Experiencing Desire Outcomes of Adult Education through Participatory Practice Design

Wey-Ying Lim, SIM University, Singapore
Horn-Mun Cheah, SIM University, Singapore

Abstract

The need for direct relevance, be it for academic, professional and/or self-actualization purposes, has added impetus for higher education institutions focusing on adult education to ensure its programs enable lifelong employability in order to achieve economic and social goals. As such, the desired outcomes of a program cannot remain lofty, but be actualized in the teaching and learning (T&L) interactions the learners experience. SIM University in Singapore, with a focus on adult education, has over the years required its programs to provide her learners with *practice intelligence*, *social consciousness* and the life-long learning skills of *self-directed* and *collaborative learning*. Recent curricula efforts have focused on redesigning the T&L interactions with the goal of having learners experience these desired outcomes. In this paper, we first explain the undergirding principles of the desired outcomes as educational provisions in enabling lifelong employability. Then, we describe the redesign principles that were largely informed by the notion of participatory practice (Billet 2010, Lave 1990). In particular, we explicate how this set of principles is enacted pedagogically in a case example of a Marketing course. To conclude, we draw on our experience of this redesign exercise and outline the implications that we may face when this intervention is scaled to the other courses of the degree programs.

Keywords: practice intelligence, social consciousness, life-long learning skills, participatory practice, adult education, lifelong employability

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Introduction

Higher education institutions, particularly those that serve adult learners, have increasingly been concerned with enabling their students with skills for continuity in the workforce, or lifelong employability. This concern is often set against the backdrop of the modern society where the individual's productive economic years are lengthening, so much so that remaining relevant over the extended years becomes critical given the rapid pace at which new knowledge is introduced.

In Singapore, SIM University (UniSIM) is the only private, non-profit, higher education institution that caters to adult learners (www.unisim.edu.sg). At UniSIM, the concern of developing her students with lifelong employability skills has been approached in the form of translating the desired outcomes of UniSIM education into practicable teaching and learning interactions. Such a strategic move is not just to ensure that practices are aligned with policy (that embodies the University's mission and vision), but also to develop and augment a working culture of lifelong dispositions that both staff and students embody.

The goal of this paper is to document the process of translation where the institution's mission and vision are transposed into pedagogical practices for enactment. More importantly, the reification of such a translation process serves as a basis for iteratively refining and improving subsequent teaching and learning interactions. This helps to exemplify the attributes of a reflective practitioner.

We first begin this paper with the explication of the desired outcomes of UniSIM as educational provisions that enable lifelong employability. This is followed by the central thesis of this paper that is the translation of the design principles, appropriated from the notion of participatory practice, into pedagogical practices. We further contextualize this process in a Marketing course. Finally, we conclude this paper by drawing on our experience of this design exercise and outline the implications when this intervention is scaled to the other courses of the degree programs.

Desired Outcomes of the UniSIM Education

Vision: Empowering society through lifelong education
Mission: To create excellence in lifelong education through a uniquely designed learning experience, equipping learners for a better future.
Desired outcome: The UniSIM graduate is a *socially conscious* professional with *practice intelligence* and *lifelong learning skills*.

UniSIM has an overarching vision to 'empower society through lifelong education'. It occupies a central role in Singapore in providing degree and postgraduate level programmes for working adult learners. This can be seen from its current enrolment of about 14,000 students compared with a total enrolment of about 77,619 [Department of Statistics, Singapore - http://www.singstat.gov.sg/statistics/browse-by-theme/education-and-literacy] for students in the five publicly funded universities. Given UniSIM's history and the context of its establishment, the university aims to prepare graduates who are *socially conscious* professionals with *practice intelligence* and *lifelong learning skills*. To meet these desired outcomes, it becomes important to

not just integrate them within the curriculum, but also to make them explicit in the teaching and learning interactions.

Table 1 below provides the definitions and anticipated responses for the three desired outcomes of *social consciousness*, *practice intelligence* and *life-long learning skills*.

