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Reading Strategy for the MBA: Informing Effective Use of Learner Time for Critical Reading

Bill Sutherland
Aberdeen Business School
Robert Gordon University
+44 (0)1224 263830
w.sutherland@rgu.ac.uk

Anne Nichol
Robert Gordon University Library Service
Robert Gordon University
+44 (0)1224 263472
a.nichol@rgu.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper is motivated by the development of a reading strategy for the MBA at RGU. It provides an overview of current views on the importance of reading to inform significant learner hours on directed and self-directed study and quantifies the extent of reading on the course, providing a learner perspective on the scope and scale of reading across modules. Exploration of learner motivation *for* reading and learner engagement *with* reading at this postgraduate level is used to establish the essence of a reading strategy. We argue that an important role for educators and the wider educational system experienced by the learner both recognises and positively supports learners as active readers. The opportunity for academic staff to assist learners with their engagement in their reading activity and to identify mechanisms to purposively link these actions to pedagogical principles is set out.

Keywords

Reading strategies, reading lists, pedagogy, curriculum design, motivation, engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a central activity in supporting a range of directed and self-directed study within many learning experiences. Weller (2010 p. 88) states that “despite the apparent centrality of reading practices for higher learning, the conceptualising of reading practices in the context of university pedagogy remains narrowly defined”. The extent and variety of reading may be communicated by tutors to learners in a number of ways such as in course handbooks, module descriptors and reading lists. Reading is an essential enabler in the development of information literacy landscape for learners (SCONUL 2011). However, reading requirements may not always be made explicit and there may be an expectation gap between tutor and learner as to the activity required. This expectation gap between academic staff and students regarding the use of self-directed study time has been highlighted by Railton and Watson (2005). This then suggests that academic staff should develop more structured, directive and clear support for learners in order to develop autonomy in reading through a conscious ‘reading strategy’. Garfield (2008) defines a university reading strategy as “a set of best-practice ideas and guidelines drawn from discussions with academics, support staff and librarians”.

Reading lists can provide an important channel of communication between tutor and learner and invariably draw on resources provided by the university library service to a greater or lesser extent. However, the lack of a clear pedagogical link to the use to which reading lists are being put has been highlighted by Stokes and Martin (2008). Collectively, these observations suggest that a ‘taken-for-granted’ approach may characterise much of the expectations of reading within the learning experience.

Given the variety of delivery modes and learning modes which are being offered by Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), reading provides the prospect of a common means of learning, regardless of study mode. Thus the opportunity to craft appropriate reading strategies may provide a fundamental unifying activity in the design and delivery of courses. With the potential of universality across modes, the (often hidden) importance of reading, and the expectations of tutors that learners will engage with reading as part of the wider learning experience, this paper surfaces developments in the identification of reading expectation, reading motivation and reading engagement within a current postgraduate experience. The research sets out an initial exploration of the role of reading in the MBA at RGU. The paper has four strands which addresses the following research questions:

- What is the scope and scale of reading in the MBA?
- What motivates learners towards reading on the MBA?
- To what extent are learners engaged with reading?
- What use is being made of reading lists in the MBA?

2. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

As part of RGU’s response to the ‘Developing and Supporting the Curriculum’ Enhancement Theme (QAA Scotland 2013a) an internal staff development event comprising two one-day workshops focused on the design and development of the curriculum for Aberdeen Business School’s MBA (see Sutherland, Russell and Scott 2013 for an overview). The event included participation of the MBA teaching team and administrators, library specialists and learning technologists to enhance the design and delivery of the MBA curriculum. This multi-stakeholder engagement is central to the Course Design Intensive (CDI) methodology used for the event. The workshops were facilitated by staff from Oxford Brookes University, the originators of the CDI method (see Dempster, Benfield and Francis 2012 for details of the methodology and background to the CDI approach). The overall aim of the initiative was to develop and enhance an MBA *course* design which could be delivered at the *module* level.

