

**A Critical Examination of Student-Centred Learning Policy
in the
European Higher Education Area**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the
requirements of the University of Liverpool for the
degree of Doctor of Education by Richard VanArsdale

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Abstract

As part of its mission to enhance the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has identified student-centred learning (SCL) as an educational reform priority. Research indicates however that uptake is weak and key stakeholders lack commitment. In response to discrepancy between EHEA rhetoric and reality on the ground, limited policy research, and calls for increased advocacy and dissemination of information, the research critically investigates SCL policy enactment. Drawing inspiration from social constructionism and a critical, participatory and reflexive approach to design-based research, the design and development of a website facilitated data collection comprising 17 semi-structured interviews with EHEA academics, institutional leaders and higher education policy experts. In response to the research question, thematic data analysis led to the development of three major themes and four policy recommendations. The research offers potential originality and significance for higher education theory and practice in the EHEA and beyond.

Keywords: student centred learning, student centered learning, EHEA, Bologna Process, higher education policy, learning outcomes, design-based research

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original, and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.

Signature: *Richard VanArsdale*

Date: March 11, 2020

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 The Context

Spanning three universities in two countries, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, this year marks the 20th anniversary of my career as an English for Academic Purposes instructor. Very early into this career I became acutely aware of a general malaise among students and teaching staff. The existence of low morale was not a secret at any of the three institutions, where administrators frequently acknowledged that student motivation was a core issue. Various theories were bandied about over the years, with numerous balms applied for limited healing effect. There was consensus among faculty members that students were largely bored by traditional pedagogy characterized by discrete knowledge transmission and high-stakes testing. Two months into a typical academic year, most students were desperate to escape the program. Poor student motivation was frequently matched by poor faculty attitudes and relatively high turnover rates that reflected, among other factors, chronic frustration over poor student motivation and tightly structured curricula that left instructors with little voice and room for pedagogic maneuvering (Mullick, 2013).

Over the years I experimented with pedagogic approaches inspired by constructivist learning theory - for example, utilizing innovative technology to transform discrete content into projects and other learning opportunities foregrounding authenticity, collaboration, autonomy, problem-solving and creativity. Given curriculum restrictions, I did this mostly on my own time with my own students. This approach paid off for the most part, and during subsequent years I

witnessed marked improvement in student attitudes and motivation, although impact on learning outcomes was less clear. Small successes led to further experimentation with learner empowerment strategies such as peer teaching. I found that many students respond positively to opportunities for increased responsibility and control, and during latter stages of my career, I gave relatively high levels of autonomy to students.

Aligned with humanist philosophy, I believe one of my most important roles is the empowerment of students through partnership and the facilitation of self-actualization. I hoped that my example might eventually lead to a breakdown of structures and practices that had a decidedly oppressive impact on key stakeholders, the students and the teachers. This applied combination of constructivist learning theory and humanist ethos forms the backbone of my educational philosophy, perspectives that underpin most interpretations of SCL, the relevance of which shall be explored in greater depth throughout this research. For now, suffice it say that I am what many, including former employers, would likely consider a 'student-centred' teacher.

My successes and those of my students are diminished however by the many challenges I experienced as a result of going against dominant institutional norms and practices: students who did not appreciate an approach that contradicted their own experiences, beliefs and perceived needs; colleagues whose reliance on traditional methods and reinforcement of departmental status quo undermined my relatively 'progressive' approach, which sometimes fueled student complaints that my classes were more demanding than other instructors; and institutions that

simultaneously promoted SCL yet failed to provide adequate support and reward.

Individual and institutional obstacles aside, I have often contemplated what may be a fundamental conceptual tension. SCL is typically defined as an approach that foregrounds student needs, interests and learning styles, but it is also commonly described as an approach that fosters active learner engagement and autonomy. But what happens if students do not want to take responsibility or become actively engaged? Is forcing them out of their comfort zones, pushing them to work harder still considered SCL? This is more than a theoretical exercise; I experienced this quandary many times - students who became uncooperative and resentful, sometimes attempting to punish me through end-of-course evaluations or direct complaints to the administration. The upshot is that despite my personal and professional commitment to SCL ethos, today I remain conflicted by an educational model that has unquestionably made my career significantly more challenging.

1.2 The Research Problem

Enhancing the quality and relevance of learning and teaching is the main mission of the EHEA. We will encourage and support higher education institutions and staff in promoting pedagogical innovation in student-centred learning environments.

(Yerevan Communiqué, 2015)

Given the professional background and personal values described above, naturally I was intrigued to come across the SCL graphic (Figure 1) on the EHEA web page while searching for a suitable thesis topic last year. Having never worked in the EHEA, I became intensely curious to understand how SCL plays out in other contexts. Perhaps I simply have not worked in the right places. My interest was further peaked by a preliminary review of extant literature. For instance, the European Students'

Union (ESU) states that following inclusion within the 2015 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), SCL is now "recognized as an objective measure of quality higher education institutions" (European Students' Union, 2018, p. 1). And yet a decade after the initiative was first identified as a priority (Leuven Communiqué, 2009), there remains significant discrepancy between EHEA rhetoric and reality on the ground (Birtwistle, Brown, & Wagenaar, 2016; European Students' Union, 2015; Eurydice/EACEA, 2015/2018; Gaebel & Zhang, 2018; Gover & Loukkola 2018; Sursock, 2015).

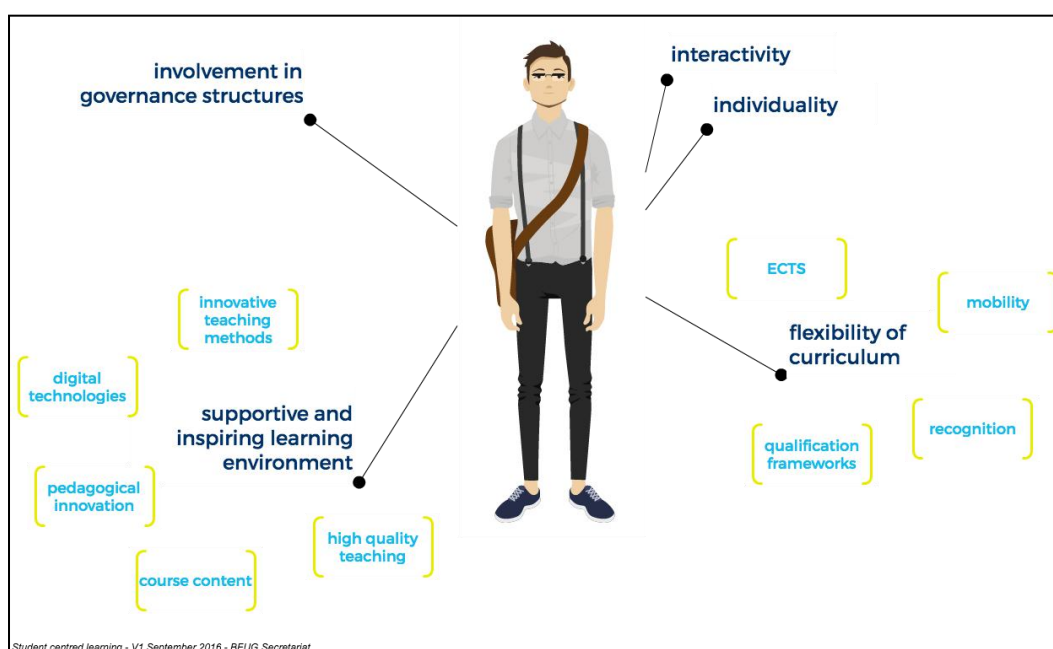


Figure 1. EHEA. (n.d.). Student Centred Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.ehea.info/pid34437/student-centred-learning.html>.

This discrepancy begs an important question: Why has the initiative not gained enough traction over a ten-year period? This disparity signals a research gap alongside opportunity to fuse my own concerns and questions with a high priority EHEA concern.

A second research gap lies in calls for increased advocacy and dissemination of

information vis-a-vis SCL. To illustrate, Huet et al. (2009) calls for dissemination of best practice, while Serbati (2015) proposes online teaching/learning resources, best practice, case studies and learning communities. European Commission Working Groups have encouraged member states to disseminate effective practice through e-learning tools, training courses, presentations, seminars, videos, guidelines and tool kits (European Commission, 2015). The ESU recommends advocacy through debate, documentation, dissemination of best practice, and online platforms for exchange of practice and policy (European Students' Union, 2015).

There is evidence that EHEA institutions are trying to come to grips with SCL. A five-day course offered through the Central European University's summer school announces:

The concept has been introduced recently into the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) but universities and national quality assurance agencies need to chart their own implementation standards and guidelines with very little information about what SCL means and how it can be measured. ("Yehuda Elkana Center," n.d., para. 1)

The Technical University of Denmark hosted an SCL seminar in April 2018. The announcement stated that while SCL has been a feature of educational dialogue for many years, the concept has only recently been reintroduced as part of quality discussions in Denmark. Nevertheless:

As a concept, SCL is far from unambiguous And precisely because the concept is so multifaceted, there may be a risk that our self-understanding shadows whether we use our potentials in practice. Do the students and their needs always determine the choice of teaching methods? Is pedagogy in practice also governed by other logics, habits and institutional considerations? (Learning Lab at DTU, Spring, 2018, para. 2).

A third identified research gap is a relatively limited amount of empirical policy

research, an issue addressed more fully at the beginning of Chapter 2.

In summary, the present study is motivated by my personal and professional history and three identified research gaps: a disparity between EHEA rhetoric and reality; calls for increased advocacy and dissemination of information; and a relative scarcity of empirical research into SCL at a policy level.

1.3 Framing the Research

The research is a quest to understand why one of the most educated work forces in the world cannot or will not embrace perspectives and practices aimed at benefiting students. It is framed as a study of policy enactment that seeks to understand how key stakeholders interpret and shape policy ideas/tools prior to and throughout enactment (Sweetman, 2019). A distinction is made here between policy as text, what is written and communicated, and policy as discourse, the complex processes in which texts are interpreted, enacted and transformed (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Policy objects such as SCL are typically ambiguous and vague when viewed in isolation from wider, related agendas and tend to find stable meaning and influence only when embedded in practice, what Sin (2014) refers to as the dual processes of ontology and enacted ontology: what actors believe the object to be, and what the object becomes once enacted. By triangulating SCL literature with the insights of experienced and knowledgeable EHEA insiders, the present study aims to shed light on forces that enable and impede SCL policy in the EHEA. Empirically generated data addressing these important questions may inform decisions regarding the appropriateness of SCL as a program theory.

1.4 The Research Approach

The research draws philosophical inspiration and theoretical guidance from two perspectives: social constructionism and a critical, participatory and reflexive approach to design-based research (DBR). As an epistemological lens, social constructionism underscores a reflexive researcher stance that challenges conventional knowledge, namely a central premise that knowledge is a by-product of shared cultures, traditions and social interaction: “Through participation in relationships the world comes to be what it is for us” (Gergen, 2015, p. 286). It would be disingenuous to claim that my professional experiences do not color my thoughts about SCL. Constructing a better understanding of this contentious issue may be advanced through dialogue and shared meaning, a crucial perspective expanded on more in the next section. Social constructionism also lends value as a reminder that while the investigation is motivated by personal and professional history, as a reflective researcher, I must strive to bracket off - to the extent possible - preconceived assumptions borne through those experiences. Scientific 'truth' arising from this study cannot be value-free; however, it can reflect “multiple truths” (p. 432).

A critical, participatory and reflexive approach to DBR overlaps with social constructionism by highlighting awareness of context, dialogue, multiple perspectives, reflexivity, and the development of new ideas for public consumption, where emphasis “is not on verifiable truth claims but on thought-provoking interpretations that challenge taken for granted accounts ... the search for promising alternatives and potential futures” (Bardzell & Bardzell, 2013, as cited in Richter &

Allert, 2017, p. 6). Richter and Allert discern that engineering approaches to design research are premised on a faulty assumption that educational problems simply require the application of a structured, value-neutral methodology, what O'Neill, (2016) depicts as the “myth of the heroic designer” (p. 500). Richter and Allert feel that a more critical approach can be practical and emancipatory. An instrumental approach would ask: Which outcomes are expected? What can be done? How are the outcomes produced? Which contexts conditions are relevant? In contrast, a critical design approach asks: Are expected outcomes legitimate and desirable? What can and should be done? Which rules, conventions, and normative commitments shape the context? What is the role of power mechanisms? (p. 11).

The present study adopts a critical, participatory and reflexive philosophical stance by asking: Is SCL a legitimate and desirable response? Should the EHEA seek alternative solutions? Do extant rules, conventions, normative commitments and power mechanisms preclude SCL as a desirable and appropriate response? (Richter & Allert, 2017). This stance is expressed through the research question driving the investigation:

■ Is SCL an appropriate response to educational reform in the EHEA?

A critical, participatory and reflexive approach to DBR complements social constructionism as a way of seeing research as a collaborative process that aims to solve complex educational problems through inclusion of stakeholder perspectives, “analyzing those target groups to be able to tailor the design to their differing and sometimes hidden and unexpected needs” (De Vries, 2018, p. 4).

Having only limited second-hand knowledge of SCL policy in the EHEA, I determined

that as an exploratory study into a complex and contentious subject, it was vital to seek out the perspectives of knowledgeable individuals on the ground. Social constructionism stresses that contextual knowledge production involves multiple voices and a democratic relationship with research participants in which the researcher's interpretive voice is not necessarily privileged over the researched (Burr, 2015). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were conducted over a five-month period with 17 research participants (RPs): EHEA academics, institutional leaders and higher education policy experts.

SCL fits Rittel and Webber's description of "a wicked problem" (1977, as cited in Kelly, 2013, p. 137), a difficult, ill-defined and open-ended problem that beckons novel methodology. This study attempts to do just that by utilizing the design and development of an online platform for SCL as an alternative and creative means of knowledge production and presentation (Gergen, 2015). The online platform (referred to more simply as a website throughout this paper) embodies the interventionist spirit of DBR as an approach that leverages innovative practice, design and scientific knowledge production to maximize impact and translation of educational research into practice (Euler, 2017). Building on Richardson (2000) and Ellingson (2009), De Vries (2018) advocates a critical and participatory stance to DBR characterized by "crystallization," (p. 5) a multifaceted approach that champions creative and diverse forms of data collection and representation, "engaging rather than formal accounts of data which invite 'readers' into an experience" (p. 7). Crystallization is also a form of triangulation that foregrounds dialogue and multiple voices, imperatives expressed through social constructionism. This strategy offers

several advantages.

Firstly, I was initially attracted to the University of Liverpool Doctorate in Education because it promotes the development of innovative and visionary educational leaders with the capacity to drive change. Prior to embarking upon this final stage of the EdD, I set a personal goal to create something that could lead to transformation of some kind, a tangible artifact that might have impact beyond the typically minute readership most dissertations suffer. The goal of social science research is the production of practical scientific knowledge. As an alternative and creative means of knowledge production and presentation, a website may draw the attention of a larger audience to resultant knowledge.

Secondly, the website functions as a mediating device for the semi-structured interviews. Movement between theory and observation are pillars of science (Bourdeau, 2018). The concurrent design and development of the website and the written dissertation are mutually reinforcing activities that bolster validity as a form of triangulation. New ideas, questions and previously unseen connections emerge through the process. One of my thesis supervisors offered a fitting analogy: If I hold before us a flower, we can talk about botanical characteristics: color, smell, growth... We can also use the flower to talk about love, beauty, peace... The website serves this latter role. Relatedly, visuals are an effective means of reinforcing comprehension and learning (Clark & Mayer, 2016). The website provided visual stimulation and reinforcement for RPs, who viewed the prototype before and during the interviews.

Thirdly, the website is a tangible representation of research findings. As noted

previously, calls for advocacy and dissemination of information is an identified research gap. The website graphically represents findings for a larger audience, which may in turn shed new light on relationships among practice, intervention and theory in a manner that contributes to educational reform (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). The ways in which shared space is understood is being continually reshaped in the modern digital era of smart phones and social media (Janning, Gao, & Snyder, 2018). A website can function as a shared space through which stakeholders coordinate understanding. The internet is home to nearly two billion websites encompassing multitudinous formats. What most websites have in common is the aim of connecting emotionally with target users (Agrebi & Boncori, 2017). How those target users engage depends on many variables, including the type of platform (Voorveld, van Noort, Muntinga, & Bronner, 2018). Irrespective of platform, people seek common ground. Edmund Husserl reasoned that all of us, regardless of what we do and how we go about achieving it, are connected by shared culture, history, nature and technology. Jürgen Habermas expanded this idea with his theory of 'lifeworld' (the realm of everyday experience) and 'systemworld' (the translation of human needs, wants and beliefs into reality - for example, money and power) (Harrington, 2006). These worlds fuse together today in the digital realm (Deuze, 2014). Identity, relationships, knowledge, beliefs, values are increasingly inextricable from technology and the internet, a modern, global Agora (Bakardjieva, 2009). The website arising from this study may serve as an agora, a shared space around which stakeholders may coordinate understanding, knowledge, beliefs, values, abilities, needs and experience vis-a-vis SCL.

1.5 Research Significance

Answers to the driving research question holds potential value for educational theory and practice. Empirical policy research on SCL in the EHEA is limited. In-depth, critical engagement with SCL policy is even more limited. This is especially true for extant research and policy papers emanating from the EHEA and key stakeholder groups such as the ESU. EHEA stakeholders should have access to less flattering data and theorization. The present research may contribute to critical theory building around this subject. The research also holds relevancy for the practice of individuals, institutions and organizational bodies tasked with SCL policy formulation and implementation in the EHEA and beyond as a means of linking policy, implementation and results for those who count most, stakeholders on the ground (Yoshida & van der Walt, 2018).

1.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 has contextualized the study through exposition linking my professional experiences, personal beliefs, epistemological stance, and the identified research opportunities motivating the scientific knowledge quest. The chapter has sketched the philosophical and theoretical perspectives underpinning the research approach, including the design and development of a website as a multipurpose data collection strategy. Chapter 2 begins with a detailed description of the literature review approach and processes. The chapter goes on to critically survey germane extant literature.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Naturalistic methods typically address three broad but important questions that seek to uncover the “complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions” of social environments (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 167): What are the characteristics of a social phenomenon? What are the causes of the social phenomenon? What are the consequences of the social phenomenon? Having limited knowledge of SCL research and even less knowledge of SCL policy in the EHEA, basic social science questions seemed like a good starting point.

Using the combined terms ‘student centred learning’ (both British and American spellings), ‘Europe’, ‘EHEA’ and ‘higher education’, an initial search of the University of Liverpool library Discover Collections of Print and Online Content was conducted in February 2017. Given that SCL did not substantially appear on the EHEA map until 2007, a delimiter of publication dates between 2007 and 2017 was applied. The search yielded 292 results from 32 databases including ERIC, Research Starters, Directory of Open Access Journals, Education Research Complete, Complementary Index, Supplemental Index, Science Direct, Books at JSTOR and Academic Search Complete. Result types included: academic journals (129), books (45), conference materials (14), reports (8), news (3), magazines (2) and e-books (2). Results were spread among 51 somewhat overlapping subjects. To narrow findings, the most relevant subject areas were delimited: higher education (46), Bologna Process (18), EHEA (13), higher education Europe (15) and history SCL of Europe (6), producing 64 potential hits. Many results were not relevant to the present study, including those

focused on pedagogy, technology or curriculum design; not available in English; regions outside of the EHEA; discipline specific studies; and other Bologna Process dimensions such as European Qualifications Framework, flexibility, choice and entrepreneurship. A search of the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database using both spelling variations and filters yielded 346 results. Again, most dissertations from this search relate to, among others, pedagogy, administration, quality assurance, and so on; none focus on SCL in the EHEA. A comparable search on Google Scholar using the same search terms and delimiters yielded 86 potentially relevant papers from the first 250 entries, most which do not focus on SCL policy in the EHEA. The Google scholar search was fruitful nonetheless because it led to grey literature by European entities located on websites such as the European Commission Education and Training portal, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, the ESU, and the EHEA website, among others. This canon provided additional insights that lacking among the peer-reviewed journal articles. However, empirical policy studies in this canon are limited as well. In all, robust empirical policy research focused on SCL numbers less than twenty papers.

The literature review was an evolving and iterative process. Based on feedback from my thesis advisers who recommended a more critical approach, another extensive search of databases was conducted again in August 2018. That search yielded results comparable to the first search, with the addition of perhaps a dozen relevant papers, mostly theoretical. A breakthrough occurred though upon discovery of an article by Klemencic (2017), which drew my attention to the significance of student engagement, a theoretical construct closely aligned to SCL. Klemencic's

theory paper opened new and more critical pathways into the subject. Another study by Sweetman (2017) was also pivotal, for it led to a growing body of critical work in relation to LOs, a key Bologna tool the EHEA inextricably links to SCL. These crucial connections were overlooked during the initial database search. Moreover, much of this newer and expanding body of critique is conspicuously absent from the grey literature emanating from the EHEA and EHEA stakeholder organizations such as the ESU, a point of interest expanded on more fully in Chapter 6 under Research Significance.

The final literature review presented below synthesizes this dynamic and ongoing search process, starting with an overview of how SCL is defined, conceptualized, promoted and evidenced within a larger canon of literature. This wider contextualization may situate SCL as it is conceptualized, promoted and evidenced within the context of the EHEA. Having established broad conceptualizations of SCL, the chapter then drills down by deconstructing SCL as a meta-concept comprising three salient dimensions: pedagogical, cultural and learning support (Klemenic, 2017). The author's overlapping categories provides a useful framework for exposing paradigmatic tensions gripping the higher education landscape vis-a-vis SCL. To provide additional context for data analysis and subsequent discussion, recent empirical research at the policy level rounds out the chapter as a snapshot of the current state of play in the EHEA.

2.2 SCL in Historical Perspective

The EHEA web page on SCL (Figure 1) is good starting point for what it says and does not say about SCL as a construct. For example, the qualifier “have probably

always existed” in the second paragraph of the EHEA web page suggests an unclear beginning:

The concept of SCL was initially a theoretical model defined as such by pedagogy and education researchers, though attempts at empowering the learner to enhance the educational process *have probably always existed* [italics added] wherever educators have strived to improve and reform. (Student Centred Learning, n.d., para. 2)

A document attached to the same page (European Students’ Union, 2015) ventures that SCL’s “long and inspirational history” (p. 1) began with higher education protests against elitism in the late 1960s, fueled by the rise of critical pedagogy, reaction against behaviorist models, ‘massification’ and advances in teaching and learning research. The ESU’s statement of provenance may not give a full picture, however.

SCL is not a new idea. More than two decades ago, Barr and Tagg (1995) called for a shift from an Instruction Paradigm to a Learning Paradigm. Several years later O’Banion (1999) declared a learning revolution; higher education should overhaul traditional practices by foregrounding learning in every program, policy and practice:

[we] need to replace the current educational system with a system designed for the kind of society in which we live, designed for the kinds of students who attend college, and designed to take advantage of new research on learning and new applications of information technology. (p. 3)

Forty years before that Tenenbaum (1959) effusively recalls observation of the renowned American psychologist Carl Rogers applying client-centred psychotherapy methods to a class at Brandeis University:

I have participated in a classroom methodology that is so unique ... so radically different from the customary and the excepted, so undermining of the old, that it [non-directive teaching] should be known more widely it has the capacity to move people, to make them freer, more open-minded, more flexible. (p. 302)

Non-directive teaching, used interchangeably with SCL during the period, is described as an approach in which students lead discussions, select their own learning goals, activities and assessments, and the teacher assumes a minimalist role to "clarify, summarize, or objectify student remarks" (Asch, 1951, p. 2). Thought to foster positive attitudes towards subject matter and deemed preferable to traditional transmission models (Bills, 1952), the non-directive classroom was hailed as "a new type of classroom society," where learners develop a sense of responsibility, self-reflection and "expressions of attitude and emotional reactions ... pierce the atmosphere of formality of the traditional classroom ... where the student now plays an active role" (Schwebel & Asch, 1948, p. 366).

Synthesizing the work of Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003) and others, O'Neill and McMahon (2005) distill three repeated SCL motifs: choice, active learning and empowerment. SCL is often linked to notions of empowerment grounded in the ancient humanist tradition: "Student-centred learning requires empowering individual learners" (Student Centred Learning, para. 5, n.d.). From Classical discourse exalting virtues representing "humanity at its best" (Aloni, 2011, p. 35) to Thomas More's *Utopia* of the Northern Renaissance (Parrish, 2010), humanism would find literary and philosophical purchase two centuries later with Rousseau's *Emile*, whose innate goodness can only flourish outside the corrosive influence of traditional schooling, the "base and deceptive uniformity" (Rousseau, 1964, cited in Petrovic & Rolstad, 2017, p. 822). Humanist concern for natural capacity and development would re-emerge throughout late 19th and early 20th century through educational, philosophical and psychological research and rumination forging linkage

among education, freedom, personal fulfillment, growth, empowerment, consciousness-raising, self-esteem, civic responsibility, social justice and democracy (Tangney, 2014).

Schweisfurth (2013) cites John Dewey's vision of progressive education as a quintessential description of SCL, capturing both the humanist element as well as advances in cognitive research that would come shortly thereafter in the mid-twentieth century:

To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill is opposed acquisition of them as a means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal. (pp. 9-10)

Dewey's dualist rhetoric reverberates today in the common juxtaposition of SCL with scientific management approaches that fail to prepare 21st-century graduate for unknown futures (Fried, 2016; Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015). For instance, the EHEA web page states that SCL is an approach aimed at "overcoming some of the problems inherent to more traditional forms of education by focusing on the learner and their needs, rather than being centred around the teacher's input" (para. 1).

As this brief historical overview illustrates, SCL hails from uncertain beginnings and draws upon multiple influences, most notably the humanist tradition and 20th century educational/psychological research. In the next section, the literature review drills down to SCL as it is conceptualized in the EHEA today, where the concept takes on additional dimensions.

2.3 SCL in the EHEA Today

Set against globalization and the changing face of higher education, SCL has gained traction as part of a larger political agenda linking teaching and learning with modernization and socioeconomic progress (Corbett, 2012; Paris Communiqué, 2018). Higher education institutions are increasingly under pressure to work more efficiently and prepare graduates for employment, citizenship and entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2011). To remain profitable in competitive markets, universities increasingly feature SCL in promotional materials (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). For instance, the Universidade Europeia in Lisbon, Portugal promotes: "A student-based academic model which aims to prepare them for a global world ... which demands the student's active participation in their own learning and development process" (Universidade Europeia, n.d.). Others like the Universidad Europea in Spain, part of the same group, offers: "A Humanistic Educational Model, centered on the person, the commitment and the demand" (Universidad Europea, n.d., para. 2). SCL has not always been the reform priority it is today, however. The EHEA took a step forward in 2015 with renewed commitment to core reform goals of the later Bologna Process (EHEA, 2015), namely enhancement of the relevance and quality of teaching and learning. Renewed emphasis on SCL speaks to growing realization that real progress depends on "shop-floor enactment and change in academic and institutional practices, ultimately of a pedagogic nature" (Sin, 2015, p. 338).

With some historical context in place, the review now circles back to the more rudimentary task of defining SCL.

2.4 SCL Defined

SCL appears straightforward enough on the EHEA web page: “focusing on the learner and their needs, rather than being centred around the teacher's input” (Student Centred Learning, para. 1, n.d.). However a review of the wider literature base lends weight to Neumann’s (2013) assessment that SCL is “a complicated and messy idea” (p. 160). For decades educational researchers and writers have expressed frustration with “the rather slippery discourse around learner centred education,” (Schweisfurth, 2013, p. 9), a concept associated with a variety of complex philosophical traditions, theoretical perspectives, political dimensions and diverse cultural manifestations. Confusingly the phrase is used interchangeably with several related terms, most commonly variants of ‘learner-centred’. It is also linked to a number of instructional and learning models that include: situated, flexible, experiential, self-directed, project-based, discovery (Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003; O’Neill & McMahon, 2005), competency-based, task-centred, just-in-time, personalized, maker-based and ‘flipped’ (Reigeluth, Myers, & Lee, 2016). Chung and Walsh (2000) identify more than 40 interpretations of child-centred education, a philosophical and theoretical precursor to SCL that masks “complex and contradictory underlying assumptions” (p. 229). Paris and Combs (2006) find definition variance, paradigmatic incompatibility, and idiosyncratic usage overwhelming, unhelpful and compromising as an open door to political appropriation.

Specific portrayals of SCL range from the seemingly reasonable to the idealized. To illustrate, Weimer (2013) describes five dimensions of change that differentiate

SCL from traditional pedagogy: instructor role, balance of power, content, learner responsibility and assessment. Given the structural constraints of most educational systems, other portrayals are more idealized. For example, Reigeluth, Myers and Lee (2016) envision a learner-centred paradigm in which progress is based on completion of authentic performance, not time; learning is completely personalized around individual interests, goals and previous learning; and curricula is expanded and structured around “effective thinking, acting, relationships, and accomplishment” (p. 9). The authors’ emphasis on social and emotional development mirror the American Psychological Association’s 12 learner-centred principles, formulated and endorsed by prominent educational and psychological researchers (“American,” 1993). The same humanistic focus on cognitive and affective development is found in descriptions going back more than a half a century:

A method of instruction which presents course content, aids in developing or maintaining positive attitudes towards the subject, and helps in personal adjustment is to be preferred to methods which concern themselves exclusively with course content. (Bills, 1952, p. 317)

McKeachie (1952) expanded along similar lines: student participation in goal setting; emphasis on affective goals and student interaction; group cohesiveness; and valuation of personal experiences and problems.

2.5 SCL Defined in Europe

Defining SCL in the EHEA is equally if not more challenging. Despite acknowledgment that SCL is “notoriously difficult to define precisely” (European Students’ Union, 2018, p. 1), the concept has been attached to a variety of Bologna Process concerns and tools. The EHEA depicts SCL as constitutive of four dimensions

(Figure 1): 1) innovative, ‘supportive and inspiring’ pedagogy; revised course content; the use of technology; and ‘high quality teaching’; 2) institutional processes and mechanisms expressed as shared governance, effective support and guidance structures; 3) continuous curricular reform focused on learner needs; and student experience expressed as ‘interactivity’, ‘individuality’ and empowerment; and 4) Bologna concerns and tools that include curricular flexibility, mobility, recognition and qualification frameworks “that helped make learner-centred education more of a reality” (Student Centred Learning, n.d., para. 4).

SCL is inextricably linked to Bologna Process technical-political instruments (Antunes 2012) such as recognition, mobility, learning outcomes (LOs) and qualification frameworks. To illustrate, the 2015 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) User’s Guide explicitly connects SCL with Bologna tools and learner agency:

By using learning outcomes and workload in curriculum design and delivery, ECTS places the student at the centre of the educational process. Moreover, using credits makes it easier to create and document flexible learning pathways, thus allowing students greater autonomy and responsibility. (European Commission/EHEA, 2015, p. 14)

Linkage is reinforced through ministerial communiques, whereby SCL “should be supported by transparent descriptions of LOs and workload, flexible learning paths and appropriate teaching and assessment methods” (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015, p. 2). The ESU reasons that SCL stimulates learner engagement, motivation, self-reflection and autonomy, which necessitates the use of carefully constructed LOs. LOs feed into ECTS, which facilitates credit recognition and mobility. Mobility, in the form of exchange programs, is an aspect of SCL in that students may return with

invaluable feedback that could catalyze change within their institutions. Moreover, the social dimension, an overlooked aspect of the Bologna Process, is considered elemental to genuine and effective SCL as a vehicle for the provision of flexibility to disadvantaged students or those juggling work and families with school (ESU/EI, 2010c).