Desired Outcome: Social Consciousness	
Definition	An awareness of the social dimensions of human activities and institutions; as well as our shared responsibilities for the well-being of our communities.
Our Programmes	Develop social consciousness through practice in the respective disciplines.
Our Graduates	Ethical and professionally responsible, committed to society's collective well-being, and able to make a difference to the community.
Desired Outcomes: Practice Intelligence	
Definition	The ability to adapt and apply learning to the practice context and the use of the practice environment to shape and guide future learning.
Our Programmes	Achieve practice intelligence through applied, real-world and situated learning.
Our Graduates	Professionals who can put theory into practice within the globalised work environment; as well as being able to determine future learning.
Desired Outcomes: Life-Long Learning Skills	
Definition	Life-long skills encapsulated by self-directed and collaborative learning skills.
Our Programmes	Provides opportunities for students to develop and practice self-directed and collaborative learning skills within the curriculum and beyond.
Our Graduates	Resourceful, adaptable, independent and collaborative knowledge-seekers.

Table 1. Desired Outcomes of UniSIM education

There are 2 key aspects of *social consciousness* when applied within the context of a UniSIM education. First, it refers to the university's desire to build up a strong awareness of the social aspects of human interactions amongst the students, and between the students and key institutions in society. Second, it aims to build on this raised awareness to actualise the sense of shared responsibilities for the well-being of the communities and society at large. Given a technologically enabled filter bubble (see Beinsteiner, n.d.) and ethical issues in research surrounding internet communities (see Eysenbach and Till, 2001), the ability to connect with a diverse range of communities is becoming an increasing crucial aspect of development for the adult learners.

Practice intelligence is internally defined in UniSIM. It articulates the outcomes of an education experience that uses applied pathways as key learning processes. It requires both the ability to effectively bring learning into the work environment, and the ability to shape future learnings based on professional needs and experiences in the work environment. This broadly requires the university programmes to bridge theory and practice, and for the programmes to be informed by practice to broaden the learning context for students. There are various aspects to the former, including direct use of learned knowledge and acquired skills, as well as exhibition of 21st Century dispositions. As for the latter, two sets of learning behavior need to be cultivated, ie.

the ability to identify learning needs and to develop strategies for meeting these needs. Thus, the programme design and delivery will need to ensure that such transitions and application of knowledge and skills occur in the workplace. It is likely to involve more than simple training. Support structures that enable learning to take place, including the natural formation of learning communities, and the provision of opportunities for the students to 'practice' the desire attributes are necessary.

There are numerous ways of framing the skill sets included in 'life-long learning'. Rather than positing a comprehensive, and necessarily long, listing of such skills, it is more useful to focus on two categories of skills which can, in turn, embrace a good range of other key 21st Century skills. This will also allow for a strong common understanding amongst teaching staff and students. To this end, two sets, namely *self-directed* and *collaborative* learning skills, have been identified. *Self-directed* learning relates to three main attributes, i.e. the ability of the learner to (a) take responsibility of his/her learning, i.e. ownership, (b) monitor and manage learning, and (c) map and extend learning. These can be effectively integrated with the curriculum and exhibited through teaching and learning interactions. As for *collaborative* learning, the learner is expected to be knowledgeable about, and to develop the ability to enhance and participate in, effective group processes. On top of this, the learner would also be accountable at the individual and group level to the success of the group.

Note that, in general, soft skills are unlikely to be something that can be explicitly taught in a traditional education environment. They need to be 'practiced' in situated environments that can best develop the skills, which often proves to be a challenging task. For instance, it is entirely feasible to design suitable context in order to provide the opportunities for students to acquire these skills and dispositions through practice, which fits within the practice approach philosophy of the UniSIM education.

Participatory Practice as Design Principles

The conception of participatory practice (Billet 2010, 2002) builds on two key theoretical pillars. One, participatory practice takes the view of unpacking learning from a *practice* perspective which brings to mind the notion of apprenticeship (Rogoff 1990). This connotes the processes of *learning to be,* drawing on observation, imitation, re-enactment, embedded in the contexts of activities and guided interactions (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Another different yet related condition is the location aspect of the practice perspective. As practice relates to the situative nature of authentic activities, hence the location for participatory practice, more often than not, is anchored in the workplace.