Of fundamental importance in the CDI methodology is consideration



of the locus of control of the curriculum and the pedagogical approaches to learning which may flow from such decisions as: the extent to which the curriculum is learner-defined versus teacher-defined; and the extent to which the learning experience is focused on the individual or is more about community and collaboration. Although *modules* are the primary unit of student experience on the course (and indeed, on many or most courses in higher learning) the ambitions of the course team are directed towards achieving the *course* as the primary basis of the student experience. Consequently, the CDI approach enabled the course team to highlight areas of interest that can enable a course-wide experience to learners. Saxby (2009) recommends that reading strategies are an explicit part of a programme's evaluation. This has resonance with the evaluative nature of the CDI approach, and it follows the reading strategies must become an explicit part of a course's design. The way in which students learn in any learning environment is a major element in the design of a curriculum. The Mayes and de Freitas (2004) pedagogical approaches ('associative', 'constructive (individual)', 'constructive (social)' and 'situative') describe distinctive implications for learning, teaching and assessment. These approaches were used by the teaching team within the CDI to identify, characterise and appropriately sequence the learning activities which would be experienced by students within modules on their MBA course. As a common element across all of these approaches to learning, Mayes and de Freitas (ibid.) emphasise the importance of *activity* on the part of the learner coupled with the need to integrate *across* activities. Thus the learning experience may incorporate one or more of these pedagogies. For example, learning may start with an associative pedagogy (where activities may be concentrated on building skills and knowledge) through to more integrating activities (requiring consideration of complexity and context as an individual or social engagement) to the development of identities and professional roles in a more situative pedagogical approach. These pedagogical approaches are briefly summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Pedagogical approaches

	Associative	Constructive (individual)	Constructive (social)	Situative
Learning is Understood as:	Building concepts or competences step-by-	Achieving understanding through active	Achieving understanding through dialogue	Developing practice in a particular community
Theory	Learning by association	Learning by individual exploration	Learning by social interaction and exploration	Learning by participation in a community of practice

Source: Adapted from JISC, 2007. JISC Innovative e-learning with mobile and wireless technologies: Three (and a half) broad approaches to understanding how people learn. [this source in turn acknowledges Mayes and de Freitas (2004)]

The CDI surfaced the importance of reading (regardless of mode of study, but particularly for distance learning engagements) as a primary activity common to many of the directed and self-directed activities within modules. Further, consideration of issues such as selection of materials and their accessibility in a purposive manner (taking account of learner time on tasks) was seen as essential to support the main transforming outcomes of the student experience on the RGU MBA. These core outcomes, which are deemed to be central to the student experience of the RGU MBA, are: academic;

behavioural and skills; industry engagement; and career development. These 'four pillars' are intended to feature throughout the course and should therefore be experienced within all modules delivered during the course. Thus the purpose and use of reading lists, e-book (and other materials) availability and access, and the recognition of the imperative for a critical reading strategies approach emerged from the CDI as an integrating theme in MBA curriculum design.

3. LITERATURE ON READING STRATEGY ELEMENTS

In preparation for this study, a literature search was conducted. This mainly employed academic journal articles and texts. However, it also became apparent that a number of other HEIs have identified reading skills (along with writing skills) as being worthy of investigation. The University of Hull (n.d.) has conducted reader surveys and several HEIs have produced skills guides and publications on related initiatives (Northumbria University Library, 2013; Southampton University, n.d.). A number of these give useful guidelines on the role of reading and some, such as the University of the West of England (2013) communicate best practice for establishing relevant elements of a reading strategy. HEIs also provide advice on the presentation of reading lists, such as De Montfort University (2007) and Jones (2009) has made a coherent case for a standard system to be adopted across modules and courses at Cambridge University.

There is a significant range of literature available on reading, reading purposes and reading skills as well as consideration of motivational and behavioural approaches to encourage engagement (Koontz and Plank 2011). Fairburn and Fairburn (2001) in their guide to students for reading at university emphasise that reading is a set of skills and Metcalfe (2006) and Wallace and Wray (2001) have provided guidance on development of more critical reading skills at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Garfield (2008) distinguishes between support for skills development in approaching academic reading and support in critiquing and synthesising reading and how these develop information literacy.

However, many of the found studies encountered during the literature search reflect themes of reading in a foreign language and the associated development of skills (see Matsumoto, Hiromori and Nakayama (2013) for coverage of concepts and pointers to further literature on this topic) plus there was an emphasis on reading development in younger people, adolescents and primary and secondary sectors. Although the former topic of reading in a second language may reflect the experience of certain students on the RGU MBA, this aspect is outwith the scope of the current study.