The ESG includes a dedicated SCL standard: “Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach” (“Standards and Guidelines,” 2015, p. 12). Aside from Bologna tools such as LOs and qualification frameworks, the 2015 ESG ties SCL to a host of institutional approaches and practices: curricula design, quality assurance, learning resources, shared governance, diversity, flexibility, pedagogy, learner autonomy, teacher support, mutual respect, student complaint procedures, and the overhaul of assessment practices (“Standards and Guidelines,” 2015).

Not readily apparent in the ECTS or the ESG guide, though prominent on the EHEA web page, is the pairing of SCL with digital technologies, a dimension that presumably reflects discourse connecting innovative and quality pedagogy with personalization and technology (Barna & Fodor, 2017). The technology angle is reinforced by the Yerevan ministerial communique: “We will encourage and support higher education institutions and staff in promoting pedagogical innovation and in fully exploiting the potential benefits of digital technologies for learning and teaching” (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015).

The EHEA definition (Figure 1) is further complicated by inconsistent,

overlapping and vague terminology. Digital technologies, supportive/inspiring learning environments, innovative teaching methods, and the arguably redundant ‘pedagogical innovation’ are perhaps more logically sub-components of high-quality teaching. Other terms on the web page (Student Centred Learning, n.d.) are left undefined, leaving the reader to ponder important and complex questions such as: To what extent should students be involved in institutional governance? How do institutions and academic faculty operationalize interactivity and individuality? How do higher education institutions define instructional quality? What constitutes ‘high quality teaching’?

Given the palette of conceptualizations surveyed above, one can sympathize with Tangney’s (2011, p. 34) frustration:

So, one would be forgiven for being confused ... is student-centredness merely doing? Or is it synonymous with deep learning? Is it connected with emancipation? Or organising (learning events)? Or reflecting on doing? ... Or maybe about the politics of the learning space itself? Or about involving students in LOs and assessment processes? Or about the complexity of learning undertaken? Or tied to a particular theoretical concept?

How does the average EHEA stakeholder make sense of this kaleidoscope of meaning?

The question is more than an intellectual exercise; it has important ramifications for the utility of SCL research, practice and policy (Starkey, 2017).

2.6 Impact of the Definition Problem

SCL is frequently drafted into institutional policy despite a lack of necessary precision, which hampers member country uptake (Eurydice/EACEA, 2015). A stakeholder survey in 20 countries revealed marked perceptual differences in understanding between students, who associate the concept with empowerment

and flexibility, and staff unions that associate SCL with professional development (ESU/EI, 2010b). Five years later, ESU project partners concluded: “Perhaps the best indicator of its vagueness is that there seems to be no one who strongly argues against SCL” (European Students’ Union, 2015, p. 5). Sursock (2015) concludes that despite consensus on the importance of SCL, “what it actually means in practice is not always clear ... depending upon the discipline, the type of programme ... and very importantly the profile and mission of the institution in question” (p. 96). The ESU acknowledges that operationalization of the concept may be hampering integration with quality assurance (European Students’ Union, 2018).

In short, SCL is a broadly conceptualized idea marked by inconsistent, overlapping and vague terminology, all of which has real-life ramifications within the identified arena. SCL is nevertheless promoted as educational panacea. Does it live up to this? The review turns to this question now.

2.7 Claims for Efficacy

There is an extensive body of research attesting to a range of cognitive and emotional benefits for learner that include improved attitudes, motivation, self-regulation, engagement, deep learning, engagement, and knowledge integration (Hoidn, 2016; Weimer, 2013). The ESU argues that SCL accrues benefits to students, faculty, institutions and society (European Students’ Union, 2015): SCL benefits faculty by making teaching more interesting, dynamic and research-based while elevating the status of the teaching profession through increased appreciation and reward of teaching and innovation to counterbalance a traditional focus on research. SCL benefits institutions as a form of continuous institutional improvement, and

increased enrollment arising through flexibility and learner-centred practices. SCL benefits society via development of an active and productive citizenry oriented towards lifelong learning (European Students' Union, 2015).

2.8 Evidence for Efficacy

Researchers have long sought to establish empirical support for SCL. In post-war America the "individual situation" was thought to foster academic values such as motivation, intellectual curiosity, autonomy, experimentation and development of the "total personality" (Asch, 1951, p. 21). Several studies from this period suggest non-cognitive benefits, yet few demonstrate significant effects for learning gains (McKeachie, 1954). Asch (1952) relays the story of an experiment at Mohawk College, where male undergraduates were taught using Carl Roger's non-directive counseling techniques. Students in the non-directive (SCL) experimental class were free to choose their own goals, select reading materials, and write weekly reaction reports based on their feelings about any experience. Students were expected to initiate and sustain discussion, then grade themselves at the end of the term. The instructor played the role of non-directive counselor. The control sections did significantly better on examination of factual content; however, the experimental non-directive group gained a broader understanding of course content, did more readings outside of class, and displayed better "social attitudes" (p. 18).

From the 1970s onwards, a great deal of empirical research was conducted on project-based learning, which draws on robust empirical support from motivation theory (Hoidn & Kärkkäinen, 2014). Like the Mohawk experiment described above, meta-analyses and meta-syntheses running into the 21st century suggest positive

effects for a variety of cognitive and non-cognitive gains (Hattie, 2008). However, empirical support also varies by focus. For instance, compared to process-outcome research aimed at measuring knowledge transmission through direct instruction, research focused on more holistic meta-cognitive and affective gains tends to offer different sets of conclusions (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). There is also a substantial body of research attesting to the superiority of direct instruction, for example, the acquisition of declarative knowledge (Mayer & Mayer, 2005).

A sampling of contemporary European classroom research mirrors the larger research base as a mixed and inconclusive picture. Studies describe approaches commonly associated with learner-centred teaching and learning without specific reference to SCL as defined by the EHEA, while others explicitly reference EHEA conceptualizations. As with much of the SCL literature, a sampling of studies indicate positive affective gains in the form of heightened motivation, meta-cognitive stimulation, development of transferable skills and learning gains, although no significant difference in learning is more often the case (Rossano, Meerman, Kesting, & Baaken, 2016; Severiens, Meeuwisse, & Born, 2015). Claims are typically accompanied by caveats: the need for a balance of instructor-led input through traditional lecture with student-led inquiry (Robinson, Neergaard, Tanggaard, & Krueger, 2016); better understanding of stakeholder needs; coordination among students, faculty and employers; cultural and individual mindsets; task organization; (Frambach, Driessen, Beh, & van der Vleuten, 2014; González, & Ruiz, 2012); stakeholder resistance to increased workload; unfamiliar activity/assessment; inadequate feedback; fragmented content knowledge; problematic group dynamics;

and the inability of students to "see the larger picture" (Baeten, Struyven, & Dochy, 2013, p. 20).

Is SCL an effective educational model? The literature suggests the answer depends on whom you ask, what you count as evidence, and how you define SCL. McKeachie (1954) recognized the historical limitations of educational research: "But a far more important reason is that we've been lumping together more variables than we could handle with our experimental designs" (p. 148). McKeachie also speculated that robust evidence is hampered by the definition issue addressed at the start of this chapter: "One reason suggested for contradictory results is that different people have meant different things by student-centered" (p. 148). McKeachie's observation remains pertinent today in that much of the research identified above treats SCL as pedagogy; whereas EHEA's conceptualizations are wide ranging, as discussed earlier. The SCL evidence base appears to be undermined by many of the same issues associated with quasi-experimental research today: lack of unifying theory, methodology, terminology, pedagogical approach, and implementation variables (Pascarella, 2006; Perry & Smart, 2007). In fact, unresolved methodological issues surrounding the accurate measurement and theoretical modeling of student outcomes has led many to reconsider the use of casual language such as 'influences' and 'effects' (Mayhew et al., 2016). It remains unclear then whether the EHEA's decision to adopt SCL is based on robust empirical support or "rational myths ... if a policy or program is rational and sounds like it should be beneficial, we assume that it is" (Pascarella, 2006, p. 513). John Hattie's (2008) landmark research come to mind: what counts is often not part of the conventional narrative and, unfortunately, often

does not find its way into policy and practice.

2.9 Conceptual Issues

Methodological issues aside, a growing body of scholarship casts doubt on the more essential theorizing upon which SCL rests. From a review of key EHEA policy documents, Klemenčič (2017) identifies three overlapping conceptualizations: pedagogical, cultural and learning support, each involving different assumptions, actors and purposes. The next section of the literature review leverages Klemencic's framework to unpack SCL as construct, an exercise that reveals troubling paradigmatic tensions.

2.9.1 SCL as Pedagogy

EHEA documents (Klemenčič, 2017) mirror a much larger and older literature canon relating to learner-centred education, which frames SCL foremost as a pedagogical concept rooted in constructivist learning theory.

2.9.1.1 Constructivism, the Sacred Cow

Concerns about the application of constructivism to education go back many decades. Matthews (2000b, cited in McPhail, 2016) worried that constructivism had become a trendy, romanticized and morally superior worldview applied without clear articulation or understanding of epistemological ramifications. Phillips (1995) likened the popularity of constructivism as "something akin to a secular religion" (p. 5). Davson-Galle (1999) exhorted separation of laudable pedagogic aims of constructivism from its "dubious philosophical underpinnings" (p. 205). Perkins (1991) colorfully pondered: "The term constructivism, with its ideological overtones,

suggests a single philosophy and a uniquely potent method—like one of those miracle knives advertised on late-night TV that will cut anything, even tin cans” (p. 11). John Dewey's 1938 book editor Alfred Hall-Quest warned of militant constructivism “posed by the ‘new’ schooling that exalt[s] the learner’s impulse and interest ... incoherent curriculum, excessive individualism and a spontaneity which is a deception of freedom” (Rata, 2016, pp. 9-10).

The constructivist debate reflects a simmering tension between relativism and absolutism, expressed today in dichotomous language pitting so-called 21st century learning approaches against 19th century factory models focused on transmission of outdated knowledge (Golding, 2011). Constructivist language is evident in EHEA depictions of SCL: active engagement, motivation, self-reflection, autonomy, teacher guidance and participation (“Standards and Guidelines,” 2015). Part of the problem lies in the mistaken but widespread conflation of psychological constructivism, how people learn, and epistemological constructivism how knowledge is formed (Phillips, 2000, cited in McPhail, 2016). Constructivism is an umbrella term for a broad postmodernist school of thought comprising overlapping and opposing philosophical and theoretical perspectives that have been applied to numerous domains including psychology, sociology, history and education. There are two major strands, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism.

In contrast to the stimulus-response-feedback approach of behaviorism, cognitive constructivism emphasizes the role of self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and learner capacity to actively engage with the challenge of assimilating and accommodating new knowledge. The educator's role is to support and challenge

students as they wrestle with confusion and uncertainty, keeping them engaged and motivated to develop intrinsic motivation. The sociocultural environment is a stimulus, not the source of individual knowledge construction. Social constructivism emphasizes the social nature of learning. Cognitive development, social interaction, culture, and physical context are inextricably linked. Cognitive development lies in the zone of proximal development between the learner and social material support. Motivation is both external through the rewards of learning community and internally driven. The sociocultural environment is more than a facilitating condition; it is the source of development. The educator's role is to organize a variety of authentic, holistic and meaningful activity that facilitates progressive learner agency, autonomy and confidence.

Both forms posit an anti-realist ontology of multiple realities, and a relative epistemology wherein knowledge is constructed via personal or social experience. As a prescription for instruction, however, epistemic constructivism is problematic when the two are amalgamated, confusing pedagogy with knowledge creation (Bransford et al., 2000). The upshot is a lack of critique, clarity, confusion and conformity (McPhail, 2016). Critique includes 1) a lack of acknowledgement of the multidimensional nature of motivation, context and timing (Herman & Gomez, 2009; Wise & O'Neill, 2009); 2) reduced efficacy in well-structured domains (Spiro & DeSchryver, 2009); 3) implication that evolutionary secondary knowledge occurs as easily as evolutionary primary knowledge (Sweller, 2009); 4) novice learners lack expert learners' strategic processing of contextual and conditional knowledge (Kirschner, 2009); and 5) transfer requires declarative knowledge, rehearsal and

corrective feedback (Clark, 2009). Much of the controversy and misunderstanding revolves around two overlapping issues: guided versus unguided instruction, and cognitive versus behavioral activity (Hoidn, 2016).

2.9.1.2 Direct vs. Indirect Instruction / Passive vs. Active Learning

The extent to which instruction should be directed or discovered has been debated for decades. Research comparing direct instruction and unguided instruction in contexts ranging from primary schools to universities tend to support the former. For example, discovery-based practices involving minimal guidance may not align with neuroscience research demonstrating limited human cognitive load and transfer from short-term to long-term memory (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007). Nonetheless, a widespread constructivist fallacy is that teachers must provide minimal guidance if learners are to actively construct their own meaning and develop learner autonomy, a false either/or dilemma (Clark & Hannafin, 2011). Observable, hands-on, 'active' pedagogy equals effective learning and teaching, while non-observable, 'passive' learning, such as lecturing, equals ineffective learning and teaching (Mayer, 2009). John Dewey condemned passive learning with his 'spectator theory': "If we put before the mind's eye the ordinary schoolroom, with its rows of ugly desks placed in geometrical order It is all made for listening." (Dewey, 1899/1969, as cited in Phillips, 1995, p. 31). To illustrate, teaching students how to solve a mathematical equation using a worked example, then asking them to apply it to a new context is a 'passive' approach compared to letting them actively figure it out for themselves using a discovery method (Clark & Mayer, 2016). By extension, the teaching of 'facts' as part of defined curricula within the structured parameters of

most higher education institutions is not learner centred, the implication being that a lecture, for instance, is bad practice. Subsequently, educational developers often see their remit as one of "dismantling and outlawing 'teacher-centredness' in favour of 'student-centredness,'" (Cousin, 2010, February, pp. 5).

Relatedly, constructivism is problematic when it is explicitly or implicitly implied that learners construct knowledge out of thin air (Kintsch, 2009), a confusion between entering the process alone and constructing knowledge alone (Klahr, 2009). Do learners 'construct' knowledge by themselves or via social interaction? Or do they elaborate on acquired knowledge through interaction with peers and experts? Relativism is problematic when no distinction is made between different forms of knowledge, and the complex relationship between spontaneous context-dependent learner knowledge and abstract context-independent academic knowledge becomes a site of contention (Rata, 2016). Dewey acknowledged the debate between knowledge-based education and learner-centred education as "the opposition between the idea that education is development from within and that it is formation from without' [Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 17, as cited in Rata, 2016].

Pedagogical constructivism and the skills-focused learning of SCL discourse does not make a significant distinction between abstract and experiential knowledge: knowledge is more process than product; the teacher is merely facilitator; students 'construct' knowledge from personal experience; and the focus must remain on individual learning style, interest and motivation (Rata, 2016). Pedagogy that pits direct instruction against inquiry moves the focus from the relationship among the learner, the teacher and the knowledge to a disembodied process (McPhail, 2016).

Others share concern that excessive focus on one party in a mutually constructed educational experience denigrates the educator's role (Carlile & Jordan, 2009; Ellis & Goodyear, 2010; McWilliam, 2009).

2.9.1.3 Performativity and Student Engagement

A significant body of literature positioning learning as a dynamic interplay of unique learner characteristics at play with environmental variables is set against more recent sociological literature focused on establishing causal linkage among student engagement, outcomes and educationally purposeful activity (Klemencic & Ashwin, 2015). The crux of this research is based on a presumption that higher education institutions can significantly alter learner skills, knowledge attitudes and values in relation to broader socioeconomic aims (Klemencic & Ashwin, 2015). For policymakers and researchers, student engagement is now "a 'good thing' in higher education" (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015, p. 343). SCL is explicitly linked to student engagement in the UK and Ireland, a pattern that may be replicated in mainland Europe (Klemencic, 2017). Many higher education institutions now advertise SCL as part of institutional engagement policies, yet few define what is meant by active participation (Macfarlane, 2015).

As with SCL, student engagement reflects western liberal educational values connecting agency, empowerment, personal fulfillment and democracy. Both theories are premised on a constructivist assumption that observable 'active learning' and empowerment equates to high quality education (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017). In practice, engagement often means adhering to Anglo-Western norms: speaking often during class and making appropriate eye contact are rewarded,

while passivity and 'lurking' is not rewarded or punished (Macfarlane, 2016). There is a presumption that identified behavioral modes equate to learner empowerment, motivation and independence; however, the extent to which SCL environments affords students genuine power over knowledge production is questionable (Harju & Åkerblom, 2017).

SCL and student engagement appear to be embroiled in a larger debate about creeping neoliberal agendas operationalized through performativity in higher education. Neoliberal policy manifest in performance management instruments that undermine academic freedom: surveillance, control and measurement displace collegiality (Martin-Sardesai, Irvine, Tooley, & Guthrie, 2017). Performativity regimes reorient scholarly and pedagogical focus away from immeasurable emotional, moral and social development to measurable performance outcomes, what Ball (2012) sees as "a growing sense of ontological insecurity; both a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do. Are we doing things for the 'right' reasons – and how can we know!" (p. 20). Gourlay (2015) sees constructivist rhetoric as a part and parcel of postmodern views on authority and neoliberal thought that cast a long shadow over policy and practice discourse to the extent that direct teaching of content has become "retrograde, flawed and antithetical to 'student engagement'" (p. 25). Prioritization of outward engagement and social interactivity over silence, reflection or reticence - behavioral modes and study practices conducive to effective university learning - risks putting both students and faculty into a performance mode, thereby subverting a constructivist orientation into shallow performativity (Gourlay, 2017). Citing Holmes

(2004), Macfarlane (2015) expands on the idea of 'learnerism', a performative discourse that aims to empirically associate achievement of LOs with observable behavior, "the need for the student to be publicly 'seen' to be learning and constructing a personal understanding instead of acquiring knowledge as a private activity" (p. 341). MacFarlane argues that fetishizing outward performance goes against a sizable body of research indicating that for perfectly valid reasons, students often prefer more passive and traditional forms of pedagogy such as lectures; subsequently, faculty and students resort to 'playing the game' by suppressing or abandoning personal beliefs and values. Conversely, resistance has consequences, be that a low course work grade or a lack of promotion. Biesta (2012) is highly critical of the constructivist-based "language of learning" (p. 38). The author finds SCL an anemic paradigm: pedagogy and education are not the same thing. Education is always relational; there is an inextricable link among the content, context, teachers and learners. With its emphasis on one stakeholder, SCL becomes "individualistic and individualising" (p. 38). Biesta believes there is a fundamental mistake in prioritizing students over content and teachers who become "process-managers of empty and in themselves directionless learning processes" (p. 38). Collapsing the complex and situated nature of education into an overly simplistic and false binary by juxtaposing 'progressive' education against 'traditional' methods, portrayed as retrograde, repressive, irrelevant and hierarchical, is unhelpful. It reinforces the individual ego at the expense of more challenging acts of learning and education, which embody an intellectual and ethical position (Biesta 2016).

2.9.1.4 The Design and Implementation Challenge

Proponents of constructivism have long argued that constructivism should be operationalized as a continuum, not a dichotomy; direct instruction should be complemented by more open-ended, holistic and learner-directed activity associated with discovery and project-based (Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Land, Hannafin & Oliver, 2012). While academic scholars may understand that pedagogy drawing on constructivism is meant to complement more traditional direct instruction, this is often not clearly understood by practitioners, who are left to grapple with mixed messages, unsupported premises about human learning, and irreconcilable epistemic tensions (Goodyear & Dudley, 2015). In the same way that Freire criticized educators for filling students' heads with the narration of declarative knowledge detached from reality, non-constructivist pedagogy is increasingly lampooned and punished; best practice equals constructivism (Krahenbuhl, 2016). Researchers have responded to this confusion with frameworks designed to facilitate translation of SCL into classroom practice. Models often take the form of continua, moving from learner-centred to teacher-centred vis-a-vis relationships, motivation and construction of knowledge (Lattimer, 2015). Lee and Hannafin (2016) propose a relatively digestible framework based on "constructivist epistemologies ... reified as SCL" (p. 710). Drawing on a range and depth of educational research, Hoidn (2016) developed a comprehensive framework for the design, development and implementation of robust SCL environments. One might reasonably assume that given institutional commitment and support, academic faculty may engage with such resources. However, for a variety of reasons, teaching faculty often avoid the

challenge of redesigning and/or significantly modifying practice, an issue addressed more fully in Chapter 4.

2.9.2 SCL as Culture

As a cultural concept, SCL describes power relationships among stakeholders and institutions (Klemenčic, 2017). References to this dimension within EHEA documents identified earlier in this chapter (SCL Defined in Europe) include adequate teacher support, mutual respect, open dialogue, learner/teacher reflectivity, and shared governance in processes that include curricula design to quality assurance standards. Unpacking SCL as cultural concept reveals further paradigmatic tensions relating to stakeholder power.

2.9.2.1 Power

SCL is often referred to as a mindset, a new way of thinking about pedagogy, curricula and stakeholder roles and responsibilities. At the heart of this mindset are Western liberal education values linking freedom, choice and agency with democracy, market logic and socioeconomic success. In this tradition, higher education strives to empower students, who then exercise personal agency, maximize individual potential, and pursue goals that ultimately serve the larger society (Klemenčic, 2017). From a cognitive perspective, attending to student needs may be interpreted as utilizing learner interests, beliefs and prior knowledge as a pedagogical entry point. From an emotional perspective, however, this opens the door to tension. To what extent, for instance, must higher education institutions and faculty involve students and cater to their needs? To what extent is the average university student in a position to appropriately and effectively share governance and vital decision making? Are faculty

and institutional leadership willing and able to share this governance and fundamentally alter mindsets? Appropriately and effectively devolving power to students is particularly challenging in today's market-oriented higher education context, where students wield considerable power (Clark, 2018). On the one hand, excessive institutional focus may oppress stakeholders; on the other hand, excessive focus on students leads to concerns over market-driven policy environment on learner disposition and LOs, subverting traditional aims of higher education in the process (Klemencic & Ashwin, 2015). This tension is embodied in the ongoing debate about consumerism in higher education, a topic to which the discussion now turns.

2.9.2.2 Consumerism

Unlike traditional liberal conceptualizations of education as intellectual, moral and personal growth, value in the free market is conceived through the lens of classical economic theory (Au, 2016). Effort and intrinsic motivation are replaced with short-term thinking and instant gratification; experiences deemed irrelevant or not engaging are discarded (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2016). This would contravene research indicating that challenge and intellectual rigour are better predictors of engagement, investment and conceptual thinking than enticement, pleasure and prescription (Lingard & Keddie, 2013). In a consumer-oriented environment, educational quality is reduced to a measurable commodity, where measurable outputs, league tables, student charters, lavish spending on amenities, and large marketing budgets signify the sovereignty of the student (Lynch 2014). Nixon, Scullion and Hearn (2018) fear that ultra-utilitarian policy and marketing campaigns featuring slogans like 'you said it, we did it' feed student narcissism, infantile

anxieties and fantasies of self-sufficiency. Faculty and staff become service workers "accustomed to having to consider 'how the student body might react' to teaching style and substance, to shrug off grade-grubbing, to retain students and prioritise their contentment" (p. 930). Against this stands recent work by Pitman (2016), who theorizes that complex economic variables, especially the role of the state, do not support a straightforward, linear model of student as consumer. While students indicate expectation for customer service in peripheral services, they do not necessarily expect to be treated as customers when it comes to core pedagogic issues (Koris & Nokelainen, 2015). To the contrary, students often base their choice of schools on a range of factors that preclude strategic instrumentality (Budd, 2016). Tomlinson (2017) sees the reality somewhere in the middle. While some students adopt a strong service-user orientation, and others resist the notion of "buying a degree," (p. 462) most students are ambivalent with regard to service quality and delivery and do not directly equate education with purchasing other forms of service or products because they know it requires hard work within defined structures. A circular debate ensues, framing student partnership as desirable but risky because students are not positioned to effectively participate, so they are not given a real stake, subverting their participation into shallow consumer-like complaint (Marie, 2018).

With its emphasis on empowerment and partnership, SCL may be a reasonable policy response to new generations of students that value and expect personalization (Francis & Hoefel, November 2018). However, it is also not unreasonable to think that SCL conjures up consumerist pandering. Is the average middle-aged

administrator or faculty member troubled by a message that quality enhancement lies in giving more individual attention to new generations associated with narcissist behavior (Jarrett, 2017; Williams, Sept. 18, 2015)? How should higher education reconcile SCL with sensitive issues of identity and power? Genuine partnerships and power-sharing among institutional leaders, faculty and students challenges deeply entrenched historical power dynamics (Matthews, Cook-Sather, Healey, 2018). The threat of consumerism, real or imagined, seems to invoke deep existential concerns, an ideological battle for control.

2.9.3 SCL as Learning Support

Within key EHEA documents, SCL is depicted as non-pedagogical learning support that includes assessment, curricula development, resources, shared governance, qualifications frameworks, lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning and LOs (Klemenčic, 2017).

2.9.3.1 Learning Outcomes

LOs work at three levels in the EHEA: At the European level, they provide reference points and facilitate cross-national transparency, recognition and comparability for the three cycles. At the national level, qualification frameworks provide explicit references and standards for programme accreditation and quality assessment. At the institutional level, they inform curriculum design. For students, they designate skills, understanding and abilities required for successful completion of study. For teachers, LOs suggest the modes of delivery and assessment for the attainment of outcomes (Adams, 2006). Featured in many policy documents, LOs are tied to National Qualifications Framework descriptors as part of a drive to modernize

education and training alongside more effective integration of pedagogy and assessment, including the constructivist-inspired involvement of the learners in the entire process (Lassnigg 2012).

As with SCL, LOs have been elevated from a minor to major role over the past ten years and are now viewed as an integral tool to further the wider Bologna agenda (Sin, 2014). The EHEA has prompted institutions to use LOs to make degree programs output-based: “In other words to make these programmes student-centred so as to better prepare graduates for their future role in society. This approach gradually became the axiom for modernizing higher education in Europe” (Birtwistle, Brown, & Wagenaar, 2016, p. 200). This message was reinforced by the Bucharest Communique (2012): “The development, understanding and practical use of LOs is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance” (p. 3).

The EHEA theorizes that SCL enables the acquisition of LOs. However, LOs have been embroiled in debate for much of the twentieth century (Adams, 2006). Critique unfolds along a number of lines: 1) explicit curricula formations and didactic practice associated with LOs tend to overlook less obvious meta-cognitive development; 2) emphasis on what a student can do supersedes the important question of how students develop a competence; 3) LOs do not account for unexpected learning or 'unrelated' abstraction; 4) a focus on dominant knowledge acquisition over contestable knowledge subverts traditional aims of higher education; and 5) because there is no research-based consensus on learning, demonstration of learning would need to be articulated in a manner that addresses all three recognized approaches to

learning: cognitive, behaviorist and sociocultural (Havnes & Prøitz, 2016). LOs draw further critique as manifestation of neoliberal accountability, standardization, and the rising influence of semi-autonomous intermediate bodies (Caspersen, Frølich, & Muller, 2017), “a *predictive promise* by the *producer-teacher* to the *customer-learner*” (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011, p. 504).

The contested nature of LOs is put into relief when placed in the hands of those on the ground. Sin (2014) investigated the use of LOs at three universities in Portugal, Denmark and England, where the author found varying degrees of use, awareness and appreciation. Sin wonders if LOs represent yet another Bologna tool that promises ready-made, easy-to-digest assessments of learning and teaching as part of a larger neoliberal reconfiguration of a public service. The author questions a presumption that formal instruments and tools can trigger cultural and pedagogic practice such as SCL when “favourable ground and propitious pedagogic mindset are necessary preconditions” (p. 1835). From interviews with 18 students and 52 faculty members at four universities in Lebanon, Nasrallah (2014) unearthed significant misalignment among institutional goals for SCL and classroom practice that remains largely teacher-centred. At the University of Leicester, Dobbins et al. (2016) discovered that faculty view LOs as a management tool to reinforce accountability. From a survey of nearly 100 new academic staff in a research-led university in the UK, Hadjianastasis (2017) postulates that most faculty see LOs as tables of content to be covered. Through interviews with 29 students and faculty at Norwegian and English universities, Sweetman (2017) surmises that LOs produce minimal effect on extant roles, power relationships and day-to-day pedagogy within environments marked by

resource limitations, increased contact hours and class sizes, especially if this requires increased time and resources to get it right. Schoepp (2017) performed document analysis on syllabi of 10 globally ranked universities. The author detected that only 50% of courses evidenced an appropriate number of LOs. Schoepp concludes: “Overall, the portrait of LOs within courses at the leading teaching universities in the world, even with pockets of best practice and elements to build upon, is quite dismal” (p. 10). Birtwistle, Brown and Wagenaar (2016) find that initial training on LOs in conjunction with ECTS is often superficial, limited and inconsistent:

[e]ither viewed as a done deal or any attempt to deal with concepts, benefits etc. was abandoned and replaced by process training. This was anathema to the staff. They want concepts, benefits, links etc. and not form filling to comply with internal QA and audit requirements. (p. 221)

In summary, research suggests that LOs have not catalyzed the sort of paradigm shift that SCL necessitates. As a theoretical cornerstone of SCL, a lack of robust theory development and contradictory evidence potentially undermines the larger SCL policy agenda.

