# Innovative practice in acquiring graduate outcomes

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# Introduction

This article discusses how the Mosaic 2007 'Ideas Through Art' final year diploma project at HCT Sharjah Women's College was innovative in achieving its goals, which were to improve the quality of student learning and acquire HCT graduate outcomes. The innovation was to employ two significant 'driving forces': greater expectations of students and the redistribution of educational power.

HCT identifies eight Graduate Outcomes (GOs) as essential to students' holistic development. The characteristics of each GO are to be achieved via the learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and attributes) of the students' courses. The Mosaic 2007 project developed: GO1, communication and information literacy, GO5, self-management and independent learning, and GO6, teamwork and leadership. The table below provides details. However, during the project, students also demonstrated several attributes aligned with GO2, critical and creative thinking.

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**Table 1: Characteristics of selected Graduate Outcomes**

**GO 1**: Communication and information literacy
1.1      communicating information, opinions, concepts and ideas effectively in English through the spoken and written mediums to a variety of audiences;
1.2      selecting, understanding, evaluating, and making effective use of information from a variety of sources presented in both spoken and written forms in English; and
1.3      acting ethically in the use and presentation of information from a variety of sources incorporating the appropriate technologies.
GO 2: Critical and creative thinking
2.1      evaluating and analysing knowledge and information;
2.2      identifying and understanding problems; and
2.3      demonstrating creativity and innovation in problem-solving.

GO 5: Self-management and independent learning
5.1      reflecting on and evaluating their own learning;
5.2      adapting to change;
5.3      working independently; and
5.4      demonstrating a positive work attitude and effective work habits.

GO 6: Teamwork and leadership
6.1      understanding the functions and dynamics of groups;
6.2      contributing effectively to teamwork;
6.3      acting effectively in a leadership role; and
6.4      demonstrating confidence and social maturity in interpersonal relationships.

(The HCT Learning Model 2006)

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Part 1 of the article provides a concise description, outlining the catalyst of the project, namely Mosaic 2007 - Ideas through Art, and giving brief details of the ensuing project.

Part 2 of the article discusses the driving forces behind this project, 'greater expectations of students' and the 'redistribution of educational power'.

Part 3 of the article describes the various stages involved in the project, the realization of  graduate outcomes, and assessment. It is followed by a conclusion.

## Part 1: Mosaic 2007 - Ideas through Art

Mosaic 2007 is an annual event held at HCT's Sharjah Colleges (SHC). The concept was born out of the Director's vision to 'reaffirm the commonality of the human experience' (Mosaic 2007 website). Students who are following different specializations are given the opportunity to integrate knowledge from different sources into a common learning experience. In the process, students are encouraged to give expression to a plethora of knowledge which transforms into activities that range from research-based projects that involve the display of student work to entrepreneurial accomplishments such as planning business enterprises, all of which are based on the current theme of Mosaic. The theme for Mosaic 2007 was 'Ideas through Art'.

The students' task was to develop an on-line educational resource based on the theme of Mosaic 2007. They produced facts and descriptions on works of art and biographies of various famous people that could be used as a resource to help future students to activate and improve their background knowledge while developing their reading skills. The finalised pieces of work were uploaded to a website for demonstration during Mosaic 2007.The project was run over 2 semesters and made up a significant part of the students' English grade. It involved 4 major stages: preparing for the project, researching and producing information for the project, editing, formatting and uploading the work, and presenting the work to members of the College and the general public during Mosaic 2007.

## Part 2: Greater Expectations of Students

In order to start, develop and complete the tasks involved in the project, the students had to employ the actual outcomes being developed from the onset. Through instructional materials, interaction with the teacher and peer teaching, they were required to carry out and use the skills they were expected to learn by the end of the course. So how did they manage to instantly use these skills, which are after all, outcomes? One of the underlying factors making this possible centered on greater expectations of students. The project required students to direct themselves and their peers, drawing on what some believe are inherent behaviors in all of us: critical thinking, problem solving, self-management, and so on. The students still needed in most cases to develop the mechanics of these skills, for example how to plan and prioritise. However, because the expectations were not scaled down to their level of language ability or content knowledge, the opportunity existed for students to 'rise to the challenge'. What was required of them was no less than if a teacher had to complete the tasks; if they didn't know what to do, they had to employ teamwork and leaderships skills to find a solution. Research on greater expectations in education recommends that students should be 'empowered', 'informed', 'responsible', and become 'intentional learners' where they are required to be:

