Fostering Dialogue About Practices

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1   APPROACHES TO ENHANCING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN UNIVERSITIES

In the contemporary research-intensive university, there is a compelling need not simply to maintain the quality of teaching and learning but also to seek ways of enhancing it—what Trowler et al. (2009) have helpfully defined as 'purposeful attempts to change constellations of practices for the better'. Intrinsically, drivers towards enhancement are the strength of an institution's commitment to an ethos of excellence in teaching as well as in research and knowledge exchange; a desire to capitalise upon advances in pedagogical understanding as well as in technologies that can enable and

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boost learning; and the embrace of new strategic goals (greater inclusivity, increased emphasis on fostering specific graduate attributes institution-wide, enlargement of off-campus learning opportunities) that have implications for curriculum, teaching–learning and assessment practices. Extrinsic drivers commonly include heightened requirements for accountability through mechanisms such as national surveys, professional accreditation, quality assurance—regardless of scepticism about the significance of their impact (see, e.g., Mårtensson et al. 2014)—as well as, for instance, a sea change in the envelope of resources that underpin the teaching function (e.g., a reduction in state funding per student or sharp rises or falls in enrolments).

The strategies that have been deployed in the service of enhancement are remarkably diverse (see, e.g., Blackwell and Blackmore 2003; Hunt et al. 2006; Bamber et al. 2009; Land and Gordon 2013). Discussing universities' efforts over the last four decades to improve the provision of teaching and learning, Gibbs (2013) pinpoints 11 types of activities that can be seen as comprising four main groups:

- the development of individual teachers or groups of teachers (including communities of practice (CoPs)), or of students as learners, or more broadly, of teaching–learning environments or of the institution as a body;
- the identification of emergent change and diffusion of 'best practice' (or 'quality practices', to use the terminology of Mårtensson et al. (2014));
- the introduction of quality assurance systems, or of mechanisms—internal or external—to recognise, accredit and reward excellence in teaching;
- the undertaking of educational evaluation, or of educational research and scholarship.

Hounsell (2011), reviewing enhancement activities across the Scottish universities under the sector-wide theme of 'Graduates for the 21st Century', distinguishes seven types of strategies adopted by institutions in taking forward the theme (see Fig. 1), ranging from knowledge exchange to seed corn projects and surfacing and sharing good practices.

A third and more conceptually directed perspective on enhancement is provided by Trowler et al. (2005). They highlight three contrasting theories underlying enhancement initiatives and focus on three different levels of
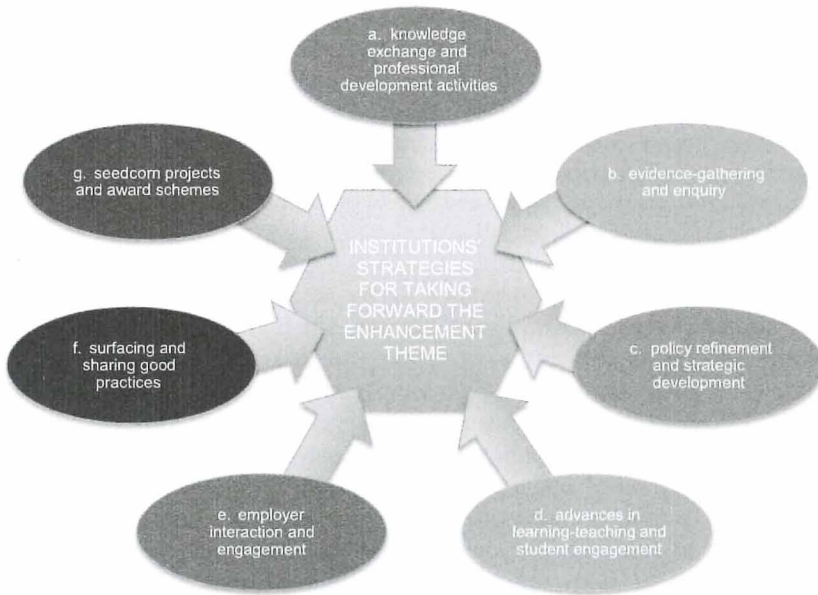
Fig. 1 Main types of institutional strategies adopted to take forward the G21C Theme

engagement. At the micro level is the concept of the reflective practitioner, viewed as a potential change agent, and broadly equivalent to Gibbs' individual teachers. At the macro level is the institution, conceived of as a learning organisation in which change 'stems from alterations in organisational routines, practices and values' (p. 427). The intermediate or meso level is argued by the authors as being currently missing in many teaching and learning enhancement initiatives in higher education. The meso level refers to the social processes at a departmental or sub-departmental and workgroup level, which is believed to be particularly essential for diffusion of innovations and culture changes. It is also argued that the meso level is where 'students and lecturers engage together in teaching and learning practices' and where 'changes actually take place' (Trowler et al. 2005, p. 435).