2.10 The State of SCL in the EHEA

Chapter 1 described a gap between EHEA aspirations for SCL and implementation. A more in-depth look at extant research indicates that SCL is not widely institutionalized to a meaningful degree in the EHEA. Huet et al. (2009) explain how, beginning in 2006, in accordance with Bologna reforms that include SCL, new academic faculty in Portuguese higher education were expected to move away from traditional practices by demonstrating commitment to gaining a deep understanding of student progress, placing them at the center of their own learning

as autonomous, effective and critical learners. The authors relay three case studies that illustrate how the quality of teaching and learning improved in some cases, yet faculty and students remained largely unprepared, mentally and pragmatically, for meaningful change. In a more recent study of four Portuguese universities, Sin and Manatos (2014) determine that policy and practice does not align with ESG recommendations for SCL and assessment. The authors note that despite limited progress and alleged institutional compliance with Bologna Process ideals, staff and students hold onto traditional beliefs and behaviors. From a comparative study of Physics MSc programs at three universities in Denmark, England and Portugal, Sin (2017) found that students in Denmark are given flexibility and empowered to make choices about their courses and degree, while faculty and students at a Portuguese university express doubt and unfamiliarity with autonomy because curriculum design and pedagogic approaches do not provide them with much opportunity for choice and flexibility. Sin concludes that political drivers do not countervail national practices, values and beliefs in relation to pedagogical notions of power and control. Members of the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS) unanimously agree that teaching in Sweden HE is sub-standard, and despite Sweden's ostensible commitment to SCL, most students do not experience SCL ("The Swedish," 2014). The report finds that while efforts to improve pedagogy exist, "development is uneven and often completely dependent upon the individual teacher's interest in pedagogy" (p. 5). Research at Swedish universities is prioritized over teaching, and inertia and lack of motivation mean "actual reform is mostly on paper, while values, hierarchies and practices remain largely unchanged" (p. 22). Respondents blame instructors, especially older faculty, who express confidence in their teaching yet lack

knowledge of pedagogical research and learning theory, and most institutions do not require pedagogic training. A master's student remarked that faculty who support initiatives like SCL are likely to face "dripping sarcasm from their colleagues, particularly from older colleagues" (p. 24). Frăsineanu and Ilie (2017) deployed surveys and focus groups with 28 students at the University of Craiova in Romania with the aim of assessing student perceptions of SCL. The authors operationalized SCL using specific criteria from the ESU toolkit (ESU/EI, 2010c): 1) student partnership through consultation; 2) a focus on LOs; 3) mobility and recognition of prior learning; 4) social dimensions; 5) pedagogy; 6) assessment; and 7) adaptation of the learning environment. The authors discovered a variety of barriers that include large classes, lack of resources, competing priorities, centralized decision-making, misconceptions, negative attitudes, disagreements about the purpose of education, resistance to change, and entrenched habits and beliefs. Matei, Hâj and Alexe (2015) also investigated Romanian higher education, where the authors define SCL per Bologna ministerial communiqués as 1) commitment to SCL, 2) innovation, 3) students as partners, 4) guidance/support structures, 5) flexibility, 6) learner focus, and 7) linkage among LOs, student work load and study credit. As a concept, SCL is not well understood. At the national level, legislation defines SCL as general student rights that include a quality education. At the institutional level, 14 universities have little-or-no documentation pertaining to SCL; another five evidence some effort but lack strategy to develop active learning environments and development of transferable competencies. Only 20 of 33 Romanian institutions have publicly available institutional strategy documents referencing SCL, with several interpreting the concept merely as provision of important information. Romanian universities

generally use SCL as an umbrella to further specific agendas. Implementation of ECTS system guidelines meant to balance LOs with credits and workload is “mostly superficial and formalistic” (p. 115). Other issues include inadequate resources, lack of incentives and expertise in developing and sustaining innovative, outcomes-based teaching practices as well as hiring and promotion practices that favor research over teaching. Matei, Hâj and Alexe (2015) conclude that Romanian higher education is student centred only as formalized rhetoric, with many “self-centered” (p. 120) faculty concerned primarily about justifying contact hours yet broadly rely on didactic methodology. Birtwistle, Brown and Wagenaar (2016) conducted site visits at 14 universities in 14 European countries as part of a six-year study, from which the authors surmise that contrary to Bologna ideals, most European institutions lack commitment to SCL, and teaching faculty remain “wedded to, the old paradigm of expert driven delivery” (p. 228). Among limited instances of institutions making genuine strides to align pedagogy, assessment and LOs, impact has been minimal. Citing issues such as a lack of communication and inability to connect their studies with assessments and LOs, most students are unaware of an SCL ethos. Faculty express apathy and disdain for the burden of dealing with LOs and unsupportive management. The authors lament: “If those who are custodians of the development of learning show a total disregard for student-centred learning outcomes, what hope is there for a paradigm shift?” (p. 220). Nearly 300 pages in length and drawing on primary data collection involving large-scale quantitative and qualitative data as well as secondary research, the 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR) is a recent and “wide-ranging and detailed picture” (p. 13) of EHEA progress (Eurydice/EACEA, 2018). Drawing on the ESU’s definition of SCL, the 2018 report

defines SCL as on-going, reflexive, institutional culture marked by student empowerment, choice, collaboration and innovative pedagogy that fosters active learning. SCL also builds on Bologna tools such as recognition and ECTS, LOs, digital learning and flexibility. As a credit transfer and accumulation mechanism, ECTS is increasingly deployed across the EHEA; however, external monitoring by quality assurance agencies occurs only in some countries. In some cases, ECTS is externally monitored, though inconsistently and incompletely. There is also a sizable discrepancy among recommendations and legislation and student perceptions, with student representatives perceiving limited awareness of their use in several countries, suggesting "a need for more coordination and information among stakeholders" (p. 63). The 2018 BPIR determines "there is still much to be done to ensure the full implementation of ECTS. (p. 63). More than three quarters of all higher education institutions in the EHEA have deployed LOs to some extent, with most respondents stating that alongside curricula revision, teaching has improved, and students are more aware of learning objectives. The report notes however that just over half of surveyed institutions say there has been no significant change as a result of LOs implementation. While most countries have put either regulations or recommendations in place, steering and guidance are completely lacking in several countries where there are no signs of progress (p. 56). Several countries provide support or incentives to higher education institutions for training; however, large-scale systematic training in the EHEA is not common. The Yerevan Communiqué (2015) equates SCL with the use of innovative digital technology. However, less than half of surveyed countries have adopted external quality assurance procedures for legal frameworks to monitor the provision of digital technology (Eurydice/EACEA,

2018). Most higher education institutions recognize the importance of digitally-enabled learning and have responded accordingly with institutional strategies, for example, online learning degree programs and the provision of lectures in video and podcast format, but this is typically limited to the provision of blended learning, with only several countries reporting systematic digital integration. The report concludes that while digital learning is on the rise, "attention to the quality of digitally provided components will require even more attention in the future" (p. 82). In terms of flexibility, more than 75% all higher education institutions in the EHEA systems (37 systems) offer non-traditional or part-time study. However, some higher education institutions do not formally recognize student status; in some cases, part-time students are not eligible for financial support and must pay more than full-time counterparts. The 2018 report identifies student involvement in quality assurance as an area that needs improvement, with minimal change happening since 2015. Transparency in quality assurance also progresses. For example, 75% of all reporting countries fully implement ESG standards and guidelines, and all systems implement guidelines to some extent. In practice, however, recognition "falls short of expectations with regard to transparency, consistency and fairness" (p. 151), which the report attributes to incomplete stakeholder knowledge of legal frameworks, confusion and "a poor level of awareness among staff who are responsible for implementing recognition procedures" (p. 151). The 2018 BPIR claims that national governments and higher education institutions across the EHEA are tackling ministerial themes with a range of strategies. For instance, most higher education institutions (86%) have some type of teaching learning policy/strategy, but there is often no consensus among institutions within the same country on the role and

appropriateness of national teaching learning strategies. Many higher education institutions report institutional strategies for course design, lifelong learning and student involvement in the learning process, yet slightly more than half of these institutions do not utilize quantitative indicators to measure operationalization of these strategies, “which may raise some concerns regarding the actual implementation and/or evaluation of institutional strategies” (p. 49). The 2018 BPIR report states that learning innovations are on the increase, yet it provides no specific data points to support the ESU’s emphasis on innovative methods that foster communication, learner autonomy, partnership and development of meta-cognitive skills. Nor does the report provide data on the extent to which higher education institutions have adopted SCL as a culture or a mindset. The 2018 BPIR report identifies teaching faculty as “the key players in enabling students’ learning,” but notes that despite the importance of teaching qualifications, “the development of teaching skills is often left to ad hoc measures” (p. 15). The report highlights that large-scale and systematic faculty development is not common across the EHEA. Academic teaching typically amounts to “learning on the job” (p. 87). Three quarters of all surveyed institutions provide optional pedagogic training, learning opportunities, and recognition for good teaching, yet less than 50% of surveyed institutions require participation in the training or ancillary initiatives such as team teaching, peer feedback and teaching portfolios. The report highlights that in practice, teaching performance plays a relatively non-negligible role in academic career progression; research is what continues to make or break careers. Mobility has improved, with 32 countries funding internationalization strategies. However, inconsistent definitions, reporting practices, and insufficient legal codification create

ambiguity. The report concludes that limited progress has been made since the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report, and "only a minority of students benefit from such experience" (p. 276). The social dimension has been on the Bologna Process agenda since the 2001 Prague Communiqué. Again, however, few countries have implemented measures to assist disadvantaged and underrepresented students so they may complete university, especially recognition of prior informal learning. The report concludes "there is still a lot of room for improvement" (p. 214). The National Qualifications Framework, developed to facilitate internationalization and qualification recognition, is quite advanced in some countries, in others, progress is "slow or seems to not move at all" (p. 125). The 2018 report concludes that progress since 2015 has been one of consolidation, not radical change. Indeed, reporting gains are frequently negated by caveats and mixed results with respect to Bologna tools associated with SCL. From a survey of 43 National Students Unions in 38 EHEA countries, the ESU describes SCL progress as "very sporadic and unevenly distributed ... extremely slow, if even present" (p. 8). The report goes on to say, "in general the fundamental Bologna tools are implemented superficially and without a serious commitment to make them instruments of achieving student-centred education" (European Students Union, 2018).

2.11 Chapter Summary

Tied to political and socioeconomic imperatives, SCL has increasingly gained prominence in pan-European policymaking. However, SCL is an ill-defined umbrella term that has taken on varied meaning and usage in different contexts over time, especially in the EHEA, where complexity is magnified through linkage with

Bologna tools. Rooted primarily in humanism and constructivism, SCL is commonly associated with empowerment and active learning, admirable yet potentially incompatible aims that become lost in translation from theory to practice. SCL is intertwined with controversial pedagogic theories such as LOs and student engagement. Noted throughout this chapter, SCL is often described as a mindset. As the literature review suggests, however, EHEA aspirations for SCL are predicated on the adoption of ideas and practices that for a wide variety of reasons are beyond the capacity and willingness of key EHEA stakeholders, as evidenced by recent and significant empirical policy research. Naturally this has important ramifications for SCL as a major element of the Bologna reform agenda.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Ineluctably, researchers bring their personal beliefs, ethics, values, histories and politics to the work, making it imperative that philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks are delineated (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Chapter 1 explained how identified research gaps, in tandem with my professional history and personal beliefs, have motivated the study. As a critical and reflective researcher and practitioner I recognize that it is imperative to remain open to new ways of thinking about this vexing and contentious issue. Have I not understood or applied it correctly? Was I simply in the wrong contexts? As someone who has never worked in the EHEA, I determined that I would have much to gain through dialogue with knowledgeable insiders. Such an investigative process calls for an appropriate methodology that aligns the knowledge quest, my ontological/epistemological beliefs, and my intention to seek answers through dialogue with EHEA insiders. Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge and learning that offers appropriate philosophical and theoretical guidance in this endeavour.

3.2 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is an unconsolidated collection of theoretical perspectives associated with a handful of assumptions (Burr, 2015). A critical stance towards knowledge is a defining assumption. In contrast to positivism, which is premised on belief the world can be objectively known through empirical observation, social constructionism pushes us to question what we take for granted, assume to be 'real'

(Burr, 2015). A second major assumption is that reality becomes meaningful through social interaction. How we describe and explain the world is a function of our relations with others, meaning that explicitly or implicitly knowledge bears values borne through those relationships: “Problems” don’t exist in the world as independent facts; rather, we construct worlds of good and bad, and define what stands in the way of what we value as “a problem” (Gergen, 2015, p. 308). Relatedly, knowledge and truth are historically and culturally embedded (Burr, 2015). Language plays an important role in social constructionism. More than a window into individual psychology, language is the very basis of psychological and social worlds (Burr, 2015). As a precursor for thought, language is a form of social action that entails practical consequences, restrictions and obligations. Knowledge and social action are therefore inextricably linked. How we mentally construct the world informs our actions and establishes and sustains power relations. To illustrate, consider how many people would see a cow as a source of food. A Jain or a Buddhist, on the other hand, may see a sacred life to be protected. In both instances, the cow is real; however, the meanings ascribed to it are a product of shared history, culture, language and traditions: “it is from our relationships with others that the world becomes filled with what we take to be “death”, “the sun”, “chairs”, and so on” (Gergen, 2015, “Together We Construct Our Worlds,” para. 3). Critics of social constructionism cite cultural relativism, unwarranted denigration of scientific objectivity and conflation of reality with linguistic depictions (Miller & Holstein, 2006). Gergen (2015) takes issue with what he views as reductionist critique: “Social constructionists do not say, ‘There is nothing’, or ‘There is no reality’ ... whenever people describe reality ... they are speaking from a particular standpoint or tradition

of understanding” (“Together We Construct Our Worlds,” para. 2). The author graphically captures the rational empiricist, “the lone individual observing and recording the world for what it is” (Figure 2).

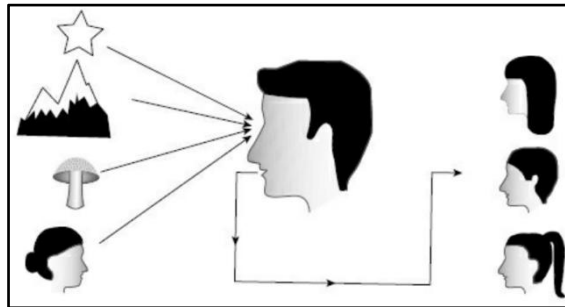


Figure 2. The Literary Assault Empiricist conception of knowledge. “I observe, I think, and I inform others.” (Gergen, 2015, “The Social Origins of the Real and the Good.” para. 1.).

Against this stands the social constructionist (Figure 3):

Rather, as we confront the world, our descriptions and explanations emerge from our existence in relationships. It is out of relationships that we foster our vocabularies, assumptions, and theories about the nature of the world (including ourselves), and the way we go about studying or carrying out research. (“The Social Origins of the Real and the Good.” para. 16)

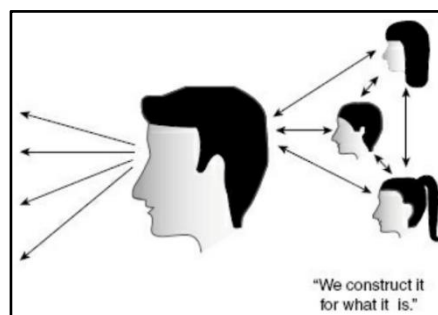


Figure 3. Constructionalist conception of knowledge: “We relate and I interpret.” (Gergen, 2015, “The Social Origins of the Real and the Good.” para. 16).

In line with social constructionism, I personally believe that reality is a contested and relative social construct constitutive of both discursive and non-discursive practices that are largely fragmented, emergent and temporal (Cunliffe, 2011). The

human experience is largely a mystery as we struggle to make sense of the world around us. We seek truth despite our limited and subjective experience muddled by the mind-boggling amalgam of contexts, structures, systems that shape our lives. When it comes to people, including ourselves, how much can we honestly say that we know or understand with absolute certainty? Working and living abroad for 25 years, I am acutely aware that social and political structures are cultural products mediated by personal cultural trajectories:

the cultural that we encounter every day is always, in effect, *intercultural* ... small culture formation on the go ... the constant, creative negotiation ... we do this through making sense of and finding new understandings about both ourselves and others. (Holliday, 2018, p. 10)

No science, qualitative or quantitative, is neutral, objective or value free (Mayan, 2016). Inquiry is ringed by the values, beliefs and preconceptions of the researcher and researched. Social constructionism is appropriate as a stance that does not search for objective facts or absolute truth claims: “There can be no final description of the world, and ‘reality’ may be inaccessible or inseparable from our discourse about it; all knowledge is provisional and contestable, and accounts are local and historically/culturally specific” (Burr, 2015, p. 177). As a reflexive researcher, I am genuinely open to multiple 'truths' that may open new possibilities for understanding (Gergen, 2015). I do not seek absolute truth or knowledge in relation to SCL, only greater understanding through collaborative dialogue with the RPs.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Data Collection

Social constructionism does not automatically translate into methodological

procedures (Burr, 2015). Rather, interpretive approaches like social constructionism embrace dialogical and relational research methods in which “meaning lies in living conversation, in dialogue and utterances where everything that is said is in relationship to others: other people, other ideas, other conversations (past, present and anticipated)” (Bakhtin, 1981, as cited in Cunliffe, 2008, p. 130). Semi-structured interviews effectively operationalize this stance in the present study as the sole data collection method. Qualitative interviews have a long history in the social sciences as a sensitive and powerful means of uncovering how people understand and experience the world: "If you want to know how people understand the world in their lives, why not talk with them?" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. xvii). From a practical standpoint, semi-structured interviews provide structure and flexibility (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

3.3.1.1 Participant Selection

It is often difficult to identify appropriate subjects at the start of a research project (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). A decision was made that as an initial exploratory investigation, more would be gained through dialogue with knowledgeable individuals than with individuals with little or no knowledge of SCL policy in the EHEA. Accordingly, the following inclusion criteria were applied: willingness to participate and knowledge of SCL policy in the EHEA as demonstrated through peer-reviewed publication and/or participation in conferences or workshops. Exclusion criteria included individuals lacking substantial knowledge of SCL or those working outside the EHEA. Potential candidates were identified via publicly available information located in research articles and websites. RPs include an even split of

women and men, ranging in age from approximately 30 to 60, located in 13 European countries: Iceland, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, the UK, Italy, Portugal, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany and Romania. RPs hold a variety of academic ranks and positions that include head of teaching and learning centers, institutional leadership, and professional higher education consultants for government ministries and private consulting firms.

3.3.1.2 The Interviews

RPs were invited by email to participate at a convenient time via the platform Skype. Interested individual were emailed a participant consent form and participant information sheet outlining the research. From 22 individuals contacted, 17 agreed to participate. Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted via Skype video calls between July and December of 2017. The average interview lasted 35 minutes, with several continuing for just over an hour. Interviews were video recorded and manually transcribed verbatim. Participants were asked if they would like to clarify any of their statements or ideas at the end of each interview; no participants requested modification. Participants were offered a copy of the transcribed interview; none accepted the offer.

3.3.1.3 Sample Size

Novice qualitative researchers often ask the question: 'How many interviews should I conduct?' When you realize that nobody can answer that question, you have arrived at an understanding of this research approach.

(Richards, 2005, p. 20)

Logical sampling builds the overall research case in qualitative research, aligning theoretical frameworks and research design while facilitating the researcher's ability to separate important data from background noise (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Unlike quantitative research, statistical representation is neither feasible nor desirable in qualitative research, where the aim is to present the subject perspectives in enough detail so that readers may understand and connect with issues (Seidman, 2013). Many writers avoid committing to specific numbers (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). From a content analysis of 560 qualitative PhD studies, Mason (2010) determined an average of 31; however, a disproportionate number of surveyed research papers dubiously reported sample sizes in round numbers, for example, 10, 15, 20, 25.... Mason considers several possibilities: 1) premeditation, 2) a desire to gain approval from thesis supervisors and review boards, and/or 3) PhD students and their supervisors who do not fully understand or apply the concept of saturation. Malterud, Siersma and Guassora's (2016) propose "information power" as an alternative sampling heuristic as an alternative to classical saturation, which the authors find problematic as it contravenes essential epistemological premises of qualitative research in that knowledge is situated, dynamic and interpretive. The authors identify five qualitative research benchmarks: aim, sample specificity, theoretical background, quality of dialogue, and analysis strategy. To illustrate, less participants are required when the research aim is targeted and subjects are recruited for specific purposes, data collection and analysis is backed by established theory, and the interviews yield rich dialogue. Conversely, more participants are required when the research aims are wide, expectations for participants are relatively unknown, theory is absent or weak, dialogue is not rich, and cross-case analysis is deployed to catch broad phenomena. Applying Malterud, Siersma and Guassora's scheme, the present research is relatively targeted, the subjects were recruited for a specific purpose, and the interviews generated a rich data set that

was collected and analyzed using established philosophical and theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, data collection is not longitudinal and the phenomena at hand is arguably broad. While this does not provide any concrete answers in terms of numbers, it does reinforce Morse's (2015) point that sampling is ultimately a judgment call "without overwhelming the analysis or collecting too little to develop a confident, interesting, and rich description" (p. 1169).

The thesis proposal for this project required an estimated sample size. This was a challenge because not unlike Richards' novice researcher above, initially I gave the number 14, which seemed reasonable given that doctoral students often wrestle with practical constraints of time, resources and access (Punch, 2013). Despite the commitment to 14 interviews however I remained open to increasing the number if necessary, which I did, and this is important because the sampling strategy evolved from a randomly selected number that might placate my thesis supervisors (recall Mason's study above) to an understanding and a desire to acquire more data. I was not fully satisfied at 14; I was satisfied though at 17, when repetition of codes and themes suggested that enough data had been compiled to effectively address the research question, hence the final number of 17.

3.3.1.4 The Interview Guide

The 10-question interview guide (Appendix D) is clustered into six areas of inquiry developed as logical, major focal points in response to the literature review: a) definition [questions 1-2], b) rationale [questions 3-4], c) implementation [questions 5) barriers and constraints [questions 6-7], d) advocacy and dissemination [questions 8-9], and e) miscellaneous (issues as yet unidentified) [Question 10]. The interview guide went through several revisions throughout the interview period. For

example, given the limited window of 30 minutes, I determined that RP thoughts on how SCL is understood among EHEA stakeholders was more important than understanding RP personal, so question 2 was eliminated after the first several interviews, a decision addressed more fully in Chapter 6 under Future Research. Potentially leading questions 3 and 5 were modified through removal of ‘why’. Data from the first seven interviews fed into the design of the website prototype. The prototype was subsequently developed over a period of several weeks following interview seven and presented to the remaining 10 RPs. The transition from website as theory to concrete artifact is reflected in question 11 of the interview guide marked RC2 (Appendix D). Accordingly, newly added question 11 addressed evaluation of content, layout and appearance. The question of potential website user-uptake was pursued more aggressively in the RC2 version of the interview guide through question 9, which solicits the extent to which the proposed website might contribute to SCL implementation, an issue that was not adequately addressed in the first several interviews. It was felt that resistance or apathy in relation to the website might open a window into stakeholder perspectives. Question 12 was reworded as question 13 for increased specificity to facilitate unexplored avenues. The third and final iteration of the interview guide comprises 12 questions. Changes include a slight wording modification to question 10 emphasizing RP feedback, and question 9 reworded from first to second person to make the query more relatable and reduce bias by removing mention of any specific potential website elements.

3.3.1.5 Conducting the Interviews

The quality of the interview plays a decisive factor in the “often messy reality” of

thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 6). Interviewing does not follow explicit steps or rule-governed methods, however, and there is no universal set of criteria for determining interview quality, which largely depends on interviewer judgments and skills acquired through extensive practice (Kvale, 2008). Interviewing may seem like a relatively straightforward task. After all, asking and answering questions is a basic human social skill. Nonetheless, conducting efficient, effective and unbiased interviews can be a challenge for anyone, especially novice researchers who often find themselves with stacks of transcripts that must be transformed into rigorous, useful and thought-provoking analysis (Brinkman, 2013). Interviewers must be able to ask clear, concise questions in a structured, gentle, open and sensitive yet critical manner. Good interviewers listen more than they talk, striking a balance between the role of “miner” and “traveler” (p. 19). Interviewers must be able to recall, interpret, clarify and extend interviewee responses in real-time. They face the challenge of uncovering both facts and meaning at a deeper level, discerning what may be implied but not openly stated, resulting in “self-reliant story that hardly requires extra explanations” (p. 81).

Conducting interviews proved to be a learning curve. As a relatively inexperienced interviewer, I struggled with issues that threaten reliability and validity: changes in question wording and sequence; ineffective prompts and biased probes; leading questions; injecting my opinion, attitude and expectations; interrupting participants before they completed their thoughts; and misunderstanding answers (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). At times I found it difficult to balance listening with keeping the conversation moving and knowing when to interject my own

thoughts. Time management was also a challenge. The mutually agreed duration of 30 minutes proved to be a very short amount of time to adequately cover a wide-ranging topic like SCL, especially after subtracting five minutes for greetings, preamble and wrap up; subsequently, I skipped vital questions on a couple of occasions while improvising under pressure.

Referencing Kitwood (1977), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) differentiate three approaches to interviewing. The first two, information transfer and transaction, conceptualize interviewing as a process littered with bias “that needs to be recognized and controlled” (p. 350). The third approach conceptualizes interviews not as problematic encounters prone to bias, but rather mutually constructed social interactions that, like everyday communication, are culturally embedded and permeated with “the constraints of everyday life” (p. 350). This third perspective aligns with social constructionism and reflects my interaction with the research participants as we mutually wrestled with a complex phenomenon, constrained by finite perspectives, personal bias and context. The resultant knowledge is a situated, embedded and dynamic interplay of linguistic, social, cultural, individual and structural dimensions that may or may be replicated to varying degrees of fidelity (Cunliffe, 2011).

The applicability of social constructionism became increasingly relevant as the interviews progressed, and I reflected on the challenge of maintaining a balance between mutually constructed dialogue and interviewer detachment. On several occasions, deep into conversation, I wondered if I was engaging too much or not enough. McLachlan and Garcia (2015) found social constructionism appropriate for

explaining collaborative knowledge production from qualitative interviews with married couples in the United Kingdom, in which interviewers and interviewees changed their understanding of key cultural frames. Taking a cue from the authors, I decided the research has more to gain than lose from a conversational approach, so from approximately the seventh interview onwards, I felt less pressure to cover the interview guide in a linear or rigid manner. The explanatory power of social constructionism became particularly salient during the final interviews when I felt more comfortable with a conversational approach in which meaning is co-created and evolves through researcher and participant dialogue (Schultheiss & Wallace, 2012). This evolution mirrored Brinkmann's (2014) transition from a rigid to a more constructionist stance, "in which the interview situation itself - including the interviewer - plays an important role production of talk" (p. 285).

3.3.2 Data Analysis

Focusing on the central research question during analysis and presentation helps to maintain focus and preserve integrity of the material, thereby "closing the loop" on the research questions" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 468). The research seeks to answer the following question: Is SCL is an appropriate response to educational reform in the EHEA? The question suggests an evaluative approach using a combination of analytical strategies: exploration, interpretation, summary, explanation and pattern development (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). To this end, analysis involved a combination of 1) first-cycle coding methods: 'Elemental' ('Concept', 'Descriptive', 'In Vivo' and 'Themeing the Data'¹); and 2) second-cycle as

¹ Frequently referenced throughout this paper, Saldana's book was an invaluable resource. Terms are spelled and capitalized as they appear in the book.

well as post-second-cycle 'Pattern Coding' to identify major themes or major networks of interrelationships (Saldana, 2016).

3.3.2.1 The Coding Process

Coding was an ongoing challenging, especially at the beginning. Spontaneity and flexibility during initial coding can increase creativity and divergent thinking (Charmaz, 2006), and so the first reading of transcripts was generally quick, followed by a close reading in which text was broken into meaningful chunks. Significant words, phrases and sentences were identified. Particularly surprising, insightful or vividly expressed ideas were highlighted in bold and reserved as quotations (Saldana, 2016). Codes, identified by all caps, were further refined through shortening. For example, 'BUREAUCRATIC PROCEDURE' became 'BUREAUCRACY'. In other cases, codes were expanded to gain more precision: 'HIERARCHICAL' became 'HIERARCHICAL DETACHMENT'. This process was beneficial as a means of reevaluating initial interpretations. I initially attempted 'Process Coding' (Saldana, 2016) but did not find the use of gerunds to create a sense of action helpful, so short sentences and verbal phrases were revised into one or two-word codes, for example, 'confusing scl with consumerism' became 'CONSUMERISM'. Saldana finds descriptive coding appropriate for describing and evaluating social environments, but he also warns against descriptive codes as inferior to Process Codes, which reveal more "about the human condition" (p. 78).

Initially, I relied on descriptive codes, though most codes are conceptual, which is appropriate for theory development and abstract contexts when applied to chunks of text (Saldana, 2016). I also found value using In Vivo coding as a way to "prioritize

and honor the participant's voice" (p. 295). I continually experienced a tension of moving between holistic and granular perspectives, seeing both the forest and the individual trees (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 462). Initially I tried to categorize codes by grouping related concepts into umbrella categories. For example, 'FACULTY RESISTANCE' would become a category for codes such as 'AGE', 'APATHY', 'FEAR' and 'HABITS'. It was later decided however that collapsing codes into umbrella categories would be more logically left until second-cycle coding.

Ascribing agency was challenging. To illustrate, while it might seem reasonable to assign codes such as 'LAZY', 'HARD WORKING', 'STATUS QUO' and 'CARROT/STICK' to individual agency, one could argue that individual attitudes and behaviors are by-products of organizational cultures and structural realities. Is 'BUREAUCRACY' an unreasonable individual reaction, or a real imposition by higher education environments increasingly characterized by managerialism? Similarly, 'FEAR' and 'LEGITIMACY' may be reasonable individual responses to contexts notable for poor leadership, obsession with research, rankings, and so on.

First-cycle coding is provisional, and there is no set rule for determining the number of codes on any data set (Saldana, 2016). The author cites examples ranging from 15 to 300 but concedes there is no magic number; however, to maintain analytic coherency, it is advisable to minimize the number of overall final themes or concepts. Initial coding of the first four interviews generated 186 related codes (themes). I quickly realized however that such "code proliferation" (p. 78) would make analysis difficult, so I began the process of "lumping" and "splitting" (p. 23), thereby reducing the first total to 122. The remaining coding yielded 189 codes.

Through a process of Themeing the Data (Saldana, 2016), first-cycle coding led to nine dominant themes, further divided into subcategories (Figure 5), with themes and related data supporting interpretation. Codes are identified by all caps, and color coding is used to distinguish the source of the theme. As with coding, thematic analysis addresses the research questions, study aims, conceptual framework and literature review, with the analytic goal of ultimately developing an integrative theme that weaves various themes together into a coherent narrative (Saldana, 2016).

4/5. Alignment

Conceptual issues

lack of a common definition; DEFINITION

structural/cultural changes needed; STRUCTURAL / CULTURAL

innovative approaches challenge institutional culture and lead to tension; however, faculty must align practices with institutional culture, goals, aims; FACULTY RESPONSIBILITY

SCL is relatively new compared to the United States, Europe 20 years behind America; NEW POLICY

policy is limited; POLICY LIMITED

Anglo-Saxon tradition; ANGLO-SAXON

more research needed to demonstrate efficacy; EVIDENCE

Individual Issues

Students

students not capable of making the best choices; IMMATURE

Figure 5. Example of first-cycle coding, Themeing the Data.

First-cycle coding suggested that dominant themes could be broken down into subcategories of structure, culture and agency (Archer, 2005). Figure 6 shows a second attempt at organizing codes following this approach. The online platform note.ly/# was used to create sticky notes, a digital version of “tabletop categories” used to facilitate “touching the data” and development of themes (Saldana, 2016, p. 231).

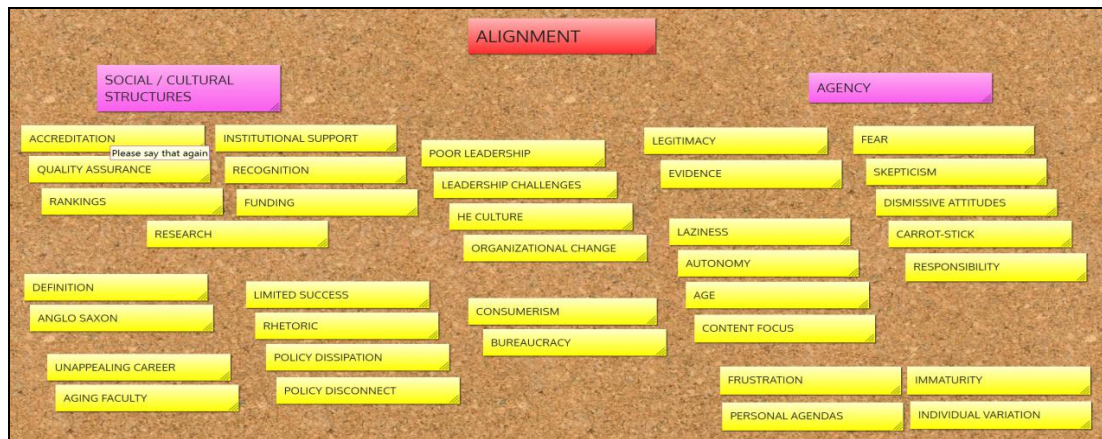


Figure 6. Example of first-cycle coding using a digital platform.