> …purposeful and self-directed in multiple ways… The intentional learner is empowered through intellectual and practical skills; informed by knowledge and ways of knowing; and responsible for personal actions…Through discussion,

critical analysis, and introspection, intentional learners come to understand their
roles in society and accept active participation.
(AAC&U 2002)

For example, during the planning stage each team of students was required to select
fifteen facts and relate them to the theme 'Ideas through Art', justifying their choices to
their class and explaining how they would expand these facts into pieces of work that
could be uploaded onto the website. The class had to weigh competing evidence to
determine which proposed pieces of work were most acceptable for presentation. A
number of 'higher order skills' (Cotton 1991) were at play during this stage, including
analysis and evaluation, together with the related sub-skills of making predictions,
making inferences, self-questioning and other metacognitive functions such as drawing
conclusions, elaborating, making decisions, determining bias from team members etc.

Another significant factor that the project encouraged was 'the redistribution of
educational power' (Heron 1981) where the management and teaching was not just
something imposed on the students but actually carried out by them. The project
involved students' active participation in the teaching process where they were
responsible for their own and their group's learning. They now had the 'educational
power', which created a student-centred learning environment and encouraged group
cooperation, which led to an increase in motivation. The link between motivation and
attention appears to be extremely close. Definitions of motivation often refer to attention
and persistence as the behavioural manifestations of motivation, which involve
'organising, planning, and completing tasks (Crookes and Schmidt 1991). These were
observable behaviours during the process of the project.

## Part 3: Stages of the project, and commentary

Stages 1 and 2 of the project involved preparing, researching and producing information
for the project. Teamwork and leadership (GO6) was planned to be at the centre of
these stages, but unexpectedly, attributes of critical thinking and creative thinking
(GO2) were also in evidence. The stages involved the following processes (see
Appendix A for a more detailed description):

1. Choosing group members and discussing the overview
2. Creating a file system on the student's HCT home drive for soft copies of
   the research and a list of all the sources of information
3. Conducting the research in the Independent Learning Centre through use
   of library resources and the internet.
4. Collecting interesting facts on the chosen arts theme (e.g. Famous Artists
   and Famous Paintings).

The following observations were made concerning the achievement of the intended
GOs during the above stages. Firstly, after teachers had presented the overview of the
project, including the implications of the high assessment weighting and the level of
expectation, the students had to choose their group members and discuss what the
project required of them. The teacher was a facilitator and was not involved in any
decision making. Interestingly, in some cases, students' choice of group members was
not based on existing friendships within the class. Whether their choice was linked to
who would assist them best in achieving the highest assessment grade is not within the

scope of this article, but is an area of interest concerning a possible inherent attribute of critical thinking skills with regard to selection after 'evaluating and analysing knowledge' (GO2).

Secondly, initial planning and organizing was the most difficult stage for the students to handle by themselves. A few of the groups could not see the importance of creating a computer file system before they had any work to put in it. Some moved straightaway to conducting their research and when it came to allocating the different areas and aspects of their research, the information was generally filed in an unsophisticated manner. However the lesson of 'evaluating the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their work' (GO2) was acquired as students compared their file systems, made adjustments to their choice of order and in some cases made an informed decision to start again. This stage created a context in which learners had an opportunity to reflect on their learning and to receive critical, constructive feedback from teachers, their peers and themselves.

Thirdly, conducting the research and selecting interesting facts for the project was reliant on cooperation between the group members. During this stage teamwork benefited not only the less able but also the more proficient student who often assumed the leadership role or was elected to do so by their peers. This allowed them to exercise skills  that they may otherwise not have had the opportunity to use, such as GO6.3 (acting effectively in a leadership role) and GO 6.4 (supporting team members through confidence and social maturity in interpersonal relationships), the motivation being that the performance of each of their peers was vital to the group's success.  As one of the students commented:

> We worked together with our team and sometimes I helped the others, it was good because I also learned more when I helped my friends. Also we shared some good ideas about the best way to save the facts and information (Shamsah Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman Al Ali, Business Student, SWC).

Stages 3 and 4, editing and uploading the work and presenting the work during Mosaic 2007, involved opportunities to make use of GO1, communication and information literacy, and GO5, self-management and independent learning. They involved the following processes (see Appendix A for a more detailed description):

5.  Writing up biographies and art work descriptions, and saving and uploading their work to the website
6.  Making a presentation about the project

There are two main observations for these stages of the project. Firstly, the students' expectation that their finished work would be viewed by a variety of audiences (teachers, students and the general public) led to an increase in motivation which, as discussed earlier, guided their attention and increased their persistence (Crookes and Schmidt (1991:484)) Students were responsible for ensuring the information they received from books and the internet was properly referenced and presented in a fashion that reflected their own thoughts and perspectives on the subject matter.