The discussion of the meso level further implies that any change strategies need to be tailored accordingly to suit the teaching and learning practices in specific disciplines stemming from the epistemological

characteristics of the disciplines concerned. As Bucklow and Clark (2003) have argued:

> Teaching takes place within particular departmental and institutional con-texts, each with its own particular culture, patterns of practice, regulations and resource constraints. However clever specific examples of 'good practice' may be, they need to be adapted and bent to the needs of particular contexts if they are to be used at all. (p. 70)

Bucklow and Clark's observation serves as a reminder that there are institutional as well as disciplinary cultures which enhancement initiatives have to address. Consideration of drivers and strategies therefore needs to go hand in glove with attention to a university's prevailing organisational ethos. In research-intensive universities, generally speaking, academic decision-making is to a significant extent devolved to faculties and depart-ments (or their equivalents), rather than being hierarchically structured, and innovation cannot in consequence be imposed or centrally directed. Approaches to enhancement therefore have a much greater likelihood of success if they go with the grain of an organisational ethos and value 'creative scope to devise locally tailored solutions to institutional policy priorities and strategic plans' (Hounsell and Rigby 2013). Similarly, Knight and Trowler (2000), discussing departmental cultures and the improve-ment of teaching and learning, argue that academic managers 'work in rather than on cultural contexts and their most important skills revolve around perceptiveness towards and analysis of these contexts', while Gordon and Land (2013) suggest that 'localised and locally-controlled contexts and actions' play a key role in approaches to enhancement. And for Bromage (2006), 'mutual education and learning within a collegiate approach' are the most likely ingredients of successful change management in higher education.

2   SCOPE AND RATIONALE FOR AN APPROACH AIMING TO PROMOTE DIALOGUE ABOUT CURRENT AND EVOLVING PRACTICES

The above discussions have implied that many existing approaches on teaching and learning enhancement have not yet effectively integrated the initiatives at the individual level, the intermediate level, and the institutional level. In particular, the essential role of the social processes at the

intermediate, or so-called meso, level is not carefully attended to (Trowler et al. 2005). As an attempt to tackle these issues, a unique approach adapted from the CoP framework (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002) is proposed at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) to fostering dialogue around teaching and learning. The paragraphs below explain what a common CoP approach is, and the following section discusses how the adaptation at HKU makes it a unique approach suitable for teaching and learning enhancement in research-intensive universities.

Since Lave and Wenger coined the term 'communities of practice' in 1991, the relevant body of theory has been continuously evolving. The initial conceptualisation described how newcomers observed and interacted with 'old-timers' in an unintervened setting through 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 29). In Wenger's subsequent publications (e.g., Wenger et al. 2002), CoPs are described as an approach to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and practices. According to Wenger et al. (2002), CoPs are defined by three indispensable characteristics: a commonly shared subject of knowledge named as a domain; a community consisting of people who are engaged in developing knowledge in the domain through regular and ongoing interactions; and practice involving shared ways of doing things, common language, and resources. The most recent publication has also highlighted the role of convenors, which refer to people who actively facilitate the development of CoPs by bringing participants from different disciplines together and creating a suitable learning space (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

The CoP approach is not a new initiative in higher education. Buckley (2012) has advocated the need for supporting knowledge sharing among academics in the higher education environment through the establishment and cultivation of CoPs. A CoP, in the context of teaching and learning enhancement, typically means a group of people who share concerns about certain teaching challenges and meet to discuss teaching practices. CoPs show potential to provide a collaborative platform for sharing ideas and co-constructing knowledge by 'identifying strengths, discussing challenges, and finding solutions' (Golden 2016, p. 84). It is important to distinguish such a community from a 'working group', such as a co-teaching team. In a CoP, teaching practitioners carry out practices in their own contexts and venues while making use of the dialogue in the community to learn from each other in order to develop solutions to enhance teaching or tackle challenges in their particular contexts and venues. In a working group, on

the other hand, members usually work together as one unit to accomplish a series of tasks, for example, teaching a particular course.

A number of examples of cultivating teaching and learning CoPs in the higher education environment are reported. Green and Ruutz (2008) present a case study of creating a teaching-oriented CoP to tackle specific teaching challenges within the business school in an Australian university. The main aim of the CoP is to provide a safe, authentic learning environment, in which academics can enhance teaching by sharing and developing their teaching practices. Pharo et al. (2014) report the successful experience of cultivating a CoP to facilitate interdisciplinary teaching of complex problems in four Australian universities. One key factor that contributes to the success is the provision for institutional autonomy in domesticating the model to fit local circumstances. In the UK, the study conducted by Keay et al. (2014) demonstrates that working towards a CoP may help provide a framework for improving communication and creating more effective transnational education partnerships.