Applying Archer's concepts was more challenging than anticipated, however, an issue the author recognizes: "whilst in the structural domain there are well-established concepts, such as a hierarchical structure, a centralized structure, an integrated structure and so forth, "culture" remains a Cinderella in descriptive terms" (p. 17). It also became apparent that emergent thematic categories of structure, culture and agency do not readily account for issues related to the concept itself, SCL as a construct separate from agency and structure or the source of the issues. Is a structure related to higher education institutions, or does it stem from external influences? This seems to be an important distinction.

Seeking an analytical approach that might offer greater "fitness of purpose" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 78), I turned to a framework by Chor, et al. (2015), who expand on Wisdom et al. (2014) to identify a synthesis of 27 predictors of innovation adoption situated at four contextual levels: External System, Organizational, Individual and Innovation. Contextual levels are followed by predictors and descriptions in the framework. For example, at the contextual level of organization, adoption of innovation may hinge on a number of predictors:

absorptive capacity, social climate; norms, values and cultures; leadership and promotion of innovation; operational size and structure; and organizational relationships and collaboration with innovation developers and consultants. At the level of Innovation, predictors include risk, complexity, relative advantage and observability; feasibility and cost effectiveness; evidence and compatibility; innovation alignment with user values and norms; and relevance, ease and trialability (Wisdom et al., 2015).

Implementation of innovation² requires stakeholder adoption, a complex decision-making process constituting a multitude of dynamic, emergent and unpredictable variables (Frambach & Schillewaert, 2002; Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Chor, et al.'s (2015) framework offers a means of structuring of data analysis by differentiating contextual layers, especially the inclusion of innovation as a separate context. Being able to readily identify where issues originate or primarily reside facilitates identification of key actors, be that human or conceptual. The authors' attempt to formulate a middle-range theory accords with my own need to deploy an analytical lens that balances abstraction with empirical observation, what sociologist, Merton identifies as the ground between working hypotheses and unified theory (Schuler, 2012). Figure 7 is a screenshot of coding using the framework by Chor, et al.

² The EHEA identifies SCL as an innovation: "Now it is time to add cooperation in innovative learning and teaching. This will encompass the further development and full implementation of student-centred learning and open education in the context of lifelong learning" (Paris Communiqué, 2018, p. 3).

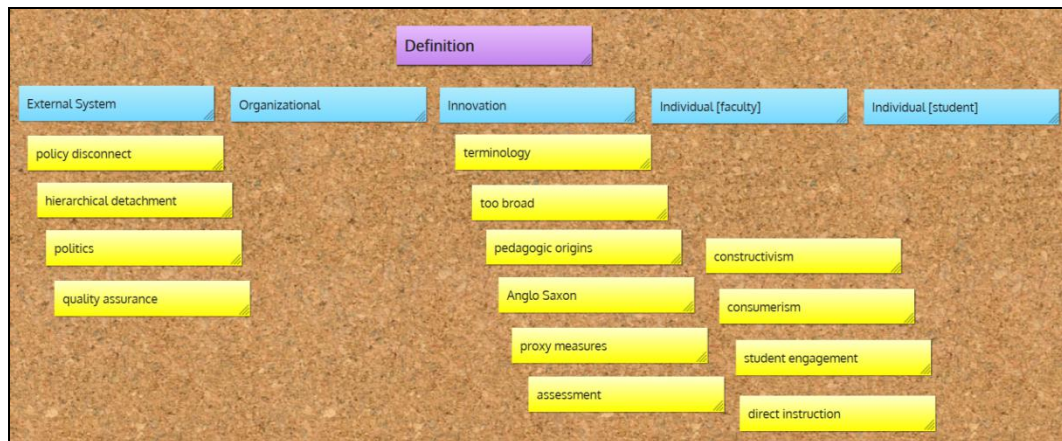


Figure 7. Example of first-cycle coding using Chor, et al. Framework.

Saldana recommends the use of code mapping as a preparatory tactic for second-cycle coding and analysis, testing “various combinations until a structure or process emerges that ‘feels right’ and can be supported by the data” (p. 231), a strategy that facilitates organization, provides an audit trail, bolsters trustworthiness and lends credibility to analysis. Table 1 depicts an example of Pattern Coding using a basic design table to facilitate website development.

Table 1. Example of second-cycle pattern coding using design tables.

Design Principle	Website Element	Context	Code/Theme
5. The website should appeal to a range of stakeholders.	What exactly is student-centered learning? [USED TWICE] MENU 2 Definition	External System	target employers [NEW] target graduate associations [NEW] target policymakers
		Organizational	target leadership target program coordinators
		Individual [faculty]	target educational researchers [NEW] target faculty
		Individual [students]	
		Innovation	multiple perspectives comfort zone confront [NEW]
6. The website should offer a variety of practical content.	Welcome! MENU 2 About Practice	External system	
		Organizational	leadership laziness

	Europe	Individual [faculty]	disciplinary focus
	North America	Individual [student]	
	Australia	Innovation	abstracts [NEW] audience and purpose [NEW] case studies [NEW] concise [NEW] expert forum [NEW] headers [NEW]
	South America		
	Asia		
	Africa		
	MENU 2		
	Practice		
	Resources		
	Articles and Blogs		

Website menu items are marked by purple font. Newly added elements are designated by orange font. Sections within the tables are conceptually subdivided under contextual categories of the Chor et al. framework: External System, Organizational, Individual and Innovation. To differentiate stakeholder groups, the authors' contextual category of Individual is further divided into subcategories of Faculty and Students. Each table includes a major theme (Design Principles), the corresponding website element, context and related codes. In some cases, contextual headings have no content reflecting no identified issue.

3.3.2.2 Design and Development of the Prototype

Data analysis from the first seven interviews fed into the design and development of a working prototype (Figure 8). Design principles are operationalized through website content. The prototype was created using the web-based platform Duda.co, which offers a basic free plan hosted on the Amazon cloud and comes with templates, limited analytics and tracking. The template is called Academic Tutor and includes stock images. Website templates available are a good choice for novice designers ("Essential," 2016, November 17).

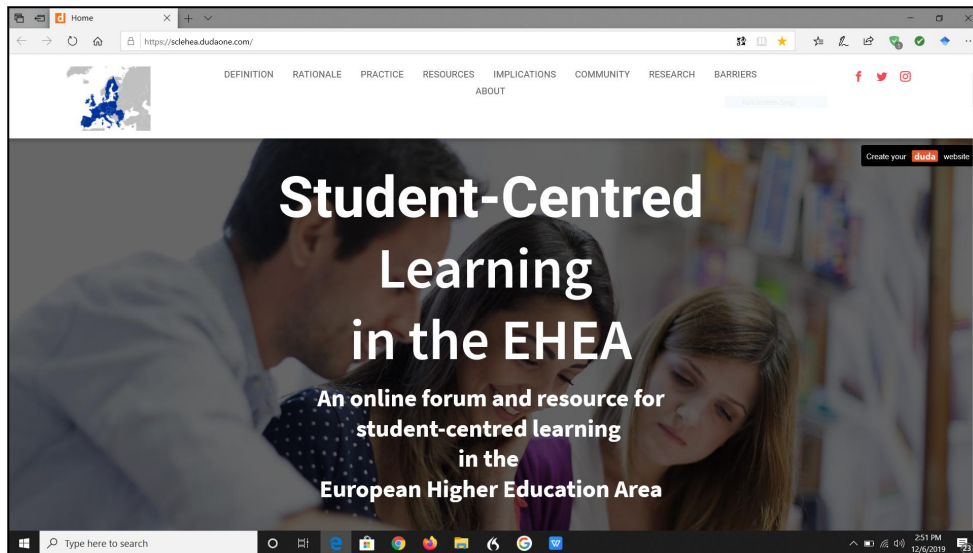


Figure 8. Top page of website prototype.

Interviews 8 to 17 afforded opportunity to generate additional data while refining the prototype, which mirrored that progress. Drawing on website evaluation literature (Denton, Moody, & Bennett, 2016; Hayek, Teich, Klein & Grêt-Regamey, 2016; Sauro, 2016), these remaining interviews focused on content, layout and appearance. RPs 11 to 17 were provided with a hyperlink to the working prototype prior to and during the video interviews. An example of modifications to the evolving prototype through this process can be seen in Figure 9.

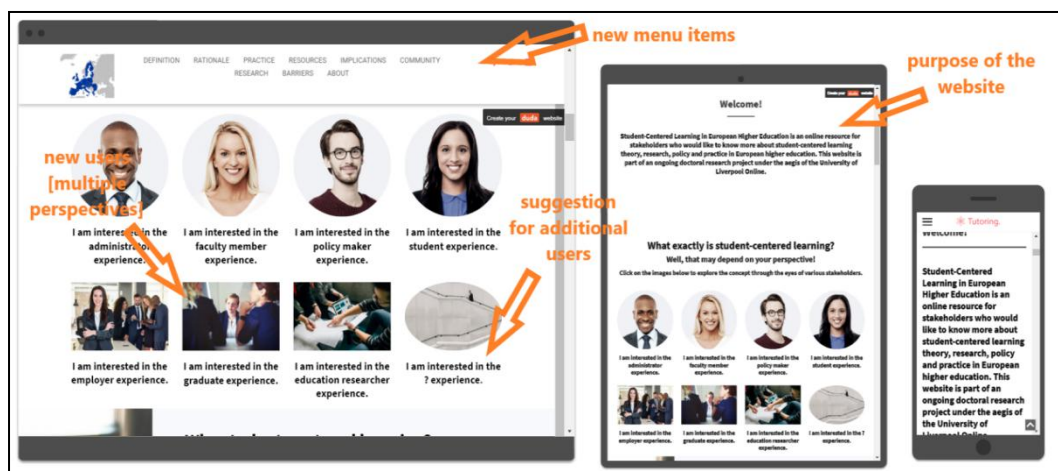


Figure 9. Example of modifications based on RP data.

Drawing on coding methods described above and partly on Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for thematic analysis, the next section outlines the rationale and process for development of latent major themes. Latent thematic analysis pairs well with constructionist epistemology, which views social interaction and language as the germination of experience, meaning and reality, "where broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorized as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85).

3.3.2.3 Development of Themes

A theme identifies a pattern of response and/or significant meaning in relation to the research question. It is up to the researcher to decide if the "keyness" (p. 82) of a theme is a product of prevalence or significance or both. Researchers may focus on one particular aspect of a data set or a rich thematic description of the entire data set as a means of giving the reader a sense of what is most important, which can be an effective approach for the investigation of an under-research area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As described in Chapter 1, empirical research on SCL policy in the EHEA is relatively scarce, making a broad yet rich thematic description of the entire data set a logical approach. Phase 5 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic analysis procedural framework involves defining and naming themes following the development of a thematic map of the data (Figure 4), "identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is about ... what is of interest about them and why ... identifying the 'story' that each theme tells ... how it fits into the broader overall 'story'" (p. 92). Analysis followed an inductive process, and, not unlike grounded theory, themes arose from the data rather than preexisting frames or preconceptions, a challenge

given that "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Saldana (2016) suggests code mapping as an effective way “to determine whether anything ‘clicks’ on paper or in your head” (p. 279). The author explains: “the stage at which I seem to find a theory emerging in my mind is when I create categories of categories” (p. 278). Using an example of Versus Coding, Saldana shows how a third cycle of coding cycle can feed into a fourth cycle to produce a thematic concept: “It is at this point that a level of abstraction occurs which transcends the particulars of a study, enabling generalizable transfer to other comparable contexts” (p. 278). Figure 10 is an example digital sticky note showing how this strategy was employed to develop conceptual meta-categories, or major themes.

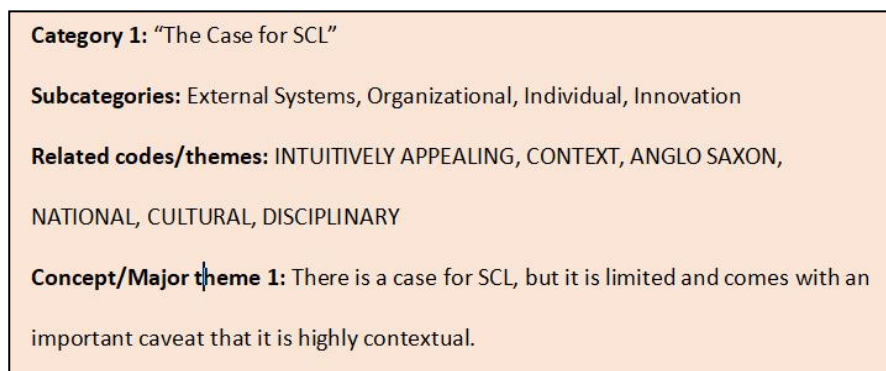


Figure 10. Draft digital sticky notes for major themes.

Major themes represent “building theory ... nascent theory providing answers to new questions revealing new connections among phenomena” (McManus, 2007, as cited in Ridder, 2017, p. 295). Digital cards were created for each major theme. Chapters 4 and 5 present full exposition of major themes.

3.4 Rigour

Seale (1999) witnessed the “sometimes bewildering” (p. 467) postmodern explosion of qualitative research criteria borne through shifting paradigms and questions of legitimacy, the “difficulty in regulating and constraining an endeavor whose guiding philosophy often stresses creativity, exploration, conceptual flexibility, and a freedom of spirit” (p. 467). Twenty years later, selecting appropriate research criteria can feel a bit overwhelming for the inexperienced researcher. There are many types of validity and reliability. The challenge is to identify and adopt criteria that is most appropriate to a one’s ontological and epistemological stance expressed through research questions, aims and methodology (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Unlike most quantitative research in the social sciences, qualitative research deals primarily in contextually bound human perspectives, emotions and language, dimensions that add color and richness yet fuel controversy in relation to trustworthiness and quality. Concepts like validity and reliability, rooted in the positivist tradition, need to be re-conceptualized to reflect the underlying epistemological nature of naturalistic research, which seeks to capture rich, diverse and contextual social interaction (Leung, 2015). The present research adopts a generic framework (Table 2) for the assessment and presentation of qualitative research by Kitto, Chesters and Grbich (2008).

Table 2. Research rigour criteria.

Criteria	Addressed	Thesis Reference

Clarification (research aim and research question are clearly set out and linked)	Yes	(Chapters 1, 3)
Justification (logical selection of research methodology)	Yes	(Chapters 1, 3)
Procedural rigour (transparency in data collection and analysis)	Yes	(Chapters 3, 4, 5)
Representativeness (sampling strategy aligns with knowledge claims)	Yes	(Chapter 3, 5)
Interpretation (full and clear description of analysis in relation to findings and extant theory)	Possibly	(Chapters 4,5)
Reflexivity (researcher's stance in relation to the topic and findings is clearly explicated)	Yes	(Chapters 1, 3, 5)
Transferability (critical evaluation of relevance and application of findings to policy and practice among other settings)	Yes	(Chapter 5)

Criteria on the left is followed by an indication of the extent to which it has been addressed, followed by references to germane chapters. Responses of yes to 'Clarification' and 'Justification' ties to exposition in Chapters 1 and 3 that establishes linkage among research aims, the research question, research methodology, my professional history and ontological/epistemological positioning. Rigorous thematic analysis is characterized by transparency and reflexivity, "assumptions about the nature of the data, what they represent in terms of the 'the world', 'reality' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). I have endeavored to provide an open and reflective account of how my own problematic experiences with SCL informed my decision to investigate this subject, along with my own belief in the humanist philosophy underpinning SCL, which holds potential for researcher bias. Social constructionist researchers acknowledge their inherent involvement in the research process as co-producers of

knowledge (Burr, 2015). From the start, I was aware that I would need to put aside my own preconceptions and experiences. This account is intended to reflect a spirit of transparency, which ties to a response of yes to 'Reflexivity'. A response of yes to 'Procedural rigour' reflects scrutiny of the semi-structured interviews, addressed earlier in this chapter, where I describe the challenges of interviewing and coding. A response of yes to 'Representativeness' reflects detailed description of the sampling strategy, which aligns with knowledge claims, addressed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Much has been written about the impact of positioning and subjectivity in social science research, a complex and dynamic endeavor that requires a careful balance of theory, data collection/analysis, and personal values/beliefs. Given diverse ontological and epistemological perspectives, different researchers will come to completely different conclusions looking at the same data set (Brown, 2010 and Morison, 1986, as cited in Dean, et al., 2018). An answer of possibly for 'Interpretation' indicates that I am not fully confident in my ability to respond objectively, issues further addressed in Chapter 5 under Research Limitations.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) concede that qualitative research validity can never be absolute; it is a question of degree. There are however strategies to bolster credibility. The present research deploys the following: an audit trail, informant feedback, weighting the evidence, checking for researcher effects, clarifying researcher bias, making contrasts/comparisons, rich and thick description, assessing rival explanations, and reflexivity (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research has adhered to the University of Liverpool research policies and

ethical clearance guidelines (Appendix A). Interview participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix B) outlining: research purpose, researcher role, rationale for participation, inclusion criteria, participation procedures, risks, benefits, expenses/payments, avenue for complaints/problems, confidentiality, use of data, complete voluntary nature of participation, and participant ability to withdraw at any time for any reason. One week prior to interviews, an information sheet was followed with a consent form (Appendix C), reiterating key information relating to consent, confidentiality and freedom.

Ethical conduct is more than just doing what's right, though: "It involves acting in the right spirit, out of an abiding respect and concern for one's fellow creatures" (Mandal, Acharya, & Parija, 2011). Given the dynamic, subjective and negotiated nature of qualitative research (Locke, Alcorn, & O'Neill, 2013), I have tried to live up to these highest standards at all times through moral grounding and vigilant reflexive orientation, a "research-praxis" (Rossman & Rallis, 2010, p. 380). To illustrate, participant anonymity was always given high priority - unintended but potentially identifying references to job titles, institutional names and countries were removed. For example, a RP reference to a specific country was replaced with 'a Southeastern European country'. Another example is how at several points throughout the interviews I made reference to insights gained through previous interviews, yet I resisted the urge to specifically reference any information about the previous interviews despite the fact a prior interviewees' job role or country, for instance, would have provided context to the current dialogue. I found that high ethical standards do indeed require vigilance. Simply ticking off ethical boxes is "unhelpful

and potentially precarious in terms of outcomes” (Brindley & Bowker, 2013, p. 304).

3.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 has provided a comprehensive description of the research methodology deployed to operationalize the research question into a coherent investigative strategy. Drawing philosophical and theoretical inspiration from social constructionism and a critical, participatory and reflexive approach to DBR, data collection was facilitated and mediated by the design and development of a website. Data were coded and analyzed using a combination of first, second, and post-second-cycle coding methods (Saldana, 2016). To identify contextual locus, Chor et al.’s (2015) adoption of innovation framework was utilized. Drawing on stage five of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage thematic analysis framework, coded data were organized and thematically categorized into major themes, statements representing a “master narrative or dominant discourse” (Saldana, 2016, p. 238). Research rigour and ethics have been addressed. The next chapter presents exposition of data analysis.

Chapter 4 - Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presents analysis of the data set comprised of 17 semi-structured interviews with EHEA academics, institutional leaders and higher education policy experts. Three major themes (marked in bold) are accompanied by analysis, linkage to extant research, and supportive RP quotations identified by chronological numbering of the interviews. For example, RP3 refers to the third interview. Analysis is organized under contextual headings as per Chor et al.'s (2015) synthesized adoption of innovation framework: External System, Organizational, Innovation and Individual (marked in bold). Following presentation of each theme, thematic development is visually depicted by a graphic.

4.2 Theme 1

There is support for SCL, but that support is limited and comes with an important caveat that SCL is highly contextual.

Analysis of the data set focused on making sense of the dialogue in relation to the research question: Is SCL an appropriate educational reform policy for the EHEA? As an evaluative query, a logical initial approach considers the extent to which RP viewpoints support SCL policy. The first major theme does this by synthesizing RP perspectives into a comprehensive evaluative statement.

External System

Beginning from the outer sphere of influence, RPs acknowledge economic, political and social levers shaping higher education policy: widening participation,

internationalization, reduced funding, performance management, technology, research demand, increased scrutiny of pedagogic quality, and learning outcomes equated with employment skills and future earnings (Barnett, 2015). Consider RP10's view on widened participation:

Students coming into higher education today have a much better background than ever before. We also have students... maybe without a clear idea of what they want from higher education, basic motivation or skills, so, it's kind of like, how can you cater for this very diverse population? And so, for some, I think student-centered learning is a way to tackle that.

RP8 believes that new generations raised in digital knowledge societies warrants more contemporary approaches to teaching and learning:

If we continue to teach the way that we have done so for hundred years, it will be obsolete. I mean, students will Google it instead; they will look at YouTube. You have a lecture and then you have an exam at the end. It will be too boring, too non-interactive. I don't think students of today will accept that.

Along the same lines, RP2 speaks to a disruption of status quo and need for transferable skills, representing both challenge and opportunity:

It challenges hierarchies because the professor is no longer the God. It cannot probably be comfortable for everybody, particularly senior professors. Many of them are at the top of leadership positions and cannot be that comfortable. There is open learning. There is the Internet. We cannot go back to the old ways.

RP1 links SCL is to the modern-day fight against extremism and democracy-building that harken back to John Dewey (Festenstein, 2019):

We see in the Middle East and North America and Europe and Australia and all parts of the world... making people responsible for their choices, the way they learn, the way they continue to learn. I mean, we really need to... to get our asses moving, to combat this stuff.

RP14 suspects that internationalization will force institutional change:

It's about what students expect from their teachers, from their universities. Going for a semester and coming back to your home country, you would expect to have a different relationship with your teachers. This is a kind of pressure, and if you don't do that the number of students coming to your university will decrease.

Organizational

Drilling down to the institutional level, RP10 does not believe that SCL is about standardization; rather, it is an opportunity for institutions to develop unique strategies and innovative practices: "I do think it's more of a promise than a problem, the attractiveness of the concept that will draw people's attention, and they want to solve problems." RP17 marks the appealing nature of this "very interesting phrase":

I think most people who hear it instinctively care about students and want the best for them as the vast majority of people do, and in higher education certainly most people would certainly feel there's something right about paying attention to students, some sort of freedom, some space for them.

Individual (Students)

At the individual level, RP2 believes SCL benefits students who are frustrated by institutional focus on structural concerns:

Students are often frustrated and bored with systems that are oriented more towards institutional bureaucracy and processes than their own needs - for example, limited library hours, access to facilities, schedules, limited influence ... small things that matter.

RP5 believes SCL fosters student accountability; moreover, students appreciate it:

Often they do not know the proper term for it. They realize that, "hey, this course is different. It might be very challenging, or it's time-consuming, but it does give me a better benefit. I can learn more. The teacher seems to be approachable and invested in doing the course," so they do appreciate when it

happens to them. (RP5)

Given that faculty play a major role in the impediment of SCL, an issue addressed in Theme 2, it is remarkable that RPs did not suggest how SCL policy might benefit academic faculty.

Innovation

RPs are generally in favor of SCL as an educational model that holds intuitive appeal with respect to empowerment, active learning, engagement, flexibility, and so on. This support comes with an important caveat though; SCL is highly contextual, a dominant code/theme identified in the data set (Figure 4). For RPs, context often takes on the meaning of 'it depends on...', a qualifier broadly expressed by RP12: "You have to take the context, the policy in a country, for example, the students or the institution, and the faculty and the traditions into account, and then maybe define your own version." RP7 points out that SCL is an Anglo-Saxon paradigm that manifests differently per national context. For example, education in France is considered a basic right, yet there is a shortage of placements; consequently, "SCL is interpreted as making sure that everybody gets in." Small tutorial sessions are populated by groups of 50 to 100 students, with regular lectures comprising 300 students or more, but "half of them show up at exams and turn in a blank copy because that allows them to maintain their matriculation status without doing work." In Germany, students cannot make it through university without doing homework, while in Switzerland, competency profiles for health care professionals are defined as developing requisite skills to join the marketplace. RP8 gathers that universities with a strong teaching orientation are more inclined to adopt SCL than research focused

universities. RP9 illustrates:

I think in the Netherlands there are researchers that do research on problem-based learning and even whole universities try to really follow this approach. It's infiltrating higher education more and more, but I think it's different for different countries.

Citing Felder and Brent's 1996 article, *Navigating the Bumpy Road to Student*

Centered Instruction, RP7 underscores the role of context by contrasting current

European interpretations with an American perspective of learner-centred pedagogy.

RP6 illustrates with the story of a conference workshop: "Some course participants

said "'this is okay, but we cannot do this in Italy, so it can be a good idea, but... not

too much American' [laughs]." More starkly, RP4 warns: "They would just, you know,

chop my head off in my university if I tried anything similar there." The ESU, a major

driver of SCL policy (Klemencic, 2017), acknowledges context:

A key concept underlying SCL is the realisation that all higher education institutions are different, all teachers are different and all students are different. These all operate in very diverse contexts and deal with various subject-disciplines. (European Students' Union, 2015, p. 6)

Three years later, the ESU reiterates: "Indeed, the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all

solution is one of the most important recommendations" (European Students' Union,

2018, p. 1). However, the ESU does not elaborate on how institutions and faculty

might go about adapting SCL to context, a subject to which this paper returns in

Theme 3.

Figure 12 depicts key themes informing development of major Theme 1.

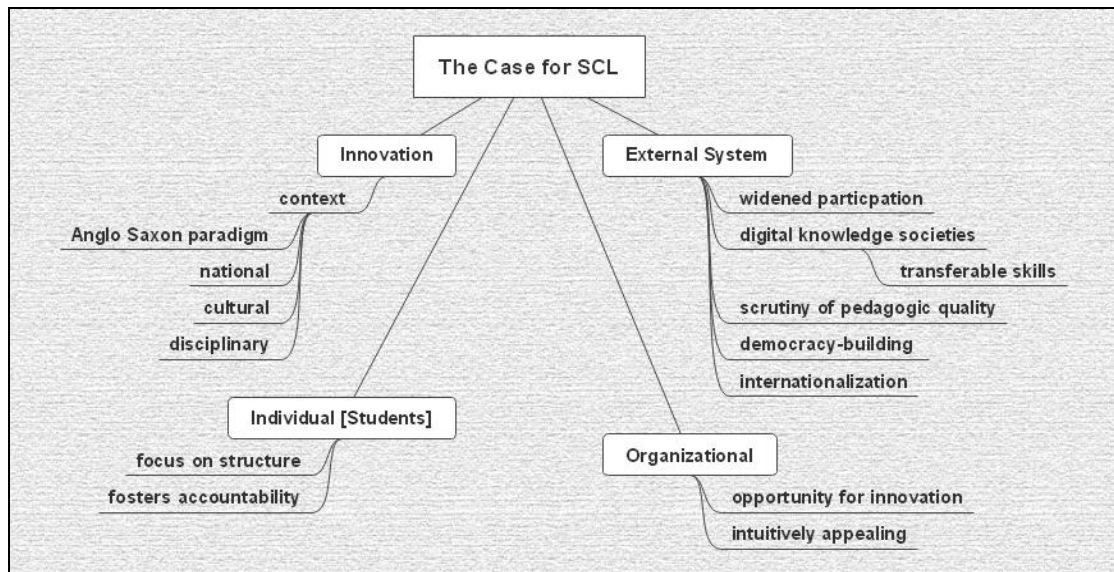


Figure 12. Graphic depiction of key themes informing major Theme 1

4.3 Theme 2

SCL is a problematic educational approach impeded by a multitude of factors spanning all four identified contexts.

Extant literature in Chapter 2 revealed a significant disjuncture between EHEA rhetoric and reality, so I asked RPs about alignment between policy and practice.

Evidenced by representative quotes below, without exception, all 17 RPs agree that

SCL is largely hype:

Many people use this expression but like a slogan. I mean, many university websites say that our university has student-centered learning, but I must say that in my experience I very rarely saw student-centered learning in higher education. (RP6)

When you look into the research on the Bologna Process, you can see that, yes, structures have changed, but the pedagogical approaches are intact. In many institutions, you can't really see any consequences. (RP10)

There's a gulf between what is written and what is said and what is reality in most of the educational institutions. (RP12)

It hasn't really moved far over the last six or seven years when it emerged as a novelty in Europe. (RP13)

Given the overwhelmingly negative RP response, a natural follow-up question was, why? RPs responded by identifying a spectrum of impediments in all four contexts comprising the framework by Chor et al. (2015), leading to the development of the second major theme, to which exposition now turns.

External System

Higher education institutions do not work in a vacuum. European quality assurance entities and higher education institutions have been tasked with the challenge of developing shared interpretations operationalized through policy, practice and indicators (Klemencic, 2017). However, European governments and higher education institutions must balance the adoption and implementation of joint European policy against national and institutional identity despite a diversity of approaches to quality assurance arising from EHEA cultural and historical idiosyncrasies that delegate responsibility differently among various actors (Gover & Loukkola, 2018). Diverse institutional approaches may be understood as a function of diverse institutional profiles that place varying degrees of emphasis on the role of higher education as identified by the Council of Europe: preparation for active citizenship, employability, personal development and creation of a broad knowledge base through innovative research (Gover & Loukkola, 2018). For example, in countries with high youth unemployment, employability often takes precedence over personal development, and quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions tend to focus on tangible and readily measured dimensions such as employment and knowledge acquisition at the expense of less tangible purposes of higher education such as active citizenship and personal development (Gover &

Loukkola, 2018). RP10 considers the attractiveness of low-hanging fruit:

A lot of reform policies in Europe are not about student-centred learning. It's about rather simple quantitative outcome measures like dropout rates and how many credits you have taken.

The ESG is a key reference for both external and internal quality assurance in the EHEA; nonetheless, the ESG is intentionally generic in order to accommodate institutional diversity across the bloc (Gover & Loukkola, 2018). RP7 ponders this lack of clarity:

With student-centred learning they tried to push the agenda in one direction, but by not defining it clearly, it accommodates people very well because it doesn't force them into some sort of ideology.

RP12 concurs with Gaebel and Zhang's (2018) assessment that at European and national levels, "beyond referencing these [SCL and LOs] as priorities in the Bologna Process and the ET2020, more concrete definitions and a more systematic follow-up on their implementation seem to have been challenging" (p. 53). RP12 is more upbeat on modernization work by external bodies such as the European Commission, the ESU and the European Union University Association, but tempers her enthusiasm with assessment that policymakers have yet to achieve a sufficient level of understanding or agreement on what SCL means as a mission or a vision for European higher education:

It is there, but it needs to have more attention on a policy level. I think there are only a few sentences, so we want to make student-centred learning a clear priority ... but then there is nothing that follows that.

RP10 questions larger mechanisms:

I'm not really impressed by their design in relation to this new idea about

student-centred learning. Some of the quality assurance bodies in Europe are trying to adapt, to become more formative, but I'm not sure about the domination of the accreditation systems in Europe.

