Enhancing communicative spaces for fieldwork education in an inland regional Australian university

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The diversity of fieldwork education models and practices ranges from mandatory to voluntary, from graded to ungraded, from paid to unpaid spectrums and they vary in length from less than a week to up to one year. Colleagues who work in the same university but in different schools, faculties or campuses are often so busy working within their discipline-specific arena that there seems to be little opportunity to learn from and collaborate with other disciplines about fieldwork education programs. This paper provides a report on a project that trialled and evaluated an online debate with university staff about fieldwork education issues. The aims were to establish a sustainable university-wide fieldwork education discourse, to break down profession-specific silos, to inform the development of university-wide fieldwork education benchmarks and to foster fieldwork education leadership through online debates. The findings demonstrate that, collectively, participants shared a wealth of experience and wisdom that remained largely untapped at a university-wide level. Participants' evaluation highlighted the perceived value of creating a communicative space for a fieldwork education discourse and it exposed aspects of the online environment and time constraints as its biggest barrier.

Keywords: collaborative learning; dialogues; fieldwork education; online; reflective practice

Introduction

In this paper, I report on a project that trialled and evaluated an online debate with university staff about fieldwork education (FWED), the education for practice debates. The aims were to explore the scope of online debates to foster a sustainable, university-wide FWED discourse, to break down profession-specific silos, to inform the development of university-wide FWED benchmarks and to cultivate FWED leadership.

Competing interests in fieldwork education

Fieldwork education is gaining currency in higher education globally for many reasons. Universities are under sustained significant pressure to demonstrate relevance in an economy that is grappling with a skills shortage. In Australia, universities are pressured and constrained by requirements from stakeholders to develop graduates who are work-ready and employable (AC Nielsen Research Services,

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2000; Billet, 2001; Reid, Dahlgren, Petocz, & Abrandt Dahlgren, 2008). There are different and often colliding expectations placed on FWED, which remain assumed and taken-for-granted by its stakeholders. There is a demand by industry that universities should produce work-ready graduates, and student expectations that university degrees will build their portfolio and increase their employability prospects. Professional bodies are interested in technical competence and professionalism, whereas universities cultivate theoretical reasoning and ethical practice. Students, employers and professional bodies send seemingly competing directives to universities. In an effort to respond to these demands, universities are increasingly looking to FWED curricula to develop professionally competent and work-ready graduates (Coll & Eames, 2004).

The potential of fieldwork education in higher education

Is FWED the answer to preparing graduates for citizenship and the world of work? This question needs further exploring because adopting or expanding existing FWED programs can be a risky undertaking for industry and university alike if not pedagogically well designed and well managed (Phelan et al., 2006). Good FWED programs invest in thoughtfully designed administrative and legal systems; develop collaborative relationships with placement supervisors; prepare and support students through their fieldwork experiences; respond to feedback and evaluation; and articulate the contribution of FWED to the overall course program (Gronewald, 2004).

In the current economically competitive and technically driven climate, it is seductive for universities to focus on the technical scientific aspects of professional practice. Such a focus runs the risk of not only neglecting ethical, sustainable and cultural dimensions of practice but also developing silos within schools and faculties of universities. Emphasizing discipline-specific differences potentially hinders interprofessional learning and dialogues across disciplines, schools and faculties within universities, and distracts academics from collaborating on the development of graduates who have proficient professional generic skills. Students with FWED experience report overall more rewarding university experiences than their counterparts without fieldwork experiences (Orrell, 2004). Fieldwork education seems to be a good place to develop interpersonal, creative as well as technical and procedural skills.

The rationale for communicative spaces for fieldwork education

Patrick et al. (2009) conducted a scoping study into FWED that mapped the issues of current FWED practices in Australia. Amongst many other issues, the report recognized a need to develop university-internal partnerships and networks that enable colleagues from different disciplines, faculties and campuses to share information, learn from each other, establish a more coordinated approach with employers and develop shared principles to enhance FWED. The report also stated that participants in their study perceived learning from others about different FWED models as invaluable and it suggested that sharing these may enhance its quality. This contributed to the project design.