3   A New Approach Within the Teaching and Learning Context at HKU

At HKU, teaching and learning quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms have been in place for a number of years. Institutional quality is assured mainly through the vehicle of the Senate Teaching and Learning Quality Committee (TLQC), the membership of which consists mainly of the Chairpersons of Faculty TLQCs. These Chairpersons are typically Associate Deans with responsibility for teaching and learning in their respective Faculties. Teaching and Learning Quality Committees at both levels (institutional and faculty) meet regularly to take forward teaching and learning policy and strategy, discuss teaching and learning quality issues in relation to academic programmes, and consider applications for teaching development grant project funding. Institutional quality enhancement services are provided in part by the University's Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL). CETL supports the university in achieving its teaching and learning aims through the provision of professional development programmes, and continuing professional development opportunities, including workshops and seminars, consultation services, and special events, for example, international conferences.

Although these two mechanisms for quality assurance and quality enhancement have by and large been effective in achieving their respective purposes, there may be more the University can do to foster a vibrant teaching and learning culture that facilitates professional conversations in relation to teaching and learning enhancement at and across different levels and within and between disciplinary boundaries. The TLQCs at both university and faculty levels have, in the past, tended to be chiefly administrative in their focus, and the practices and values associated with excellent teaching and learning have not traditionally been the subject of widespread conversation. While the services provided by CETL have been quite effective in disseminating 'good', research-informed, practices, they have not necessarily created a collective group of reflective individual practitioners at the meso level, which, according to Trowler et al. (2005), can facilitate changes and infuse innovations.

A new approach based on CoP theory has been developed in order to address the opportunities and challenges at HKU. The notion of 'fostering dialogue' emphasised in HKU can be seen as an extension and adaptation of the evolving theory and application of CoPs, as illustrated in the previous section. Such an approach may even be regarded as a deviation from the original meaning (implying a naturally emerging phenomenon), but is relatively closer to the later conceptualisations (e.g., Wenger et al. 2002; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). The unique characteristics in the HKU's adapted CoP approach can be represented by its four major components: themes, processes, audience, and outputs (see Table 1).

Specifically, themes refer to the main areas in teaching and learning that interest teachers, which are similar to the domain in the original CoP framework. In our approach, themes are also defined as strategically important matters as reflected in the University's vision statement. The processes in conventional CoPs refer to the process of learning from each other and developing shared routines and resources. In our approach, the processes include the intervention by the CoP convenors such as identifying specific opportunities and challenges, interviewing key stakeholders, collecting practices from the ground, systematically documenting and analysing the practices, and compiling teaching and learning resources. The role of convenors has therefore been expanded to intentionally promoting exemplary practices and diffusing innovations. Audiences not only refer largely to the community but also involve a range of other key stakeholders, for example, occasional participants, students, subject matter experts, and decision-makers (such as faculty deans and associate deans of teaching and learning).

Table 1 The original and the adapted CoP approach at HKU

Essential component	The adapted CoP approach at HKU	The original CoP approach
Themes (Domains)	Themes—main areas in teaching and learning that are both interesting to teachers and strategically important to the University	Domains—main subject or knowledge areas in which people are interested
Processes (Part of the Practice)	Processes—knowledge sharing among community members and the intervention from the convenor (including identifying specific opportunities and challenges, interviewing key stakeholders, collecting practices from the ground, systematically documenting and analysing the practices, and compiling teaching and learning resources)	Practice—a set of frameworks, ideas, stories, and language that the community members share
Audiences (Community)	Audiences—a group of people who have on-going communication and interaction in order to develop their expertise around the themes and a range of other stakeholders, including occasional participants, students, subject matter experts, and decision-makers	Community—a group of people who have on-going communication and interaction in order to develop their expertise in the domain
Outputs (Part of the Practice)	Outputs—teaching and learning resources that are collectively developed by the convenor and the community members and are widely shared across the University to promote exemplary practices	As shown in Practice above

These people may not be part of the community per se, but they are involved through the convenor at a certain point of the processes to provide input and sometimes enable changes. The outputs form part of the practice which becomes the shared ways of doing things within the CoP. However, the outputs in our approach carry more functions than documenting shared practices and involve promoting exemplary practices and driving changes across faculties. Shown in a variety of formats, the outputs are shared widely among all faculties across the University as teaching and learning resources and from time to time used as stimuli for further discussion.