RPs put a spotlight on policymakers. RP4 connects mandated quality assurance with externally imposed decision-making by those not fully qualified to do so: "You have policymakers who are thinking about quality assurance. They might not be able to think about the implementation of the ideology the same way as educational developers might do." RP7 suspects that top-down mandates are politically motivated, resulting in a lack and divergence of understanding: "Quality assurance people took hold of this because some politician said we need to do student-centred learning." RP7 believes that European policymakers are mostly concerned with political issues and not well informed about pedagogical issues:

It's about "what can we do to keep the students from protesting and complaining... don't take it to the streets" [laughs]. And so, I think student-centred learning was a well-intentioned idea that hasn't been fully thought through."

RP4 suspects that most quality assurance specialists do not have a teaching background,

so you have a small group of people who truly understand what it truly is, and a larger group who sort of get it forced upon them without understanding what it means, so it leads to all sorts of things that were not intended to happen originally.

RP11 likewise conjectures that policymakers do not adequately comprehend that SCL involves fundamental change:

Policymakers look at higher education the way that they look at any kind of education, knowledge delivered to the learner from the system. Students are kind of filled up with knowledge and then go out and use it. I mean, the understanding that I have of higher education, the research, is a much wider

understanding.

RP13 indicts misguided political imperatives: “I’m more skeptical about policymakers than the website because they don’t necessarily like to look at evidence [laughs]. On the one hand, domestic policymakers have not supported and endorsed ministerial level initiatives (Birtwistle, Brown, & Wagenaar, 2016); on the other hand, the context is rife with political agendas and dynamics that reflect larger historical/societal hierarchies. Take RP11’s theory on the connection among structural practices, politics, control and social reproduction:

There’s a lot of inertia around this, and this system has been built up with the purpose of providing students with a specific knowledge for specific jobs out there, but student-centred learning is about giving students control over pedagogy and content. It’s not bad will that policymakers will not do it, but it is complicated, to give up control. Policymakers want to see value for money, and it’s difficult to see that in a system that is too student-centred.

RP11 does not entirely fault the institutions because the politicians control the money that pays for salaries, research, etc. RP11 theorizes:

employers also get it ... but even if they say something to the policymakers, they will not give up control of the system. They want to have that kind of fixed curriculum, where they’re controlling the entire system.

RP11 links control mechanisms to higher education systems deeply entrenched within political and historical structures resistant to disequilibrium, where political expedience trumps personal values and research:

It’s difficult because you’re talking about an entire system, an entire society that has been built for centuries Politicians need to defend these perspectives, even if they don’t believe it. They go into these meetings with these rucksacks of points of view, immune to research and evidence because that is their view of the world. They fall back on the old historical rationales.

European universities have enjoyed greater levels of autonomy in the 21st century, a privilege that is neutralized by increased reporting requirements managed by increasingly empowered institutional bureaucracies that offer restricted scope for innovation, diminish shared governance, and reduced funding tied to performance indicators (Sursock, 2015). Reduced external funding and tightening of university purse strings hampers SCL (Birtwistle, Brown & Wagenaar, 2016). RP3 explains that European teaching faculty is aging, with fewer younger people entering the profession, in part because academics are poorly paid, which is making teaching an increasingly unappealing career in East Central Europe. RP3 adds that financial incentives that would pay for additional salaries, alteration of physical space, and pedagogic research and training, especially within more deprived contexts, has been cut. Reduced funding and deteriorating working conditions in higher education is not limited to less prosperous EU countries. Lecturers and staff in the UK have returned to picket lines in ongoing protests against “a marketisation process that has, over the last decade, transformed university life for those who study in it and those who teach in it” (“Editorial,” 2019, November 25, para. 5). Rising student debt and falling pay for academic faculty juxtaposed by increased bureaucracy and rising salaries for institutional leadership:

An intellectual precariat has come of age, made up of millennials who stumble from year to year on temporary contracts, often part-time, wondering where the next teaching gig is coming from. The drive to keep student numbers buoyant has led to relentless micro-management of academic performance, much of it driven by questionable assumptions such as those of the teaching excellence framework, which a recent study found constructed “excellence” as the development of employability in students. (para. 5)

Bess and Dee (2014) observe that shared multiple internal and external

constituencies bring varied paradigmatic lenses to bear on matters ranging from accountability and academic freedom to assessment of institutional performance and the core outputs of research and teaching effectiveness. An unfortunate byproduct of such diversity is communication breakdown, a disconnect among people, policy and practice at all levels - from national governments and educational ministries to departments and classrooms. RP10 surmises that while EU states share common socioeconomic ambitions and universal values, higher education institutions are embedded within idiosyncratic cultural, historical, political and social contexts (Crosier & Parveva, 2013). RP12 explains:

I think institutions are key but also at the national level. If you want to divide policy then you have the European level, the national level, and then you have the higher education institutions, then you have the program level, and then you have the classroom level.

RP6 extends the disconnect to employers and higher education institutions:

“European universities and companies live in parallel universes, so the perception of the provision of students is completely different,” findings consistent with Birtwistle, Brown and Wagenaar’s (2016) research identifying “disconnect ... throughout the tiers of a higher education institution (and indeed beyond that throughout the European Higher Education Area)” (p. 225). For many key actors, Bologna has become synonymous with a neoliberal agenda, with many on the ground left feeling excluded having “received scanty, biased, or incorrect information about the nature of the process,” producing suspicion and resistance (Brajkovic & Matross Helms, 2016, p. 68). Given their relative absence at Bologna ministerial meetings, Sin (2015) is not surprised by a generally “profound ignorance among academics about the implementation of Bologna and its intricate policy developments” (p. 339). Saunders

and Sin (2015) illustrate the governance challenge via the experiences of Scottish middle managers angling to mediate their “position on the ‘implementation staircase’ ... a culture clash between managerialism and collegiality” (p. 147). RP5 describes this sort of hierarchical detachment:

It’s difficult to get these ideas into people’s heads and to communicate them from a policy-making level, be it as a stakeholder in an organization or as a national authority. It’s just that it might end up getting stuck on the management level of the institution.

Critical RP perspectives on external drivers lend support to Kahn’s (2017) fear that higher education’s historical role as an engine for transformation and emancipation is being eroded by the very structural forces meant to drive transformation: inspection regimes, incentive mechanisms, codes of practice, reporting systems, market orientation, and quality assurance and accreditation regulatory frameworks. The cumulative effect is powerful sociocultural systems that exert pressure on individual agency, project and practice.

Organizational

Speaking to institutional diversity described above, RP8 supposes that European and national guidelines “are probably aligned, but each university has their own.” Drilling deeper, RP9 determines wide-ranging capacity within and among institutions: “We have institutions that are quite aware of what could be, others that don’t have a clue.” Notably, RPs do not speak of higher education institutions as lacking capacity. Rather, like how one might say that given enough effort, most learners have the capacity to succeed, higher education institutions are not succeeding at SCL because they are simply not putting in the effort.

Much of this has to do with leadership. Sustainable innovation requires effective leadership: “Where a strong, unified message from the institutional leaders is lacking, it becomes much harder to embark on and embed processes of institutional change” (Fung & Gordon, 2016, p. 19). There can be a significant dissonance however between leadership direction and the daily lives of academics on the ground (Graham, 2015). Prevailing logic today is that higher education needs professional managers to reach performance targets. Historically though, higher education leadership is a relatively new phenomenon running parallel to increased external pressure for enhancement and accountability, developments that have led to increased formalization, standardization and centralization of administration and governance procedures and roles (Maassen, Gornitzka, & Fumasoli, 2017). That European HE leadership is responsible for weak implementation of SCL is apparent in RP calls for more institutional responsibility and support. RP4 describes the challenge of innovation in the face of poor leadership that has not bought into the ideology and do not provide adequate training for teaching and learning:

We just got a new leader of teaching. She’s an excellent person, but she has not been following what has been happening. She comes from a faculty. She’s interested in her discipline. How is she going to know ... I mean, a lot of things have been happening in the last 20 years.

Birtwistle, Brown and Wagenaar (2016) also finds “institutional indifference or mere lip service” has a deleterious impact, leaving faculty feeling “stranded both by lack of training and by the pull towards research and away from teaching as a career enhancement” (p. 221). Furthermore, while many academic faculty have some understanding of the concept because they attend educational development courses,

institutional leadership does not “because they do not bother with pedagogy” (RP 8).

Organizational leadership decisions can be frustrating and perplexing (Schein, 2010).

Reflecting on the research section of the website prototype, RP9 describes

leadership of limited engagement:

Well, I know the administrators would not read the sections on research [laughs] ... more like highlights from the research, the interesting results and ways to deal with student-centred learning in practice.

RPs describe a higher education landscape in which teaching and research are severely at odds, a dominant theme. RP1 elaborates:

They’re supposed to be a coupling that really isn’t happening because of the way that we place merit on research, but we place almost no merit on teaching. We need to figure out a way for the two of them to come into balance.

National and international institutional rankings have become the de facto measure for higher education quality because they are easily digestible among diverse audiences (Hazelkorn, 2014). Universities have taken on a corporate mentality that fetishes research rankings at the expense of innovation (Mills, 2012). RP2 calls rankings “the dirty word in higher education.” RP5 illustrates European fixation on research via the story of a young American academic

who said it’s quite sad how in Europe because in the US... how winning a teaching award would just be part of your CV as it is a publication in a higher education journal in your field, and that is not the case in most European institutions.

Through the voice of a research participant, Fung and Gordon (2016) describe the research-teaching divide: “A publication in a top journal is a meal ticket and it thereby increases your marketability, your value, including financially - and it is this

hard, international, unambiguous currency” (p. 18). In RP15’s context, “all indicators of teacher professional development and careers are focused on research.” RP3 explains that innovative practice is typically rewarded in high schools, where personal development is encouraged, monitored and supported; and promotion is tied to training. Conversely,

once you get into a university, you are not obliged to have any kind of training, and so you do your course like business as usual, and you do research, and innovative teaching is not encouraged and recognized to the extent that is in high schools.

Academic faculty are often painfully aware of power differentials and prestige, where focus on education at the expense of research leads to a deep sense of inferiority:

"The sense of being deemed to be ‘less than an academic’, when individuals are highly qualified subject experts and passionately dedicated to student education, is deeply felt" (Fung & Gordon, 2016, p. 28). RP9 voices a similar concern: “Sometimes you have to do it [teaching], but it’s not valued. You don’t have to change to get promoted” (RP9). RP4 believes her colleagues are hard-working and dedicated individuals, but they are increasingly pressured by research and rankings, burdens driving young academics to seek work in research institutes and private organizations: “Whatever I do in my teaching is not going to be acknowledged, and nobody is going to notice it except my students, hopefully.” RP13 invokes the proposed website in relation to increased valuation of teaching:

There might be a wonderful resource there, but how do you motivate them, to give their time to that and not to something else? ...have teaching awards, recognize teaching and career progression... more than just how many courses you taught, and how many courses you designed, and so on... show more appreciation.

Beyond research and rankings, RP3 suspects that European higher education is suspicious and condescending towards pedagogy, which is typically associated with primary and secondary schooling, while knowledge and content are associated with 'proper' university teaching. More cutting, RP5 observes higher education cultures of hyper-autonomy and general intransigence: "There are individuals and institutions who are kind of resistant to following any kind of rules... all kinds of mechanisms of autonomy within the institution."

SCL is impeded by structural realities. RP17 questions the practicality of SCL within complex ecosystems:

If you imagine the kind of ultimate in student-centered learning, a sort of one-to-one, many possibilities, many teachers, resources, modes of learning, flexibility in that learning ... The complex rules, processes and mechanisms of complex organizations such as universities will never completely disappear, which makes it difficult to flex into change.

RP2 concurs: "It's difficult to steer mammoth universities with long histories and gravitas, governance systems, so that's always a challenge." RP11 is adamant that teachers want to practice SCL, yet lack power:

It's the systems that stand in their way because they are not part of the whole steering system from top to down, so they [students] can only be included by the teachers doing it, but they are limited by the curriculum and guidelines.

EHEA institutions have increasingly devoted more attention and effort to pedagogy, innovation and the implementation of SCL and LOs, in particular. However, much of the work at the institutional level has been grassroots by interested staff and departments, not institutional-wide collaboration supported by leadership (Gaebel & Zhang, 2018). RP10 shares the same worry that SCL requires comprehensive course

redesign, yet this is a responsibility all-too-often foisted upon faculty: “You really need to have a collective action for the course design. I don’t see many institutions that have a holistic take on these kinds of approaches.”

Communication breakdown is not limited to external systems. RP10 is amazed by how little people know beyond their own roles and responsibilities: “They interpret it as my department, my discipline, my program They have narrow understandings of how the university actually works.” RP3 relates the story of administrators that do not see any relationship between SCL, accreditation and quality insurance; and faculty that associate SCL exclusively with pedagogy but do not appreciate complex ecosystems. RP8 believes that policy dissipation represents a system-wide failure owing in part to sheer laziness: “There is some misalignment at all sorts of levels”. Within the higher education institutions, individual instructors, course designers and program coordinators who “don’t read the European documents.”

Individual (Faculty)

Faculty commitment is essential. Research has shown however that change to teaching practice is contingent upon a wide range of factors (Entwistle, 2003; Kember, 2009; Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015). RPs describe faculty as dedicated and hard-working people. RP11, for instance, is positive about faculty at her university as they involve students in research projects, with many faculty keen to innovate despite the challenge of class sizes that go into the hundreds.

Positive observations are counterposed by a more unflattering picture. RP3 describes laziness and apathy. Even when training opportunities are offered, faculty often do not attend unless it’s mandatory:

Faculty and managers are even lazier than students in the sense that what they want is a two-hour training on student-centered learning with a coffee break [laughs]...

RP6 relates the story of a conference workshop in which faculty struggled to break from entrenched mindsets. RP6 describes how colleagues were unwilling to get up from their chairs for an SCL modeling activity at an international conference workshop even though attendees from other countries were fully participating: “My colleagues were worse than students!” RP6 reasons that people need either push or support: “I think people might use that [the website] if they are pushed or accompanied or guided through this material you are preparing.”

More than 25 years ago Bonwell and Eison (1991) identified faculty excuses for avoiding SCL: workload, class size, lack of resources, student resistance, traditional views, fear of student reaction, loss of control, and lack of skills or self-confidence. Many of these issues continue to apply today. Faculty are conservative, fearful and lack confidence:

They’re not fond of experimenting with students, and they don’t know if students might like it or not. I would also say they are also concerned about evaluations, of course, because if your course is not evaluated very well, it might not be taken up the next year, so the reforms depend on the instructor mainly. And some instructors like myself try to implement student-centered learning approaches in their classroom, but it’s not so common. (RP12).

RP8 adduces that when students complain about active learning, insecure faculty may revert to passive learning formats such as lecturing. Christensen and Eyring (2011) fault defensive and self-serving faculty reluctant to give up power or be seen pandering to student whims. RP1 communicates a bleak view of academia unaccustomed to accountability and constructive criticism: “In general, I mean, it’s a

very specialized sector with lot of people who think they know what they're doing and don't want to be harassed and told what to do." RPs suggest general intransigence:

You have to convince people to change their way of doing things, and that's not easy, so it's a very personal thing here. It's about changing the individual, and the way the individual acts. It's quite difficult. (RP14)

RP5 fears the website will not be interesting to anyone who is not already interested:

"I mean, there might be the case of people who will hear about this and find a website and click on it, but I mean, there are still people who refuse the whole idea."

In other cases, it is difficult to separate unfavorable dispositions from legitimate constraints:

You might already have the course done, and you might think, "oh, I don't have the time for this... maybe it's not the best, but it's done, and why should I worry about this when I can work on something else," so I don't think there's intrinsic motivation there. (RP6)

Tenenbaum (1959) surmised what may be a truism of the human condition: "We are loath to give up the old. The oldest bolstered by tradition, authority and respectability; and we ourselves are its product" (p. 328). In lieu of educational research (Hattie, 2012; Weimer, 2013) or lacking a clear and compelling reason to alter practice, many experienced academic faculty teach in a routine and ritualized manner, unable or unwilling to reconcile espoused theory with 'theory-in-use' (Argyris, 2002). The upshot is that teaching faculty often cling to long-established routines by "doing what they've been doing for the past 50 years" (RP3). RP8 illustrates:

You take one course that's maybe three weeks or something... Of course, that's

very small compared to your own experiences over years and years, so trying to change how people think, what they do, takes time.

RPs connect faculty age with an unwillingness to embrace innovation:

There are also some teachers... I don't know how to make it politically correct, but some old teachers, who are not so open, not equal to students, to a partnership with them. It's very hard for a teacher who has been teaching for 30 years to change suddenly. (RP13)

RP3 connects a growing academic brain drain to slow uptake of SCL by older faculty more resistant to innovation and change. Prefacing his observation with a joke that higher education is one of two European institutions least amenable to change, the other being the church, RP3 attributes resistance in part to aging faculty unwilling to change practice or give up authority: "It's unlikely they [professors] will change anything in their pedagogy and practices, and they are probably not ready to give up their authority."

Individual beliefs or an institutional epistemic climate that does not support constructivist epistemology can hamper SCL uptake. RP12 speculates that SCL is halfheartedly implemented because instructors "do not believe in the concept ... the instructor is the sage on the stage and does most of the work and lectures." RP12 acknowledges: "This is a shift in thinking, in philosophy. Not all faculty and students share this epistemology, which is, of course, constructivist."

SCL will meet resistance if its perceived to be irrelevant, a bureaucratic imposition, what academics consider entitlement to academic freedom, a conflict magnified when professional learning is viewed primarily as compliance (ESU/EI, 2010a) by specialized 'experts' equipped with tools and approaches that have been

legitimized by institutional leadership, resulting in symbolic control and unequal participation by those faculty excluded from the process (Stavrou, 2016). RP14 warns, “otherwise you just have some policies forced down someone’s throat, and they don’t understand it. They don’t feel part of it. They will find a way to just check boxes” [laughs]. The corrosion of traditional academic values as part of a transition to Taylorist mass-production of knowledge (Watermeyer, 2016) figures into what Giroux (2011) calls “the onslaught of a merciless economic Darwinism and theatre of cruelty that has emerged since the 1980s, the historical legacy of the university as a public good no longer” (p. 147). Nearly 100 UK academics signed a petition lambasting outdated micromanagement practices engineered by overpaid institutional management and management consultants that has effectively stifled creativity and critical thought, further exacerbating the de-professionalization and demoralization of academic faculty and staff (Letters, 2015, July 6),

with “obedient” students expecting, and even demanding, hoop-jumping, box-ticking and bean-counting, often terrified by anything new, different, or difficult. Managerial surveys then “measure” their consumer “satisfaction” ... for what is there left to learn, when you already know it in order to demand it?. (para. 3)

Against this backdrop, SCL policy communicates a message that improvement lies in foregrounding student needs. RP10 suggests that SCL is perceived by some as a box-tick exercise: “They don’t really care where it came from, it’s just a policy that needs to be implemented as part of the European framework.” Trying to convince faculty to change their pedagogy has backfired to some extent, which is unfortunate because SCL is a complex and context sensitive educational model that requires shared understanding among internal and external stakeholders (Gaebel & Zhang,

2018):

Without denying the differences between higher education systems and among institutions, it is probably fair to say that the European reform push on learning outcomes and student-centred learning could have been better communicated, and their implementation better supported and more collaboratively organised. This would have made it easier for the sector to link them to the existing and ongoing bottom-up approaches to innovate and transform learning and teaching. (p. 55)

RP2 invokes faculty that take autonomy for granted: “In my university, you don’t tell academics to do anything. You need to make them think it was their idea.” RP4 alludes to stakeholders that seek value and purpose, not bureaucracy:

I mean, it’s really difficult to implement something if the people at the university don’t see the purpose of it, the usefulness of it. Somebody told you that you have to do this. It’s not just ticking the boxes; it’s also wanting to be part of something that’s going on in the world.

Teaching and learning are a collective process and responsibility; meaningful and significant changes to learning and teaching require a careful synergy of top-down and bottom-up guidance and support support (Gaebel & Zhang, 2018). On one hand, RPs urge universities to appeal to individual motivation by connecting SCL to faculty concerns and interests, creating a sense of value and purpose. On the other hand, RPs say that faculty need to be confronted - both reward and punish are necessary to enact change, the metaphorical ‘carrot/stick’. RP3 illustrates with the story of faculty grudgingly roped into curriculum work: “This was the stick not the carrot, but it was an understanding that we can do it, and there are people who know how to do it, so let’s just start cooperating.” Asked to clarify her statement that: “You have to confront them,” RP10 explains (in relation to the website prototype):

I don’t think they would click on anything else, that’s the point! [Laughs]. I

think people will stay in their comfort zone unless they are exposed to something else. If I am an administrator, what other people am I dependent on to solve my problem? ...try to create some sort of understanding for what other parties think of the concept.

Like the 'chicken or the egg' causality dilemma, the issue of hyper-autonomy challenges us to consider the extent to which faculty are naturally autonomous people or simply part of a larger cultural milieu that reinforces independent thinking. One person's bureaucracy may be another person's vision of organizational efficiency. Either way, where should the line be drawn? How do higher education institutions balance push against pull? Is aversion to organizational structure and functioning an imagined individual issue, or a legitimate response to repressive systems that need overhaul? There is an obvious parallel here with the humanistic question of pushing students to embrace SCL. Do faculty need to be pushed as well?

Faculty resist new approaches to teaching and learning for practical and professional reasons. For example, they may lack pedagogic training (Fry, Ketteridge, & Marshall, 2008). RP7 speculates that SCL has been implemented with limited success because "this is a major paradigm shift in teaching, and not many people have actually operated within this paradigm shift. I mean, they've done stuff on the surface." RP9 agrees: If you want to understand student-centered learning, you need to really challenge yourself and try to think out-of-the-box, that kind of idea." Faculty may understandably feel overwhelmed or intimidated by the complex reconfiguration of course design, supporting structures, scaffolding of participatory knowledge construction, and fostering collaborative learning (Hoidn, 2016).

There is no universal constructivist teaching formula, and the multidimensional

nature of goals and purposes that characterize most learning contexts fuels the constructivist debate (Hoidn, 2016). RP8 suspects that some faculty misunderstand SCL as a prescription:

I think it can be misunderstood. We are starting to see that in our courses. You're not allowed to lecture, but for me, student-centered learning is a way of thinking, a way of teaching and learning rather than a recipe of how to do things. You need a variation of teaching and learning methods.

RPs acknowledge that evidence is incomplete, leading to contradictions between theory and practice. RP12 personally believes in the constructivist foundations of SCL - putting students at the center, engaging and supporting them in deep learning.

RP12 acknowledges, however, that constructivist approaches remain contested:

"Research still hasn't figured out how this guidance should look like, how one could combine parts of discovery-based with guidance or lecturing from the instructor, so opinion is divided on this matter." Asked to develop her suggestion that SCL would gain better traction if issues and limitations were acknowledged, RP12 reaffirms the existence of a large body of teaching and learning research, "but it's inconsistent and not all tailored to student-centred learning." RP12 suspects that we need more research, "so people know what it is about. I think this is still not clear. Also, me, I'm trying to understand what research is out there, how can I see better whether the concept is effective or not." RP7 touches on the need for more research from multiple perspectives:

students have written about this, but it's more like a wish list of what universities should do for students to be happy. If you do the same with teachers or school directors, you would probably get the opposite of what students are asking. Perhaps a comparative paper contrasting different stakeholder perspectives might be a way forward.

Disciplinary focus is a factor. RPs describe a craft viewed through disciplinary glasses. In all fairness, most research-intensive universities are historically grounded in the German research model, where allegiance to academic discipline over the institution is a remnant of the mid-19th century Vormärz Era, making it “complicated and very difficult to have university governance structures that can steer, let alone control, the disciplinary activities of the university’s academic staff” (Maassen, 2017, p. 292). Breaching sacred academic territory is a challenge, especially when disciplinary classification and framing regulates how knowledge, skills and dispositions are to be transmitted and acquired (Bertstein, 1971, 2000, cited in McLean, Abbas, & Ashwin, 2013). Asked if the section at the top of the website should provide a single definition, RP13 is cognizant that academia often work in silos:

I don’t know if you can get coherence between, say, a physicist and an economist. I don’t know if you want to aim for coherence, to be honest because if you look at academics, they are more bound by their disciplinary context.

Resistance occurs when stakeholders perceive new practices as less effective in meeting the normative needs, standards and aspirations of what implicitly or explicitly constitutes quality education (Schweisfurth, 2013). For instance, academic faculty may feel pressured to cover content. RP4 explains: “It’s almost impossible to adequately cover the topics and if you don’t cover it, you feel like you betrayed your students.” RP5 expresses concern about losing respect; teachers and administrators afraid of students losing respect when the traditional hierarchy is altered. Apparently, this is true in some cases: “I think there are some students who would take advantage of a situation like that.” RP4 has observed colleagues fearful of changing

approach if it potentially leads to lower end-of-course student evaluations. In other cases, faculty revert to traditional methods after receiving low evaluations. RP3 gives an example of a colleague who won an award for exemplary teaching but admitted that modifying practice was difficult; some students judged her methods as unnecessarily harshly. As time progressed though, others seemed to appreciate a more student-centered approach: “So yes, if you are doing it well, then you might even be a hated teacher but... yeah, because instead of teaching them you ask them to learn.” RP11 finds that personally connecting with students facilitates a shift in thinking: “The more you know them, the more you understand, the easier it is to give them power,” the implication being that the further removed you are from the classroom, the less you understand the concept of SCL.

Individual (Students)

SCL requires student commitment. Research shows however that student involvement, not unlike faculty acceptance, is influenced by a wide range of factors (Entwistle, 2018). RPs note the importance of tailoring SCL to learner readiness and motivation. RP4 explains how some students are open to new approaches, “and then you have others who say, you know, let’s make it a smooth path through here, it’s easy as possible... I really need to start earning some money”. Learner readiness has direct implications for those on the front line. RP1 believes it is important for students to learn how to make responsible choices, “what they choose to do and choose not to do.” RP1 qualifies by adding: “We can’t put too much responsibility... there’s still an element of guidance that absolutely needs to be there for them to make informed decisions.” Key EHEA documents explicitly tie SCL to humanist ideals

of empowerment and constructivist learning theory emphasizing active engagement (Chapter 2). Constructionism is based on presumption that provided scaffolding and empowerment, students will use cognitive dissonance as a learning opportunity and seize learning opportunities to pursue individual learning paths and become responsible, self-regulated learning who favor challenge and deep approaches to learning (Bransford et al., 2000; Land, Hannafin, & Oliver, 2012). However, students may enter university intrinsically motivated, utilizing deep approaches to learning, but as exams approach, they become more instrumentally motivated, adopting surface learning approaches (Baeten et al., 2016; Entwistle, 2000). RP4 finds that not all students are interested in the kind of deep engagement associated with SCL, while other students appreciate SCL when they see value and purpose:

...and you can see that so many of them are really interested to be highly engaged. I mean they're calling out for that kind of ideology, but it has to be meaningful, you know. Why would you spend all this time if it doesn't make a difference in your life?

Students may believe that SCL is a reduced form of educational quality (ESU/EI, 2010a; Wiemer, 2013), concerns voiced more than 20 years ago when students complained about 1) paying to be taught, not to teach, 2) peers who do not carry their weight on projects, and 3) wasting time explaining things to slower project members (Felder & Brent, 1996). The authors warned:

The enthusiast may be in for a rude shock ... although the promised benefits are real, they are neither immediate or automatic Some students view the approach as a threat or as some kind of game, and a few may become sullen or hostile when they finally have no choice about playing. (p. 43)

RP10 relates that students are skeptical about SCL because they see it as unproductive, lending support to extant research findings that students may prefer

lectures over active learning strategies for perfectly logical reasons (Cullen, Harris, Hill, & Weimer, 2012): “Now I am at University, and I expect a lecture. I expect a professor in his wisdom to just fill me up with knowledge... the big professor coming to tell us something important.”

Students may resist change if that change requires a change of routine or real/perceived increase of responsibility and workload. Asch (1951) published an excerpt from a student who expressed opposition to non-directive teaching (SCL) at the start of the semester. Commenting on the “vagueness in the discussion,” the student concludes:

My earlier skepticism toward the innovation was, I think, justified, when viewed in the light of thirteen years of the former mode of teaching. I never regarded the lecture-note taking scheme very highly so I gradually became a member of the herd. (pp. 22-23)

Writing about the “limitations and inadequacies” of “a new technique [which] starts off with a handicap,” Tenenbaum (1959, p. 302) describes the chaos and student frustration of a totally unstructured format, “this atmosphere of freedom, something for which they had not bargained and for which they were not prepared” (p. 287). RP12 illustrates in the present day:

They have kind of teacher-centered expectations... . Also, you might have many surface learners and not so many deep learners because also the pressures of the Bologna Process, and the curriculum reform, so you have to take many courses, so many examinations, and some students might have bad experiences.

RP5 illustrates with the example of a large lecture course in which the teacher introduced new methodology by offering students a choice of books to read in preparation for an exam. Most students felt overwhelmed and challenged by the

idea of going to the library and choosing three books on their own:

They have to get used to it. I think it's not so much a refusal but a confusion: "Oh, my goodness, there is choice. There is not somebody telling us what to do," and they have to learn to deal with that. I mean, after 12 years of learning in a European school system, they are not used to choice.

Students may possess naïve understanding of effective learning strategies, or they may simply opt for minimal effort and apathy (Saele, Dahl, Friborg, & Sørli, 2017). Asked to reflect how the website might embody student perspectives vis-a-vis SCL, RP5 doubts that many students would use the website: "There might be some other students who end up on the website because they get lost on the internet." SM1 is also less than optimistic about student involvement: "I would definitely not try to target any Joe Schmo student. That's so hard to do, to get students to engage in their academic life, unfortunately."

Innovation

Adoption of innovation occurs more rapidly and comprehensively when the intervention is perceived to be relatively straightforward, readily observable and clearly advantageous (Chor, et al., 2015). This is not the case with SCL. Substantiating extant research, RPs are unanimous in their verdict that SCL is hampered by a lack of shared understanding. Asked if EHEA stakeholders are on the same page, RP8 expresses a general view by laughing and saying: "No!".

RP5 sees variance in understanding as a contextual issue that varies by country and institution. RP13 illustrates by explaining that SCL is grounded in Western philosophy and research: "Maybe in the British or English-speaking countries where the Anglo Saxon came on the agenda early in the 1990s, people know what you're

talking about.” RP13 refers to the fact that beginning in the early 1990s, bolstered by support from global organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, SCL spread globally, especially to the developing world, where the construct is sold along three dominant reform policy narratives: cognition, preparation and emancipation (Schweisfurth, 2013).

Theme 1 addressed paradigmatic tensions related to constructivism as a theoretical cornerstone. RP12 touches on this issue with assessment that extant research “is kind of scattered because student-centred learning is not clearly defined... what exactly does it mean? What are the key characteristics? People don’t really know it can be lecturing.” Faculty mistakenly assume that SCL is only group work and student presentations: “It’s important to understand that student-centred learning does not necessarily mean that lecturing does not play any part or that the teacher is not needed anymore” (RP12). This poses a very real dilemma for the average university teacher - Is lecturing wrong? What about a lecture followed by a group discussion? A project? Two projects? How much control over the project/s should students be given? Assessment? At what point does ‘teacher-centred’ end and SCL begin?