According to Billet (2010), the process of learning, given the practice perspective, can be summarized as both "personal and situational" (p. 10). The situational aspect of the workplace affords conditions of authenticity and fluidity that are a constitutive function of the experience a learner builds-up. On the other hand, the engagement level of the individual, the competence, and the extent of guidance received are conditions related to the individual that bear consequences to the outcome of learning.

The other key theoretical pillar participatory practice builds on is the social foundation of human development. The workplace is not a neutral context from which economic products and services are generated. The workplace is shaped by organizational hierarchy, group (formal and/or social) affiliation, and occupational-related activities that were borne out of its social historical development (Scribner 1997). Therefore, learning in such an environment is not an objective, out-of-context process but that the "local order" (Engestrom & Middleton, 1996) is an evolving cultural condition the learner has to negotiate in the course of engagement.

On the whole, the dialectics between individual learner's agency and the social context is an important factor that shapes the outcome of learning. Personal meaning making determines the extent of engagement in work practices and as such mediates the construction of knowledge (Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000). The role of discourse, thus, is key to what and how a learner construes one's experience. In other words, having access to and engaging in kinds of discourses shape in complex ways how a learner appropriates the practice.

Design Principles for Pedagogical Practices

At the nexus of the desired outcomes of UniSIM and the conception of participatory practice is the common emphasis of *practice* set in the expansive and situated nature of learning. Although represented in different forms, there is a common epistemological belief that lifelong learning requires more than the transmission of content knowledge.

At this point, it is important for us to recognize that while learning at the University is fundamentally not the workplace itself, we argue that educational institutions can be organized in ways to facilitate learning akin to the workplace. Such organization can be by means of simulating higher education contexts as proxies of workplace, or to develop personal heuristics, dispositions, and therein skills that would enable meaning making at the workplace.

Towards this goal, from the literature, we distill the following principles that will guide us in our pedagogical enactment as we redesign our courses. We do not envisage that all principles will apply to all courses given the occupational nature of the courses is wide-ranging. We recommend judicious application depending on the learning outcomes of the course.

1. Connect learners to authentic workplaces
2. Engage learners in occupational dispositions (i.e. values) like practitioners in the field
3. Embed content in the context of workplace use
4. Develop discursive capacity for learners to engage like practitioners
5. Develop cognitive (thinking) skills in learners
6. Develop learning-to-learn skills in learners
7. Use technological tools to promote work-based learning

The first principle refers to apprenticeship-like approaches where learners are placed in workplaces through practicum or capstone projects. As the saying goes, the map is

not the territory. Learners experience the distinctive nature of occupational practices when placed in authentic environments.

The second principle refers to the dispositional development of learners like practitioners in the field. In this regard, we refer to the personhood aspects of development such as the occupational worldviews, values that practitioners hold. For instance, there are values that the legal professions hold which are unique and distinct from that of social workers.

Third, knowledge is only meaningful when applied to contexts of use. In this third principle, we refer to the effort of connecting theories and concepts to how they are used in the field.

Next, the role of discourse is crucial for meaning making to take place. Hence, this principle focuses on the development of the discursive capacity of learners to engage effectively and productively with other practitioners in the field.

The fifth principle refers to the disciplinary thinking related to the occupational practice. For instance design thinking is often associated professions such as the engineers or architects. This principle plays a complementary role to the second principle where one focuses on cognition and thinking while the other emphasizes on disposition and values.

The sixth principle refers to the lifelong learning attribute of learning-to-learn which is a necessary habitus in today's evolving nature of knowledge in the workplace. Learners need to remain open to learning and to continually create new forms of practices in response to evolving contexts.

Finally, the last principle refers to the use of technology to support the preceding six principles. Technological advancement has, in myriad ways, brought about new practices and new ways of being. We can draw on technology as an enabling support in the enactment of work-based learning.