Among the four major components in our approach, the most essential and core component is the process that involves the collection of practices on the ground, followed by a systematic, research-directed approach to data analysis and dissemination. Such a process is one of the unique features of the CoP approach we have developed in the context of teaching and learning enhancement at HKU, which is a strongly research-intensive university. The rationale for collecting practices on the ground relates to our earlier discussion regarding the contextual nature of teaching and learning practices. Although there are general principles of good strategies, for example, for assessment for learning, or culturally responsive teaching, their implementation needs to take into consideration the student population and their learning preferences, class size, and other contextual factors and dynamics (Bucklow and Clark 2003). The concept of 'teaching and learning regimes' (Trowler and Cooper 2002) aptly encapsulates the power of local practices. Teaching and learning regimes are the implicit theories and assumptions held by academics about teaching and learning. Trowler and Cooper (2002) argue that a professional development programme is more likely to succeed if the practices promoted are compatible with the participants' teaching and learning regimes. Furthermore, a research-directed approach has been employed to data analysis in order to identify patterns in these grounded practices and, more importantly, enable us to convey the patterns to academics using their familiar format and language. Being systematic and rigorous in the data analysis is also helpful in generating high-quality resources and benchmarking best practices internationally.

With a number of new additions, the CoP approach at HKU still contains important features identified in the CoP literature. First, CoPs are largely built on the existing culture and ethos of an institution, rather than being a revolutionary transformation of it (Wenger et al. 2002). The intention to promote exemplary practices and drive changes shown in our adapted approach is effectively based on the existing culture and ethos through surfacing and acknowledging current practices from the ground. The changes we aim for are gradually facilitated through the sharing and celebration of good practices as part of the teaching and learning resources. This grassroots approach fits particularly well in a university environment in which effective change is often initiated through departments. Another feature that aligns with the existing CoP literature is that CoPs build a safe, collegial environment in which teachers feel comfortable talking to one another. In research-intensive universities, academics typically assign a high priority to research and actively engage in a range of academic

activities, such as conference presentations, journal publications, and seminars, in order to develop their expertise through interactions with scholars with similar research interests: they effectively constitute a research-oriented CoP. However, there may be very few equivalent spaces suitable for the development of professionalism in teaching and learning. An academic who wishes to explore the opportunities of a specific improvement in their approach to, for example, assessing students or designing group work may not easily identify relevant venues within their discipline.

Based on CoP theories, the approach at HKU has incorporated unique features that help create opportunities to drive changes and diffuse innovations at a collective level (or a meso level), which was not a typical emphasis in the original CoP approach. However, this adaptation fits particularly well into the teaching and learning context of HKU. A case study is presented below to illustrate how this approach fosters dialogue about practices across the University.

4   A Case Study in Fostering Dialogue: A Tale of Two Themes

In the period 2014–2016, two initiatives have been pursued at HKU using the adapted CoP approach, focussing on 'assessment and feedback' and 'internationalisation in teaching and learning', respectively. The following sections describe how dialogue around teaching and learning on these two initiatives has been fostered through the four major components: themes, processes, audiences, and outputs. As part of the case study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 faculty members who had been involved in the CoPs. The findings from the interviews will also be reported.

4.1   Theme

Both of the themes selected are key issues facing HKU as well as many other universities internationally. It has long been recognised that assessment and feedback have a significant 'backwash' effect on students' learning approaches and priorities (Biggs 1996). The University has therefore established an assessment policy to ensure that students are assessed in an appropriate, credible, fair, rigorous, and transparent manner. Some of the key principles promoted by the University include assessment for learning, alignment of student learning outcomes, diversity of assessment types,

equitable assessment, and timely and professional feedback (University of Hong Kong 2015).

Under the theme of assessment and feedback, four strands have emerged as salient through the CoP: (i) assessment in the Common Core Curriculum; (ii) assessing experiential learning; (iii) understanding standards; and (iv) high-impact feedback. The first two of these strands sprang from major changes that came about as a result of the recent higher education curriculum reform in HKU: the introduction of a Common Core Curriculum into the formal programme structure in 2011–2012 and a commitment to providing all students with meaningful experiential learning opportunities. These changes to the curriculum have presented challenges in terms of the design of assessment. In the Common Core Curriculum, for example, assessment designs need to be aligned with the broader scope and multiple perspectives of Common Core courses. The assessment of experiential learning requires that its design recognise the assessment of processes and experiences largely outside the classroom and the possible involvement of external assessors.

