EXPANDING WORKPLACE LEARNING FOR ENABLING STUDENTS: AN INNOVATIVE AND SCALABLE SOLUTION FOR UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS AT AN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Increasingly Australian University are expected to prepare students for transition into the workforce and to obtain the required employability skills to function effectively within the work environment upon completion of their studies. Workplace learning (WPL) is considered as an effective program that provides students with the necessary skills needed to operate effectively within the work environment. Traditionally WPL programs are available to students who are in the final stages of their undergraduate programs. However, in recent times the Australian government implemented policy that promotes representative access to University. Consequently, the tertiary sector now has more diverse students entering via enabling programs. These foundation studies programs are designed to build students competency with the knowledge and academic literacies required for success in an undergraduate program. Yet, for many of these non-traditional, underrepresented students there is often uncertainty and a lack of awareness regarding a) what career direction they wish to take b) the variety of undergraduate degrees available to reflect their career aspirations and, c) what it means to be a professional.

In an attempt to explore the applicability and merit of WPL for enabling students, this study proposes an innovative and modified version of WPL for students who are transitioning into undergraduate programs. This paper proposes that for enabling students completing their foundation studies program, their destination and workplace will be their undergraduate program for up to 3 years. Therefore, this paper recommends that enabling students should have the opportunity to experience and learn first-hand what it means to be an undergraduate student, how this differs from being an enabling student and where this undergraduate program may lead them. In doing so, this paper offers a potential (scalable) option for these non-traditional students to experience WPL within the University context and thus help them successfully transition into their undergraduate program.

Consistent with previous research, this paper conceptualizes WPL as a transition pedagogy that addresses interest in student retention and attrition within the enabling sector (Trede & McEwen, 2014). Furthermore, it is argued that there are significant benefits for enabling students to experience and learn more directly about the variety undergraduate programs and ultimately what that may mean for their future career options. Finally, this study contends that early WPL experiences in enabling programs may be an effective strategy to support students transitioning into undergraduate programs and assist them in developing more clarity around their career aspirations.

Keywords: Workplace learning, enabling education, transition.

1 INTRODUCTION.

One of the most important goals for higher education is to produce job-ready graduates with many University's now focussed on enhancing students career skills and employability (Kinash et al., 2016). However the graduate labour market remains highly competitive worldwide and this is particularly notable in Australia where rates continue to fall regarding full time employment options for graduates (Karmel and Carroll, 2016). One popular and effective strategy to address this issue of student employability is incorporating Workplace Learning (WPL) into course curriculum. The main intention behind WPL, is to better prepare graduates for entry into the workforce following completion of their studies. WPL combines academic study or formal learning with the hands on experience in order to better prepare students for the realities of work. There are however many variations work placements, including internships, field work, work integrated learning, work experience, job shadowing and cooperative education (Von Treuer et al., 2010). Irrespective of the title given, each of these course
designs share common goals that are centred on students achieving an authentic work experience and having the chance to apply their skills and knowledge to real life scenarios within the workplace.

Clinton and Thomas (2011) suggests that service learning can also be considered a form of WIL where students may improve their professional skills through their ongoing and active participation in an organised service activity that aims to benefit the community for example. Around the world, WPL has established itself as an important feature in the tertiary sector and one that continues to attract significant funding and further growth (Abeysekera, 2006). In Australia, WPL is already common practice in many undergraduate programs however there is one key area that has not received much attention in the literature and that is with regards to WPL for students in enabling programs.

The tertiary sector in Australia has seen significant growth and change over the last two decades. Between 1989 and 2007 student enrolment numbers increased significantly in higher education and over the last 10 years there has been significant growth in enabling education dramatically changing the ‘face of university’. Historically University participation has been largely dominated by the elite and the affluent members in society. However, in 2008 the Australian Federal Government initiated a Review of Australian Higher Education sector. In this review a number of aspirational and ambitious targets were set that promoted equity and open access in the tertiary sector. One of the most notable targets is that by “2020, 20% of enrolments (come) from low SES backgrounds… by 2025, 40% of 25 – 35 year olds hold a bachelor degree” (Bradley et al., 2008, xiv).