Case Example to Illustrate the Pedagogical Enactment

In this section, we present a case example to illustrate the process of how we translate design principles into pedagogical enactment. In this example, we provide the background of the course, the redesign process, the redesign strategy, and finally how they relate to the design principles.

Case Example: Marketing Management

Background. Marketing management is a second year undergraduate course. It runs for six weeks with an enrolment of about 300 to 350 students per cohort. The two main assessments of the course include a group assignment that requires students to analyze a marketing case study, and an examination at the end of the semester. This course is conducted is a blended mode of which three sessions are online while the other three are held face-to-face. The topics covered in this course is as follows:

Week 1	Online	Study Unit 1: Defining Marketing Analysing Marketing Environment Conducting Market Research
Week 2	F2F (SU1 & 2)	Study Unit 2: Creating Long-term Loyalty Relationships Analysing Consumer Markets Identifying Market Segments and Targets
Week 3	Online	Study Unit 3: Crafting Brand Positioning Marketing of Products Marketing of Services
Week 4	F2F (SU3 & 4)	Study Unit 4: Developing Pricing Strategies & Programmes Designing and Managing Integrated Marketing Channels
Week 5	Online	Study Unit 5: Designing and Managing Integrated Marketing Communications Managing Mass Communications
Week 6	F2F (SU5 & 6)	Study Unit 6: Managing Personal Communications Tapping into Global Markets

Figure 1: Topics covered in the marketing course

Redesign process. Our starting point was to identify courses with open-minded instructors who are also practitioners in the field. This is to enable learners to engage in the thinking and occupational discourse like practitioners. Thereafter, front-end analysis was conducted where we analyzed learner profile, nature of content and how the course was conducted. Next we briefed the chosen instructor of the rationale and basis of design principles, and to reinforce the desired outcomes we seek to achieve in the education at UniSIM. Finally, we developed a work plan (see Figure 2 for an example) where the tasks to be performed are listed.

Item	Actions Required
Update of Course design document & Blueprint	✓ To amend documents to meet new teaching requirements
Identify course topics for case studies	✓ To develop case reasoning guide. Guide to infuse thinking skills ✓ To identify key topics necessary for the development of case studies
Develop case studies	✓ To develop a total of 15 cases for face-to-face and online sessions. ✓ Case to contain realistic dilemmas and distractions ✓ Guiding questions to scaffold towards case resolution ✓ To test the case reasoning guide against the cases developed
Develop teaching materials	✓ To develop teaching materials for the 3 face-to-face sessions and 3 online sessions
Update instructor's and student's course guide	✓ To update instructor's and student's course guide according to new teaching requirements
Record chunked lessons	✓ To record chunked videos for 3 online sessions
Brief tutors	✓ To brief tutors on the new format of teaching

Figure 2: An example of a work plan that guides the redesign process

Redesign strategy. The current course delivery, albeit relies heavily on lecture presentation, draws on a variety of small cases to enrich the understanding of the marketing concepts. These cases are current products and services in the market that the learners can relate to.

Building on the strong foundation in the use of cases in this course, the redesign focused on expanding the cases to equip learners with the case learning technique. The expansion of the cases is to increase the complexity in the cases so as to simulate reality where facts are intertwined with dilemmas and even distractions (see Appendix A for an example of a case). At the same time, the redesign focused on developing case reasoning skills in learners (see Appendix B), like marketers in real-life, where cases are deconstructed for deeper understanding so as to derive the ideal marketing solution for particular product or service.

At the same time, to increase the effectiveness of the blended flipped learning approach, we scaffold learners' learning in two ways. One was to develop pre-class questions focusing on specific marketing concepts that students need to know. The intent is to encourage learners to draw on this knowledge when performing case reasoning in-class. The discussions in class are to be done in groups. This is where the content knowledge, case reasoning like practitioners, and the construction of a resolution for the cases occur. Such learning contexts can be likened to work group

discussions in the workplace where dilemmas were deliberated over and marketing solutions to issues were developed.