As noted in Chapter 2, part of the problem lies with the intervention itself, a complex and a broadly defined amalgam of ideas rooted, but also a decision by the EHEA to link SCL with Bologna tools such as mobility, ECTS, qualification frameworks and LOs. Bologna reforms began as structural concerns focused on issues such as cooperation and mobility. SCL, LOs and other tools were introduced over time by educational ministers keen to develop additional modes of accountability and

indicators for success, decisions that put pressure on institutions to effectively and meaningfully translate policy into practice (Gaebel & Zhang, 2018). Aside from educational developers, however, most stakeholders lacked in-depth understanding of Bologna tools as pedagogical concepts: "They had to face implications that learning outcomes and student-centered learning how or when properly (not just pro-forma) implemented" (p. 34).

A one-size-fits-all approach to contextual sensitivity is laudable; however, lack of shared institutional understanding hampers uptake. Even when institutions have included SCL as part of internal quality assurance, a formalized definition is often lacking (Gover & Loukkola, 2018). Birtwistle, Brown and Wagenaar (2016) determine that a tapestry of meaning owing to cultural/historical influences and varied usage by the EHEA has given rise to "confusion, lack of clarity, lack of determination to join the paradigm shift and therefore lack of consistency" (p. 222). For instance, it is notable that RPs speak of SCL primarily in terms of pedagogy; they do not associate the concept with Bologna tools. In fact, only two RPs referred to a specific Bologna tool - LOs - in conjunction with SCL, suggesting that even for knowledgeable EHEA higher education professionals, the broad umbrella of SCL as described by the EHEA is not widely comprehended:

They may come up with this idea of learning outcomes, but all the other ideas of active roles of students ... this more partnership way of working together through a course with students, that is something that might come up very rarely. (RP5)

Given the construct's multifaceted DNA comprising assorted philosophical, theoretical and political threads, lack of clarity is not entirely surprising. Accordingly,

throughout the interviews I tried to understand why such a fundamental problem persists. It is difficult to imagine how an educational reform initiative can readily gain traction if the core people involved are not sure what it means. RP11 postulates that multi-layered contexts do not adequately communicate:

There are so many different levels within the education system, from the classroom, to the institution, to the regional, to the national, to the supranational level, and so on. All these levels you have a different understanding of the concept.

RP1 ties definitional variance to a disconnect between a conceptualization of policy and implementation of that policy:

I mean were not all talking the same language when you say student-centred learning. You see that quite clearly in the ministerial communications from the Bologna Process, a lot of really pretty words. I love them to death, but it's hard to put that into practice.

It does not come as a surprise that at least one RP feels that as a lexical item, SCL holds intuitive appeal: "I think there is some attractiveness about the concept. It's sort of like the term 'quality'. Everyone is in favor of quality, but it has very different meanings" (RP10), an observation that recalls work of Clapham, Vickers and Eldridge (2016), who investigated the use of the term 'outstanding' in the English state education sector. Expanding on the work of Michel Foucault, Stephen Ball and others, the authors find that while no one disagreed with the premise, "difficulties arose when informants were asked to define what 'outstanding' actually was" (p. 769). RP3 feels that from a purely terminological standpoint, 'learning' in SCL confuses and restricts understanding, affirming Taylor's (2013) assessment that: "It is now an approach that is so commonplace that few have questioned its underpinning theory or meaning, its continuing relevance or its impact on practice: "Its colloquial

interpretations may not be enough to clearly articulate what programs aim to achieve and may lead to practices or student expectations that are counter to effective learning ” (p. 40). RP7 believes the definition problem lies in conflation of terminology and pedagogical origins. RP7 explains that SCL is more commonly referred to as ‘learner-centred teaching’ within the field of educational psychology, a philosophy that evolved alongside research on teaching and learning - the limitations of lecturing, and so on, making the term

overly recursive and quite self-centered. It might defeat the whole purpose of what we’re after here. This also prevents them becoming student obsessed, which happens in some cases if we don’t clarify the parameters of what exactly happens here.

Echoing RP7’s perspective, RP17 is dubious:

Whilst it has all sorts of attractions, it could take us off into a not particularly helpful direction. It conjures up the idea of students in a room, and somehow there is a light shining on that person, and all the attention is on that person, and for me that’s not what the depths of good education are really about.

RP concerns here epitomize Biesta’s (2012) notion of ‘learnification’. As with Macfarlane’s (2015) ‘learnerism’, discussed in the literature review, learnification is a manifestation of neoliberal imperatives underpinning reform agendas such as SCL. Galvanized by constructivist learning theory, SCL is a mistaken shift in focus from purpose, content and relationships to process, prescription and the individual student, “where the teacher only exists as a facilitator of otherwise ‘autonomous’ learning processes” (Biesta, 2016, p. 375). Biesta argues:

the suggestion that we can overcome this problem by focusing on students and their learning—understood as acts of interpretation and comprehension—fails, because such acts of interpretation and comprehension have an egological structure that emanates from the self and returns to the

self, even if this occurs ‘via’ the world. (p. 376)

RP16 makes a persuasive argument that SCL is fundamentally flawed as a prescriptive educational fix that overrides contextually bound dialogue and intellectual engagement:

It creates an atmosphere of where all we need to do is collect enough bright ideas and apply them rather than recognizing the principles are easy, but it’s how that plays out in a particular context in relation to particular students in relation to particular knowledge, positioning these things as difficult, collective intellectual problems to solve. That’s where the difficulty lies, and you’re always going to have local answers to those problems. You’re never going to have *the* theory of instruction that solves all of our problems.

RP16 argues that higher education is too complex for prescribed solutions, a major theme to which discussion returns in Chapter 5:

Often people within these debates people worry about reinventing the wheel, but my view is that people need to reinvent the wheel. They need to reinvent things to come to an understanding about why this is a good way of doing ... not expecting them to take that on trust as the best way of doing something.

Conflation of SCL with consumerism, a paradigmatic tension discussed at length in the literature review, is a dominant theme in the data set. To some, SCL may be a welcome antidote to classical teacher-centred approaches. For others, SCL may be written off as flavor of the month; worse, the idea represents customer service in the hallowed halls. RP10 theorizes: “They understand it as a fancy concept without understanding the theoretical and philosophical perspectives underpinning it. As it’s traveled around, it’s gained different interpretations, for example, the market orientation”. For RP10, higher education institutions are co-opting SCL to drive profits through market-based approaches, in turn, putting key stakeholder into positions for which they are ill prepared:

We see universities that are desperate to attract students, and they are really underplaying the responsibility and work that they are expecting from the students. I think universities need to be honest about the study programs, so I think it can be a challenge for both parties. If this is going to happen, then they are in for a surprise [laughs].

Faced with cuts in government funding over the years, UK universities have responded in part by diverting large sums of money away from faculty salaries and teaching resources to marketing, luxury student accommodation, and questionable real estate acquisitions. According to The Guardian: “The new emphasis on student experience was overdue and welcome; it gave undergraduates power and voice. But the perverse consequences of the marketisation process have become familiar” (“Editorial,” 2019, November 25, para. 4). RP6 expresses this tension between SCL values and neoliberal orientations:

I don’t think these are the same thing. In one case, you are more worried about customer satisfaction. In the other case, you are worried about making them more responsible, more engaged in society, more engaged in what they learn.

RP1 is unequivocal in assessment that consumerism is inappropriate: “Unfortunately, students are not always the best ones to judge what they need... in a market model... is not going to be beneficial for student-centred learning because students need that guidance.” Asked to clarify her stance on a possible tension between a customer service orientation and forcing students to take responsibility, RP9 replies that faculty and institutions have a responsibility to push students, ideally through curriculum design: “It’s important to understand that it’s not about treating students like customers. It’s not about just students taking.” RP10 agrees that institutions and faculty are responsible for pushing students to take responsibility for their learning.

The ESU (European Students' Union, 2015) acknowledges the consumerist tension in their statement that bringing students on board as genuine partners and co-producers of knowledge requires "challenging the growing perception of students as customers to be provided 'customer service' that threatens the shift towards student-centred learning" (p. 1). Three years later, the ESU repeats this caveat: "SCL is not about satisfying the immediate demands of the student body, but truly empowering students become competent and autonomous learners" (European Students' Union, 2018, p. 1). Geven and Attard (2012), SCL proponents, join the chorus in claiming that institutions and academic faculty are responsible for creating engaging and flexible learning environments," (p. 169) but students must participate fully and take responsibility for their learning." (p. 168). As noted in discussion under Theme 2, how the ESU or writers such as Geven and Attard would resolve this conflict of interest is less clear, however. RP4 elucidates: "You have members of the [European] Students' Union who say: "Can you broadcast all lectures? We shouldn't have to be there. We should have access to it. It's our right." I think this totally misunderstands student-centred learning." For their part, the ESU simply reiterates an assertion that students must be taken seriously and empowered through the provision of "real choices, autonomy and responsibility in their learning process" (European Students' Union, 2015, p. 1). However, in doing so, the ESU and others reinforce an assumption that autonomy and responsibility are compatible. If making students happy and fulfilled is a central concern, should pedagogy serve that aim, even if that pedagogy is not ostensibly student-centred? Is it wrong for students to prefer a lecture and PowerPoint notes over more demanding activity if the former offers a more expedient approach to succeeding on high-stakes exam, which

facilitates attainment of a degree and a well-paid job upon graduation? Chapter 1 explained how I faced this dilemma many times in my career, the challenge of stimulating the sort of intrinsic learner motivation needed to persist with activity that does not offer immediate tangible benefit for students who have spent their lives in academic environments designed to reinforce instrumental thinking. Findings suggest that RPs also remain uncertain. I pressed this issue with several RPs but failed to locate a consensus. RP3 believes the task of pushing students towards acceptance falls to individual instructors:

In the long run, it's going to be very beneficial to them, so you have to do it properly, and you are only successful if by the end of the story, they feel that "yes, there was a moment when I didn't like... I was taken out of my comfort zone, but now I see the results."

Others are less certain. RP9 emphasizes the importance of context and approach: "It depends on the situation. It's always about student-centred learning; it's just how you do it. Sometimes students need guidance and direction." RP9 stops short of fully committing to a position though, suggesting the bigger picture of SCL has yet to be determined:

That's a tricky question. We can't force them, but we can try to make them motivated. However, if we say forget it, then this won't do any good for the students or the academics, but then there are always students that we can't do anything for, so then what are the values... the big picture behind student-centered learning?

Findings raise important and unresolved questions about SCL as an educational approach grounded in constructivism and humanism. SCL may be flawed as a theory which presumes that students know how to translate a multitude of affordances (Figure 1) into academic success that translate into individual and socioeconomic

success. Klemencic (2017) hones into this tension through argumentation that student engagement is not an appropriate theoretical foundation to SCL because student engagement, as measured by typical institutional surveys, elicits a propensity for a variety of behaviors and experiences relating to academic participation that actually “reveal very little about students’ capabilities to intervene in and influence their learning environments and learning pathways, i.e., student agency, which is what student-centeredness is essentially about” (p. 71). Klemencic argues:

despite ideological congruence of both approaches within liberal educational philosophy. A case is made that theory of student agency presents a better conceptual framework since it captures and highlight elements of autonomy, choice and freedoms, which are the core premises of SCL. These elements are not captured in the behaviorist-orientation of student engagement. (p. 82)

RP9 likens SCL to “a trendy word like student engagement; people use it widely at conferences ... in different situations, but nobody really knows what engagement is.”

As with SCL, indeterminate usage of student engagement fails to address two vital assumptions: with what, and to what extent are students being asked to engage?

(Ashwin & McVitty, 2015). Under-theorization of student engagement and SCL begs a critical question: If the EHEA wants to sell SCL, then do stakeholders deserve to know that paradigmatic tensions are part of the part of the SCL package? My impression is that key stakeholder organizations such as the ESU would fortify their credibility through more balanced literature toning down the hype against the reality of many higher education contexts as expressed by the present research, which significantly mirrors extant research. The ESU and others would acknowledge limitations, paradigmatic tensions and difficult questions, an argument that will be extended in Chapter 5.

A lack of consensus on meaning has implications for stakeholder uptake. Higher education institutions and quality assurance bodies have been tasked with the development of common interpretations, implementation strategies and indicators, yet key stakeholder organizations acknowledge that SCL is “a complex matter that is difficult to integrate into everyday higher education reality” (Eurydice/EACEA, 2012, p. 52). Complexity stems in part from a common refrain that SCL is more than a set of pedagogical strategies; it is a mindset, making operationalization and assessment a challenge (European Students’ Union, 2018). However, pedagogic strategies associated with SCL, such as inquiry-based learning, require considerable planning, patience and commitment (Blessinger & Carfora, 2014). RP12 elaborates:

First, you have to understand what these different parts or characteristics of student-centred learning mean before you understand the whole concept. Then you have the learning and teaching methods or approaches, and then you have the assessment. ... in the background, you have the vision and the philosophy that you have to share; otherwise, you cannot implement this concept. I think this is still too overwhelming. I think this is a huge undertaking and it takes time.

RP17 finds the concept of SCL laudable; however,

the reality to many people who work in a complex organization ... almost too demanding, too much to grapple with [laughs] ... and pay lip service to it, but will kind of gently leave it on one side because to do it in its fullest sense is to put it bluntly, impractical.

SCL conference attendees in Malta relay similar challenges:

[t]here are many processes, which may not be easy to implement. Caring about students entails providing a number of expanding support services ... challenges to institutional management ... transforming and requiring not only a change in mind set but also a lot of resources ... a complex task.... (Valeikiene, 2011, p. 10)

RP9 concludes that SCL is weakly understood and poorly implemented as a result of

the ill-defined nature of SCL. RP14 elucidates:

I've been to many conferences and people say they use student-centered learning, but when you ask them what it means, they say, "well, taking students into account, or let them decide what kind of aims they have." They do not understand the way you would expect them to understand it. (RP14)

RP9 touches on the multi-dimensional, actor-specific nature of the construct:

I think they know, but the understanding is rather weak. It includes very different things and that's the problem because we think about the points from administration, learning, teaching... and this kind of variation makes it difficult to understand what we're talking about.

Lack of common understanding invites the use of proxies. RP7 connects SCL with proxies of student evaluations of teaching:

I'm in favor of this. However, students are students; they are not teachers, so we can ask them about their experiences of learning, but we can't ask them about the qualifications of teaching staff. They would not be equipped to evaluate that.

RP15 suggests the problem relates to a lack of "a common understanding... the indicators to assess what it might be ... in (a Southeast European country), every policymaker grabs everything under the student-centred learning umbrella because it's about everything." Development of indicators for internal and external quality review has been a major stumbling block (Gaebel & Zhang, 2018). RP7 contends that SCL is talked about as the standard for quality learning, "and yet we're not sure what it means, and because we were not necessarily sure what it means, we don't have the right instruments... we use all sorts of things."

Figure 13 depicts key themes informing development of major Theme 2.

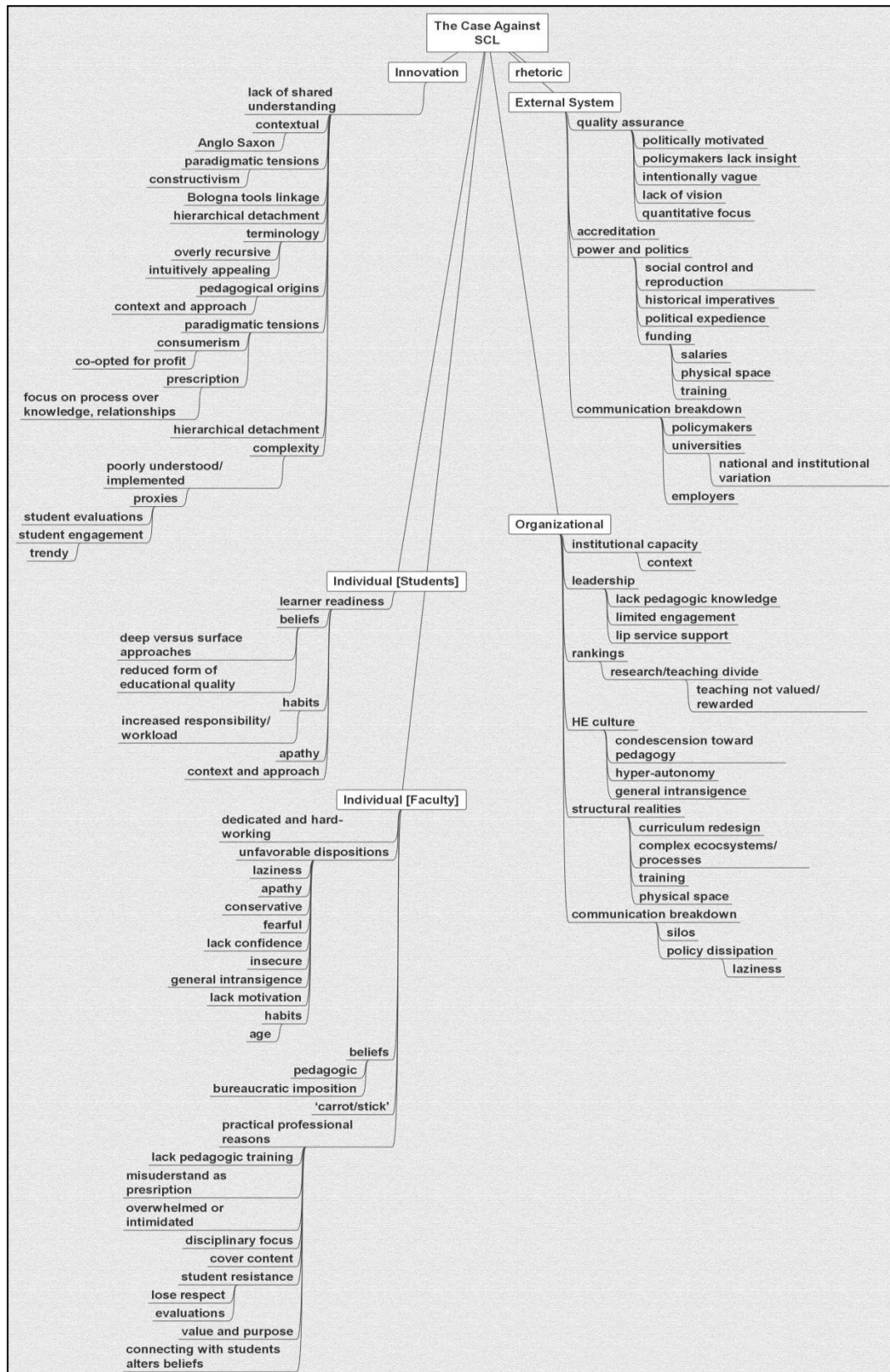


Figure 13. Graphic depiction of key themes informing major Theme 2.

4.4 Theme 3

More complete policy enactment of SCL in the EHEA will require far-reaching change and intervention across all four identified contexts.

The scale of response to a problem is often a good indicator of the scale of the problem. From an evaluative perspective, understanding what needs to happen in to facilitate uptake of SCL policy may generate data needed to address the research question, which critically examines the appropriateness of SCL as a major EHEA reform policy. Asked to explain what could be done, RPs responded with manifold ideas for change, themes synthesized and expressed by Theme 3:

External System

RPs identify better linkage among quality assurance, accreditation, curricula, and quality assurance indicators as one of the most challenging aspect of SCL policy development (Gover & Loukkola, 2018). RP14 would formalize SCL as part of quality assurance, while RP3 reasons that SCL is already evident in criteria such as student-teacher ratios and the percentage of international students, a form of SCL; however, more specific teaching criteria must be translated as indicators: “Right now, all the rankings are focused on research and money that is brought in ... Noble prize winners ... fund-raising. Until now they don’t pay attention to student-centered learning.” RP4 echoes a view that SCL would be more effectively implemented if formalized as part of rankings, accreditation and quality assurance processes. RP15 believes universities and national educational ministries in her context are motivated by decreased student enrollment to develop higher education pedagogy. RP15 feels the proposed website has potential to impact policy by addressing a lack of clearly

defined quality assurance indicators: “There are not enough practical examples. I think the site might have a greater impact on the policy level because there is some type of will there.” The ESU acknowledges that operationalization of the concept may be hampering integration into quality assurance, making the development of measurable indices key, “without losing sensitivity for institutional context and diversity of students” (European Students’ Union, 2018, p. 8). RP17 agrees: “To have it as a general goal without having specific steppingstones and examples obviously makes it a bit more limited.”

Fully functional and effective institutional quality assurance systems and quality cultures require the participation of key institutional stakeholders (Gover & Loukkola, 2018). RP10 stresses the importance of national education ministries along with quality assurance agencies: “all those semi-autonomous bodies that do not see student-centered learning as their responsibility.” RP12 sees an opportunity for collaborative partnerships and research coalitions. RPs call for higher education institutions to better involve employers as well as local and national politicians. RP10 feels these entities need to help institutions through funding and “by showing them how to implement SCL.” RPs think a website should target policymakers. In relation to a website, RP4 reasons

the internet is already chock-a-block with pedagogic resources, and so, I think it’s the policymakers, the government, those that have a leadership role but need to be the most supported doing that. I mean, they’re the most influential people, the ones with the money.

To address the “third mission” of institutions, RP5 would also target policymakers:

“We need new ways of teaching these skills. Policymakers should be pressured to

spend funding on student-centered learning so that students can learn how to solve problems.” RP1 is more skeptical: “I think that working on the Brussels level has already been done. The very centralized level is already in place. The work is to get it to trickle down.” European higher education institutions have failed to genuinely involve students in quality assurance policy processes and procedures (Logermann & Leisyte, 2015). RP14 stresses the importance of determining what SCL looks like in practice, measures of impact beyond inputs and processes – for example, genuinely taking student perspectives into account, not simply “because you have included a student in some committee, and so you can just tick the box but without looking if something has changed.”

Organizational

RPs highlight the role of institutional leadership. The highly devolved nature of many research-intensive universities makes consistent and accurate communication a challenge (Fung & Gordon, 2016). Departmental and disciplinary leaders are often positioned to support or contradict messaging: “local messages and myths can have a strong hold” (p. 19). RP10 underscores crucial management involvement: “This is not about the individual teacher trying to implement something from the bottom-up; it’s really an organizational effort.” Leadership faces the tension of balancing continuous change in the form of new practices, procedures and policies against a reality that real change is often difficult to successfully initiate and manage, a balancing act that requires a capacity to implement and support not only planned change but also the vision and willingness to support and implement emergent change (Bess & Dee, 2012). RP9 believes that real change requires courageous and visionary leadership:

I think we need more brave people, people who say, you know, I don't care, let's drop this university down 100 points in the research area. It's going to take five years, and we're going to do this, and were going to see what it takes.

Davis, Dent and Wharff (2015) draw on complexity theory to formulate a 'systems thinking leadership' framework that foregrounds collaboration. In the same spirit, RP4 couples improved implementation with leadership commitment, dialogue, and a focus on success: "You have to keep hammering and hammering. You have to listen to student voices, and you have to highlight things that work well, success stories." The highly devolved nature of many research-intensive universities makes consistent and accurate communication a challenge (Fung & Gordon, 2016). RP17 concedes that change takes time: "If you've got a big vision that's value based, then you need five and 10-year plans that build up to 20-year plans.

As discussed earlier, balancing research against teaching is a recurrent theme. RP5 contends that institutions must value teaching by linking it to professional and academic advancement: "In the end, it's going to always be the guy with the bigger publication and ranking record than the person with the better teaching evaluations." RP2 proposes that institutions formulate and adopt new ranking systems placing more emphasis on teaching and learning. The European Commission has called for a re-balance of research and high-quality teaching fortified through ongoing and abundant professional learning opportunities that are not discipline specific (European Commission, 2013). Research-intensive universities in the UK, for instance, have responded to internal and external drivers by restructuring policy and practice to create more parity between research and teaching (Fung & Gordon, 2016). From interviews and focus groups in the UK with 10 Russell Group Pro-Vice Chancellors,

heads of departments, academic developers and faculty, the authors believe the “institutional ‘mood music’ concerning the teaching and research divide is becoming more explicitly orientated towards valuing education alongside research” (p. 5). RP13 invokes the proposed website in relation to increased valuation of teaching:

There might be a wonderful resource there, but how do you motivate them, to give their time to that and not to something else? ... have teaching awards, recognize teaching and career progression ... more than just how many courses you taught, and how many courses you designed, and so on ... show more appreciation.

How this plays out in the EHEA is yet to be seen. Academics remain largely committed to the idea of a close link between teaching and research; however, economic pressure, rankings and research specialization has not benefited teaching nearly as much: “research achievements are primarily in the limelight and teaching achievements are hardly registered” (Teichler, 2017, p. 26).

RPs propose various strategies and tactics that universities may enact. General strategies here refers to institutional cultures and approaches. RPs use descriptive terms such as transparency, inclusiveness, sustainability, momentum, flexibility and commitment. To illustrate, RP1 maintains that increased transparency and greater inclusiveness goes hand-in-hand with student involvement in curriculum design and research: “I think that will also make staff more open to hearing feedback from their students ... if you have both mechanisms playing at the same time.” RP6 believes that to meaningfully change pedagogy and assessment, faculty need more institutional support. Frequent reference is made to abandonment of status quo, for example:

You need to change not only individual persons thinking and how they do things, but also the department level, on the group level. It’s a slow process, and even if we had all the time and money in the world that we need to do

this, it's still hard for people to think new thoughts and do things differently.
(RP8)

RP2 applies the maxim that changing a problem requires recognizing the problem: identifying key stakeholders, processes and mechanisms. Along these lines, RP8 believes that faculty are proud of their discipline: "they want to be good, and they want to be strong, and as an administrator you say, 'we are going to focus on this. We are excellent in research but now let's look at the gaps here.'" RPs speak of visibility: "... transferring this mechanism from national to institutional to departmental handbooks ... making processes that you think are important, that are fruitful, making them visible" (RP4). RP9 uses the same term: "Make it visible for the university, for the academics."

RPs propose a variety of specific institutional interventions. Professional development is key. RP12 clarifies that SCL cannot solve all problems, but it can work under certain conditions and for certain purposes, and this requires understanding that "when faculty acquire more expertise, they are better positioned to implement SCL through application of both directed and inquiry-based teaching strategies." RP7 explains how interventions such as workshops require can help participants translate theory into practice: "You get people working at that abstract layer, which is really more about getting people to operationalize the concept by getting people to think about how it can be implemented at various layers within the organization." RP9 also sees an advantage in helping stakeholders move from the strategic to tactical level by connecting theory to practice. RP8 concurs: "Help users make the connection between theory and how to use it. If you only have practical examples, then people don't understand why. I think understanding why is quite important and vice versa."

RP6 advocates a train-the-trainer approach:

If you change the perspective of trainers of teachers, then the things should go in the same way, the same direction. You can't change the policies, but if you don't change the practices, then it remains slogans, marketing.

Chapter 2 dealt with the constructivist challenge of restructuring existing curricula. RP11 fears that SCL requires a complete overhaul of existing pedagogy, a daunting task requiring high degrees of coordination and commitment: "If you really want student centred learning to happen, then you have to look into everything from your syllabus and your course designed to teaching activities that you have in place to forms of assessment." RP1 reasons this would require a comprehensive approach:

I think if you pick and choose what elements of student-centred learning you want to use, it can be detrimental. You need to look holistically at how to implement it. If you just put lectures on YouTube, that's not student-centred learning.

RP12 surmises that more work needs to be done on the distillation of research into curricula redesign. RP16 makes an interesting proposal that he calls "grounded educational design," whereby effective pedagogy is not about "grand innovation," but rather

a design-based exercise of understanding the knowledge that we think is incredibly important and the students we're inviting to engage with that knowledge. It invites a much more thoughtful conversation than student-centred learning processes, or best practice, or teaching excellence. I just don't think they're helpful metaphors for thinking about what teaching actually is.

RP16 underscores the importance of making pedagogic redesign organic and "grounded" in contextual realities, be that a classroom, a department or an institution:

Given your three-dimensional, rich understanding of this aspect of the curriculum, how can you make that available to your students in such a way that the students have the best chance of understanding these materials? That's a difficult process, an ongoing process.

Asked how this might work, RP16 explains that university teaching is a collaborative design process, not an individual performance:

It's not about amazing sessions in which people going around showing what works. That happens on a few occasions, but it happens so rarely that you can't build the system around it. So, focusing on design is how do we design our curricula in a way that takes account of who our students are, that takes account of why we think the knowledge that we're engaging students.

RP16 would make it a cross-disciplinary effort:

Designing a course is more than saying, "okay, well we have to have these things because the student body says we have to have them. We can't have that module, because Jeff's always taught that module. We can't have this here, and within the modules, week one, the Romans, week two, and so on" ... this sort of lists as constituting curriculum design.

RP16's comments parallel Fung (2017), who draws on Gadamer, Weinsheimer and Marshall's (2004) notion of *Verständigung* or "coming to know with someone", underscoring the collective, negotiated nature of knowledge formation. RP16 would start from

a position of building on what already works, and for me, the center of that is how do you promote conversations with people. What are we trying to do when we invite students into conversations about higher education? There is that sense of seeing teaching as a design-based exercise of understanding the knowledge that we think is incredibly important and the students were inviting to engage with that knowledge. Discussions around that is what is crucial.

RP16 contrasts collaborative design and dialogue with formula:

It invites a much more thoughtful conversation than student-centred learning processes ... or best practice, or teaching excellence. I just don't think they're helpful metaphors for thinking about what teaching actually is so you need

to find a way of grounding it in particular curriculum or educational design problems in a way that that leads to these wider questions.

RP16 goes on to invoke Locke's (2014) argument that a New Public Management zeitgeist in which increased productivity expectations and disproportionate financial rewards has led to further segmentation and inequality across the Academy (Teixeira, 2017):

I would have something that promotes these intellectually informed discussions of what they're practically trying to do in their teaching, reinvigorating teaching as an intellectual profession, to really see this as intellectually rigorous, not "oh he's into teaching, that's nice. Well, it's usually for women, but, oh well."

Revising assessment is a key component of redesign. Nearly seventy years ago Asch (1951) addressed the SCL assessment dilemma, where self-evaluation fosters maturity and responsibility; however:

If I provide an atmosphere in which the student can come to make a clear and non-defensive self-evaluation, the locus of evaluation puts the instructor in conflict with prevailing educational practices. These practices place knowledge of subject matter on the highest level as a criterion for grading. (p. 22)

Asch explains that while most of his research experimental group (SCL approach) students performed self-evaluation honestly, others gave themselves unrealistically high marks, leading the author to consider: "In these cases, was an injustice being done to those students' future employers and graduate schools to whom, rightly or wrongly, letter grades signify degree of mastery of traditional subject matter?" (p. 22). Educators continue to struggle today with reconciling SCL against traditional evaluation systems. Expounding on "the tail that wags the dog," RP11 reasons that while classical written and oral assessment is restrictive and prescribed, SCL entails a

high degree of learner control,

but to do this you need a new type of assessment system, and if you allowed students to choose even part of content, it would be difficult to assess, and you would be into a system where you are having to assess competencies, and that is very complicated, difficult when you have 600 students.

RP1 proposes mandatory peer review of teaching:

We peer review research, but teaching has been too much of a private affair, and many teachers will feel disrespected if colleagues talk poorly about their teaching performance, yet when they submit an article, it's seen as fair critique.

RP14 would introduce a combination of incentives and mandatory professional development: "You have policies, and you have resources for teachers."