Therefore, like many developed nations, the Australian higher education system developed enabling programs to provide supported pathways to undergraduate degrees that align with the widening participation targets set in the 2008 review. The University of South Australia, College, Foundation Studies program is a government funded one year full time enabling program designed for students from underrepresented backgrounds. UniSA has a strong commitment to widening participation, and established the UniSA College in 2011 as a bridging program to help students from non-traditional backgrounds enter into university. In Australia, six designated equity groups have been historically underrepresented in higher education. These are: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from regional and remote areas, students with a disability, and women in non-traditional areas, students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1990). In order to better prepare students from underrepresented groups for tertiary education, many Australian universities have developed enabling programs to better prepare students for the intensity and expectations of their undergraduate courses.

However an ongoing challenge within this student group is retention and attrition rates across the sector, largely being attributed to the complex issues and barriers many of these students face. The UniSA College offer foundation studies students an inclusive and supportive learning environment to facilitate a positive transition into higher education undergraduate programs. With a focus on providing greater access for underrepresented groups, these programs aim to provide relevant pre-requisite knowledge and education that will actively prepare them for success in their further studies (Murray & Klinger, 2010). Opened in 2011 the UniSA College provides equity pathways and enabling programs that bridge the gap between high school and university that promotes critical pedagogy in an inclusive and respectful environment. There are approximately 1000 full-time equivalent students at UniSA College with all of the previously mentioned equity groups well represented. Positioned as a separate school aside to the University undergraduate programs, UniSA College students still enjoy the privileges and benefits a traditional university student has (i.e. library and learning resources, counselling, student associations). Beyond this, College students also have additional support systems embedded into their programs to facilitate a smooth transition into an undergraduate program based on the grade point average (GPA) students achieve upon completion of their foundation studies. This GPA will give them competitive entry into undergraduate program of their choice. It is supporting in this transition that presents a host of challenges for enabling educators. Hviid and Zittoun (2008) explain that transitions occur when people are confronted with a unfamiliar situation that requires an adjustment to line up with new environmental demands. UniSA College programs aim to provide students with a supported and guided transition into higher education where they have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to be successful as independent undergraduate students.

1.2 Enabling programs: diverse students in higher education

It is well documented that commencing tertiary education involves major changes and difficulties for individuals. Hussey and Smith (2010) argue that adapting to university life is not only challenging from an academic perspective but the personal, social and lifestyle changes and demands also contribute to
how overwhelming the transition into University can be for them. For many students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds, or are the first in their family to attend university, or those that come from low socio-economic status (SES) background, many of these students enrolled in enabling programs are often more likely to experience interrupted educational journeys. In addition enabling students typically come with a host of negative educational experiences that affect both their confidence as well as their ability as learners (Stokes, 2017). To better support foundation studies students an inclusive pedagogical approach is included in most teaching practices to support students looking to transition into an undergraduate degree. The College fosters an active learning culture that aims to break down the barriers for students and better support them in the pursuit of education.

There are currently over 20 electives available to foundation studies students at UniSA College with each of these courses designed to service four main divisions offered by the wider university. Broadly speaking these foundation studies courses feed into studies in Business, Education, Arts and the Social Sciences, the Health Sciences as well as Information Technology, Engineering and the Environmental studies. Each of these pre-degree courses are designed to support student transition and prepare students with the prerequisite knowledge and academic literacies required for success at university. However, despite the significant growth and variety in the number of courses available to students, there remains a gap in the enabling student experience. Providing a traditional ‘work experience/ work placement’ course for enabling students is simply not feasible and would not result in enough benefits to be worthwhile pursuing. However with so many different designs of ‘work integrated learning’ being offered across Australian University’s, this is an area yet to be fully explored within the enabling space.