Secondly, students were required to make use of the appropriate technologies, including computer software and hardware (Power Point, Photoshop and scanners) to

communicate the results of their work (GO1, GO5). To achieve this, a number of students had to do what a teacher in the same situation would have to do: undertake further training in the use of unfamiliar technologies in order to develop skills needed to complete a task. Most students approached these stages by either asking those who could to help them, or by developing the skills themselves. This, we feel, was due to the driving force of the project i.e. greater expectations of students and the redistribution of educational power.

As another student remarked:

It was good to learn the technology the teachers used but scanning the pictures was difficult in the beginning. Sometimes we can't get the help in the time when we wanted it because all the students were in the ILC the same time, so my group asked the Graphic Arts students for help and the Graphic Arts technology man for making picture files the correct size for the PowerPoint. It was easy when we did it many times, so we could do it without the teacher
(Shaikha Saif Rashid Al Talay, Business Student, SWC).

Turning to an assessment of the project, it is clear that Mosaic itself establishes broader goals for learning than our students would otherwise set for themselves. Our students' goals are usually more immediate and tangible, like passing exams and finally graduating from their course. In the early stages of the project, students' decisions about their work were directly linked to achieving high assessment grades on the various evaluated tasks. However their eagerness to discover their grades soon diminished because assessment was used to inform and support their learning, it was ongoing and continuous, involved peers, teachers and themselves so there were no elements of surprise as to the grades awarded. Student Shamsa again:

We enjoyed this work because it is something new for us and something different than we studied which is business. We of course wanted the highest grade we can get but we know how to make it highest because each time we did the work I asked all teachers and the students what they think, if it's good or bad or ok. Then I choose to make it better, not like the exams when you can do it only one time
(Shamsah Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman Al Ali, Business Student, SWC).

# Conclusion

This innovative approach has shown itself to be an important adjunct to the established curriculum. The added energy and excitement which this approach generated increased the students' motivation and improved their acquisition and learning of information and language. This has positive spin-offs in raising the standards of the students and consequently their achievements in the existing curriculum. While the HCT curriculum aims to align knowledge, skills and attributes to the respective graduate outcomes, the overriding expectation is that students will develop these skills under the guidance of the teacher. However, this project encouraged a shift from teacher to student self-management which compelled students to use and acquire the graduate outcomes required in their diploma program. The twin driving forces of the project, greater expectations of students and the redistribution of educational power, coupled with the assessment methods, allowed students to be active participants in the learning

process. This enabled the students to make positive criticisms rather than being simply passive, uncritical recipients of other people's knowledge. Perhaps the most rewarding outcome was to see the high level of enthusiasm this approach generated in the students, which was a result of empowering all students of all abilities to reach new standards.

# Appendix A

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

You will be working on a **special project**, using your **English skills** to develop an **on-line educational resource**. This resource will be used to help students in the future. The on-line resource will be **based on the theme of Mosaic 2007 - "Ideas Through Art",** and will be displayed at Mosaic 2007.

## DIPLOMA

You will work in small teams. Each team will be given an arts theme to research and develop.

**Themes are as follows :-**
- o    **Famous Artists and Famous Paintings.**
- o    **Famous Poets and Famous Poetry.**
- o    **Famous Composers and Famous Music.**
- o    **Famous Writers, Plays, Novels and Stories.**
- o    **Famous Architects and Famous Buildings.**
- o    **Famous Actors and Actresses.**
- o    **Famous Photographers and Famous Photographs.**
- o    **Famous Fashion and Jewelry Designers and their Creations.**
- o    **Famous Sculptors and Famous Sculptures.**

You will prepare a combination of:-

- o    **Short biographies about famous people** giving interesting facts about their life and works - for example the play writer 'William Shakespeare'.

- o    **Short descriptions of famous art work (music, plays, paintings, buildings etc**) giving interesting facts about this important piece of art - for example 'The Blue Mosque in Istanbul',

**TASK 1 - PREPARING TO RESEARCH YOUR ARTS THEME**.

You should buy a binder which you will use to collect research on your arts theme. You should also create a folder on your HCT home drive to collect soft copies of your research.

You must keep a list of all the sources of information you use. Prepare a record sheet now and save it in your project folder.

## TASK 2 - COLLECTING RESEARCH ON YOUR ARTS  THEME.

You should conduct your research in the **ILC** and on the **Internet.**
Each group should collect facts on **15 different famous people or works of art,** from their theme.