RPs stress the importance of more resources. RP3, RP8 and RP9 would provide additional funding, incentives and training for teachers and administrators. RP6 notes that changing mindsets requires resources:

best practice examples and tools ... all the stuff that people need to see, to change their thoughts, not only to see the practice but also to understand that doing something different might work. This fear of changing is really an obstacle.

More than funding or quality assurance schemes, RP15 would like to see a dual path career option to incentivize faculty to focus on teaching or research "because there are a lot of teachers who are not involved and research, and they like to teach, so we should encourage this typology in higher education."

Fung and Gordon (2016) propose an institutional checklist for systemic change to evaluate current practice and catalyze change: review and clarification of institutional mission, career structures, academic titles, promotion criteria, professional

development and recognition. RP17 would likewise develop an SCL framework as part of regular program review:

I don't want to reduce something rich to a 'how to', but if there is a 'how to' element to evaluate your current provision against the principles of SCL, then you've got a mechanism and a reason why a given institution or department. So, you can set it up as something like 'how student-centred is your department, your degree?'.

Mirroring extant research that identifies integrated approaches for complex higher educational ecosystems, all RPs believe that increased uptake of SCL necessitates holistic strategies. RP11 articulates a common viewpoint among RPs:

I don't see many institutions that have a holistic take on these kinds of approaches. You have to operate on many different levels It's really an organizational effort, so you really need to develop some sort of organizational response.

Geven and Attard (2012) insist that SCL requires not only institutional commitment but also connection and collaboration with external political, social, educational and economic actors to operationalize and legitimize the approach. The authors argue for a multilevel, holistic approach as well as targeted policy making to enhance capacity sets such as working conditions, career structures, pedagogical support, governance, professional development and support. For students, this means e-learning, library resources, time, counseling, computer facilities, student housing, financial means, student support services, and diversity of assessment. Taylor and McCaig (2014) advise policymakers to develop better quality indicators, provide examples of good practice, consider more expanded views of the purposes and aims of higher education and reward teaching. The ESU (European Students' Union, 2018) argues that holistic and systematic implementation is needed. SCL needs to be more fully

developed, codified and prioritized as part of internal and external quality assurance processes that recognize, reward and nurture innovation in learning and teaching. According to the ESU, reform requires stakeholder commitment and ownership of goals as well as coordination among national policymakers, public authorities, institutions, staff, students, and other stakeholders. Real change cannot be imposed from the top down though; it must be facilitated and enhanced through European level cooperation and national level incentives and resources. Furthermore, SCL is linked to sundry EHEA tools, meaning that advancement will not occur without advancement on these concerns. The 2018 Trends report (Gaebel, & Zhang, 2018) concludes that innovation and transformation occurs at the ground level but depends on institutional, national and European-level support. For example, funding for exchange and collaboration among institutions is needed. Additionally, leadership is key. However, synergy must spring from cooperation and collaboration between leadership and the classroom level. Birtwistle, Brown and Wagenaar (2016) call for more organizational and financial support at national and European levels to include: increased funding, the creation of task forces, communication strategies extolling the benefits of SCL at national and institutional levels, strong institutional leadership, commitment to adopting evidence-informed practice, investment in staff development/structural necessities, more systematic evaluation of progress, adoption of existing effective practice, and loosely-coupled but efficiently organized international staff mobility, mentoring, professional development and informal learning opportunities. Importantly, training must not be viewed as bureaucratic compliance or substandard. Hoidn (2016) makes a case for a paradigm shift at three levels: pedagogical, curricular and cultural. The author posits that SCL “begins in the

classroom ... and requires a change in mindset and behavior on the part of the students and the instructors as key players” (6.2.1 Higher Education Classrooms). This requires students and instructors to become more aware of their own educational beliefs, develop productive classroom dialogue, and balance carefully designed participatory activity. Hoidn challenges higher education institutions to foster SCL through professional development grounded in the scholarship of teaching and learning, while overall “working conditions in higher education institutions must serve to enhance the motivation and capabilities of faculty to teach in a student-centered way and avoid giving raise to individual resistance” (6.2.2 Higher Education Institutions).

Individual (Faculty)

For RP17, the real work is changing faculty hearts and minds, “to get it ... to really understand why this is meaningful to not only the students, but also to themselves [faculty], their research, to their professional linkages and making contribution to the global common good.” RP17 stresses value and purpose:

Once you get into the intellectual and values-based conversation, what the academy is and what we’re trying to do for society, most faculty are quite interested, and if they can see a better way that is still congruent with their intellectual values and principles, then generally speaking they can be won over.

RP14 reinforces value and purpose but concedes there are no guarantees:

Just because you have a website, from a teacher’s point of view, I will use it if I want to change something in my practice. People have a natural motivation to improve themselves as teachers, as practitioners, but that doesn’t mean you would use student-centred learning.

RP17 qualifies that change rubs against hyper-autonomy in the academy:

Certainly, in our sector ... that's not going to change the hearts and minds of the academics, so my modus operandi is to try to start with those conversations about where people are. You have to work through a kind of subtle strategy. You get to a point very early on where everybody kind of thinks it's their idea rather than somebody else, so there's a lot of diplomacy involved in these things.

RP9 concedes that real change takes time and effort:

We know from training and university pedagogy that it takes a lot of time to understand what lies behind the student-centred learning pedagogy. People really need to challenge themselves. It's a huge challenge.

Expanding on this idea, RP16 would like to see faculty take more responsibility:

The sorts of despair filled rhetoric of the neoliberal imposition: "Isn't it dreadful, and the students, oh God, students used to be so good, and now they're rubbish," and, you know, those narratives of decline have always been with us. As a profession, academics have to take more responsibility.

More precisely, RP16 calls for increased intellectual engagement:

If these things are to be questioned ... and people show up at your session, and they sit through your session and go away ... then you can think to yourself, "oh well, brilliant we've introduced X number of people to these ideas; whereas, if you actually ask them to engage, and they don't say anything, then you know they're not actually doing anything with it.

RP7 considers strategies used by his institution's teaching and learning center, where faculty do not keep up with pedagogic research: "You need to begin with individual conceptions of student-centred learning and help them with the literature because many of them will not read literature and have their opinions." RP7 supports an inclusive approach through what he calls "informed consultation": "If you ask people who know nothing about a topic, they will think lots of things. Let's say in scientific terms, out to lunch [laughs]."

Geven and Attard (2012) argue that higher education cannot be student centred

without collaboration and freedom. The authors believe that institutional adoption of SCL must go beyond implementation of Bologna tools, which offer scant practical guidance. Building on Sen's (1999) notion of 'unfreedoms', the authors advocate turning focus to removing restrictions and giving support, where, unshackled from administrative hands, academic faculty and students have genuine freedom to create and evaluate learning environments. RPs similarly warn of turning SCL into a performative measure. In consideration of the proposed website, a number of RPs would include user-generated content in the form of blogs, forums or social networking, which RP5 likens to peer learning, an approach that circumvents performativity: "We are not forced, we are invited, inspired by other people." RP3 speculates that SCL will be most appropriate as a broad framework that foregrounds learning over teaching. RP3 contrasts this with prescriptive guidelines that faculty and administrators would likely interpret as unwanted bureaucracy:

I don't think universities will have a separate student-centered learning policy or regulations. It's more about taking existing policies and regulations, documents, rules and regulations ... going through them and seeing, I don't know, is there anything there, a way to make them more student-centred?

Status quo is held together by complex, dynamic and systemic forces that necessitate intense and sustained counter measures. Reform requires more than introducing the newest policy; it necessitates deep and meaningful change in institutional cultures: "educational reform stands or falls on whether educators, students and other learners find personal meaning in what they are learning and how they are learning" (Fullan, 2016, p. 4). RPs recognize that effective SCL policy implementation requires understanding dominant mores (Klemenčič, 2017). RP13 explains: "If I am a tutor in physics or fine arts in this particular university, what might

that mean to me, to us as a department? Again, that differs from one national setting to another". RP2 relates how participants at educational development courses frequently ask for examples of what works in similar contexts. For instance, faculty in Latvia would be interested in how something works Hungary or Poland rather than the UK or the USA: "If you talk to faculty and you are not starting with content, then they consider you as this generic person who doesn't understand what I'm teaching ... not relevant to my course, to my students."

Innovation

RP12 proposes the formation of a coalition of researchers, practitioners and other key stakeholders to collaboratively identify effective practice that can be tailored to context: "It's not an approach where it's the same for every institution, but there should be some guidelines that are understood correctly, and then you can put some variation in how you really implement it." RP7 cautions however against value-laden exemplars, a point that he ties to multiple perspectives: "It would depend on the vision of the people, and this would determine what best practice is ... if you have a multiplicity of views, you might have a variety of different practices that could be implemented." Using the example of the apartheid Museum in South Africa, where visitors are randomly assigned a black or white ticket that determines viewing experience, RP7 expands on the idea of multiple perspectives:

Students will live this differently than teachers ... the administrators will also live this experience differently In this sense, I think that's what your website can do, by clarifying the concepts, but also having different entry points depending on which stakeholders are interested, by having different examples of what's being done.

RP7 connects multiple perspectives with varying levels of analysis, credibility and

validity:

Higher education is a field that has various levels of analysis: the micro-level of teaching and learning; the meso-level of administration and quality assurance; and the macro political layer. I think you will have no choice but to look at student-centred learning from those various layers, viewpoints, because if you don't, the teaching and learning, the quality assurance people, the political people will say that's very nice, but we can't apply that.

RP7 would create "what anthropologists would call *thick descriptions*":

You could have small boxes essentially describing scenarios that people have put in place, which is very tactical or technical in that regard. You include implementation details, things to be aware of, etc. This might be interesting to do with various stakeholders because then you would be able to bring them all together in relation to one another.

RP10 confirmed the inclusion of multiple entry points for different stakeholders in the subsequent versions of the prototype ('What is student-centred learning?'): "I especially like different ways into the problem. The administrator experience, the faculty member experience, the student experience. That's the way to do it because people come in with different luggage, so to speak." Looking at the website, RP12 later advised the inclusion of separate disciplinary subsections: "It depends whether you have physics or psychology, for example." RP8 relates how course participants in teaching development courses assign more value to disciplinary examples:

Course participants are like, "yeah, we know how to do this from teacher training, but I teach physics, and you can't discuss this, its facts." And if you have a concrete example of a discussion in a physics class, they might be like, "oh look here, this is quite useful."

RP12 also felt that 'Real Life Examples' should include other countries and continents:

"What about Asia? I mean, these are different international contexts. They have a very good education system overall, so that should be included ... China also ...

Singapore also ... Japan and countries like that.”

RPs introduce another dose of reality with assessment that should the research and the website prove relevant, practical and inspirational, it may be unrealistic to expect a website to effect change. I asked four RPs to estimate the percentage of stakeholders that might be interested enough to spend time on the proposed website. All four RPs estimate the same low figure of 30 to 40%, at best. RP11 does not believe that a website will appeal to many stakeholders beyond faculty, program-level coordinators or mid-level administrators: “How do you get people to look at the website, make a click, that’s difficult.” RP6 is also skeptical about reaching decision-makers: “You need to address other ways, too. I mean, a website is not enough for them.” Providing information or exemplars may therefore have little impact on furthering an initiative that requires specific strategies and systemic change by stakeholders with a weak appetite for engagement.

Legitimacy is a recurring theme. RP4 speculates the website should appeal to the most powerful representative for each group: “For example, if you want to appeal to researchers, then you go to a conference. For policymakers, you would go to the OECD ... give them some sort of stake or co-ownership.” RP11 apprises that policymakers and high-level administrators may have little interest in the website regardless of quality: “policymakers only listen to people with a high status. You need to have a really big cap on. If you just approach them as yourself is not enough.” RP11 relates his experience as the head of a major European university research project, where policymakers showed little interested until he organized a public relations event with a recognized journalist: “The politicians needed the fanfare and

some kind of light on them, so the big question for me would be how to get access to these people. You use websites when you need them, but I try to avoid them [laughs]". SME3 explains how the website needs external endorsement: "They need some form of authority that carries the badge of the European Union, some accreditation agency that would give it extra gravitas, extra weight." SME3 links a sense of being overwhelmed to trust and legitimacy:

They want to meet somebody who went to a training and said that it's useful. For me the first question is why would they watch that video at all? They don't have time to look for videos; someone needs to recommend that: "there's this wonderful video... and who's that person? And why?" That's where trust comes in.

SME2 describes a situation in which faculty seek external approval at training workshops:

and from someone who is not from your own country. You know, somebody senior or at least old [laughs]. It's like you need an external authority who will come, who would advise you, and no more than two days.

SME1 ties legitimacy to trust:

It's very difficult to say, "hey, just listen a little bit, to disregard what you teach and let's just talk. Maybe we can help you, maybe we can offer you something which is very much related to your course," but how is that done. How do they start listening?

SME4 ties context to legitimacy by arguing that classroom teaching is specific, and best practice examples from foreign contexts are often not perceived as relevant:

"it's difficult... If you post a website about how to do this, and it's a foreign website, and they're going like "yeah, yeah, that's not how it's done in my field, it's just not my discipline." SME9 notes the importance of legitimacy in her recommendation of less policy and more research on the prototype: "I would somehow emphasize these

pages are built on research carried out in the field or something. More academics interested in doing research would see this kind of page, and they would take this page more seriously.” SME4 stipulates that a blog format on the website could be effective if the contributors “are somebody at their own level, somebody who they admire, kind of respect.” SME13 fears the website will only thrive with the support of influential actors: “You should contact somebody in the European commission. Then it might cascade down to institutions. I think otherwise it would be difficult for you to reach institutions in a way that would catch their attention.”

RP11 pulls back the lens with summation that societal and political change is necessary:

I don’t think the website is good tool for changing the whole system. Websites can provide some utility, but “change happens when you interact with people in constructive dialogue, so you really need to have people on the ground that can push this forward.

RP16 also thinks big, addressing “a question that has been largely ignored”:

How do we create systems for teaching and learning rather than for institutions? You want to do it in a way that wouldn’t look like the new broom coming in and saying: “Oh, that’s all wrong. You’ve been doing it wrong for years. If only you had been doing it my way, things would be brilliant.”

RP11 and RP16’s thoughts on dialogue and the bigger picture lend credence to a policy recommendation presented in the next chapter.

Figure 14 depicts key themes informing development of major Theme 3.

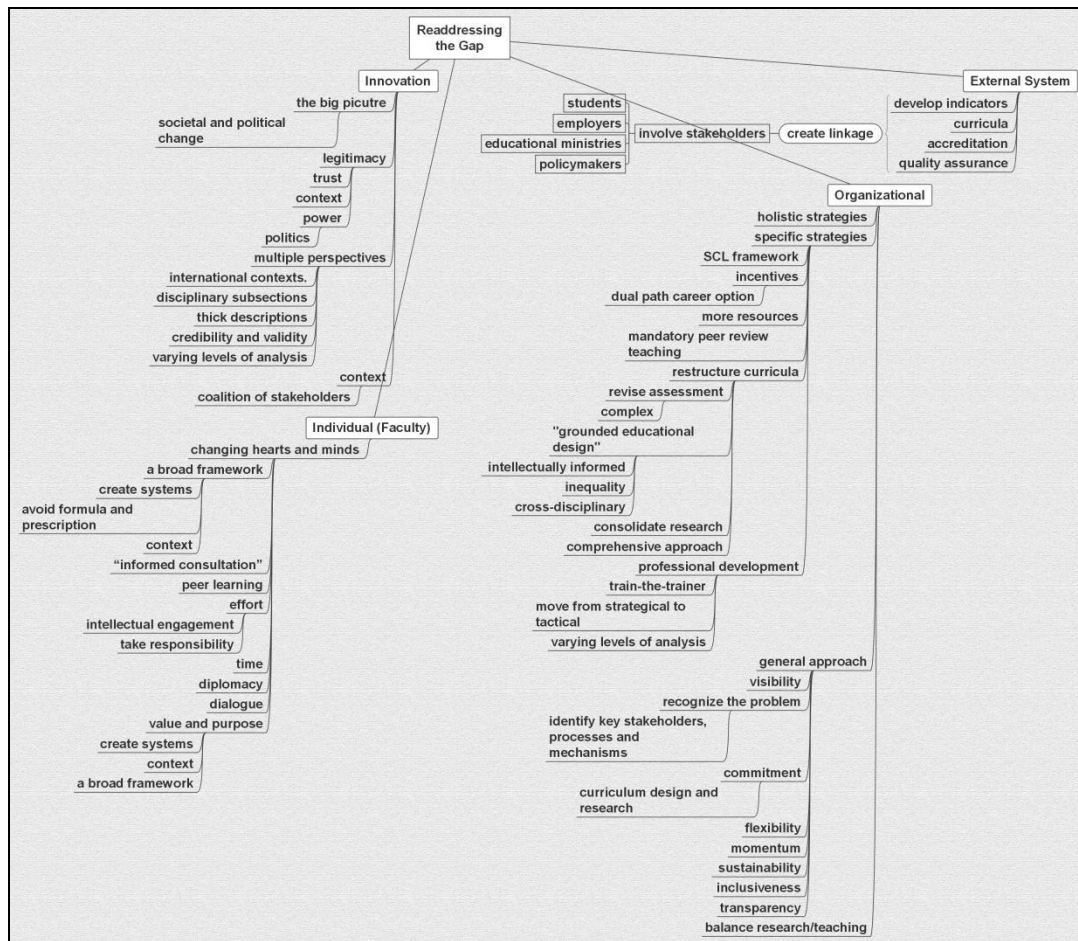


Figure 14. Graphic depiction of key themes informing major Theme 3.

4.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 has addressed the driving research question through analysis and synthesis of the data set, leading to the development of three major themes. The next chapter presents a synthesis of findings, addresses the research question, and makes four policy recommendations based on data analysis and synthesis.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

5.1 Addressing the Research Question

Reflecting a stance that goes beyond instrumental rationality focused on means, method and outcome to a critical perspective based on “value-rational questions” (Richter & Allert, 2017, p. 8), the research began with a basic question: Is SCL an appropriate response to quality enhancement in the EHEA.

Research findings indicate that SCL is an intuitively appealing idea that offers higher education institutions an opportunity to innovate and shift focus away from structures and processes to student concerns while fostering development of transferable skills for new generations raised in digitized knowledge societies in which higher education is driven by external forces that include widening participation, scrutiny of pedagogical quality, internationalization, and political imperatives linking higher education with socioeconomic progress and western democratic values.

Research Participants (RPs) temper enthusiasm however with an important caveat that SCL is highly contextual. It is an Anglo-Saxon construct and adoption, simply defining it, must account for myriad variables and perspectives among diverse stakeholders and contexts. Additionally, support is relatively limited compared to a plethora of impediments. The limited nature of support is underscored by the fact that knowledgeable and experienced stakeholders interviewed for this study did not meaningfully reference closely linked Bologna tools such as LO's or ECTS.

More worryingly, and corroborating extant research identified and discussed

throughout this paper, RPs identify a spectrum of impediments traceable to all four contexts of the Chor et al. (2015) framework.

From the external environment, SCL is impeded by a lack of money and quality assurance indicators that emphasize structural concerns over pedagogy and meaningful student involvement. Politics impede SCL. RPs believe policymakers are more concerned with protecting positions, social control, and reproduction of status quo than developing in-depth understanding of key issues. SCL is hindered by inertia and policy dissipation magnified by communication breakdown among people, policy and practice at all levels, from national governments and educational ministries to departments and classrooms.

Application of Chor et al.'s (2015) framework led to a significant finding that most factors hindering SCL reside primarily in the Organizational and Individual contextual fields. Individuals and the institutions inhabiting these spaces have the power to more effectively address vital levers but do not for a variety of reasons. Findings suggest that key EHEA stakeholders may not have the requisite capacity and willingness to bring in students as genuine partners.

At the organizational level, for example, RPs describe ecosystems in which faculty lack real power and constrained by limited understanding of complex organizational machinations tied to external mechanisms and processes like accreditation and quality insurance. Moreover, universities do not commit the necessary resources and support for salaries, space and training needed to implement a complex and conflicting paradigm that requires considerable modification of traditional systems and processes, a job that is all-too often foisted upon individual faculty. RPs blame

poor institutional leadership for many of these problems. RPs identify other well-established tensions such as the predominance of research over learning and teaching, which is not adequately recognized and rewarded.

Institutions are populated by people, making a precise distinction between organizational cultural and individual agency difficult to assess. That said, unhelpful faculty dispositions form part of larger organizational cultures that necessitate a carrot and stick approach to on-boarding. Faculty display a broad spectrum of unfavorable attitudes and behavior that include inertia, a penchant for routine, status quo, hyper-autonomy, and general intransigence. Findings suggest that students may not possess the requisite capacity and willingness to act as partners in the direction and management of their learning. Not unlike faculty, students may be unwilling or unprepared for significant change if that change requires new routines, risk or additional workload.

SCL is undermined by fundamental conceptual issues. For instance, it is not consistently defined or well understood. Practice-theory disconnect, communication breakdown, and political agendas have left key players with limited or incorrect understandings of the concept. It is possible that SCL has also not gained traction due to contentious theoretical grounding and philosophical assumptions. The construct derives from teaching and learning research, yet core theorization remains contested. For example, the constructivist issue discussed at length in Chapter 2 is a concern. Furthermore, motivated practitioners are often left to sort out the challenge of curricula redesign by themselves, efforts that may or may not pay off due to learner resistance and a lack of institutional support. The humanist dimension also becomes

problematic when practitioners must push students into active learning and accepting responsibility for learning, an issue about which RPs remain divided, as do I, a fellow practitioner. Aligned with extant research, RPs warn that SCL has the potential to fan the flames of consumerism. SCL seems to invoke deep, historical tensions vis-a-vis power, legitimacy, identity, value and purpose - repeated themes that go to the heart of higher education.

Findings indicate that intervention and furtherance of SCL requires not only sweeping and fundamental change to institutional structures, practices, processes and cultures, but also highly contextualized translation across diverse higher education landscapes inhabited by stakeholders inclined to resist change, and institutions that not provide adequate incentives, support or reward in support of fundamental paradigm change.

In response to the driving research question, findings suggest that SCL may not be an appropriate response to quality enhancement in the EHEA. The next section presents four policy recommendations based on this response. The policy recommendations are “building theory” (McManus, 2007, as cited in Ridder, 2017, p. 295) that aim to capture and unify “the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (DeSantis and Ugarriza, 2000, as cited in Saldana, 2016, p. 362) and translate research findings into practical knowledge (Euler, 2017). The first two recommendations propose abandonment of SCL as a blanket policy. The second two are based on a scenario in which the EHEA is unwilling to abandon the idea of deploying a blanket reform policy like SCL. All four recommendations draw on the totality of Chapter 4 data analysis and synthesis. The fourth policy recommendation

draws on additional evidence from the data set.

5.2 Policy Recommendation 1

Abandon SCL as a blanket reform policy and replace it with endorsement of EHEA concerns as interrelated but separate aims.

SCL is obstructed by a host of external, organizational, individual and conceptual issues. Most troubling perhaps are the conceptual issues. The mantra of SCL as a fundamental paradigm change that necessitates sweeping overhaul of institutional cultures, processes, structures and roles is a strong indicator that SCL is an overly ambitious program theory. This is especially true in the EHEA, where the construct has been attached to numerous ambitions and tools that go well beyond generic conceptualizations. As addressed above, given the plethora of barriers identified in the present study, alongside weak progress over a ten-year period, SCL may not be an appropriate response to the enhancement of educational quality at either a local or at a pan-national level. The conventional response is to soldier on, to escalate efforts with new recommendations, more resources, more money, and so on.

Birtwistle, Brown and Wagenaar (2016) exemplify:

There is a long way to go but there is no certainty that the shift will be achieved, indeed it seems that it is finely balanced and could, without additional and continued support, fail. Making it work is the responsibility of all levels involved and cannot be simply left to the academic staff responsible for delivering the programmes. (p. 227)

But if a policy has not gained substantial traction after 10 years due to a staggering array of issues, then perhaps it is time to start thinking about abandoning that policy.

On the current trajectory, it is not inconceivable that another set of interviews in

another ten years could lead to the same finding: SCL in the EHEA is largely rhetoric and a highly problematic policy. Perseverance is commendable, abandoning the policy altogether is a reasonable alternative.

The first policy recommendation therefore suggests the EHEA may continue to promote desired approaches and practices such as inspiring, inclusive, supportive and personalized learning environments characterized by flexibility, choice, mobility, and innovative teaching/learning strategies that utilize LOs and digital technology (Figure 1). However, in lieu of SCL as an umbrella policy that attempts to encompass all these concerns and more, EHEA policy objectives could be endorsed as interrelated but separate aims. Institutional dialogue could then focus on how to address said concerns and opportunities without a need for stakeholders to buy into a confusing and potentially flawed policy mired in a slew of impediments. In comparison to overhauling diverse higher education systems and mindsets historically resistant to change, endorsing EHEA concerns discretely might be a less grandiose aim, an argument that will be extended in Chapter 6.

5.3 Policy Recommendation 2

Consider alternative models.

If the EHEA remains determined to endorse a single reform policy, perhaps it is time to consider alternative models. For example, Fung (2017) has done interesting work with research-based education at University College London. Fung's model, the Connected Curriculum (CC), shares much of the same SCL humanist ethos and constructivist orientation. Unlike SCL, however, which is typically sold as a more favorable approach than traditional pedagogy, the CC creates space for a range of

pedagogy, where knowledge transmission is balanced against individual and socially enhanced knowledge construction (Fung 2017). The CC utilizes a through-line of collaborative research to unify critical engagement, pedagogy and power dynamics among teachers, students, professionals and the community (Fung 2017). With its focus on active learning and collaborative research, not one stakeholder group, the CC may encounter less resistance by side-stepping paradigmatic tensions such as consumerism and institutional issues such as the research-teaching divide, significant themes identified in the present study.

5.4 Policy Recommendation 3

Provide stakeholders with a more candid presentation of salient issues.

Decision making in higher education is founded on thorough consideration of research-based knowledge and a depth and range of perspectives. Relevant bodies undertaking the promotion of SCL arguably do stakeholders and the policy initiative a disservice when myriad problematic issues are minimized in relation to speculative benefits (Chapter 2). Pitching SCL to EHEA stakeholders without adequate acknowledgment of tensions and limitations is not a solid foundation for winning the kind of support needed to change mindsets, a common SCL refrain. RP10, senior research professor and director of the teaching-learning centre at a prominent European research university, made a striking statement:

It's an irony that SCL has been picked up by the ESU, which managed to push this into the European agenda. But we have plenty of research on SCL, and the basic problem with student-centred learning is that students basically don't want it! [laughs] We know that. Like problem-based learning, researchers like it because they can link it to the research. They can have more interaction with their students, but all empirical research, all studies that we know show that problem-based learning is for advanced-level students that have high

motivation. You can't apply problem-based learning to undergraduate students that are not motivated. At least you need to do some footwork before you can go ahead with that kind of approach.

RP10's assessment is noteworthy as a suggestion that the ESU may have influenced EHEA ministry representatives to adopt an idea that works better on paper than in practice. RP11 likewise speaks to the impact of stakeholders pushing agendas:

"Everybody is having on their own cap, filling in their little bricks in the system."

Perhaps the ESU and other strong advocates have persevered with a model that is intuitively appealing but fraught with challenges and limitations that need to be more clearly and fully acknowledged. The present research argues that if the EHEA is unwilling to abandon SCL, then stakeholders deserve, at the very least, a more candid presentation of salient issues.

5.5 Policy Recommendation 4

Endorse SCL as a catalyst for dialogue about the meanings, purposes and quality of higher education.

The research has been motivated in part by calls for increased advocacy and dissemination of best practice. Utilizing a website to facilitate data collection was inspired by a critical, participatory and reflexive approach to DBR. A website, one that provides more resources, information and examples of best practice would constitute a reasonable response. However, findings corroborate extant literature indicating that SCL is an extremely contentious reform policy and meaningful lack of uptake may be traced to a wide range of contextual barriers.

Therefore, another and potentially more effective policy response, which the

proposed website can model, is to do what people often do when presented with complex and challenging problems, they talk. The present study has identified communication breakdown as an inhibiting factor. In response, RPs recommend, among other interventions, increased dialogue, multiple perspectives and recognition of context. RP16 and RP17, who demonstrate a remarkable ability to see the big picture, effectively pull back the lens and question SCL as a blanket response.

RP16 speaks to context and prescription:

What does it mean to be educated as an economics graduate is a completely different answer than what it means to be educated as a literature graduate. It's more about how do we get them to bring that context with them because the moment it becomes very abstracted is the moment that you get an awful lot of espoused and wishful thinking, and it's not grounded in relation to what people are actually doing.

RP17 believes that catalyzing systemic change begins with structured, context-focused dialogue

without being too directive about the solutions in any one context because it recognizes the difference in context among disciplines, institutional and national cultures, and subcultures and missions within those cultures. It recognizes the diversity of the reality of the higher education sector and the different ways it's set up, and the different types of students within those institutions.

RP16 reasons:

There's a real strength in starting from the particular that moves you to a more general discussion because if you start with the general it never really moves anywhere because you get locked into very familiar patterns of discussions that either have things as a disaster or a brave new world upon us.

RP16 expands on context in relation to dialogue:

You want these conversations to be particular. How do we get them to bring that context with them? Because the moment it becomes very abstracted is

the moment that you get an awful lot of espoused and wishful thinking, and it's not grounded in relation to what people are actually doing.

RP17 likens this approach to the German Bildung tradition: "The depths are drawn from dialogue, shared conversation, shared debate, critical thinking about society and relationships between disciplinary knowledge and the real world."

RP16 and RP17 perspectives embody three significant themes identified in the data set: context, multiple perspectives and dialogue (Figure 4), what Saldana (2016) calls "the study's 'trinity' ... the three (and only three) major codes, categories, themes, and/or concepts ... that strike you, that stand out in your study" (p. 275). The trinity moves the research towards a reasonably solid theoretical proposition: "Aesop's fables have morals; our research tales have theories" (p. 278). Applying this logic culminates in development of the fourth and final policy recommendation: SCL may be more appropriate as a catalyst for ongoing, constructive dialogue about the meanings, purposes and quality of higher education than as a prescriptive fix to quality enhancement.

The EHEA promotes SCL as a specific, albeit ill-defined and potentially flawed policy that puts a firm stake in the ground vis-a-vis stakeholder roles, power, content, responsibility and evaluation (Weimer, 2013). In doing so, the EHEA has introduced an educational approach that, among other conceptual issues, invokes deep and difficult tensions that go to the heart of simmering debates about the purposes, meanings, and the quality of higher education. Hadjianastasis (2017) observes a recurring theme in higher education literature:

We constantly find ourselves divided into behaviourists and constructivists, positivists and interpretivists, fact focused or concept focused industry /

market oriented or citizenship oriented. And at the heart of this debate lies the same question, the same problem; that we have varied and often conflicting views as to the purpose of HE. (pp. 2262-2263)

It should come as no surprise when resistance and intense debate ensues. Advocacy and dissemination of best practice may represent a conventional response.

Problematizing SCL and catalyzing dialogue are potentially more practical and urgent tasks. In lieu of endorsing SCL as a policy for adoption and implementation, SCL can be a conversation starter, one that can bring diverse stakeholders and institutional layers together. EHEA stakeholders can look to SCL principles not a list of ready-made action lines “here to make them ‘fully implemented’ (thus declaring the ‘end of history’?), but rather catalyst for discussion “as something to be tested and debated” (Zgaga, 2012, p. 32).