It is a key priority for University’s to produce students who are career ready, who have hands on knowledge and experience in the industry or sector they are studying to pursue for their future careers. The Global Skills Gap in the 21st Century (2018) found there are still significant gaps between graduate skills and employer expectations. Therefore it is important students can identify what skills are required to be successful in their future careers following completion of their studies. Ensuring graduates are employable and career ready is central to the University of South Australia’s mission and vision. With a long well established history of industry and university collaborations, the University of South Australia has well documented placement programs in the areas of nursing, social work, engineering, business, education to name a few. There are a number of programs that foster work integrated learning within the undergraduate programs, each with slight variations and differences to their design and application/operation. Furthermore these course are primarily designed to give students the hands-on real life experience they need to be prepared for work following completion of their studies. The benefits of work integrated learning and work placements are well documented in terms of getting students career ready. However, many of these workplace learning experiences often don’t take place until the second or third year of their undergraduate studies. Furthermore the extant research highlights the numerous limitations of student placements and that these courses are notoriously problematic and difficult to coordinate and manage for both organizations and the University.

It is an important decision for any prospective student to carefully consider what degree they will choose to study for the next 3 to 5 years. Not only are there now significant financial implications due to the increase cost of tertiary qualifications, degree selection will heavily influence the type of career they will be eligible for which in turn will affect the rest of their life. Making those decisions can be a stressful time and frequently what students think they want from a career does not correlate with what they may be required to study in order to achieve that career outcome. For many students their career aspirations are not well researched or understood. Students remain optimistic and ambitious about their careers but are not necessarily aware of other opportunities that may exist and critically consider what they might be better suited too based on their academic ability.

Many students who are enrolled in enabling programs are either very clear in their study pursuits, they come to the College with specific aspirations and goals, and tend to know exactly what they want to do in terms of their undergraduate degree. However there are some students who come to College who have been ‘told’ to study, these students can lack direction, motivation, ambition and clarity in their studies. They do not necessarily know what they want to do. They do not know where their interests lie, what their strengths are and what skills set they have to offer. For many students they simply don’t know what they want to be when they grow up. Students today are heavily influenced by their social environment and for enabling students many don’t know the scope of career opportunities available that extend far beyond their immediate situation and previous influences. This is especially the case for UniSA College students who are interested in studying at the UniSA Business School upon completion of their Foundation Studies program.
Workplace learning has become a feature of business curriculum in Universities globally. This aim of getting students to engage with workplace learning is to highlight the skills, qualities and attributes required by industry following completion of the undergraduate studies. It encourages deep learning in relation to their future profession and includes engagement with industry in an authentic learning environment. Given there is increasingly focus for graduates to be career and work ready, this has been identified as a limitation within the enabling curriculum. Therefore the present study proposes that by including workplace learning for enabling students to experience their undergraduate destination, prior to their degree enrolment with give them direct insight and exposure to their future learning environment as well as what they can expect in the years to come. Smith et al., (2009, p.14) argues that “how Australian Universities prepare their adult students and graduates for the world-of-work should be critically appraised”. Therefore, to improve student degree selection and transition into undergraduate studies, this study sought to engage the undergraduate program in the development and delivery of the curriculum. The extant literature highlights the benefits of workplace learning, Gibson et al., (2002) suggests professional learning opportunities enrich students skills and gives them experience in what it is actually like to work in a real business. Accordingly, a key goal for students in enabling programs is that by participating in their workplace learning modules they can obtain the necessary skills needed as well as obtain direct experience in what it is actually like to be a student studying an undergraduate degree in Business.