You are looking for interesting facts to help educate others about **famous artists** and their works, or **famous pieces of art work.**
You can use the two lists on the following pages to help you plan your research:-

### WHO AM I?

1. What is the famous artist's nationality?
2. Where was the famous artist born?
3. When was the famous artist born?
4. What sort of family was this famous artist born into?
5. When did the famous artist die?
6. What did this famous artist die of? (For example old age or illness)
7. What was this artist's special talent? (For example for poets - did they write love poems or war poems?  For photographers - did they take nature photographs or portraits of people? )
8. What are this artist's most famous works of art? (For example the writer William Shakespeare had many famous plays like 'Macbeth', 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Hamlet')
9. Did this famous artist get married?
10. What age was this famous artist when he/she got married?
11. Did this famous artist have children? How many?
12. Was this famous artist rich or poor in their life?
13. Are there any amazing facts about this famous artist? (For example - the artist Vincent Van Gogh went insane and cut his own ear off!)

### WHAT IS IT?

1. What is this famous piece of art work? (E.g. Painting, building, play, poem. etc)
2. Where is this famous piece of art work now?
3. How old is this famous art work?
4. Where was this art work made?
5. How was this art work made? (For example it took 23 years and 22,000 workers to build the Taj Mahal in India)
6. What material is this art work made from? Or, if it is a play, poem or piece of music - where was it first performed?
7. Who made this famous art work?
8. Give a brief description of the art work
9. Why was this art work made?
10. Has this art work always been famous?
11. Why is this art work so famous?
12. Does anyone own this art work? If so who?
13. Do many people visit the place where this artwork is kept, or see it being performed?

**TASK 3 - SAVING YOUR RESEARCH**

**Save all the facts you collect** in your **project binder** and in your **project folder** on your HCT home drive.
If you have any pictures, audio files or other examples, please save these as well.
**Remember that you must reference your work**, so record the details of any books or journals you use and the web address of any websites you use. **Fill in your research resources record sheet.**

**TASK 4 - WRITING UP YOUR BIOGRAPHIES AND ART
        WORK DESCRIPTIONS**

Once you have completed your research, you should **carefully write up the facts about each famous artist or art work.**
Use the headings **"Who am I?" or "What is it?".**
Each **'biography' or 'work of art description**' should be about **150 words in total.**
Remember to **carefully check the English** in your final work, and reference all sources of information.
You should then **print the biographies and work of art descriptions and put them in your binder.**
**The information you have collected will be loaded onto an educational website to help other students learn about 'Ideas through Art", and improve their knowledge and reading skills.**

**PRESENTATION TOPICS**

   o   How we planned our research.
   o   How we selected the artists and works of art that we chose.
   o   How we carried out our research.
   o   Any difficulties we had with the project.
   o   How we organized and presented our findings.
   o   What we enjoyed most about the project.
   o   What we learnt from doing the project.
   o   How we hope our project will help other students to improve their English and learn about "Ideas through Art".
Each member of your group should participate in the presentation.

**ASSESSMENT AND GRADING**

**This project will make up a significant part of your English grade this semester.**

Your grade will be based on the work in your project binder and HCT home drive folder, and also on your final presentation.
Full details of the grading structure will be given to you at a later date.

You will be required to submit your project binder for grading **during the project and at the end of the project. (Your English teacher will give you the exact dates for submission)**

# References

Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Greater Expectations National Panel, Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College. http://www.greaterexpectations.org Accessed 15 May 2007

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http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/6/cu11.html Accessed 1 May 2007

Crookes, G. and Schmidt, R. W. (1991). Motivation: reopening the research agenda. Language Learning, 41, 469-512.

Heron, J.(1981). Assessment revisited, Developing Student Autonomy in Learning. Kogan Page, London.
http://www.city.londonmet.ac.uk/deliberations/assessment/mowl_content.html
Accessed 1 May 2007

Mosaic 2007 website http://shc-portal.hct.ac.ae/web/public/events/mosaic07/index.htm
Accessed 1 May 2007

**Students' Work**
Examples of students work should be viewable on the Flashcards website and the PowerPoint link below.

Flashcards Website
http://efuture.ecommerce.hct.ac.ae/Flash_cards/index.php
Developer Samer Aoudi - IT Academic Coordinator SMC

PowerPoint link
D:\My Data\Desktop\Mosaic 2007 Project - Shaikha and Shamsa.ppt

**Endnote**
The project was written by Gwyneth Jones (Business Faculty SWC) and delivered by Gwyneth Jones, Julie Butler and Heather Raymond (English Faculty SWC).