Second was to develop videos (see Figure 3) that exemplify the case reasoning process for the online sessions. This is to ensure this new approach is consistently applied to the online sessions as with the face-to-face sessions.

The design principles that were applied in this case example:
- Engage learners in the thinking like practitioners in the field – authentic dilemmas and complexities practitioners experience that were incorporated into the cases
- Embed content in the context of workplace use – marketing theories and concepts that were interwoven into the cases
- Develop cognitive (thinking) skills in learners – development of the case reasoning skills as a thinking heuristic
- Use technological tools to promote work-based learning – videos that exemplify the case learning skills

Figure 3: Video that exemplify the case reasoning skills

Discussion & Conclusion

To recap, the goal of this paper is to present our effort of translating desired outcomes into practicable teaching and learning practices towards lifelong employability for adult learners. Towards this end, we articulated the three desired outcomes in *practice intelligence, social consciousness,* and *life-long learning skills*. We also drew on the

literature, in particularly the notion of participatory practice, to help us shape the seven design principles for translation into pedagogical practices. Then, a case example in the form of a marketing course was presented to exemplify the translation process.

Through this redesign work, we found the exercise to be a fruitful yet challenging one. On the one hand, we found the design principles to be comprehensive and effective to guide us through as we work at the level of the individual courses. They provided the clarity and the concrete premises such as the content, the communicative ability of the learners, etc. that requires redesign attention. Hence, in this regard, the design principles are beacons that we think could be scaled productively across to the other courses in various disciplines.

On the other hand, because we took a ground up approach by analyzing the strengths and the weaknesses of each course, and correspondingly the construction of the redesign solution, it was a highly contextual effort that could not easily be replicated across courses. As such, there is a concern that over time, we may have pedagogical practices that are too diverse that could not be categorically placed into recognizable patterns that could be associated with UniSIM.

To circumvent this anticipated concern, we are selecting courses of maximum variation (similar to the maximum variation sampling method in the case study approach), e.g. counseling and the math degree programmes, to elucidate the range of pedagogical practices possible. That way, there will be sets of recognizable pedagogical practices that could be branded as uniquely UniSIM.

In going forward, we have plans to study the effectiveness of the redesign efforts and to report the results in future conferences and events.

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Contact email: rebekahlimwy@unisim.edu.sg, hmcheah@unisim.edu.sg

SIA offers premium economy travel as it seeks sweet spot

Singapore Airlines (SIA) customers flying to Sydney on selected flights will be the first to experience the carrier's new premium economy class from Aug 9 2015. For a fare of around 20 per cent more than what they pay for a full-fare economy class ticket, passengers will be able to enjoy wider seats with more leg room, better meals and amenities, and an improved all-round experience.

SIA's decision to introduce the new tier follows the likes of Air France, British Airways, Cathay Pacific and Lufthansa. As the airline struggles with a challenging environment, and with its rivals narrowing the gap in service excellence, its new premium economy class is intended to help SIA stay competitive. This initiative is also expected to improve yields and profits in challenging times.

Singapore Airlines had until now opted to stay focused on the business and first class segment of the business, which make up around 40 per cent of its revenue. Even when the 2008 global financial crisis came, which resulted in a major slump in demand for premium air travel, SIA was still convinced that the good old days would return. However, they did not. Even after the recovery, not all businesses went back to spending on **premium** air travel. Fewer executives are now flying business as their companies try to stay lean and keep operating costs down. And where firms once flew executives only on full-service carriers, a growing number now turn to budget carriers for short-haul flights.

The rising preference and demand for air travel in Asia has increased significantly in recent years. The boom in air travel was also partly contributed by rapid globalization and rising wealth in many Asian countries, including China. This trend has in turn fuelled the rise of budget airlines which are now doing brisk business with this segment of the market. In consideration of the various conditions, it seemed timely that SIA launched its **premium economy** service. Basically, SIA is looking to lure business travellers and less cost-conscious leisure travellers who do not mind paying premium for more comfort on long-haul flights.

