that people are able to relate to each other.

JOHN: Ok. So your understanding of community out was broadened out as a result of doing the course?

ERIC: Yeah.

JOHN: Can you remember the first reaction you had to this module no?

ERIC: Em......
JOHN: Actually no before we get on to that. So what do you think of Wexford are you from Wexford originally. (yes) Wexfords community what do you feel about community in Wexford?

ERIC: Um you see I wouldn’t think of of you know its hard to think of one, like, Wexford community you know there’d be divided into loads of little subcultures. But even still you know its not much good.. people in Wexford are not that nice.

JOHN: Do you think they aren’t the socialising aspect of it...

ERIC: Oh no they socialise but they just more prone to kick the shit out of each other. Theres a lot more violence in Wexford than there used to be but like compared to other places as well I think. I don’t know why it is like. There was a thing in the People paper there’s all these statistics about Wexford in relation to other counties and theres like the least number of atheists here um what was it something like most litter most aggravated assaults you know so these negative things that Wexford came first in the country.

JOHN: And does that connect up with anything in your mind or is it just.

ERIC: Um Ive been trying to figure it out why cos you know well my friend like hes been involved in fights and stuff. Er its mainly down south end you know where Uncle Sams is you get just people looking for a fight around that area
JOHN: So um do you think and you think the paper is highlighting theres more here but do you think that is the case or do you feel is it just dangerous anywhere I don’t know I am an older person so

ERIC: Er wouldn’t be surprised if it was true that Wexford is...you know I wouldn’t have much experience of the night life of other places. Remember going to Clonmel and it was really laid back there because there wasn’t really anybody out.

JOHN: yeah ok. So I was starting to ask you about your first reaction to this module.

ERIC: I remember thinking first this is probably going to be a bit of a doss.

JOHN: Right.

ERIC: Because I don’t know it seemed structured but not in a really academic way so maybe just had to show up to class.

JOHN: And is that confirmed or ..?

ERIC: No not really. Hopefully it will pass.

JOHN: How have you found this way of learning? Learning on the computer and that sort of thing.

ERIC: Yeah I like it. I think I wrote on that questionnaire you handed out about the computer thing there would be people who wouldn’t speak out in class or anything like that. You know because there’s because its on a forum you know people get to think out their answers better so its not
the first thing that comes into your head. Or you get to compose your
point of view a bit better.

JOHN: That’s a really important point then isn’t it. Getting time to get your ideas
together otherwise you stay quiet. Yeah that’s a good point. Um So um..
did you enjoy working with others that collaborative aspect?

ERIC: Yeah it’s a good laugh.

JOHN: Any aspects of collaboration that you can think of like say the recent
exhibition is that an example of working together or not?

ERIC: Um well you definitely have to be able to compromise especially with our
class. I mean there were fights and stuff. I wasn’t involved in any but I
saw. I dunno like if I’m working with people if its usually people that I
choose to work with not forced to work with.

JOHN: And so getting together this exhibition you know the collaborative
aspects of that what were they do you think?

ERIC: Well finding roles to do what...well somepeople didn’t really do anything.
They acknowledged that they didn’t do anything. That was it like.

JOHN: Was that a large number or a minority?

ERIC: Um trying to think now. There was a few people who did much more
than everyone else and that would have been...do you want names?

JOHN: Ok I can edit them out

ERIC: Vera, Orla they seemed to do a lot. Frances did at the start. Going round
going a lot of contacts.
JOHN: And do you feel what about yourself in that did you not feel confident at the start or not sure

ERIC: Well at first people were saying ok I am going to do this and they go and do it. I wouldn’t be sure what needs to get done because the meetings were terribly organised. What we really should have done was made sure everyone had something specific to do rather than just saying this needs to be done. And then someone can volunteer for it. And a lot of the time it ended up being the same people cos.

JOHN: Ok. Do you think you will suggest that in the future then? That idea.

ERIC: Yeah well now in hindsight I know like how to be a lot more organised but from the start you should say youre doing this and if you don’t do it there will be some sort of consequences.

JOHN: So amongst all of the students I suppose you feel that some poeple were more motivated some less and if theres more clarity over everyones role at the start...its gonna be more

ERIC: Well originally at the start we had groups there was three different groups advertising I cant even remember the names of them but er they just kind of disintegrated cos people wouldn’t be showing up so there would be like one person in a group left to do four peoples work.

JOHN: Did you involving yourself were you involved with community in any way with this project
ERIC: Er no I was I actually want to do that like I applied to Oxfam there a while ago. I got the form of a woman who works there and she said they would be delighted to have someone but I never heard back from them so I think I ...I originally wanted to do something (knock on door)

JOHN: Come in. Sorry there.

ERIC: Er I originally wanted to do something with the homeless so I think I could do that cos I know a few people who are homeless.

JOHN: Is there a homeless project here?