The other two strands identified, understanding standards and high-impact feedback, are less the result of the new curriculum reform as the result of our growing understanding of the crucial role of assessment literacy and feedback. Assessment and feedback are often aspects of university study for which students report relatively lower levels of satisfaction (Carless 2015). An earlier study across higher education institutions in Hong Kong also pointed out that students perceive the lack of useful feedback as a problem in the assessment process that inhibits their learning (Carless 2006). Successive student surveys at HKU have provided confirmation that the quality of feedback, together with student uncertainty about assessment goals and standards, are recurring areas of concern. These were therefore identified as two strands upon which the work of the project would focus. Further details of how the assessment and feedback theme has been framed and undertaken can be found in Hounsell and Zou (in press). Internationalisation is one of the four key themes, alongside 'innovation', 'interdisciplinarity', and 'impact', in the university's strategy of becoming Asia's Global University, and HKU has already made great strides in this direction. Recently, the University was rated the world's third most international university (Times Higher Education 2016). Though this result is very encouraging, a closer examination of internationalisation raises deeper questions, such as what the impact of an 'internationalised' curriculum is on students' learning and how teaching and learning needs to be designed to

facilitate intercultural engagement. The focus in the related literature over the years has shifted from topics such as the number of students studying abroad and the ratio of international staff and students, to more fundamental issues such as the learning benefits to students, internationalisation at home, and internationalisation of the curriculum (Leask 2015; Teekens 2007).

Unlike the assessment and feedback theme, where it was relatively easy to identify underlying strands, no specific strands stood out under the theme of 'internationalisation in teaching and learning'. A slightly different approach has therefore been adopted in this case for identifying the strands for discussion. Firstly, a number of challenges and opportunities associated with internationalising teaching and learning have been identified through literature review and consultation with stakeholders at HKU. These draft challenges and opportunities were presented in the first of a series of 'Join-the-Conversation' events (a signature event in the HKU approach to CoPs, referred to in Sect. 4.4). Comments and suggestions were then solicited from participants regarding the significance and relevance of each of these topics. Based on input from participants, the draft was then refined. This resulted in eight challenges and opportunities relating to internationalising teaching and learning at HKU. Each of these challenges and opportunities became one strand, namely 'learning outcomes and graduate attributes', 'student mobility and learning abroad', 'internationalisation in the HKU curriculum', 'language and intercultural competence', 'learning and intercultural interaction', 'digital and virtual learning', 'assessment and evaluation', and 'internationalisation and the postgraduate experience'.

4.2   Processes

The process follows a cycle of identification, surfacing, synthesising, and sharing of quality practices. Taking the theme of assessment and feedback as an example, the process started with a survey of the assessment practices in the Common Core Curriculum and experiential learning programmes within HKU. Subsequent interviews were then conducted with course or programme coordinators who were identified as having adopted innovative and effective assessment practices. The interviews surfaced practices and insights that were verified by the contributors, and then compiled as case examples. The data (i.e., practices) were analysed systematically following qualitative data analysis procedure (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Briefing notes were developed to synthesise and highlight the key findings across

the case examples. Meanwhile, the project team working as convenors also identified, through a literature search, world-renowned experts in assessment who had published influential work of specific relevance to HKU's needs, and approached them to request that some of their representative work be edited and re-printed as briefing notes in a format that would be suitable for sharing among teachers at HKU. Finally, the sharing of quality practices was promoted through dissemination of the compiled resources, and the running of face-to-face events in the form of a series of 'Join-the-Conversation' events, as they were called.

The work with the theme of internationalisation of teaching and learning followed a similar process. One additional element was an international advisory panel that was formed to provide advice on the direction of the CoP. The panel comprised external and internal scholars with expertise in various aspects of internationalising teaching and learning in higher education. The rationale underlying this difference in the processes is that 'assessment and feedback' is a relatively focussed area in the literature, whereas 'internationalisation in teaching and learning' is a broader, more multi-faceted and arguably more complex area of study. An international advisory panel not only provides expertise through the distinctive interests of its members but also reflects the importance we attach to internationalisation in our approach by soliciting multiple international perspectives on the issues in question. Specifically, the advisory panel members contributed to the CoP in three major ways. They each compiled one briefing note drawing on their experiences and expertise. They all provided advice to the convenors in relation to the framing of the issues and problems and possible strategies that may help address them. Finally, they all joined one Join-the-Conversation event, delivered a keynote speech, talked to community members, and convened a panel-led discussion.

4.3   Audiences

The audience for the CoP, although mostly HKU teachers and other academic staff with day-to-day curriculum, teaching–learning and assessment responsibilities, is actually quite broad. Some members have recognised expertise in the two areas, and have already undertaken various innovative initiatives and been engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning in respect of assessment for learning and/or internationalisation of teaching and learning. Others are relatively new to the focal areas and are still exploring the key concepts. The audience also includes deans and

associate deans of faculties in the University, who have formal organisational responsibility for promoting teaching and learning across the institution. Students are another important group of stakeholders, and they have contributed to the resource materials and participated in CoP events.