Taking an associative pedagogical approach several authors have explored the use of reading techniques. For example, Artis (2008), Fadlemula and Ozgeldi (2010), Taslidere and Eryilmaz (2012) and Carlston (2011) look at the application of techniques for reading comprehension via self-regulated reading models such KWL (What I Know, What I want to Know, What I Learned) after Ogle (1986) and SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) after Robinson (1946). Duggan and Payne (2009) have looked at tactics for reading coverage and the application of text skimming. These approaches provide a useful platform for the development of reading as a core skill.

Papers for tertiary-level learning were fewer in extent. Where found, these concentrated on issues of critical evaluation with some consideration of reading requirements in disciplines such as arts, humanities and the social sciences. In reflecting the issue of tutor and student expectations, Weller (2010) considers conceptions of critical reading from student and tutor perspectives. Hobson (2004) has encouraged academic staff to periodically review at the module and course level to guide strategies to increase the value of reading. Themes of information literacy coupled with the use of technologies

of reading, including: e-book collections and interface systems; comparisons with physical texts; reading devices; and considered issues of technology acceptance and technology diffusion are a growing subset of the literature. For example, Chan Lin (2013) has explored technological features of e-books and their uptake and Abdullah and Gibb (2008a, 2008b) have also investigated student attitudes at Strathclyde University relating to several of these issues. Underpinning much of the coverage on reading are the core concepts of motivation and engagement. Park (2011) provides useful coverage of motivational concepts (although the empirical work is at secondary rather than tertiary level) and Unrau and Quirk (2014) have attempted to separate-out notions of motivation and engagement which are often conflated. Trowler (2010), in a wider study of student engagement, identifies reading as part of small-group interaction as a means of forming and maintaining social connections and intellectual stimulation. Wider aspects of information literacy, in which academic literacy is an element are summarised by Coonan et al (2012). This work also features a useful template which breaks down lesson plans into components, a feature which is similar to the Herrington, Reeves and Oliver (2003) activity design approach which is featured in the CDI methodology. Stokes and Martin (2008 pp.121-122) have highlighted differences between tutor perspectives of reading on student behaviour and student perspectives on his/her own actual behaviour. The relate to aspect such as breadth or reading, approach to support, type of resource accessed, engagement with tutor the extent to which reading is process driven or task driven.

The aforementioned divergence between student and tutor perspectives on reading and reading lists expressed (Stokes and Martin, *ibid.*) begs the question, should these perspectives be more closely aligned, and if so, how can this be achieved? Reading lists, their use and acceptance, are also developing as a theme within the literature. However, the comments of Weller (*ibid.*) and Stokes and Martin (*ibid.*) on the lack of coverage on pedagogical aspects of reading appear to be largely confirmed by several studies. Piscioneri and Hlavac (2013) have picked up on this theme and have examined student preferences which relate to modes of delivery. Franklin (2012) has surveyed staff at Loughborough University and Brewerton (2013) has also sought to contrast student and lecturer views on reading lists at the same institution. The currency and geographic dispersion of these studies indicates a renewed interest in the role of reading within HEIs.

4. THE RESEARCH

The research comprised two main strands: a quantification of reading requirements in module reading lists and partial examination of access made to content contained in these lists; and a focus group to examine learner perspectives on motivation and engagement with reading. For the remainder of the paper, reference is made to sources of issues, theories and concepts in discussion as a prelude to, and discussion of, findings. Therefore, presentation of the gathered data is interwoven with elements of the found literature. Of particular importance for the study was the quantification of the scope and scale of reading expectations and how these were being communicated to students. This provides a student-view of the totality of tutor-derived reading on the course; a view which hitherto may not have been apparent to the collective MBA team. This supply-side element is balanced with investigation into the motivational issues for students in reading and their engagement with reading.

The focus group was conducted with Full-Time MBA students during their second semester of study. The primary topics for discussion related to the core themes of the paper: motivation for reading; reading engagement; and use of reading lists. Data on the scope and scale of reading materials and the time expected for students to engage in directed or self-directed study was gathered from available module descriptors, published reading lists within

modules (accessed via the RGU Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), 'CampusMoodle'), and data from examination of individual module study areas. The Online Distance version of the MBA was used for the latter, as this was deemed to be a more efficient ways of gathering data given the imperative to capture all reading requirements within the VLE, rather than perhaps in face-to-face engagements such as in lecture presentations where additional information could be transmitted in a more ad-hoc manner. Discussions on motivation draw predominantly on the Unrau and Quirk (2014) paper whereas the discussions on engagement use the Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) engagement model of reading and development as a primary structure.