2 BACKGROUND: WORK BASED LEARNING

Increasing student employability and career prospects has become a widespread priority within higher education (Kinash et al., 2016). Most of the research that surrounds work based learning is usually related to work integrated learning (WIL). WIL argues that it is essential for job-ready graduates (Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council, 2007). This is achieved by developing confidence in students in their workplace skills and abilities (Billet, 2011) as well as provide students with a better understanding of the nature and standard of industry work and the skills needed (Gamble, Patrick and Peach, 2010). It is now common practice that University programs include some form of work-based learning or industry placement experience. It is now common practice for many programs in higher education to include work integrated learning in an effort to enhance student’s employability in Industry (Kinash et al. 2016). Bonwell and Eison (1991) suggest that the main ethos of WIL is based on the theory of active and experimental learning (Kolb, 1984). This is where learners transition from envisaging and listening to actually attempting to do what they are being taught. Research suggests that deeper learning may be enhanced when students work collaboratively in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as opposed to working in isolation. Jackson and Collings (2018, p404) state “WIL is the intersection of academic and workplace learning where students connect with industry as a formal component of their learning program”.

There are a variety of different ways WIL can be applied in University courses including unpaid or paid specific work variations, short versus long term placements, virtual workplace learning environments as well as contributing to industry-based projects for example. In Australia, it is common practice for many degree programs to have compulsory WIL for qualifications and accreditation purposes (i.e. nursing or teaching degrees). However WIL experiences for students are largely unpaid in Australia and therefore increasingly difficult for students to achieve. For students in enabling programs the financial strain of work placements can make it almost impossible to achieve. Whilst research emphasizes the need for students to refine their non-technical skills for the workplace, students also need to build effective career self-management skills (Jackson 2015), build their soft skills, for example student should become more socially connected to help them grow and develop their professional networks (Bridgstock, 2016).

Billet (2011a; b) offered a range of teaching and learning strategies that promote WIL in University contexts. With an emphasis on integration, Billet suggests that when students are learning in the workplace this can be integrated with on campus learning that provides an opportunity to link learning across different settings making students more effective in developing their work based skills and knowledge. This enables students to acquire new learning concepts, practice the necessary behaviours and procedures as well as evaluate and reflect on best practice and identify areas for improvement. Knight and Page (2007) warn researchers that there are a host of challenges in assessing the employability skills of students and that there are a number of limitations in developing a measurement-based approach for such courses. However for the course and the experience to be taken seriously Yorke (2011) acknowledges that it is critical assessment are carefully constructed and finely graded.

Similar to WIL, work-based learning (WBL) is also commonly cited in the literature, however WBL is often used to describe a relationship between learning and working (Keevers and Outhwaite, 2001).
Other research describes WBL as learning for work, at work and through work and that can be formal or informal and is gained through the experience of undertaking work asks (Brennan & Little, 1996). Burke, (2012) suggests that authentic and innovative work-based learning (WBL) opportunities for students in enabling programs are essential for them to learn and acquire new skills and knowledge. Placing emphasis on the “learning” component as opposed to the work placement, students can learn about work outside of the classroom and this helps to prepare for the realities of work to follow. Burke and colleagues (2016) looked at perceptions of work-based learning in foundation degrees in the UK and used Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. Whilst traditionally this theory was based on children and not adults the researchers highlight two key points of relevance as to how this can help us understand how learning can happen in the workplace. Piaget suggests that learning is an active process and therefore students can have the opportunity to learn outside of the classroom, and in doing so perhaps make mistakes and errors but also then have the opportunity to problem solve and overcome the issues as they occur. In addition Piaget emphasizes that learning should be authentic and that students are more likely to learn and engage if they feel it is meaningful to them. However, Beaney (2004) argues that the relationship between work and learning is a complex one and even though something may be learned from any form of experience, there is not necessarily a clear relationship between the two.

Applying a WBL program for enabling programs is problematic at best. Hodges, et al., (2013 p. 32) notes that “these students tend to be characterized by a lack of confidence in their capacity to cope with demands of a formal educational environment along with a wide range of differing levels of study skills and a range of life skills”. Whilst students may achieve the literacy and numeracy skills they need to be successful at the undergraduate level, enabling students have a propensity to make poor choices when it comes to degree selection. It is not uncommon for College students to change their degree selection, and there are a host of reasons that can be attributed to this. However it is the aim and intention of this course design to promote greater awareness of business, the relevant careers and build student’s academic competency.