The Education for Practice Debates Project arose as a response to a preliminary survey of current FWED programs at Charles Sturt University (CSU) (Trede & Higgs, 2008). The results of the survey highlighted a diversity of approaches and models,

which drew attention to the fact that FWED is strongly shaped by the requirements of professional bodies and interdependent relations with industry. These findings pointed to a need to develop a university-wide discourse to understand current contextual and pedagogical FWED practices, to identify shared underpinning principles that inform collective systems for FWED. Because CSU is a multi-campus inland university in Australia with an international campus in Canada, the online environment was chosen because it was the most accessible and flexible environment for conducting these education-for-practice debates. Universities commonly conduct online professional development activities (Bowskill, Foster, Lally, & McConnell, 2000), however, there is a dearth of literature that reports on online debates at a university-wide level that critically reflects on FWED (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). The term debate is deliberately used to align the intended nature of the online dialogue within a critical pedagogy frame of reference (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1973; Habermas, 1984). The intent of the debates was to reflect on practice that looked beneath the surface, to search for deeper meaning and values that construct current practices. Such reflection leads to a critical awareness which Freire (1973) coined 'conscientisation'. Critical debates should be conducted in such a manner that reminds all participants to problematise practice rather than to re-confirm current practices without any prior challenge and critique (Trede & Higgs, forthcoming). The theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984) postulates three conditions for a critical debate: (1) reason prevails over power, (2) debaters take a self-reflective stance, and (3) arguments need to be transparent and have intrinsic properties that help decide whether to accept or reject validity claims. A critical perspective to debates promotes disclosure of interests, bias and motivation, rejects deriding rhetoric and unsubstantiated statements that lead to deception and honours genuine transparent discussion (Koegler, 1999). The debating conditions were articulated in the information sheet to potential participants as discussed below. It was the moderator's task to ensure the debate was conducted in the spirit of critical dialogues.

Objectives

There were three key reasons to establish an online, networked, university-wide FWED discourse. The first was to raise awareness of diverse pedagogical intentions and to support actions that arise as a response to conscientisation. There are seemingly colliding stakeholder interests in FWED and there is a tendency (reinforced by the dominant discourse in FWED and accrediting bodies) to focus on technical and competency standards rather than on harder to measure professional attributes such as ethical, communicative, reflective and critical practice capabilities. The debate offers an opportunity for participants to become aware and articulate influences that shape current FWED practices and to make more informed choices to improve FWED programs. The second reason was to break down discipline-focused silos and develop leadership for a university-wide FWED discourse. And, finally, there is little insider research conducted into academics' own practice and learning in FWED. Academics have little opportunity to share and reflect upon their learning and teaching approaches and practice philosophies (Eraut, 2000) let alone across disciplines, schools and faculties. The aim of the communicative space was to provide a networked online platform for professional development and support for change. The objectives of the FWED debates were to:

(1) Provide a creative and open online forum for FWED staff to:
    - reflect on what is working in their FWED and what is not;

- raise awareness of the breadth of FWED practices;
- consider options;
- critique beliefs and assumptions about FWED theory and practice;
- share ideas, practices and resources;
- build capacity to facilitate excellent FWED for CSU students; and
- Support each other in making improvements and innovations to current practices.

(2) Develop an accessible and sustainable infrastructure for ongoing debates about education for practice that supports a community of practice across the multi-campus university.

(3) Research the debate as a tool for generating innovative ideas and recommendations for improving and promoting education for practice.

Methods

This research project is informed by a critical practice inquiry approach, which is located in the qualitative research paradigm. A critical inquiry enables research participants to gain critical insights into their own practice, which generates new knowledge and enables transformation (Kemmis, 2005; Trede, 2008). Open transparent dialogues provide participants with the opportunity to stop, reflect and reconsider collectively what informs and motivates the way they practise and conduct FWED programs. Such a critical practice inquiry fitted the research purpose of critically sharing and informing future approaches to FWED.

Online debate design

This six-month project consisted of three phases, which are illustrated in Table 1, the debate flow chart.

The researcher clustered brainstorm contributions (Phase 1) into four topics, which comprised the four separate debates. Each debating topic was active for four weeks (Phase 2). In the fourth week the researcher summarized key debating points and concluded with major findings and recommendations. Participants were invited to critique, edit and write into these word document summaries. The critical appraisal (Phase 3) at the conclusion of this trial consisted of a 10-item questionnaire accompanied by written reflective comments (see Appendix 1).

The software program Interact was used as the online environment. The non-synchronous discussion forum was used to conduct the debates, a resource site was used to share scholarly reading materials, a wiki was available to share other comments and reflections about the debate and the announcement site served as the site to upload summaries of each debate. The rationale of using these four functionalities was to enhance an effective learning environment.