4.1 The Scope and Scale of Reading on the MBA

Contact time with academic staff as part of lectures, tutorials, workshops, seminars, online discussion or other forms of tuition may only represent a (relatively) small proportion of the learning hours for a module. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the number of hours students will spend on the anticipated range of activities within an MBA module.

A significant proportion of this time is spent on directed or self-directed study. The survey of materials was carried out in December 2013 across 11 modules constituting the majority of those delivered on the MBA. Some of the information was taken from the previous years' delivery so it is important to note that changes may have occurred when modules were next delivered. Exact numbers of reading materials were sometimes difficult to establish due to repetition of references appearing in different places (sometimes sources in reading lists for the module, such as in *Aspire* were duplicated within the study areas or in *Module Guides*). These 11 modules represent a total of 150 credits, and private and directed study time of 1359 hours.

From examination of Table 1 several categories are evident. These comprise readings (journal articles, book chapters, books) non-reading elements (such as videos or podcasts) and web links (which could comprise reading or non-reading elements) and an 'other' category which refers to PDFs found on the internet, and in some cases, a list of journals which students may find it useful to read.

Over the 11 modules, journal articles (29%) and book chapters (21%) account for the majority of reading materials recommended to students. While the total for recommended complete books is 22% of the readings, 65% of the recommended books were recommended in a single module (H). Module H displays the approach of offering students a choice of books from which to select their own readings; most of the other module leaders have chosen to direct students to certain selected book titles. Those modules recommending book chapters represent a more prescriptive approach, directing students to clearly identified readings. The statistics on videos and podcasts refer to externally produced materials produced on the internet and on library databases, not in-house teaching materials. Usage of these sources primarily occurs in one module (K).

The choice of reading materials may partly reflect the availability of electronic books and journals in that particular subject area, as these are more easily available in some subjects than others. One module requested students to contribute to a central reading list; students were asked to justify the inclusion via a discussion list.

Figure 1 shows the number of readings per semester, and indicates the number of modules within that semester. Semesters 5 and 6 are shown together as module H is delivered across both semesters. Semester 8 shows results for one of the optional modules delivered in that semester. It shows considerable differences in the amount of

reading required between semesters 1 and 2; semester 1 offers students a total of 25 credits and semester 2 offers a total of 20 credits. Semesters 4 and 5/6 offer the most credits (30 and 20 respectively).

4.2 Reading Lists in the MBA

Information on reading materials was collected directly from the module study areas on the VLE. References to recommended reading materials were offered in a variety of ways, sometimes within the same modules. For instance, a combination of module descriptors, course handbooks, links provided within the module topics and sometimes within the teaching materials themselves listed different information sources. Sometimes the variety of presentation methods of such information made it difficult to identify the core readings because of duplication of some references in different places. However, where readings were listed within the individual topic, these were easy to identify.

There was little evidence of annotations provided by tutors; in most cases students were simply directed to the readings as a possible useful source of information. Of the 11 modules surveyed, 4 currently offer their reading lists via Aspire. Of these, two relied entirely on Aspire to present their references and the remaining two also added additional recommended reading details elsewhere within their modules. Direct communication with one tutor established a preference to provide links to resources directly within each topic to encourage students to read the materials rather than use Aspire. This was a conscious design decision within one of the early modules on the course, rather than direct the students to Aspire with several clicks to reach the materials.

However, Table 2 shows the number of times someone clicked on the links on the existing Aspire links to link to a given resource.

Table 2. Access statistics via reading lists on the MBA

Module	No. of clicks	No. of items on Aspire list	Total No. of items recommended within the module
A	1708	23	28
D	126	9	16
E	207	4	29
G	633	64	84

Source: Authors

These figures were taken for the semester that the module was last delivered to the online students, but may possibly show usage by other modes of study as well. Even where substantial Aspire lists have been produced, there are still additional reading materials mentioned in the main modules. The figures show significant variation in the numbers of items per module and the number of clicks per set.