2.1 Business fundamentals: Workplace learning pilot program.

The Business Fundamentals program is a foundation studies course at UniSA College that has roughly 250 students enrolled across multiple campuses and offers students a blended learning environment offered. The aim of the course is to help student distinguish and understand the differences between each of the disciplines available in the broader field of business. Currently there are 12 business degrees students can choose from ranging from tourism to marketing, to accounting to finance, to human resources, just to name a few. Given the scope and variety of programs, College students simply do not have adequate knowledge to make informed decisions about what program is going to best suit them at the end of their foundation studies program.

As a result of this, it has become evident that this presents a current gap in the student experience for foundation studies student. This paper aims to address this gap by developing an inclusive and critical pedagogy that also give students a work place learning experience within the University environment, yet still in unfamiliar spaces. Furthermore, students will be invited to explore their career aspirations, develop their career skills and further their understanding on the employment options available in business. This course was designed using inclusive and critical pedagogies. Business Fundaments is underpinned by the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which is described as “… a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people” (CAST, 2011). It is based on the idea that the course experience can provide students with an opportunity to develop and act upon their strengths in three key ways, “multiple means of representation”, “multiple means of actions and expression” and “multiple means of engagement” (CAST, 2011). The Business Fundamentals pilot program was designed to ensure that the course material addressed the needs and interests of diverse students and provides preparatory skills and knowledge needed for success at the undergraduate level.

Lartha and Harvey, (2017) found there is a disparity of employment outcomes for enabling students from equity groups and that more research is needed to provide ways for enabling students to connect with industry and build their professionally skills and employability. In response to this gap in the enabling sector this course responds to the growing need for enabling students to have a better understanding of their career aspirations and subsequent degree selection.

The Business Fundamentals course considers the UniSA Business School undergraduate program as the future “workplace” for enabling students and therefore worthy of being a workplace learning environment for students to gain knowledge, experience and awareness of Business studies and career options. Although not in line with traditional versions and applications of workplace learning which would
usually happen in collaboration with an industry partner. In this proposal, UniSA College will partner with the UniSA Business School to offer students a host of benefits including improved learning outcomes, networking skills and professional development. This strategy is in line with the overarching University’s core mission which is to achieve employment ready graduates. Despite its limitations, this design not only provides enabling students with the content and theory that underpins Business but furthermore ot requires students to participate in a one day workshop that showcases the Business School. Students work in teams and groups to create and devise their own ‘Build a Business’. This workshop promotes inclusive pedagogy by giving students flexibility in the design, in addition students work collaboratively and develop their understanding of the operational aspects that go into running a business. The course is designed to provide opportunities for students to engage directly with the Business School. This includes participation from key stakeholders including the Dean of Business, relevant Professors, Business sector for prospective students. However beyond the key presenters, students are required to attend one key marketing event that showcases undergraduate studies and careers, this may include Business School. They are inspiring, knowledgeable and well informed where it comes to business and it is these people who are the best for promoting the careers, opportunities and strengths within the Business sector for prospective students. However beyond the key presenters, students are required to attend one key marketing event that showcases undergraduate studies and careers, this may include example UniSA Open Day or The Business School Spring Fair, both corporate marketing events that are designed to highlight the benefits and career outcomes available for students.

2.2 Integrating new learning practices: embedding workplace learning into course assessment

In Business Fundamentals students complete 4 key pieces of assessment including a Discussion Paper, a media presentation, final report and students also receive a participation and engagement mark. For the first assessment students conduct a research activity that requires them to find jobs and employment opportunities in the business sector. Students find and research a series of business job advertisements and write a discussion paper on each position description highlighting what the strengths and weaknesses are as well as outline the skills needed for the role. Due to the inclusive pedagogy students have the ability to find and select job advertisements that resonate with them personally making their studies more relevant and applicable to their life. Stokes (2017) suggests that students who are able to make course material and assessment personally relevant, are more likely to have a better student experience and improve course outcomes.