Table 1.   Debate flow chart.

Phase	Activity	Duration
1	Recruitment and brainstorm activity	1 month
2	Four topical debates	4 months
3	Critical appraisal	1 month

Ethics and access

This study had ethics approval from the CSU Human Research Ethics Committee. The online environment provided no opportunity for anonymity because the names of contributors could not be concealed. However, access to the online debates was restricted to staff who actively contacted the debate facilitator and agreed to the participation guidelines. In order to develop a sense of community and trust it was deemed important to contain the group size in this trial. A well-defined community promises a more coherent and focused engagement and is recommended by Bowskill et al. (2000).

Recruitment and participants' details

The FWED debate was advertised in the university electronic newsletter that reaches all CSU staff. In addition an email invitation was sent to all administrative and academic staff engaged with FWED. This email list was generated with the assistance of secretaries of each CSU school, who identified FWED staff in their school. Course coordinators and heads of schools also received email invitations and were asked to encourage their staff to enrol and participate.

Nineteen staff representing all four faculties at CSU (science, art, business and education) self-selected to participate. All but one participant were academic staff. One participant was researching FWED practices, whereas all other participants were engaged in coordinating FWED subjects.

Participation guidelines

Conditions from the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984) and critical pedagogy (Brookfield, 2005), as discussed above, were adapted and rephrased into the following participation guidelines:

- Be as open as you can.
- Share critical moments that expose challenges, problems and errors that we can all learn from. There is no pressure to be seen to succeed.
- Feel free to disagree and engage in vigorous debate, but treat all contributions respectfully.
- Focus on problem-posing and exploring choices rather than immediately looking for solutions. This is a forum for learning and transforming, not teaching.
- Use the debate constructively for genuine professional development, not to simply off-load frustration and anger.

These guidelines underlined the intent of an open, respectful and ethical environment for discussion. Participants were encouraged to respond to other contributions to foster dialogues.

Text construction and interpretation

Contributions and responses from participants comprised the process of constructing texts and can also be regarded as initial text interpretations. Further text interpretation occurred after the completion of this project when the researcher interpreted all contributions. The text interpretation methods were informed by the principles and methods of philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1996) and the theory of communication

action (Habermas, 1984, 1987). Initially each contribution was scrutinised for information that related to the research topic to generate descriptive codes (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). These codes emerged from the data and were not preconceived. These codes were then reduced by comparing and clustering them into themes as described by Miles and Huberman (1994). The frequency of a theme that emerged from contributions was given relative weighting. The following analytical questions were posed to the text: What did participants say about their FWED practices? Were they aware of competing interests that influenced their practice? Is there evidence of self-criticality? What do the debates reveal about FWED models? Findings from the debates and the critical appraisal were compared for a match or mismatch (Blaikie, 2000).

Findings

Participation and nature of dialogues

The education for practice debates project was a trial and staff had no external incentives to participate. They were not given special time to participate and their participation was not formally recognized or acknowledged. The sole incentive was their personal motivation and interest. From the 19 participants, 4 never contributed to the debates. However, they all responded to an email asking them for explanations why they had not participated. They all mentioned time constraints including being on sabbatical or needing to take unforeseen leave. One had logged on and read contributions but found the online environment a barrier. She wrote:

> I just wasn't comfortable having an email debate about difficult and complex issues, which may be a personal thing, but I felt I needed to talk about them rather than write my responses. Having said that, if I'd had more time I may well have used some of it to get my responses in to the debate. (participant 10)

This comment reminds us that the transition from the spoken context to the online writing environment can act as a barrier (Daly, Pachler, & Pichering, 2003). The non-participants did not put forward suggestions for improvement to the structure or content of the debates. Figure 1 illustrates the participation pattern and evidences a significant drop over time. The debate activity denotes the number of participants engaging in different activities.

Participants found it difficult to find the time to participate regularly over the six-month period. The message to be drawn from the participation data was that the length of the debate is an issue. Participants were more active in the first two months. Further, written debates have their limitations compared with oral debates because sparse contribution rates in an asynchronous online written environment threaten to stifle responsive discussion. However, the (asynchronous) online environment was chosen to increase accessibility and flexibility in a multi-campus university.