A number of centres and units outside the faculty structure within HKU are part of the audience, too. The list includes the Centre for Applied English Studies (CAES), the Centre for Development and Resources for Students (CEDARS), and the Gallant Ho Experiential Learning Centre (GHELC), among others. These centres are important stakeholders in the university's assessment and internationalisation activities, and play a pivotal role in facilitating intercultural engagement among undergraduate and postgraduate students, in particular, through co-curricular and experiential learning.

The heterogeneity of this audience has been an important characteristic of the community. CoPs are not about experts sharing their insights; rather, they are opportunities for learning and development for all participants through dialogue around effective practices in participants' respective contexts. Interestingly, we have found that the involvement of relatively senior formal stakeholders in the CoP has helped the CoP to provide system-level support and recognition, at the same time as more hands-on support for classroom teachers. The involvement of students on the CoP has also had an unanticipated benefit, in that some teachers have started to share the resource materials created through this project with their students as a pathway towards students developing an understanding about teaching and learning principles and academic standards.

4.4   Outputs

The outputs take a variety of formats, including written materials, digital videos, sharing events, and newsletters. Written materials comprise briefing notes as a synthesis of the key principles and points learnt, some of which are accompanied by case examples from HKU and elsewhere. Digital videos include 'vox pops' featuring HKU students' voices around the two strategic themes and a number of talking heads featuring the views of assessment experts. The production of the student 'vox pops' emphasised authenticity over other factors such as rigour and systematicity. Students in a learning commons (i.e., an indoor area where they read and study) were casually approached with no pre-selection and invited to take part in the filming on the spot. Approximately one in three students approached by our staff

agreed to take part in the video filming. Each student had five minutes to read the interview questions before they answered the questions in front of the video camera. The instant and 'unprepared' nature of student voices in front of the camera has appealed to our audiences, especially to faculty members who are eager to know what students' views are. The assessment experts were selected based on their influence in the field and their areas of expertise. All five of the experts (i.e., Prof. John Biggs, Dr. Catherine Tang, Prof. Royce Sadler, Prof. David Boud, and Prof. Dai Hounsell) have instrumental influence in the field, and each possesses expertise in an area that is highly related to the four strands identified under the broad theme of assessment and feedback.

'Join-the-Conversation' events are sharing events to which all HKU colleagues are invited. Four Join-the-Conversation events were conducted under the theme of assessment and feedback and five under the theme of internationalisation of teaching and learning (Please refer to the Appendix for details). Unlike conventional seminars, in which one or two speakers talk to an audience, Join-the-Conversation events are typically led by panellists who are active members of the CoP and have contributed information about their assessment practices to the community. These panellists need not be 'experts' in the area; however, they have 'wise' practices that they wish to share and discuss. Such wise practices might not otherwise be surfaced in conventional seminar events, given that, in research-intensive universities in particular, academics are often fully occupied with research, teaching, and service activities. The flow of a typical Join-the-Conversation event starts with a facilitator introducing the topic of the discussion, followed by each panellist talking for around 5–7 minutes and joining other panellists to lead a discussion with the audience for around 45 minutes to one hour, and finally a wrap-up by the facilitator or sometimes a subject matter expert.

5   FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS

Fifteen CoP participants were interviewed as part of the case study. The participants were recruited through a purposive sampling strategy. Fifteen invitations were sent to academics who have been involved as either panellists or participants in the Join-the-Conversation events. The invitations were intentionally directed at people from a range of disciplines (e.g., Architecture, Arts, Dentistry, Education, Law, Science, and Social Sciences) and at different stages of career development. All invitees agreed to

participate and granted consent for their interview to be part of a case study. Among the interviewees, seven were relatively senior (e.g., professor, associate professor) and eight were relatively junior (e.g., assistant professor, lecturer). During one-to-one semi-structured interviews, they were asked about their experiences in the CoP, their perceptions of the concept of CoP, and its role in enhancing teaching and learning. The experiences described by the participants focussed on the following elements: learning, generating ideas, interdisciplinarity, and being connected. The learning element is to the fore in the sense that all of the participants interviewed valued the learning opportunities provided by the community, especially being able to learn from others from different disciplinary backgrounds. One participant said the following:

> I was a participant but also a learner of assessment practices. Besides, I would like to see what others do with assessment... It provided opportunities for me to explore, to know more about what other departments are doing. (A faculty member in Social Sciences)