The second assignment is based on industry research, students are required to pick an organisation of their choice, preferably an organisation they would ideally like to work for in the future and prepare a 2 minute online media presentation that highlights the sustainable and ethical operations within the business. Students should aim to include how the business is doing good and what makes them attractive as a potential employer. Here, the incorporation of the UDL approach is essential, its gives students a chance to personalize their studies to craft their course experience (CAST 2011). Although presentations are typically an intimidating process for students, this is minimized by the nature of the presentation being digital and therefore recorded in a ‘safe’ environment (i.e. at home with no immediate evaluation or judgement from peers or a marker). However this assignment is considered to be highly reflective and applicable to current industry practice. In recent times the move towards digital online live interviews, online meetings, such as skype as well as webinars are all considered common practice in business today. Students build an understanding and appreciation for the importance of communication skills and being able to ‘sell yourself’ in the work force. Students are increasingly mindful of how competitive employment is; currently in South Australia the unemployment rate amongst young people is 15% and the overall the unemployment rate nationally in Australia holds at 5% (ABS, 2017). Therefore this assessment is designed to build students awareness of the labour market, giving them the research skills they need to successful transition into the degrees and eventually into their careers.

The remaining two assessment pieces are interconnected; students prepare a final 2000 word report on their Business School experience. However in order to do this effectively students not only attend normal lectures and tutorials but they will also be required to attend a one day workshop facilitated by the UniSA Business school. In addition they must also attend one key careers based event of their choice (i.e. Open Day, Business School Spring Fair or Careers and Tertiary Exo). To remain inclusive and consider students in regional or remote areas, a series of career focused online learning modules have been created including video recordings of lectures, podcasts and online resources, all highlight and showcase the complexities and diversity within Business. Fostering a blended learning environment, this course offers open access and is crafted by inclusive pedagogy. Florian and Linklater (2010, p370) stated “Inclusive pedagogy focuses on extending what is ordinarily available as part of the routine of
classroom life as a way of responding to differences between learners rather than specifically individualizing for some”. Business Fundamentals has been designed to embrace and value student’s prior experiences, also known as “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005). Inclusive teaching practice helps bridge the gap between student’s expectations and life experiences and making connections back to the course material helping them to feel more connected to their studies. As a result, course work becomes more relevant and important and students also feel more valued, accepted and validated therefore leading to more positive and meaningful learning experiences. The content included in this course is aimed at preparing students for the challenges of higher education and learning, employment and participation in organisations. By personalizing their assessment students learn about University practice with attention given to the goals they have at the end of their degree. Each of the topics covered in the course are scaffolded to build students’ understanding, knowledge and awareness of business careers available, this is further complimented by the opportunity to engage directly with the Business School.

There is however a lack of research in enabling programs that include workplace learning in the curriculum. There is an assumption that the same benefits of workplace learning can be achieved in enabling programs just as they are in undergraduate programs. In fact, one would argue it is an important foundation for so many students now to understand that they will be required to do placements in most UniSA degrees. Therefore it is anticipated that by engaging in workplace learning this may improve enabling student’s transition into the undergraduate programs as well as improve their employment opportunities. This research is interested in understanding the viability of workplace learning for enabling education. The core objectives are (1) examine the influence of workplace learning on enabling students in the Business Fundamentals course, (2) examine the influence of workplace learning on student degree selection and (3) explore the benefits of workplace learning within enabling programs and finally (4) identify the limitations and weaknesses of including workplace learning for foundation studies students and assess the viability for expansion into other disciplinary areas.