The nature of the debates was inquisitive and respectful. The following quotes provide a snapshot of how participants experienced the debates:

> I find everyone else's comments typically very well-informed, often inspiring and I often feel humble in the light of the collective wisdom that emerges in this debate. (participant 8)

> On a personal note I enjoy reading the postings, but I am no academic – far from it. I am a retired old X who is trying to give something back to a profession I worked in for over 30 years. So when I give my point of view it is based upon my beliefs. It is much appreciated for letting me have my say and I hope it makes sense. (participant 9)
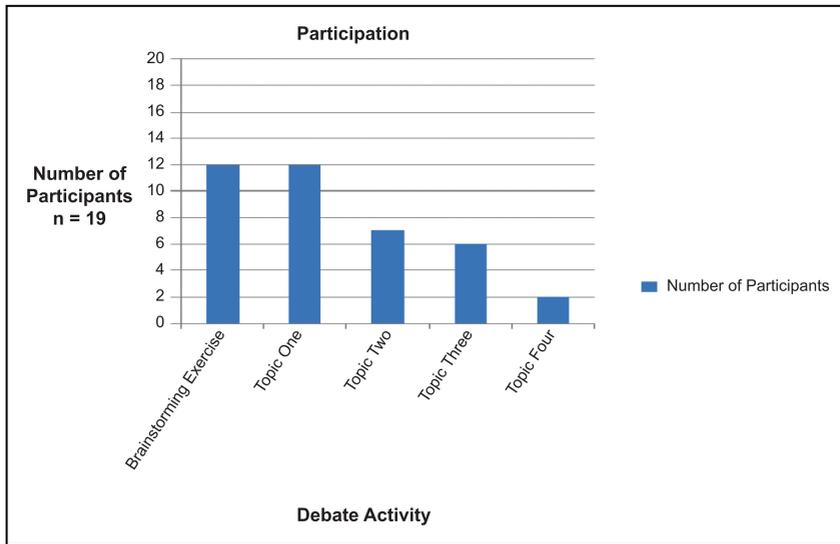
Figure 1.   Participation pattern.

Participants openly shared their experiences, gave each other advice and asked how others would have dealt with critical issues; challenged policies; identified gaps; and developed their arguments based on theoretical and contextual knowledge. Participants did not challenge each other, instead there was evidence of self-critique and support for others. There appeared to be a strong sense of respect for each other. It is important to be mindful that debaters had and used the option of silence (no responses), which remains open to interpretation.

Issues raised in the debates

In the brainstorm phase of the debate participants were asked to (1) share what their most pressing concerns were in conducting FWED, (2) provide an example to illustrate their concerns in context and (3) pose up to three questions they wanted the group to respond to. The issues and accompanying key questions raised in the brainstorm were clustered into five themes and are listed in Table 2.

These issues and questions from the brainstorm activity were collapsed into the following four debating topics: (1) quality placements, (2) good assessment practices, (3) engagement between university and industry and (4) career development learning. The formulation of each debating topic was purposefully framed in a provocative tone to entice responses and stimulate debate. These are listed in Table 3.

The debates unearthed a wealth of individual, context-rich and situated wisdom, which had remained untapped. Participants raised issues such as limitations in finance, accommodation and connectivity to the Internet. In addition CSU attracts students from regional and rural areas and a significant proportion of them are first-generation university students. This has an enormous impact on FWED experiences away from home. Some students had never been to larger metropolitan (compared to rural) cities and for them FWED was life-skill education. 'Students often complain of less than ideal accommodation and financial pressures while on placement which impacts on their learning as they are tired, depressed and anxious to return home' (participant 1).

Table 2.   Debating themes and their questions.