From the focus group discussion, students acknowledged that module reading lists were important in order to highlight the recommended reading. The extent to which the reading requirements were made explicit in module lists was perceived as being variable. Sometimes requirements were conveyed using week-by-week structures which provided a focus to specific materials during module delivery. Student preferences indicated that the lists could be further enhanced through communication of what to read and why it should be read. It was generally felt there was good alignment between the reading lists and the topics featured in modules.

Particular problems regarding accessibility to materials (or constraints to accessibility) were mentioned, with students

identifying limitations with some online resources and lack of accessibility to physical copies of texts.

4.3 Motivation of Learners

Unrau and Quirk (2014) state that *reading* motivation and *reading* engagement can be considered as essential contributors of the wider motivation for *academic* motivation and engagement. These authors see these motivation and engagement as important (but distinct) forces which drive reader behaviours. They report a lack of conceptual clarity between reading motivation and reading engagement and emphasise the requirement to disentangle motivation and engagement as separate concepts.

Unrau and Quirk (2014 p.262) maintain that motivation is “primarily viewed as an internal process or event, not a product”. It can be argued that educators should play an important role in motivating student learning and helping and encouraging students to develop goals, values, interests and perceptions has been emphasised by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000). Motivation can be defined as:

“internal processes that instigate and sustain reading activity”
Unrau and Quirk (2014 p.272)

“the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained” Schunk, Pintrich and Meece (2008 p. 4)

Figure 2 summarises characteristics of motivation. These characteristics are manifest in both the individual learner and the wider context of the individual learner. Most importantly, in an educational context, elements of these characteristics may be influenced by educators themselves. Thus a motivation to read can be considered as a pre-requisite to engaged reading.

An internal process or event
Require energy, purpose and durability
Things which provide impetus for action and drive action
May be Inferred from actions
Changeable over time
Can be shaped

Figure 2. Characteristics of motivation

Source: Unrau and Quirk (2014)

The primary motivation for reading given in the MBA student group was that it was deemed as essential for a number of purposes. Uppermost in these was the link to assessment. The centrality of reading was confirmed by agreement that there was “no choice not to read”. Further reasons for reading were as “a preparation for class” reflecting tutor requirement to engage in pre-reading as precursor to wider discussion of concepts and case studies during classes. A further motivation was that reading was seen as a structural component of modules (and therefore of the wider course).

An important motivational theme emerged in the discussion of students wishing to exercise choice in *what* to read. This indicates some level of challenge to prescribed lists of reading provided by academic staff. Several students wished to see more individual student input to reading selections as a self-motivational approach and proposed that this could be designed-in to modules. One reason for suggesting this was to prompt, develop and motivate autonomy

in reading selections. The anticipated value of such an approach lay in developing self-engagement and a degree of ownership to further encourage students to identify and explore readings which satisfied a personal need. Declared needs of reading having more real world relevance to practitioners and, additionally, to have greater currency or industry or sectoral applicability were common within the group.

When discussing how students gauge the effectiveness of their reading, two main themes developed: firstly, tutor feedback on student findings and distillations of their readings; and secondly, peer feedback via discussions within student self-managed study groups. The latter study group approach is recognised as being strongly promoted by tutors within the MBA and these groups have endured during the students' ongoing course of study. Learners recognise that reading motivation and reading output is not evenly distributed within these groups, with some individuals feeling that there is scope for their fellow students to participate more in this activity. Tutor feedback is seen to be of particular importance in gauging levels of understanding and as a reinforcement of the value of reading for learning.

When asked if their approach to reading has changed during the MBA, it was widely agreed that students had become more selective in reading, and thus more strategic in their reading selections. The criteria for this more strategic approach included arguments for identification of materials which were strongly aligned to the summative assessment. However, there was also evidence that some students were making judgments on what the 'best' articles were – although there was no single explanation of what 'best' was. This seemed to be primarily related to the perceived clarity of the readings, and thus those which were more readily persuasive in knowledge transmission were being favoured above others. Other students suggested that their reading choices were influenced towards those articles and materials which supported their own world views or reflected a particular argument that they wished to communicate. However, such approaches may not adequately provide such students with appreciation of different world views as required in masters' level characteristics of the requirement to deal with complexity (QAA, 2013). With academic papers, selections were being made by more judicious use of abstracts, summaries and conclusions. There was a belief amongst the group that reading fewer, 'better' articles helped engagement and this in turn became a motivating factor for continuing to read.