To ensure a seamless experience, priority check-in and baggage handling will be offered to premium customers. The baggage allowance of 35kg is 5kg more than for economy travellers, and KrisFlyer members will receive 10 per cent more miles when they fly premium economy.

The new product will be rolled out to other destinations served by SIA's Airbus 380s and Boeing 777-300ERs, in addition to the future fleet of Airbus 350s. Routes including Beijing, New Delhi, Hong Kong, Frankfurt, London, Mumbai, New York, Shanghai, Tokyo and Zurich will follow in the later part of 2015 and early 2016.

SIA chief executive officer Goh Choon Phong is confident the product will be well-received by travellers who want more features underpinned by "exceptional service" on the ground and in the air. Centre of Asia Pacific Aviation analyst Brendan Sobie said: "The overall reduction in capacity on several medium- and long-haul routes is also sensible, as it should enable improved yields and profits on routes that have come

under increasing pressure, particularly from Gulf carriers. "For SIA, carrying fewer economy passengers can be viewed as a positive trade-off as these are passengers who are generally travelling below cost."

Businessman Rick Wong, 44, a regular traveller, said: "Comfort is definitely important for long- haul flights and if the difference in fares is about 20 to 30 per cent, I would go for it."

(Original source: SIA offers premium economy travel as it seeks sweet spot, by Karamjit Kaur, The Straits Times, 4 February 2015, Page A3)
Other Reference source: Seeking a better way to fly in a changed world, by Karamjit Kaur, The Straits Times, 10 May 2014, Page A3

Pre-class Activities

1. Identify and describe the major macro-environmental factors that may create opportunities or threats to a company.

2. Discuss the various types of consumer characteristics that can influence consumer behaviour.

In-class Activities

1. Analyse the possible macro-environmental factors that may have contributed to

     a. The Rise of budget airlines in Asia
     b. SIA decision to launch the premium economy class

2. Analyse the possible cultural, social and personal factors that may influence consumers to decide to purchase premium economy tickets for personal travel.

APPENDIX B: CASE REASONING SKILLS

STEP 1 – DECONSTRUCT THE CASE STUDY (TAKE THE CASE APART)

- Form a basic idea of the case, such as,
    - ✓ Nature of business/industry, product/services offered
    - ✓ Nature of business environment , competition
    - ✓ Company's performance, market share, etc.
    - ✓ Customer profile

- Identify the key:
    - ✓ Elements or issues,

- ✓ Symptoms of the problems, or
  - ✓ Opportunities and threats faced by company

- Establish potential impacts on the company and/or consumers. The following are some of the possible impact:
  - ✓ Sales and profitability
  - ✓ Strategic directions of the company
  - ✓ Competitiveness
  - ✓ Morale of the company's stakeholders - employees, business partners, etc.
  - ✓ Market share and growth
  - ✓ Customer loyalty and satisfaction
  - ✓ Consumer bahaviour

STEP 2 – DECONSTRUCT THE CASE STUDY QUESTION (TAKE THE QUESTION APART)

- Identify the vital word(s) and/or phrase(s) in the question

- Write or mark out the key components of the question

- Interpret the requirements of the question based on the action verb used. E.g. Analyse, Discuss, Differentiate, Employ, Explain, etc.

STEP 3 – DETERMINE MARKETING TOPIC(S) & CONCEPT(S) REQUIRED IN QUESTION

- Identify the key topic(s) of focus in the question

- Write out the key concept(s) relevant to this topic

STEP 4 – DECIDE ON THE RELEVANT MARKETING CONCEPTS TO USE FOR YOUR ANSWER

- Establish how the concept(s) can be used to answer the question

- Narrow down to the relevant concept(s) or the most appropriate solution(s) that should be used to answer the question

STEP 5 – DEVELOP THE ANSWER

- Consider the action verb and craft your answer according to the requirements of the action verb. For example, the word, 'Discuss' implies that the writer needs to examine appropriate factors, tools, or strategies to explain or address an issue or problem.

- Craft your answer to link the appropriate concept(s) to explain or address the issue or problem.

- Give justification for your answer by providing relevant supporting reasons or examples from the case.