The website, which embodies the research findings, can model what EHEA stakeholders may do as part of this policy recommendation: sit down together, talk, and figure out how and if EHEA concerns fit into variegated contexts. RP13 buttresses a call for dialogue: “People don’t know what it is, and if it [the website] can show what it is ... well, not show but help with understanding.” For RP16, a website can be effective only to the extent that it catalyzes dialogue among practitioners on the ground:

It’s important that people are beginning to make the ideas for themselves, but these spaces are actually speaking to policymakers and institutional leaders. They are not speaking to individual teachers. You need to have a conversation whereby teachers gathered to discuss the way their teaching with other people in the discipline from other areas. It’s only through sharing and engaging and thinking together that you can expect to have that kind of embedded change.

More than simply disseminate information or advocate uptake, the website may take

a cue from the Bologna Process:

The “Bologna agora” has enabled us to formulate challenges, exchange ideas, test and debate and, finally, to take action. Instead of preaching a single “philosophy”, it has made it possible to formulate and confront ideas on higher education in Europe and worldwide (Zgaga, 2012, p. 31).

This would be the primary function of a website, an agora: “a space for countries to discuss these challenges, and this dialogue remains critical” (Eurydice/EACEA, 2018, p. 3).

5.6 Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 has addressed the driving research question through analysis and synthesis of the data set, leading to the development of four policy recommendations. The next chapter brings the study to a close through reflection on research findings, contributions to theory and practice, limitations of the study, and future research directions.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

6.1 Reflection on Findings

Chapter 1 explained how my personal and professional values align with core SCL values, namely a desire to shift focus away from the teacher, the content, the exams and the procedures to the students, to engage and empower them. As such, I find the EHEA's ambition to advance SCL admirable and welcome. It speaks to Barnett's (2010, April 9) "liquid age," in which higher education endeavors to replace the "striated spaces" (p. 8) with the "smooth," to maximize the "life-wide experiences" of 21st century learners (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, as cited in Barnett, 2010, April, p. 10). Many RPs feel the same, a general sentiment expressed by RP16's assessment that SCL is "a necessary corrective to focus very teacher-focused approaches to teaching in higher education teaching and learning."

That said, Chapter 1 also described how my professional history with SCL motivated the investigation, a continual sense - a reality on many occasions - that I was swimming against powerful currents. This investigation has been an opportunity to better understand the EHEA's decision to adopt and persevere with SCL as a major reform initiative. Going into it, the literature review and my own experiences had prepared me for a likelihood that SCL is indeed a problematic educational model for higher education. At the same time, I wondered if my checkered past with SCL was mostly due to having worked in less-than-ideal circumstances. In other words, it was me and those contexts, not the educational approach. Frankly I was surprised by the findings, the yawning chasm between SCL as text and SCL as discourse (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Analysis of the approximately nine and a half hours of recorded

conversation reveal that what might have been an opportunity for RPS to speak favorably about a major reform policy, and how that policy is closely intertwined with other Bologna tools, was instead spent talking about shortcomings and tensions. Candid, insightful and intriguing interviews with 17 EHEA insiders corroborates extant research by indicating that SCL is hampered by a multitude of factors across all four identified contexts of the Chor et al. (2015) framework. SCL policy has not taken hold; rhetoric and status quo hold sway. SCL is a well-intended educational reform priority that has been inducted into a complex higher education landscape struggling to reconcile manifold and competing demands (Machado-Taylor & Peterson, 2017). The upshot being that EHEA aspirations remain largely unfulfilled as ideology, systems and roles collude to constrain agency (Priestley, Robinson, & Biesta, 2012).

The EHEA is a vast area spanning 48 countries, home to thousands of higher education institutions operating in different academic, cultural and political traditions. Putting aside for one moment all the barriers identified in the present study, it may simply not be realistic to expect such a vast and multifarious environment to adopt specific values, approaches, practices, and positions on what constitutes quality in higher education. The Bologna Process is not a monolithic political initiative; it is a pan-national cooperative alignment with limited scope involving a multitude of actors, processes, mechanisms and discourses (Miklavič, 2012). Policy is reinterpreted and transformed as it moves through regional and local contexts, where it meets national social and economic agendas, ideologies, cultures and administrative processes (Zmas, 2015). Wagenaar (2019) warns that voluntary governmental coordination has limitations: “The execution of the Bologna Process

confirmed that international cooperation simply does not work sufficiently well if there are no clear incentives, obvious self-interests and/or agreed mechanisms for enforcing it" (Wagenaar, 2019, p. 437). The author believes many countries that joined the Bologna process, especially after 2005, were either unable or unwilling to conform to a unified European model:

It gives the impression of a maximum stretched platoon of cyclists, with some lagging very far behind and about to give up, without informing the others ... the image created that the Bologna Process has been one of the most successful examples of international (voluntary) cooperation has proven – so far – to be a mirage. (p. 438)

Wagenaar concludes that "change is not realized by inward looking civil servants of national governments, meeting each other regularly on an international platform in a voluntary setting. Talking has to be replaced by actual doing" (p. 439). The EHEA has made great strides to harmonize economically, politically, socially diverse educational systems. However, there is no guarantee that achieving greater understanding, participation and social equity will continue at the same pace (Gaebel & Zhang, 2018). The bloc recently expressed concern about "violations of values" (p. 16) among higher education institutions and member countries, noting that determining the cause of said breaches are related to the diverse nature of higher education governance and over-reaching governmental interventions (Eurydice/EACEA, 2018). The ESU attributes limited progress on Bologna tools, in part, to "[R]igidity and traditional mentality, especially in some regions of Europe" (European Students' Union, 2018, p. 6). The same report goes on to lament how

the nature of SCL makes it difficult to implement top-down, in the way that many other Bologna processes are embedded Indeed, the unevenness of implementation of SCL is problematic to such a degree that it makes

questionable whether EHEA level policies even influence national levels to any significant extent. (pp. 6-7)

SCL illustrates how policy can be a living, embedded and dynamic process translated through prisms of diverse connections and inter-dependencies among diverse stakeholders and institutional layers (Braun, Maguire, & Ball, 2010).

Perhaps the EHEA is losing relevance, evidenced by a lack of follow-up to commitments made by member countries with increasingly divergent educational priorities (Bergan, 2015):

Is this because there is a feeling that the EHEA has achieved all it was intended to achieve, because the initial goals are now seen as too ambitious and nobody wants to be associated with failure, because the EHEA is seen to lose focus and become everything to all people, because an increasing focus on implementation implies that the EHEA is now seen as an administrative—some would say bureaucratic—rather than as a political challenge, or simply because as “Bologna” ceases to be new it is also perceived to cease to be innovative and politically interesting?” (pp. 727-728)

Or perhaps the EHEA lacks real commitment to the SCL project. A Google Boolean query conducted in June 2017 and again in April 2018, using combined search terms of ‘student centred learning’ (both British and American spellings), ‘Europe’, ‘EHEA’ and ‘higher education,’ failed to yield a comprehensive, independent or dedicated website for SCL in the EHEA. Several high-profile SCL initiatives by the ESU ended with nothing new in sight. The absence of a dedicated online resource by European bodies tasked with SCL implementation is poignant.

Large-scale educational reform over the past 60 years has been notoriously unsuccessful. Challenges associated with implementation feature largely in these failures (Fullan, 2016). Findings in the present study support extant research surveyed in Chapter 2 indicating that translation from policy to practice is a core

challenge. As noted in Chapter 5, however, findings also suggest that essential conceptual tensions are potentially more troubling. Implementation notwithstanding, SCL may not deliver the benefits it purports to offer (Harju & Åkerblom, 2017) because it is premised on faulty theorization. Explaining that generic prescriptions “conceal more than they reveal,” RP16 suspects that as a prescribed intervention, SCL “very quickly reaches its limits,” bringing into question the EHEA’s assumption that SCL can work as blanket policy:

There’s probably 60 years of educational innovations where there’s a system of instruction where you get a small funded pilot that has amazing results. Then the moment you try to scale that up and cease to be effective. If you’re a university teacher trying to make sense of student-centred learning ... You’re given a broad range of principles and asked to apply those in your environment, but the meaning that they take on in those environments is completely different.

Echoing Biesta (2012, 2016) and Macfarlane (2015), RP16 argues that with its focus on one stakeholder group (the students), with educators reduced to facilitators of learning, and generic competences that diminish the complexity of advanced knowledge acquisition and transfer, SCL unintentionally obscures the evolving and transformational relationships among disciplinary/professional knowledge, teachers and institutions. SCL is flawed because, as the saying goes, it tries to be all things to all people. For RP16, the notion of “bestness” is problematic; effective practice must always be understood as fit for specific purposes and changeable over time:

All this focus on good practice, teaching excellence, hides the fact that these are things that we constantly need to remake, rather giving the sense that if you give people best practice, they can go off and transform our world, which is, you know, I wish it were true, but the evidence suggests it isn’t. And so, for me, it’s no surprise that as a starting point, student-centred learning has ended up where it has.

RP16s critique embodies what may be the true Achilles' heel of SCL, questionable essential theorizing. You can throw more time, effort and money at a problem, but if the identified intervention rests upon a shaky theoretical foundation, what are the realistic chance of success? This may represent the greatest existential threat to SCL as a program theory, making it another grand but doomed educational reform initiative in a long history of grand educational reforms that never quite make it off the runway, aptly captured by Hargreaves and Fink's (2006, cited in van den Akker, 2013) lamentation: "Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain" (p. 54). Zgaga (2012) theorizes:

The grand initiatives which we may remember from the past all have something in common: the energetic collective ascent, which is usually linked to developing a new "philosophy" is followed by embarrassment, which is usually linked to gradually emerging paradoxes of its realisation and which also brings a threat of dissolution of the "movement". (p. 30)

Unfortunately, if history is any indicator, deep and widespread change will not occur anytime soon. From an exhaustive historical survey of American teaching excellence, Bernard (2016) determines that despite major social and intellectual paradigm shifts over the centuries, higher education pedagogy has not fundamentally changed since the 12th century. Apparently, winning hearts and minds takes time.

The EHEA states that SCL "has many implications for the design and flexibility of curriculum, course content, and interactivity of the learning process and is being increasingly used at universities across Europe" (Student Centred Learning, n.d., para. 1). Given that students are most affected by a potential paradigm shift (European Students' Union, 2015), a reasonable assumption is that unless higher education institutions enact meaningful change, students will experience the greatest impact.

For other EHEA stakeholders - academic faculty, administrators, policymakers, activists - spending more time, effort and money on a potentially flawed and unworkable educational model is spurious, a point expanded on more under Research Significance below.

6.2 Research Significance

SCL - and various incantations - has been studied at practically all educational levels for more than 60 years. Empirical SCL policy research within the EHEA context is relatively scarce (Chapter 2), however, a knowledge gap the present research addresses by offering a potential theoretical contribution to an under-researched area. In doing so, the research may hold significance for educational theory. Research findings and policy recommendations may also hold relevancy for the practice of individuals, institutions and organizational bodies tasked with policy making and implementation of SCL in the EHEA and beyond, systems and entities grappling with SCL or educational reform.

Burr (2015) identifies ‘usefulness’ and ‘fruitfulness’ as general criteria against which social constructionist research may be evaluated, the extent to which theoretical development makes an original contribution to extant research. Drawing inspiration from a critical, participatory and reflexive form of DBR, the research offers a potentially original contribution through the design and development of a website prototype as data collection strategy. An extensive search of relevant literature yielded no comparable research, suggesting the present study affords a degree of originality.

Finally, the research is significant as a comprehensive synthesis of a wide range

of critical secondary literature combined with in-depth analysis of a rich data set utilizing a synthesized adoption of innovation framework. An extensive search of extant literature yields no comparable empirical study or policy report, suggesting a potential degree of originality.

6.3 Research Limitations

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) identify two major threats to the credibility of interpretive research: internal and external. The first threat, internal credibility, refers to the "truth value," (p.234) the neutrality, consistency and dependability of interpretations. Unfounded analytical claims are a major threat to validity and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A response of 'possibly' to 'Interpretation' (Table 2) is based on a reluctance to commit to a statement that research findings definitively meet this standard. The world of higher education, like the rest of the world, is a complex, dynamic and largely unknowable open system. Much of what we think of as reality occurs exists and dynamically unfolds independently and beyond our ability to comprehend it, meaning that knowledge and understanding will always be tentative and restricted by personal, social, cultural and historical circumstances (De Souza, 2016; Wynn & Williams, 2012). As described in Chapter 3, coding was an ongoing challenge. A more experienced researcher might have approached and executed the coding and thematic analysis differently, generating a different set of conclusions. The research seeks "judgmental rationality," an open, honest, critical and comparative evaluation that leads to a tentative and relatively plausible account (Archer, Collier, & Porpora, 2004, as cited in Easton, 2010). Ultimately, social constructionist research does not search for objective facts or absolute truth claims:

“There can be no final description of the world, and ‘reality’ may be inaccessible or inseparable from our discourse about it; all knowledge is provisional and contestable, and accounts are local and historically/culturally specific (Burr, 2015, p. 177). Findings are based on limited data that has been subjectively interpreted as an attempt to see the entire iceberg while touching the tip from the surface (Fletcher, 2017), supporting Kahn, Qualter and Young’s (2012) observation that it is difficult to comprehend the dynamic multitude of factors at play in open systems, comprised of various layers, “let alone to redirect the system” (p. 864).

The second threat, external credibility, is the extent to which findings may be confirmed and extrapolated. Kitto, Chesters and Grbich (2008) conceptualize ‘transferability’ as the critical evaluation of relevance and application of findings to policy and practice in other settings. As discussed under Research Significance above, the research offers some potential for extrapolation to the formation of policy and practice within and beyond the EHEA. That said, reliance on purposive sampling means that findings are not necessarily generalizable. Interviews with another 17 RPs of similar profiles may generate an entirely different data set. Knowledge claims in the form of themes and policy recommendations are therefore limited as analytical generalizations or “ideal-typologizing,” coded data patterns synthesized into “a limited number of descriptions which one-sidedly underline particular characteristics at the expense of others” (Halkier, 2011, p. 790).

6.4 Future Research

The research has sought to develop a rich picture of SCL policy enactment in the EHEA through dialogue with knowledgeable insiders. Thematic analysis was

conducted through a constructionist lens with the aim of theorizing structural conditions and sociocultural contexts from which individual accounts arise (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From a social constructionist perspective, experience and meaning are understood as expressions of social relationships, and research "cannot and does not seek to focus on motivation individual psychologies" (Burr, 1995, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). Pursuant to this and given the relatively short duration of 30 minutes to cover a complex and wide-ranging topic, it was deemed important to retain focus on issues relating to SCL in favor of individual contexts or RP personal histories. Data collection thus assumes that RP perspectives reflect the totality of their personal and professional experience, values, educational philosophies, and so on. Future research may therefore include continuation of the present research using a similar sampling strategy, but one that dives more fully into participant histories as well as additional and expanded samples of EHEA stakeholders that include students, employers, policymakers, and EHEA academics and professionals with little-or-no knowledge of SCL, perspectives that would undoubtedly offer new and important insights. Relatedly, future research may explore the viability of the four policy recommendations presented in Chapter 5. How would a more diverse sampling of EHEA stakeholders view these proposals? Future research may look at how SCL policy plays out across and within different national and institutional contexts. Are certain national contexts or disciplines more successful implementing this approach than others? What patterns emerge in case studies of successful and unsuccessful uptake? RPs in the present study spoke both generally about the EHEA as well as specifically with reference to their own institutional experiences. More targeted and in-depth institutional case studies may provide triangulation to current findings. Given the

interview time constraint of 30 minutes, I did not pursue issues such as LOs and student engagement. Exploration of these key SCL theoretical associations could be interesting and timely areas of research in the future.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval Form, University of Liverpool

Dear Richard Vanarsdale			
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.			
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)		
Review type:	Expedited		
PI:			
School:	Lifelong Learning		
Title:	highereducationshowcase.eu : An online resource for student-centred learning, teaching and assessment in European higher education		
First Reviewer:	Dr. Lucilla Crosta		
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Janet Hanson		
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Julie Regan, Dr. Janet Hanson, Dr. Kalman Winston, Dr. Marco Ferreira, Dr. Greg Hickman		
Date of Approval:	29/05/2017		
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:			
Conditions			
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.	

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc>.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,
Lucilla Crosta
Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix B: Research Participant Information Sheet



Committee on Research Ethics

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title

<http://highereducationshowcase.eu/>: An online platform for student-centered learning, teaching and assessment in European higher education

Research Project [Short] Title

The design and development of a website dedicated to student-centered learning, teaching and assessment in European higher education

Invitation

I am a doctoral candidate for the Doctor of Education – Higher Education, at the University of Liverpool. This research will be used to fulfill the dissertation requirement of the program. There is no direct connection between this research and my professional role as instructor at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates.

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

Purpose

European bodies such as the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and the European Students' Union (ESU) have identified student-centered learning (SCL) as a priority. SCL is now a standard in the newly revised European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Research indicates progress is being made; however, implementation has not fully met a range of stakeholder expectations and challenges remain. In response, European bodies such as the BFUG, the ESU, and the ESG, among others, have called for intensified efforts to build capacity for SCL across European higher education.

The proposed study aims to investigate the design and development of a website dedicated to SCL in European higher education. As a high-level objective, the research aims to understand relationships among practice, intervention and theory in a manner that contributes to educational reform (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). More specifically, this study seeks a two-fold yield of 1) a high-quality, research-based intervention, and 2) well-articulated design principles.

References

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Rationale for Your Participation

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are conversant with European higher education SCL policy. My hope is that you may offer valuable insight into the structures and processes that facilitate and impede European SCL. While I am technically building the website, it has a much greater chance of success if it is designed, built and tested with input from knowledgeable individuals like you. What sort of content should the site include or not include? What factors currently foster or hinder uptake by European higher education stakeholders? What are your perspectives on SCL? These are the kinds of questions I would like to ask you as part of a 30-minute interview.

I may also provide you with a URL link to a prototype of the website. Your interaction with the prototype may remain optional and limited to basic visual evaluation of content and design. I will not ask you to evaluate technical functionality of the website, nor will I ask you to interact with anyone or do anything that would require you to identify yourself; you will be an anonymous user looking at a website prototype. It is hoped there will be a total number of 14 participants taking part in this research.

Do I have to take part?

No. Taking part in this project is totally voluntary. You are free to withdraw anytime without explanation or penalty. If you choose to withdraw you can request that any data related to you or your work will not be used or reported in the research study.

What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part you are agreeing to participate in one individual semi-structured interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes, at a mutually convenient time, in a location of your choice using an audio and/or video platform such as Skype. If you agree to participate, on the day of the interview please find a quiet, private location to conduct the interview on your end. If you decide to take part, I will seek your informed written consent at least five days before the interview.

With your permission, I will audio and/or video the interview to create a verbatim transcript of the interview, which I will use for data analysis and eventual dissemination. I will keep the audio/video file/s and transcript in a folder on my password protected personal computer, to which I alone have access. I will not share this data with anyone prior to dissemination. I will delete your personal information after data collection is over. I will keep all other anonymised information such as interview transcripts and recordings for 5 years. At your request, I will send you a copy of the interview transcript prior to data analysis.

Risks

I do not anticipate that you will experience any risk, harm or expense arising from your participation in this study. However, if you begin to experience any distress during the interview, I will immediately pause or stop the interview at your request. If you experience any distress

following interview, please feel free to contact me or directly contact my thesis supervisor whose information is provided below.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you stemming from your participation. You may derive benefit from increased professional reflection, awareness, and knowledge that you have assisted in the creation of an online resource for student-centered learning, teaching and assessment in European higher education.

Expenses and Payments

There is no planned financial compensation or reimbursement for your participation.

What if I have a problem/complaint?

If you have any problems, complaints or questions, please feel free to contact me by email at the email address below or my supervisor Marco Ferreira at:
marco.ferreira@online.liverpool.ac.uk.

If I am unable to adequately address your problem, complaint or question, you should feel free to contact the Research Participant Advocate at: liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com. When contacting the Research Participant Advocate, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

I will not disclose any data or information identifying you to any third party. I will keep your identity anonymous using pseudonyms and removal of any identifying information, such as the name of your institution, that someone could use to identify you. I will not disclose your name or the name of your institution to anyone. I will delete your personal data once the transcriptions have been checked.

What will happen to the results of the study?

I will compile and report anonymous results to the University of Liverpool. I will remove any information that could be used to identify you in published results.

What happens if I want to stop taking part?

You are free to stop the interview at any point. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You may withdraw from the research at any time without explanation. I will only use data that you approve, and I will destroy any data upon request.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

Researcher: Richard [Randy] VanArsdale
UAE telephone: 097150 912 8024
Email: richard.vanarsdale@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool
USA telephone: 001 612 312 1210
Email: liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com

Supervisor: Dr. Marco Ferreira
Email: marco.ferreira@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference. Please contact me and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any question or concerns you may have.

Richard [Randy] VanArsdale

Date: 6/7/2017



Appendix C: Research Participant Consent Form



Committee on Research Ethics PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project

<http://highereducationshowcase.eu/>: An online platform for student-centred learning, teaching and assessment in European higher education

Researcher/Principal Investigator

Name: Richard [Randy] VanArsdale

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [June 15, 2017] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any question or questions, I am free to decline. ☐
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish. ☐
4. I understand that all efforts will be made to maintain my confidentiality and anonymity in any relevant future research. ☐
5. I agree to have the interview recorded (video or audio), so it can be transcribed after the interview is held. I am aware that I have the right to edit the transcript once it has been completed. ☐
6. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____ Participant Name	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Name of Person taking consent	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

Researcher/Principal Investigator

Name: Richard [Randy] VanArsdale

Work Address: Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Mobile Telephone: +97150 912 8024

University of Liverpool Email: richard.vanarsdale@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Supervisor

Dr. Marco Ferreira

Email: marco.ferreira@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Richard VanArsdale

Interview Protocol

RC1

Thank you for talking with me today. The data collected will only be available to me, the researcher, and my supervisors. I will not comment on the data to third parties or other participants. After the interview, I will transcribe our conversation, anonymize your identity, and store it for safekeeping in a password protected folder on my laptop. Do I have your permission to record this session and use it for my research? I know you are a busy person, so I will start the timer now and limit the interview to 30 minutes. Do you have any questions or concerns? Are you ready to start?

1. What do you think SCL means to the average European HE stakeholder? [students, faculty, staff, administrators, policy-makers].
2. What does SCL mean to you?
3. Why is SCL important for European HE?
4. Do you believe SCL is inappropriate or detrimental in any way to European stakeholders?
5. Why is there not better alignment between official policy and practice on the ground?
6. What are the biggest challenges/forms of resistance moving forward?
7. What can be done to facilitate SCL implementation?
8. To what extent will European HE stakeholders utilize the proposed website?
9. What elements should I include or not include on the website? [examples of best practice, resources, links, community boards, research articles, blogs, other...?]
10. Do you have any parting advice?
11. Is there anything you would like to change or clarify?

Thank you for your participation!

RC2

Thank you for talking with me today. The data collected will only be available to me, the researcher, and my supervisors. I will not comment on the data to third parties or other participants. After the interview, I will transcribe our conversation, anonymize your identity, and store it for safekeeping in a password protected folder on my laptop. Do I have your permission to record this session and use it for my research? I know you are a busy person, so I will start the timer now and limit the interview to 30 minutes. Do you have any questions or concerns? Are you ready to start?

Richard VanArsdale

1. What do you think SCL means to the average European HE stakeholder? [students, faculty, staff, administrators, policy-makers].

~~2. What does SCL mean to you?~~

~~3. Why is SCL important for European HE?~~

4. Do you believe SCL is inappropriate or detrimental in any way to European stakeholders?

~~5. Why is there not better alignment between official policy and practice on the ground?~~

6. What are the biggest challenges/forms of resistance moving forward?

7. What can be done to facilitate SCL implementation?

8. To what extent will European HE stakeholders utilize the proposed website?

9. To what extent might the proposed website contribute to SCL implementation?

10. What elements should I include or not include on the website? [examples of best practice, resources, links, community boards, research articles, blogs, other...?]

11. What do you think about the prototype content? How about the layout and appearance? Is there anything about the prototype that you would change?

~~12. Do you have any parting advice?~~

13. Is there something I am missing? Something that I should consider in developing this resource?

14. Is there anything you would like to change or clarify?

Thank you for your participation!

RC3

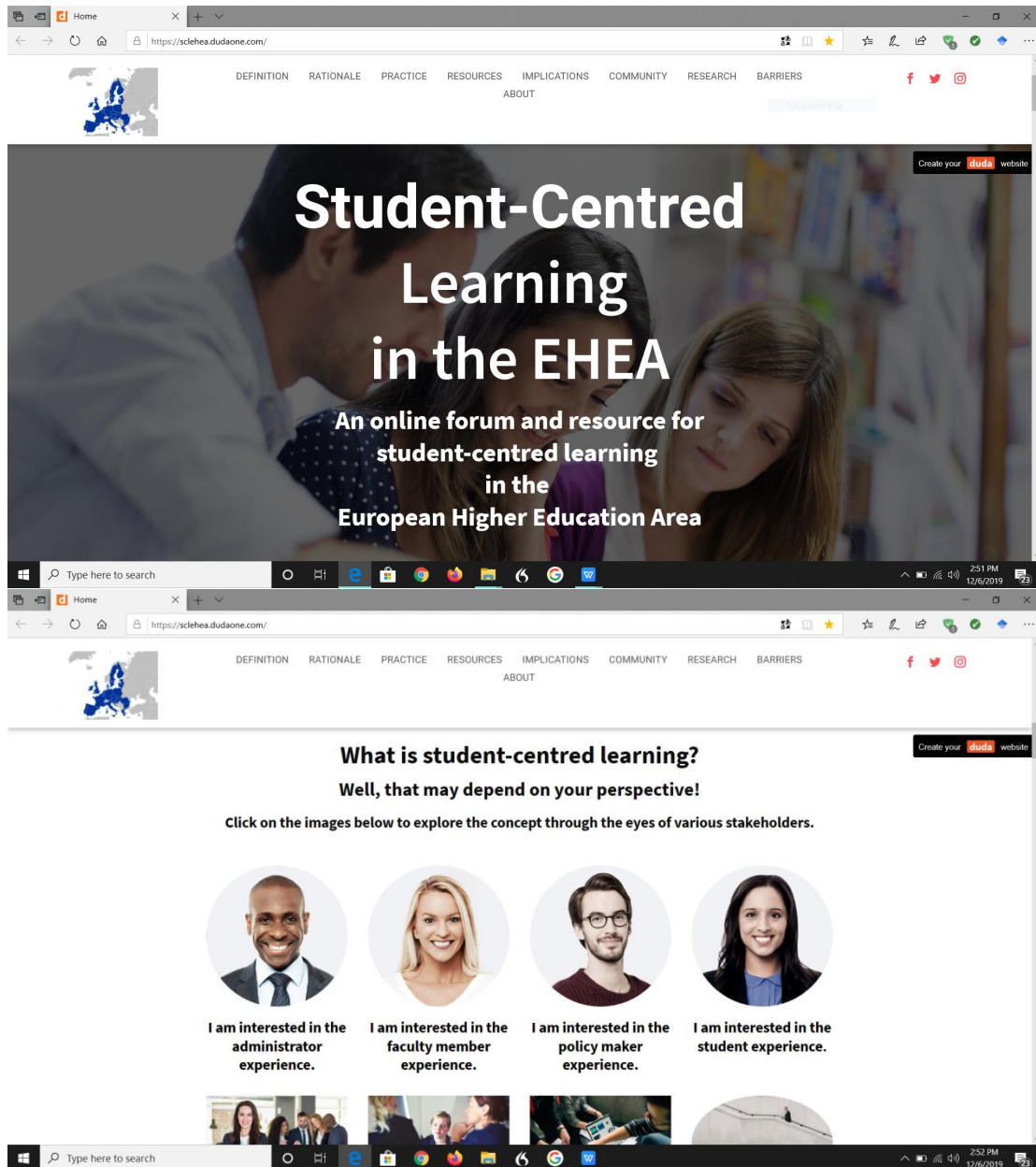
Thank you for talking with me today. The data collected will only be available to me, the researcher, and my supervisors. I will not comment on the data to third parties or other participants. After the interview, I will transcribe our conversation, anonymize your identity, and store it for safekeeping in a password protected folder on my laptop. Do I have your permission to record this session and use it for my research? I know you are a busy person, so I will start the timer now and limit the interview to 30 minutes. Do you have any questions or concerns? Are you ready to start?


1. To what extent is the concept of SCL commonly understood among European HE stakeholders? [for example: students, faculty, researchers, staff, administrators, policy-makers, other...?]

Richard VanArsdale

2. Is SCL important for European HE?
 3. Is SCL inappropriate or detrimental in any way to European HE stakeholders?
 4. To what extent is there alignment between official policy and practice on the ground?
 5. What are the biggest challenges or forms of resistance moving forward?
 6. What can be done to facilitate SCL implementation?
 7. To what extent might European HE stakeholders utilize the proposed website?
 8. To what extent might the proposed website contribute to SCL implementation?
 9. If you were developing the proposed website, what would you include or not include?
 10. Based on this interview, is there anything that I am missing? Important questions that I have not asked? Issues that I have not considered?
 11. What do you think about the prototype content? How about the layout and appearance? Is there anything about the prototype that you would change?
 12. Is there anything you would like to change or clarify?
- Thank you for your participation!




Appendix E: Final Prototype





[DEFINITION](#)
[RATIONALE](#)
[PRACTICE](#)
[RESOURCES](#)
[IMPLICATIONS](#)
[COMMUNITY](#)
[RESEARCH](#)
[BARRIERS](#)


ABOUT

What does SCL mean to you - in your role, your context?

[Join the discussion!](#)

[Create your !\[\]\(f353959cb8f916dd316b2686355171f4_img.jpg\) website](#)




Why student-centred learning?

The EHEA has identified SCL as part of its coordinated reform of higher education systems in response to the opportunities and challenges of the higher education landscape. Research suggests however that while SCL may intuitively represent a welcome alternative to traditional educational models, it may be appropriate only under certain conditions.

Do you agree?




What's your take on the rationale for SCL?

[Join the discussion!](#)



[DEFINITION](#)
[RATIONALE](#)
[PRACTICE](#)
[RESOURCES](#)
[IMPLICATIONS](#)
[COMMUNITY](#)
[RESEARCH](#)
[BARRIERS](#)

ABOUT

Practice


[Create your !\[\]\(81559b3a95a27f63f588b4ddd9859c97_img.jpg\) website](#)

Explore real life examples from Europe and beyond.




Europe

Check out real-life examples from a range of European countries.



North America

Take a look at examples from colleges and universities from Canada and the USA to Mexico.



Australia

Go Down Under to see examples of SCL in Australia.

- DEFINITION
- RATIONALE
- PRACTICE
- RESOURCES
- IMPLICATIONS
- COMMUNITY
- RESEARCH
- BARRIERS

[f](#)
[t](#)
[i](#)

Resources

Create your [duda](#) website

Explore a variety of SCL resources by discipline. Click on the resources below to explore resources by discipline.

Articles and Blogs
Share your passion, knowledge and experiences.

Books
Go old school and read books on SCL.

Case Studies
View up-close, in-depth examples of SCL best practice.

Executive Summaries
Short on time? Click here to get the gist of SCL policy and research.

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