In summarising, assessment is an important impetus for action. It is evident that the message of the importance of reading and its role in success within module summative assessment is being emphasised by tutors and this in turn is being internalised by students. Formative feedback opportunities on the effectiveness of reading are sourced from the tutor and within student study groups. The reading actions of students are subject to change over time, and these strategies for reading have been learnt and developed by the students themselves, without significant intervention by tutors. Having said this, there is clearly a role in tutors shaping the motivations of students. From this, Figure 3 summarises proposed elements to motivate students in their reading should be encompassed in the MBA reading strategy:

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicate the uses and contributions of reading to learning in the module and the wider course 2. Communicate the rationale for selections of tutor-selected readings 3. Recognise that learners may benefit from support in tackling more challenging readings and set out ways in which to find value in such tasks 4. Provide advice for reading and accommodating alternative viewpoints |
|--|

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Be constructively aligned to summative assessment and offer suitable formative assessment opportunities 6. Reflect learning trajectories and paths of learner development throughout the module and sequence of modules 7. Include student-selected readings to encourage motivation and ownership of selections 8. Feature authentic, practitioner, sector or industry readings |
|--|

Figure 3. Summary of elements for motivation

Source: Authors

The discussion also surfaced a range of module-specific approaches to reading, and it is recognised that modules may feature several of the afore-mentioned elements already. However, given the previously declared ambitions of the teaching team to take a course perspective, incorporation of these elements across all modules should provide positive outcomes for the course.

4.4 Engagement of Learners

Increasingly, academic staff and tutors are being viewed as facilitators of engagement within the HEI sector and are therefore seen as providers of the primary role in creating and sustaining engagement. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the concept of student engagement has emerged as an important indicator of student involvement in their learning. This may further be taken as an indication of learner satisfaction with their module or wider course experience. Alternatively a lack of engagement may be a contra-indicator of learner satisfaction.

Engagement “manifests as involvement in activity, such as reading” Unrau and Quirk (2014 p.264). These authors further define reading engagement in terms of “the actions (both observable and unobservable) associated with a person’s reading activities” (ibid., p.272).

Saeed and Zyngier (2012 p.255) summarising the work of Kuh (2009) that “engagement refers to the quality of effort and participation in authentic learning activities”. Indicators of action and interaction in the engagement process could include quantifiable measures such as the number of words read or the number of readings read, however evidence of comprehension (perhaps through interactions within face-to-face or online environments) may be seen as more appropriate examples of the relationship between the reader and the environment. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) have produced an engagement model of reading and development. This comprises nine variables of the instructional process which contribute to engagement. These are summarised in Figure 4.

- | |
|---|
| Teacher/Tutor involvement |
| Evaluation |
| Rewards and praise (self, teacher, peer group, alignment with assessment) |
| Collaboration |
| Strategy instruction ('how to' approach) |
| Interesting texts |
| Real-world interaction |
| Autonomy support |

Figure 4: An engagement model of reading and development

Source: Guthrie and Wigfield (2000)

When asked about the role of the tutor in engagement with reading, the group said that one of the most important factors included the volume of reading set out. Volume of reading (quantity and extent of readings) could be viewed as a means of engagement or could also be a means of disengagement if the reading load was considered to be unmanageable within the time available. The requirement of coming to class prepared, as presented in the discussion on motivation, was also recognised as an indicator of tutor involvement and a further means of encouraging engagement. This dialogue with tutors also provided confirmation or clarity on the priorities of the tutor and this in turn proved to be an instigator for further activity.

In considering the tutor evaluation of their reading effort, students said there did not seem to be consistent evidence of this. Discussion on the issue of evaluation was linked by students on their time spent on in-class presentations. There was a general (but not universal) view that there was often no direct benefit for this effort. This perception of benefit has relevance to features of ‘rewards and praise’ (albeit, this aspect in reading engagement is often viewed as something of more relevance to lower levels of education). However, it appears that MBA students are conscious of tutor neutrality in this regard, by reporting there was often “no reward” (for reading) and “no consequence” (of not reading).