Another participant emphasised the value of generating new ideas from talking to others and believed that the CoP helped break hierarchical and departmental boundaries:

> Some of the best ideas you just get from people, just you know, talking... talking to them. Um... and... you know sometimes it is quite frustrating in a sense that we all... kind of... have our individual offices and we are working separately and yet... you know, there is so much potentially that we could learn from each other and this is why CoP exists, I think. (A faculty member in Arts)

As a senior member in the department, the above participant also shared that participating in the CoP activities helped her convey a message to other members that teaching and learning is important and enabled her to know what her colleagues are doing in a pleasant manner:

> And you know it is a form of support as well. I think... to a certain extent, I see my role as a kind of senior member in the department [A] to encourage people and to get involved... and to know what people are doing... so I think that community of practice has a kind of interpersonal value to it. (A faculty member in Arts (same as the above))

While the interaction among participants during the CoP events and activities seems to be fruitful, it is also noted that there are relatively fewer cases where participants follow up with one another about what they have discussed:

> After I shared our assessment practices, two people came immediately to ask me questions. We chatted for a while and left contact but there was nothing after that. You know...people are busy and I did not contact them. (A faculty member in Social Sciences)

A few participants have highlighted the usefulness of the briefing notes generated from the CoP process:

> Assessment and feedback is a universal concern to teachers in this university. The project briefings are very useful ... especially the one with the Common Core ... as it facilitates the long overdue interplay between the Common Core and the disciplinary curricular. (A faculty member in Law)

> ...we can access valuable online resource repositories about best practices of teaching and learning. One example is the types of assessment in Common Core Courses at HKU. The research findings from CETL have facilitated us as coordinators to strengthen the curriculum of [Course name], a course for year 1 undergraduate students. (A faculty member in Arts)

Other than the learning aspect, another factor that a number of interviewees mentioned was the benefit of belonging to a group in order to avoid the danger of isolation. One participant who transited from being a practitioner in the field to becoming a member in academic faculty said that:

> I was completely new to the academic world. I knew very little about assessment or internationalisation or any of this stuff. Therefore I think I need to learn from others what all this is about. I like to talk to people who also care about teaching and learning. (A faculty member in Architecture)

When asked about the role of the CoP in the current higher education environment, all participants believed that it would be helpful to promote more CoPs and social learning opportunities. For example, one participant compared a teaching-oriented CoP to what happens in a research context, and commented:

I think the community for research is pretty well established...it is systematic. But really, there has not been enough for teaching. I think more opportunities to have more discussions about teaching will be better. Perhaps you can have information sharing. I just ... think research develops very fast but teaching does not change so much. (A faculty member in Science)

Another participant commented that the CoP needs to be linked to the university's aims and focusses on teaching and learning. The same participant raised an interesting point about the life cycle of CoPs:

(Whether the CoP is needed) depends if the CoP is in harmony with the university aims and objectives like internationalisation...is certainly a major focus of the University. Another issue with CoP is that it may become redundant over time. Say we have got a CoP on international practices ... or internationalisation of teaching and learning. After a period of time, that won't be of any use because everyone is doing it. (A faculty member in Dentistry)

The interviews have shown that opportunities to learn from others' practices, especially across disciplines, are highly valued by CoP members. This has to a certain extent demonstrated the usefulness of surfacing exemplary practices from different venues including the literature and the individual faculty members within the University. The value of the 'Join-the-Conversation' events consisting of people from different disciplines has also been affirmed from participants' responses. The interviews have, however, reflected that teaching-oriented CoPs were perceived as less mature and systematic than their research-oriented equivalents. This view is consistent with our earlier literature review, showing a lack of venues for faculty members to share and discuss their teaching and learning practices. Our adapted CoP approach offers a space for quality dialogue on teaching and learning. Such a space is, according to the literature as well as to the comments from participants, much needed in the current higher education environment.

6   CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The adapted CoP approach described in this chapter has responded to the strategic teaching and learning themes emphasised by the institution, undertaken a systematic process, involved a wide range of stakeholders as

audiences, and generated substantial outputs. Taken together, these four major components have provided an effective response to the initial issue identified in the HKU's teaching and learning context regarding the two largely independent mechanisms of quality assurance and enhancement. The CoP approach, in its locally adapted form, has been found to connect these two mechanisms through bringing the strategic teaching and learning themes to the community's attention and simultaneously soliciting locally grounded practices from faculty members according to a systematic process. Furthermore, the approach has created a safe and collegial space bringing together people responsible for quality assurance and those who are working on quality enhancement. Finally, the substantial outputs consisting of student voices, expert advice, local practices, and the literature also help facilitate a more productive dialogue that is based on substance rather than on abstract or administrative concerns.