Themes	Questions
Quality fieldwork placements and assessment	• What constitutes a quality placement? • Is there a place for critical dialogue in FWED between student, supervisor and coordinator? • What is a reasonable standard? What is shared understanding of professional standards? Why standardise FWED if it is complex, diverse and contextual?
Effective teaching for students' and teachers' learning	• How can we ensure that students, coordinators and supervisors all have a quality experience and learn well? • How do you transfer the classroom environment to 'distance education'? • How do you get reality in the material you deliver? • How to prepare students and supervisors so all have a quality experience and learn? • How can you ensure learning is taking place with large cohorts? • How to support student learning especially of those who are at risk of failing in a DE accelerated program? • How not to silence otherness and difference? • How to work cooperatively with other institutions to further the fieldwork opportunities for students and address common challenges? • What is a good outcome for students?
Cost and recruitment	• Who controls payment for placement supervisors? • Is it placement supervisors' professional responsibility to supervise or is it an additional job task justifying their demand for payment? • How can we deal with short-term cancellations? • How to recruit more placements? • What is a true partnership between industry and uni? Should we recompense supervisors individually or rather industry use the money to supply space, equipment, education, release from work to educate and evaluate students? • The only problem area we have is the huge payment students have to make via HECS during a period when they are not being taught on campus.
Assessment and supervision	• How to ensure equitable, culturally sensitive and consistent supervision of our students on placements? • How do others approach assessment in clinical/FWED and what strategies do they use to increase consistency in assessment? • What is a good outcome for students? And for that matter what is a good outcome for uni (coordinators, schools)? • What is the use and limitation of competency assessments? • How to fail students; what do supervisors need to know, what skills do they need to fail someone appropriately?
Equity and engagement	• What is a true partnership between industry and university like? How can we make student placements attractive to industry? • How can we ensure equitable, culturally sensitive and consistent supervision of our students on placements?

Table 2. (*Continued*).

Themes	Questions
International students and international placements	• Why do some placements view 'students with accents' as a risk to customer relations? • How can we reduce the language barrier with placement supervisors in different countries who speak languages other than English?
Career development and employability skills	• Should a university Careers Service contribute directly, much more strategically, to the career development of ALL students (something to commence earlier than in the students' final year of study)? • Is there a link between a student's personal career development and work integrated learning? • Does CSU see any opportunities arising from pre- or post- fieldwork activities which might further enhance our students' understanding and appreciation of what employers want?

Table 3. Debating topics.

First debating topic	A good budget ensures quality placements: In these economic rationalist driven and financially competitive times, the solution to ensure quality FWED experiences for students, placement supervisors and university coordinators lies in a generous budget
Second debating topic	To provide good assessments is a shared responsibility between the assessor and the student: Only the assessor (placement supervisor) and the student can make a fair assessment of student learning while on placement. University coordinators should not get involved and question assessment results
Third debating topic	Engagement between university and industry: Students learn best about work on placements when university staff establish good professional relationships with host agencies • How do you make connections, establish shared working relationships with your host agencies? • What and who is involved in this relationship? • Should this be the role of general or academic staff? • How does this work in your school?
Fourth debating topic	Career development learning greatly enhances the goals of practice-based education

Participants were also mindful of the key role fieldwork (FW) supervisors play in constructive student learning whilst on FWED. Fieldwork supervisors often felt like outsiders and had poor access to professional development to improve their supervisory skills. One participant reported blatant discrimination of FW supervisors against mature-aged students who were looking for a career change. 'FW supervisors may act as "gatekeepers" to professional learning experiences choosing to "protect" patients/clients from students' (participant 1). There was consensus that the university had ultimate responsibility for quality placements.

The debate on assessment explored critically the complexity of assessing learning journeys, student capabilities and failing students:

> If the placement is primarily a learning experience then I believe that we should be down playing any of the sifting and sorting roles – or we don't find spaces for learning, changing, making mistakes, challenging traditions, pushing boundaries, taking chances. They [students] are too worried about the 'mark'. (participant 2)

Fieldwork education subjects without grades focused on creative and transformative learning opportunities. Many participants were aware of the dangers of completing tick boxes rather than facilitating student learning:

> I aim to make the assessment process painless for the student and for me and so I do not specify their reflections in fine detail nor do I assess their reflections in any pedantic way. My aim is to open the reflection as an opportunity for the student to self-assess and to provide insights into how their work has gone and what it has done for them and what they've learned. Students always say that doing the reflection was useful to them. They often don't know how to start but just as often find it difficult to stop writing once they've started. These [reflective writing pieces] make very interesting reading. (participant 3)

Coordinators of graded subjects were aware of the dependence on supervisors to assess fairly, and the limited nature of competency-based assessments. These participants favoured a participatory assessment approach that included fieldwork supervisor, student and academic coordinator. They argued that such a triadic assessment approach provided an opportunity for dialogue and learning for all involved. However, even this assessment approach was critiqued:

> If there is an expectation that all three participants will share the assessment process the likelihood of all three participants having an equal say is questionable because of the relations of power that are produced in and through the practicum assessment process. These relations of power mean that students are often positioned and position themselves as powerless to have an impact on assessment decisions. (participant 4)

Failing students exposed issues of responsibility and leadership: 'I think this has implications for the work we do with supervising teachers in terms of preparation for supervision – it has to go beyond superficial "training"' (participant 4). Another participant confirmed the importance of training of and collegial collaboration with supervisors: 'Our recent experience with clinical educators clearly highlighted their desire for increased support in the area of assessing students' (participant 1).