Collaboration in reading and sharing of findings from reading was evident amongst the group. The afore-mentioned study groups and other team activities were characterised by discussions of shared readings and summaries of key issues and messages from readings. These summaries were sometimes e-mailed between students. This shared reading experience also gave some students the opportunity to identify current readings from business and news journals which were considered as being of significant relevance and therefore being of more interest (and therefore more engaging) than some of the module reading list requirements or suggestions. Collaboration in reading is therefore a good indicator of collaborative engagement on the course – and for the MBA, this evidences the requirement from professional bodies, such as the Association of MBAs (AMBA), that significant learning within the course is rooted in learning from others. This co-construction of learning is also anticipated in other masters’ level postgraduate programmes (QAA 2013b).

On this issue of currency of readings as a contributing factor for raising levels of interest, students identified issues of reliability as a potential problem. However, the desire for real-world interaction as a facet of both motivation and engagement appears as common element of a reading agenda for the MBA. Industry journals, news media and corporate publications were identified as important sources – these were often found by students in response to assessment tasks and in order to bring tutor-provided case materials up to date. Learners are questioning (and taking action regarding) the authenticity of source materials.

In considering support available to become independent learners, there were some divergent opinions on the responsibilities for this. Some students felt it was down to the individual learner, as action for this would have been an element of learning reserved for earlier degree or learning engagements. Others would welcome the course developing more guided outcomes for reading and felt this in turn would develop critical skills in reading and also bring wider information literacy benefits. Students agreed that learning

and knowledge goals included: scale and scope of subject knowledge; developing depth and expertise; coupled with competence and familiarity in the world of work. Trowler (2010) proposes using reading guides as part of this communication and acknowledgement of balancing study time with other commitments.

In summary, there is therefore evidence of engagement on a number of different levels. Behavioural engagement is evident in the positive observable involvement in academic tasks. The development of strategies used in the process of reading suggests an active engagement with (and psychological investment in) learning. Affective engagement is manifest in student’s emotional responses to reading and the reading agenda set by tutors. There is clearly a strong social context to reading (Guthrie and Wigfield 2000) and this incorporates tutor-student-tutor and student-student interactions. There is scope for further student-tutor-student interactions.

Instructional processes are having an impact on motivation and engagement processes in the MBA. In this regard, Lawson and Lawson (2013 p.448) have proposed a number of “student engagement dispositions”: initiative; investment; ambivalence; and disidentification. Students are demonstrating initiative in finding their own source materials. This is a positive approach which could, however, be viewed by some as a disidentification with prescribed reading sources. This level of independence in engagement can be viewed positively as an enduring behaviour which may be transferable. Indeed, the use of student-found content as part of the engagement is indicative of, and anticipated within, the notion of ‘mastersness’ in postgraduate programmes (QAA 2013b).

Students are responding to the academic challenges presented in the MBA and are participating actively to construct and test their knowledge. Reading provides important grounding for these activities. Consequently, Figure 5 sets out proposed elements to engage students in their reading which should be encompassed in the MBA reading strategy.

1. Quantify the reading expectations in the module, identifying ‘must read’ priorities and base this totality on the available time within the learning hours for the module
2. Provide feedback on reading efforts
3. Identify opportunities for both individual and collaborative opportunities for reading and how these are managed and shared
4. Consider the currency and authenticity of materials and provide any perceived justifications for inclusion or exclusion
5. Develop a strategy for creating autonomy in the learner, within the context of the subject/discipline

Figure 5. Summary of elements for engagement

Source: Authors

How can these elements of the reading strategy be linked to identified and declared pedagogical approaches in modules? In revisiting the afore-mentioned Mayes and De Fretias (2004) associative, constructive and situative pedagogical approaches, Figure 6 attempts to provide an illustrative (but in-exhaustive) set of activities which are consistent with a given pedagogy. These may be incorporated into activities within the module to initiate and maintain reading during module delivery.

Table 3. Linking ‘reading strategy’ and pedagogy

Pedagogy	Examples of elements of a reading strategy which would support a given pedagogical approach
Associative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routines of organised activity (such as reading of core text chapters) • Clear goals (reading tasks, reading quantity, reading variety) • Prescribed constructs to develop skills in reading (criticality, review, summary, précis) • Use of rules and frameworks (such as KWL ‘What I Know, What I want to Know, What I Learned’ after Ogle (1986) and SQ3R ‘Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review’ after Robinson (1946)) • Individualised pathways (from identification of learning need, possibly from diagnostic or felt needs)
Constructive (Individual)	
Constructive (social)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paired and group reading exercises (Hartley 2002) • Guided peer questioning on set texts (Hartley 2002) • Use of Wikis to develop information gathering, communication and editorial capabilities
Situative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to, and analysis of, professional body publications • Examination of discipline-specific literature which is central to practitioner day-to-day activity • Conference proceedings on specialised subjects matter of relevance to practitioners • Blogs and articles from industry professionals and engagement and response to these blogs. • Organisation annual reports and press releases • Sector or Industry trade bodies and publications • Identification of experts and their published work. • Consideration of ‘communities of practice’