ERIC: Yeah well there’s a home for ‘em.

JOHN: Where’s that?

ERIC: I think its Ozanam House. My friend worked there he’s in the social studies class worked there for while.

JOHN: Yeah that would be interesting for a while yeah. Yeah. So reflection how did you find that I haven’t asked you that have I (No) Reflection was that useful for you?

ERIC: Well I find that when I write about ..are you talking about the writing (yeah) that when I write about things it kind of I dunno kind of concretes it in my mind makes it more makes me makes it hit home more when I actually verbalise the thoughts so in that way it kind of got me to focus more so on what I was actually doing.

JOHN: And did you use the learning blogs..the blogs for your learning journal?

ERIC: I only did a few entries. I intended to do em but just...
JOHN: If you say at the start you didn’t see the purpose of it but if at the end you saw the use of it you might do you think you would have kept at it

ERIC: Yeah I think I would because it would be interesting just to you know have a record of what I was thinking.

JOHN: As you go through I suppose the discussion board is a representation of different peoples conversations through it’s a bit of

ERIC: It’s a bit like that.

JOHN: Ok. Um. So do you have any comments about how he course was delivered?

ERIC: Um I’m trying to remember what I wrote on that questionnaire um oh yeah I remember thinking it would have been cool if we had like a collaborative community based project where we all go out and actually actively do something in the community (Ok) All together and try or either try get something achieved because even if you don’t do it still grand you know. Maybe try and lobby for something like a skateboard park because I think the whole recreation and socialising is important that’s probably what Wexford needs more of because theres feck all to do here really so people just end up going drinking up on the rocks

JOHN: Do you think are there any local youth groups or whatever that you would go and do that sort of work with or work with young people with?

ERIC: Bui Bolg. They do I’m not totally sure what they do I know they make models and stuff for the parades and all and that involves teenagers
JOHN: Maybe go into youth projects themselves and engaging the young people. I don’t know.

ERIC: I’m not sure.

JOHN: That would be the sort of thing you think might be useful

ERIC: Well if you can get ‘em motivated. Very hard to get kids do anything like that.

JOHN: So any changes you might make to the course? To improve it or..

ERIC: Yeah probably more practical stuff. More so applied. I don’t know its hard isn’t it? That’s the main thing.

JOHN: Ok so to link up some practical activities and then have the discussion in class.

ERIC: Yeah like maybe learn about the thing one week then do it the next week and then discuss it

JOHN: In reflective maybe online in the process of that might be interesting yeah. Ok Anything other thoughts ideas come up while we’ve been talking.

ERIC: I would have thought of them by now

JOHN: Ok that’s great thanks a lot.
Interview with Vera

JOHN: So maybe just tell us a little bit about yourself your interest in art?

VERA: Em, I’ve always been interested in art and when I was in school I always had this idea I’d like to go to Art College but I never actually did, I ended up working and once I started working then I kept it up so its only after I moved to Wexford then I decided I’d pursue it.

JOHN: Yeah what’s your main ……?

VERA: Painting.

JOHN: Painting, yeah yeah, okay. Eh you just had an exhibition, are you pleased with the way it went?

VERA: Eh, yeah it was good, it came together really well in the end so it was good, it was enjoyable.

JOHN: How is your working progressing over the 3 years then do you feel?

VERA: My painting has changed a huge amount since I started I think. Em, but I always liked figurative work and I’ve sort of gone back to doing that again. Eh, I was playing around with abstraction a lot last year so em, but I haven’t really got my own style as of yet. I’m like a schizophrenic every time I paint. There’s a different style at the moment so I don’t really know where I’m at at the moment. I think that’s part of the process.

JOHN: Did this module the community based module, did that help you formulate your ideas?

VERA: With regard to my painting?

JOHN: Yeah. Did that have any influence on your work?

VERA: I don’t know if it would have influenced my work, my practical work as such. Maybe it did unsubconsciously or subconsciously whatever. Em I don’t know directly how much it would have impacted on my actual practical work if anything at all.

JOHN: Okay em so em do you think your thinking has changed much as a result of taking part in this module?
VERA: Em, I found the .. I did my em community work in B National School with the Art Project people and I found that was actually really good em and it probably did change certain things about my ideas, well certainly about what the Art Project was about but probably just about the whole going into the classroom situation probably did change my ideas em but other than that I don’t know how it would have changed me really.

JOHN: Yeah what do you think then of the idea of community these days then or what have you learnt about the idea of community or...?

VERA: Well I guess that there’s lots of different types of community like you can have an online community or em I mean that you can be a member of loads of different communities at the same time. I guess that’s really what I meant.

JOHN: Yeah interesting yeah and the community of Wexford? Are you from Wexford originally?

VERA: No I’m actually from Dublin from D originally and I’m living here 7 years.

JOHN: Okay so how do you experience community in Wexford then?