   The third debate highlighted a range of creative strategies to engage and foster professional relations with industry. Strategies included sending formal emails, networking at professional events and 'plain begging'. As one participant described it:

> I chat to people, I buttonhole them, cajole, sweet-talk, seduce, schmooze, and genuinely get involved. This is at first. After I have a student placed and I do an interview with the industry representative who is their head of studio or supervisor I find that that cements the relationship into a personal one. (participant 3)

Many participants networked with alumni. In some courses, academic coordinators maintained a clinical role and were able to take students as fieldwork supervisors. Key obstacles to engagement included geographical distances, large number of industry partners, and high staff turnover in work places, which made personalized contact almost an impossibility. The preferred engagement strategy was face-to-face and regular contact. One participant integrated fieldwork supervisors into the academic teaching program, extending the world of work into the classrooms of universities:

Every year we take the third year students to Sydney for two days and visit a wide range of public relations practitioners. This always leads to internship offers. The means of fostering and retaining industry relationships is further supported through a specific third year subject where every fortnight a specialist practitioner (e.g. investor relations, IT communications, local government, fast moving consumer goods) comes to Bathurst for an extended lecture and discussion. (participant 5)

The final debating topic co-facilitated by the career development officer tried to draw out the link between FWED programs and graduate employability and to what extent programs actively encouraged students to build their future careers. Fieldwork education is grounded in the preparation of students for the world of practice. Career development learning includes personal management, exploration of learning and work and career building. This topic did not attract many contributions possibly because of debating fatigue and the fact that participants assumed and did not evaluate employability skills as such.

Critical appraisal

The trial concluded with a qualitative and quantitative evaluation, see Appendix 1. The responses to the qualitative questions are summarized in Table 4.

Findings from the qualitative evaluation data complemented and affirmed the quantitative evaluation questionnaire data (see Appendix 1). There was overwhelming agreement from the participants that sharing experiences and perceptions of FWED across professions and faculties was the most valuable aspect of this project. Participants appreciated being listened to and learning other colleagues' approaches and perspectives to FWED: 'The most valuable thing I learnt was the universal nature of some of the issues – across disciplines – and how much we have to learn from other disciplines' (participant 4). Another participant found: 'It was reassuring to see other people from a wide range of disciplines struggling with the same or similar issues. It was also inspiring to see the creative solutions some people had implemented' (participant 2). The value and need for a communicative space to develop a FWED discourse at a university-wide level across disciplines was highlighted strongly in this appraisal phase. There was also agreement amongst participants that the negative aspects of this project were that participation was time consuming and that the online environment was not the most user-friendly: 'The most difficult aspect for me in participating in the forum was finding the time to read and respond to messages' (participant 6).

Opinion was divided regarding what the ideal timeframe for each debate would be. Some would have preferred a more condensed debating time, some even suggested an intensive synchronous debate whereas others would have preferred longer time frames for each debate.

Conclusion

The significance of this study is that it highlighted the urgent need for more collaborative knowledge building projects that focus on researching the professional practice of FWED. It was noted that FWED practices were often not discussed with colleagues. The debates enabled participants to reflect collectively and learn from each others' experiences. Turning collaborative discussions into critical dialogues that lead to change remained a challenge for participants and moderator alike.

Table 4.   Qualitative evaluation data.

Questions	Responses
What did you like most about the debate?	• Hearing other people's ideas. • It is important to share about these demanding aspects of courses. • Enjoyed the contributions from the debators with a wide range of experience. • Discussions about actual practice. • Jockeying back and forth which arose from differences of opinion (that's debating I guess). • Hearing from others and sharing experiences – it was informative, interesting and beneficial. • That there is so much going on, so much experience and so much to learn from each other. I would like to capture so much of what I have seen and heard in the discussions.
What did you dislike the most?	• How the discussion sometimes churned into educational babble complete with references and quotes, typically later in any thread. • It was hard to wade through all the messages and keep a set of mental connections going in relation to who people were, what the topic was, and what aspects they were addressing at the time (as well as what comments they were responding to). • It was difficult to find time. • [Online] forum was not user friendly and difficult to navigate.
What would you change?	• Add a space for participants to introduce each other so we know who is participating. • Send weekly reminder email. • Tell participants to read papers, provide hyperlinks to papers; this was not obvious.
What was the most valuable thing you learnt from the debate?	• Learning, thinking and reflecting collectively on what we do and think we are doing. • That my strategies were being trialled in other courses. • Noticing similarities and differences was comforting. • Hearing about experiences of people from other courses.