3 METHODOLOGY

This action research project examines the challenges enabling students face as they transition into their undergraduate studies, specifically, Business studies. Using the UniSA foundation studies course Business Fundamentals as the basis for this research, the present study is a conceptual and theoretical paper. It proposes the idea and strategy to embed work place learning into a foundation studies program to facilitate and improve the transition into higher education for enabling students. Built on a transition pedagogy it is the aim of this course to improve enabling student’s success in undergraduate business programs. The study reported here is the redesigned curriculum that will be delivered for the first time in semester 2 (second half of the year) in 2019. It is anticipated that approximately 200 students will enrol in the program. Therefore, a mixed methodology will be employed to collect data from all key stakeholders to determine the outcomes and key findings of this pilot program. Furthermore, the outcomes of this pilot will inform the future strategic direction of UniSA College, and if it is viable to replicate this course in other disciplinary areas of the University.

However this paper is part of a larger mixed method program of research to be carried out following completion of the course. Business Fundamentals is offered only once annually running for 13 teaching weeks from July to November. Qualitative data will be collected via audio-recording the tutorial and class discussions. Further research will also aim to explore how students and teachers engaged with the transition pedagogy employed as they reflect on their career aspirations.

The focus of the study is to assess if this pilot study using Business Fundamentals as the trail course can offer benefits when a transition pedagogy like work place learning is employed, and can this lead to improved student outcomes. With each of the course topics scaffolded students achieve both academic and professional benefits. Establishing and working collaboratively with the UniSA Business School was essential in the developmental phase of this program. Providing a work place learning experience for enabling students is challenging, even when that workplace learning is occurring within the University there are still challenges and financial implications, resourcing issues and space limitations. By establishing strong positive relationships between College and the Business School only improves the quality of the program and outcomes for the students. There are multiple stakeholders and ongoing coordination and management resources needed that extend far beyond traditional operations of foundation studies courses. Therefore it is important to understand the value and benefits of embedding work place learning, in this format, and determine if it is worth the efforts and investment for this cohort of students. The research will also look at the student outputs including their second and third assessment pieces to determine if students are achieving the course learning objectives. Overall student
feedback is provided via a University wide course experience questionnaire however students will be invited to participate in an online voluntary and confidential survey to give their feedback and evaluation on the course experience.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This paper provides a case study of redesigning curriculum for business students in an enabling program, underpinned by inclusive and transition pedagogies. It highlights the challenges presented by the students and the course, as well as highlighting the benefits and positive outcomes that can result. By using the UDL principles to develop this course, it aims to help students access and engage with concepts from across all the business disciplines including marketing, management, human resources, accounting, finance and economics. UniSA College embraces an inclusive learning environment and there is a belief that students bring value through their “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al., 2005). As a bridging pathway program, the foundation studies course offers students from non-traditional backgrounds a well-supported and well-designed program that helps students transition into undergraduate programs.

In an attempt to build and improve the student experience, as well as improve the learning outcomes for students, the course Business Fundamentals was redesigned as a pilot program to test the worthiness of workplace learning in enabling programs. Given the host of limitations associated with this project, the study proposes that the University undergraduate program acts as the “workplace” for enabling students to experience and engage with. By keeping the program internal to the University it reduces the need for industry and external business stakeholders, and can be effectively resourced by internal staff and this reduces the costs and administration significantly. Despite the challenges of being a large course, this pilot project offers a platform for building stronger relationships between the College and the Business School. It also provides a good case study to evaluate the viability of this strategy being used in other courses and other disciplinary areas.

There is currently a need for more research on developing inclusive curriculum in business and career skills in enabling programs. There are well documented challenges with both WPL and enabling programs. As a relatively new area of research, this paper offers a strategy to improve students understanding of the business sector and the relevant career opportunities available. The course integrates workplace learning modules and concepts and students develop their understanding both theoretically and practically. By carefully considering the design of this course, it can serve to improve student confidence, create new knowledge and outcomes, and develop their soft skills that will inform their undergraduate choices. By building and scaffolding student’s awareness of business concepts and then applying them to the Business School environment, it is hoped that students will have more meaningful experiences and develop a clearer career direction.

REFERENCES