VERA: Well I’m from a small village em and village life has its ups and downs its eh can be a little claustrophobic sometimes, em I think in the town its very different.

JOHN: You’re in a village now or .......

VERA: Yeah, yeah ..... 

JOHN: Yeah ok ..... 

VERA: Now in saying that the place I’m from in Dublin was relatively small by Dublin terms as well but probably would have been more .....well it would have smaller than Wexford town, but lot bigger than where I’m from now or where I’m living now.

JOHN: Okay so the learning you did about community on the course I suppose that has thrown up some ideas that you weren’t aware of before?

VERA: Well yeah I guess I would have just thought community before was predominantly just the people who lived immediately around you. I wouldn’t really have thought of other groups as community or else I would have thought
of maybe community groups as being maybe like travelers or you know I really
would have thought of people on the fringe as being sort of referred to as
community groups.

JOHN: Okay, yeah.

VERA: But not necessarily just any group you’re involved in anyway can be community
groups.

JOHN: Yeah so you feel you’ve become aware of your own realm in the community
then?

VERA: Yeah.

JOHN: Yeah, yeah okay. Em what is your first reaction to the module then?

VERA: Em ...

JOHN: Can you remember?

VERA: Yeah my first reaction to the module was sort of like what on earth has this got
to do with art and why do we have to do this sort of thing you know?

JOHN: Yeah okay, and has the thinking changed, have you seen any relevance then
or....?

VERA: Yeah, I think em I think overall its been good I mean just even opening your own
outlook or whatever em there’s parts of it now I just hated like the role playing
and stuff like that I just found it cringing. I can’t you know, but that’s just me I’m
not saying it’s bad for the, I’m not saying its a bad part of the course ‘cause I’m
sure other people find it great but I found myself a few times, I’d be sitting there
thinking like I’m sitting here paying so much money to kids so I can play you
know?

JOHN: Okay, alright yeah. Do you feel as a learner that’s your position... that you’d be
worried about your learning time that you are given the freedom to do that
because of... following that idea through?

VERA: Em sometimes I would and sometimes I wouldn’t.

JOHN: Yeah, yeah okay. Em so that was the first reaction so eh I think I’ve asked you
that, has it changed?
VERA: I thought on the whole it was good and I think going out doing the community work was good. I found that was really really good. Em the only thing is the one I was doing it was sort of like it was a whole morning a week which did take up quite a lot of time which then maybe left me a bit under pressure to get maybe other work done but I still think it was good.

JOHN: Yeah. Em so have you noticed any changes in the way you learned through from in different stages say the beginning and the middle of this module and now near the end?

VERA: I don’t think so.

JOHN: No, and have you found you benefit in different parts of it so the role play you weren’t too happy with ....

VERA: Yeah but I mean I think that’s just me. I don’t think the role play is a bad idea. I think I personally would find it really sort of crazy.

JOHN: Yes. Any things that you found good or bad or indifferent, other parts of the modules way of learning?

VERA: Em, yeah I thought the reflections were quite handy as well. Em I probably didn’t actually do it as much as I should have done but I think when I did do it, it is good to sit down and actually reflect, em like the whole real benefit of a blog is that anyone can look at it and other people can get in touch with you but because my community work was in a school I kept my blogs private so it sort of defeated the purpose of having a blog really. It was more like just an online journal for myself.

JOHN: Yeah but did you find that useful?

VERA: Em I think its useful to have it there in case I want to refer back to it because like next year I’m not going to remember certain things that I thought about doing the Art Project or whatever so I think its useful to have it there em but with regard to the blog itself it probably would’ve been more useful if I had of just left it freely available and I know I could’ve like sort of watched what I said on it and not given names and that sort of stuff but I just didn’t really want to do that.
JOHN: But em do you have to do another reflection later do you?
VERA: Don’t know.
JOHN: Okay it might be useful for that. Okay so reflection you found useful and working with computers you.....
VERA: I was fairly okay with computers anyway em its never been, like I’m not an expert but its never been a problem to me.
JOHN: Yeah so and do you enjoy using the computer for your learning?
VERA: Yeah yeah its fine. I’d use it I mean no matter what I’m going to research or whatever that would be my first port of call always you know.
JOHN: Yeah, okay em so have you got any comments on the way the course was delivered?
VERA: Em no I thought on the whole it was good. I thought all the online threads and posts whatever were good particularly for people maybe who mightn’t be as vocal in class. Like there’s one or two people who are quite quiet and I think the online stuff was really good for them because I think maybe they were saying things that they mightn’t have liked to say out loud in class. So think for that reason it was good.
JOHN: Yeah, yeah eh so any changes you might make say to improve it or any ideas or whatever?
VERA: Em I can’t think of any.
JOHN: Okay yeah. Any ideas come up as you were talking there that you thought you’d like to go back to?
VERA: No.
JOHN: Okay. Pain’s over now!
VERA: Okay thanks.