Challenges that emerged from this project confirmed findings of the national scoping paper of work-integrated learning (Patrick et al., 2009) and added rich situated details. In this study good practice of FWED was individually driven and not sustained in a systematic approach. Changes in practice occurred due to individual initiatives rather than as a systemic approach. As one participant asked: 'Why is it that we all know the problems and have obviously known for a long time but don't appear to be able to make a difference?' (participant 7). This challenge points to the need for leadership of innovative, collaborative and pedagogical systems that enables meaningful integration of the world of practice into the university curriculum.

The aims of this project were to establish a sustainable university-wide FWED discourse, to break down profession-specific silos, to inform the development of university-wide FWED benchmarks and to foster FWED leadership through online debates. Directions for achieving these aims have been identified and next steps have

been established but the aims have not yet been fully achieved. The changes required suggest a long-term culture change from individualist to systematic FWED approaches (Orrell, 2004).

The education for practice debates have entered their second cycle incorporating feedback from this trial. Currently the *chat room* is being trialed instead of the *discussion forum* and further trials of other online discussion designs are planned. Sustainability is addressed by sharing the moderator role. Leading experts in education for practice will be invited to co-moderate a debate. Each debate is now treated as a separate activity and participants commit to debating for one month only. By breaking down the debate into a defined period of time staff can participate when it best suits them. The cost of time can be justified now because the debates are recognised as a professional development activity as long as participants fulfil strict criteria regarding the quality and quantity of their contributions. Participants have to contribute at least once a week. A contribution is either raising new aspects of a debating topic, asking deeper and challenging questions and or responding to others' contributions that demonstrate good understanding of their perspective. Each participant will be required to contribute a minimum of 100 words to the evaluation phase of the project. At least one contribution must include some resource material that has been made available on the interact site or participants are asked to contribute a useful reference, e.g., project report, upcoming relevant conference, journal article, website etc., that relates meaningfully to the debating topic.

The debates have started to break down silos, however, no shared projects have emerged from this trial yet. Findings from this trial have started to inform preliminary discussions for the next CSU strategic plan and are being considered in benchmarking activities. Findings and recommendations arising from future debates will be reported as a short discussion paper to key learning and teaching committees at faculty and university-wide levels. Research projects have been identified and are being developed as well. A challenge for the future is to turn learning and insights into structural, personal and professional changes. Brookfield (2005, p. 335) stressed the importance of dialogue to facilitate better understanding of what shapes perceptions and practices before current practices can be transformed. But he is also mindful that for change to occur support from peers and enabling systems have to be in place. Debates alone cannot necessarily achieve sustainable change. Billett (2001) discussed the importance of opportunities for participation in the workplace, which he termed workplace affordances. This has been addressed by alerting participants to research, grant and teaching fellowship opportunities at CSU that have been especially created to advance education for practice. These opportunities make an important contribution to turning insights into actions, researching practice and advancing the scholarship of FWED. The evaluations revealed that the debate stimulated learning collectively across disciplines and as this project enjoys more and more recognition and staff participation, its current small-scale grassroots leadership has great potential to enhance FWED capacity and its discourse at a university-wide level.

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Appendix 1. Critical appraisal

Evaluation questionnaire

1. I have read the Profiling fieldwork education at CSU report that was in the resource folder in interact.
2. I would recommend this debate to others.
3. I have done something differently as a result of participating in the debates.
4. I would like to continue the debates.
5. The time frame for each debating topic was too long.
6. The summaries of each debate by the facilitator were useful.
7. The facilitator did a good job keeping the debate on track.
8. What I learnt by participating in this debate was interesting and relevant.
9. It was valuable by sharing education for practices across professions and faculties.
10. The online environment created a safe and constructive space to debate education for practice issues.

Qualitative evaluation comments based on the following questions

1. What did you like most about the debate?
2. What did you dislike most?
3. What would you change?
4. What was the most valuable thing you learnt from the debate?