Larging it
Implementing interdisciplinarity, a progress report from the University of Sheffield: what have we learned?

Claire Allam
Interdisciplinary Conference, Milton Keynes 10 April 2017
Main themes

- Transition tool for students
- Definitions of interdisciplinarity
- Unforeseen Benefits
"Achieve More will broaden your horizon and your experience of people and life, and this can only prepare you more completely for living and working in the wider world when you leave university".

http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/undergraduate/why/achieve-more
Vertical integration

First Year Students
Join students from other disciplines within your Faculty to encounter new perspectives on a range of local and global issues.
Discover what your faculty has in store →

Second Year Students
Come together with students from all five Faculties to explore the problems and possibilities that will arise as the world population rises to 10 billion.
About 10 Billion →

Final Year Students
Communicate your knowledge and ideas to non-specialists, both from within the University and beyond.
Discover More →
State of Sheffield 2015
Outline of the State of Sheffield Challenge

- **choose a topic**
  - 26/27 Nov
  - Take on a Challenge! Your tasks...

- challenge week begins
  - Monday 2 Feb
  - Guest Speakers on the Sheffield context

- project planning
  - Monday 2 Feb
  - Go off to your project base rooms.

- info gathering & research
  - Tuesday 3 Feb
  - To know your group & your facilitator.

- project work
  - Wednesday 4 Feb
  - Arts Tower base rooms.

- produce an artefact
  - Thursday 5 Feb
  - Base rooms, skills support rooms.

- present & exhibit
  - Friday 9 Feb
  - Base rooms. Arts Tower base rooms.

- reflect & evaluate
  - Moving on
  - After the Challenge week

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State of Sheffield 2015
“collaborative/cooperative learning, discovery and problem-based learning ... and methods of assessment that are multi-dimensional, including qualitative and quantitative measures, normed measures, and self-assessments.” (de Zure, 1999)
"Interdisciplinary groups are great - seeing the different skills everyone brings and putting these together was a highlight of the week."
“I enjoyed creating a video and was pleased to find out that I can borrow cameras from the Diamond and use the editing suites.”

“• **self-directed learning**: non-prescribed learning – no road maps; inventions, integrated with one’s values, skills, life experience, e.g. inquiry-based learning

• **creative learning**: inventive learning – divergent thinking, exploration, discovery

• **feeling learning**: vulnerable learning – *making mistakes*, trying out, acknowledging limits of competence”

(Gabelnick. 2002)
“The step from an appealing idea to an operational method is large indeed.” (Karlqvist, 1999)
‘A challenging module for challenging times’

The State of Sheffield
Global Perspectives on Local Issues

Module Introduction 2016-17
Week 15 Semester 1
30 January-2 February 2017

Evolution
Research project (Learning)

Individual input (Attributes)

Alumni participation (Skills)
"Getting to use research methods in a way that actually contributes to something, getting the independence to go into the streets and apply them".
Models ‘best practice’ UG student approaches

- Skills development
  - where/how to access
- Promotes Sheffield Graduate Attributes
  - eg civic engagement
- Promotes independent learning and introduces research methods

A transition tool
What does interdisciplinarity mean for level 1 students?

“The mere presence of individuals from different disciplines does not signify interdisciplinary collaboration.” Chettiparamb (2007)
Level 1 perceptions

"I enjoyed meeting a new group of people, thinking differently."

"I enjoyed working with students from different academic departments and providing a creative twist to an existing research question."

"I think that volunteering is an opportunity to learn new things, helping others, and crossover paths with people who have more interests that are compatible with my existing ones."

"I probably would have never thought about research questions, providing a creative twist to an existing problem if I didn't have this opportunity."

"I don't think I would have ever had the awareness to know how to explore learning in my deep knowledge of people and things."

"I think I would have never thought about research questions, providing a creative twist to an existing problem if I didn't have this opportunity."
“To see the whole is to see it in breadth, but without access to the particular vision: to see the part is to see it in depth, but in the absence of the general overview.” Becher (1989)
“I had a great conversation with a fellow student at the session and it was interesting to hear his opinions and how they differed to mine due to the fact that the courses we are studying were really quite different. This opened my eyes to the importance of interdisciplinary learning.”
Unforeseen benefits

- Staff
- Facilitators
- Students
Unforeseen benefits

The Faculty of Social Sciences

- Law
- East Asian Studies
- Management
- Economics
- Sociological Studies
- Sheffield Methods Institute
- Architecture
- Urban Studies & Planning
- Geography
- Information School (has only PG students, who don't take part in The State of Sheffield)
- Politics
- Journalism Studies
- Education
- Landscape
Enthusing students about their discipline
Expands their network (colleagues and community)
Learning from students’ research
Opportunity to try different teaching techniques
... And use elsewhere

Unforeseen benefits – for staff
Unforeseen benefits - facilitators
Unforeseen benefits

- Teaching experience
- Dealing with lack of engagement
- Transferable skills
- CV building – work experience
- Broadens network (academics/facilitators)
- Interdisciplinarity has influenced direction of own PhD studies
- New types of research skills
- Creativity and freedom!

Unforeseen benefits
"Facilitators were friendly, open and willing to discuss and share their knowledge and it opened my mind."

Unforeseen benefits - verticality
Transition tool for students
Interdisciplinary definitions
Unforeseen Benefits

Conclusion
“1. Creativity often requires interdisciplinary knowledge.
2. Immigrants often make important contributions to their new field.
5. Many intellectual, social, and practical problems require interdisciplinary approaches.
7. Interdisciplinarians enjoy greater flexibility in their research.
9. Interdisciplinarians may help breach communication gaps in the modern academy, thereby helping to mobilize its enormous intellectual resources in the cause of greater social rationality and justice. (Nissani, 1997)
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References


Lyll, C., Meagher, L., Bandola, J. and Kettle, A., 2015 Interdisciplinary provision in higher education