One useful framework that has helped us reflect on the impact of these two CoPs is Wenger et al. (2011) value framework, which describes five cycles of value: immediate, potential, applied, realised and reframing. In our specific context, immediate value refers to the immediate impact of participation and engagement of participants in community activities, such as the 'Join-the-Conversation' events. Potential value includes knowledge about the practices and approaches that our audiences have acquired through their activities. Applied value is a matter of the actual adoption of such practices and approaches in daily teaching work. Realised value refers to improvements that come as a result of adopting these new practices. Finally, reframing value refers to new theories, redefined successes and refined frameworks that emerge as a result of the improvements achieved.

In the case of our CoPs, the most observable aspects of impact that have been achieved are in terms of immediate, potential, and reframing value, while applied and realised value are still evolving and are thus less visible and yet to be documented. Immediate value can be most easily articulated through the participation records of and feedback forms from the Join-the-Conversation events, that is, the number of participants and their substantive comments. Potential value is evident in the interviews with participants who have emphasised their learning of exemplary practices, as shown in the previous section. Reframing value is shown in the gradual changes of academic development in the University. Prior to the case study, academic development at HKU relied on compulsory programmes and workshops, both of which regarded experts as the main source of knowledge. The case study has brought Join-the-Conversation events to the

attention of both academics and institutional leaders, who have started to see the value of acknowledging and honouring local practices as well as the possible collaborative opportunities generated from a cross-disciplinary community. Though still at an experimental phase, we believe that Join-the-Conversation events, and our CoP work in general, will become part of the mainstream for academic development at HKU. This will signal a gradual shift of academic development from one-off programmes to ongoing and participatory involvement.

As for applied and realised value, our method for recording participants' reactions to most of our community activities has focussed on participant satisfaction, and so has not yielded particularly rich evidence of whether participants have adopted changed practices in their daily teaching. Although a number of participants have mentioned during interviews that they adopted some of the practices in their teaching (e.g., using the resources to strengthen the curriculum design), it is still not clear whether the changed practices have resulted in actual improvements in student learning. Thus, our evidence of applied and realised value is relatively weak.

There are two initiatives planned for the near future. The first is to develop a better understanding of the impact of our CoP approach through follow-up actions aimed at exploring the extent to which audiences adopt the approaches and practices to which they are exposed in CoPs and the extent of the impact of adoption on student learning enhancement. We anticipate that a better understanding of the impact of CoPs on the daily practices of academics will help us to refine the effectiveness of current and new CoPs, enhance the nature and effectiveness of administrative processes in relation to teaching and learning, and generate materials that will enhance professional development programmes offered through the CETL.

The second initiative that we are planning is to extend the scope of our second CoP. This new project will build on the existing CoP work on enhancing internationalisation in teaching and learning using a refined cross-institutional CoP approach (a so-called CoP2.0 approach), with a greater emphasis on achieving and documenting applied and realised value.

Appendix: Details of the Join-the-Conversation Events

Theme	Topic/Strand	Time	No. of participants (including faculty members, support staff members, and students)
Assessment and feedback	1. Assessment in the Common Core Curriculum http://www.cetl.hku. hk/workshop150512/	May 2015	40
	2. Wise assessment: Towards a community of practice (in conjunction with the International Conference of Assessment for Learning in Higher Education) http://www.cetl.hku. hk/conf2015/confer ence-programme/	May 2015	90[a]
	3. Assessing experiential learning http://www.cetl.hku. hk/workshop150616/	Jun 2015	90[a]
	4. Enhancing feedback http://www.cetl.hku. hk/workshop150618/	Jun 2015	39
Internationalisation of Teaching and Learning	5. Learning benefits of internationalisation http://www.cetl.hku.hk/ conversation160129/	Jan 2016	32
	6. Curriculum Internationalisation in the Common Core http://www.cetl.hku.hk/ conversation160322/	Mar 2016	28
	7. Enriching international learning experiences in your course: What can	Apr 2016	48

(continued)

Theme	Topic/Strand	Time	No. of participants (including faculty members, support staff members, and students)
	digital and virtual learning do for you? http://www.cetl.hku.hk/conversation160420/		
	8. Assessment and feedback in experiential learning http://www.cetl.hku.hk/conversation160608/	Jun 2016	47
	9. Community of practice – Aspects of internationalisation (one-day event) http://www.cetl.hku.hk/cop160624/	Jun 2016	71
Total number of participants			485

[a]*Join-the-Conversation events No. 3 and 4 were held in conjunction with other events so they attracted a particularly large group of audiences*

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