Source: Authors

Lastly, the focus group identified a number of transitions experienced by MBA students in their personal engagement with reading. For students without (or even in some cases, with) a previous masters’ qualification, an issue of *level* may be a significant transition. For students who have engaged in an MBA course with a prior grounding in subject disciplines outwith the social sciences (and the study of management in particular) there may be a transition in terms of *discipline*, which may require engagement with reading for a set of purposes different to that previously experienced. Students may be reading in a second language, and this also brings transitional *language* elements to their educational context. For other learners, a transition in *mode* of study may be evident, and this new environment may require a period of adjustment. Further, the focus group discussion suggests that reading motivation and engagement are dynamic within the course experience itself, with learners developing personal reading strategies which reflect a heightened selection

environment, time on task and alignment with assessment. This in turn suggests *modular* transitions are experienced by students.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Formal curriculum design and development activities involving a multi-stakeholder approach provide important opportunities to identify, evaluate and develop enhancements for course design. Participation in such workshop events has identified a requirement for a more deliberate tutor intervention as part of a ‘reading strategy’ approach for the MBA.

We see ‘reading strategies’ as an underpinning element of information literacy with good reading as pre-cursor of good thinking and good writing. Reading is an essential, but often taken-for-granted, practice in academic study at postgraduate level in higher education. This paper has sought to explore how teaching staff support, motivate and engage students to conceptualise, articulate and enact their approach to reading on the MBA. The primary research supports the literature view that academic staff and students may have some degree of misaligned expectations regarding reading.

The emphasis within the found literature on reading features models, frameworks and studies which are, by-enlarge, not specifically aligned to postgraduate learning. However, the frameworks selected for this study, in considering learner motivation and learner engagement, have proved useful in separating out these behaviours in the MBA learner experience. Reading requirements feature combinations of implicit and explicit activities. There is a role for HEI academic staff and library staff to develop student cognitive abilities such as critical skills.

For the library, the supply side issues are the crucial element of any reading strategy. Common issues in this regard relate to academic staff recommending materials that cannot be provided by the library, or materials which cannot be accessed by learners. The purpose of reading lists is often assumed, and sometimes ignores the use of these lists as a directional tool which may have institutional and modular context. Thus the structuring of lists along particular facets or categories and levels of performance is preferred by MBA students as means of communicating the context of reading for learning.

This paper has surfaced the role of reading as an enabling activity contributing to significant hours of directed and self-directed study. Reading is anticipated to be central to many of these learning hours and also as a major contributor to the production of, or engagement with, the formative and summative assessment regime for the module. Given this proportion of activity on a module (and indeed, on an entire course) appropriate reading strategies are required to motivate and engage learners and to make best use of this time. The articulation of explicit reading strategies within modules must recognise and support any pedagogical variation within the module. Tutors may have sound reasons for a particular strategy however, the communication of this strategy to students as part of the explanation of pedagogical approaches to the module should be made explicit. If these explanations were to form part of the information set which is provided to learners, we believe this has the potential to encourage motivation and engagement in reading. At the very least, it should reduce (and perhaps eliminate) the afore-mentioned tutor-learner expectation gap.

Despite the centrality of reading we argue that the pedagogical approaches to reading may not be fully appreciated or shared by academic staff and learners. Opportunities to consciously couple reading activity to distinct associative, constructive and situative pedagogical approaches have been proposed to assist teaching teams in the implementation of the reading strategy. In addition to acting as a learning design tool, these pedagogical perspectives can (and should) be used as a shared communication device within the teaching team and with learners. Adopting this pedagogical language

across all modules can provide a common 'course feel' while still permitting individual subject disciplinary bodies of knowledge to be preserved.

A number of transitions are evident within a dynamic reading context. These transitions require recognition and consideration within the reading strategy with the ultimate purpose of moving students from dependent learners to creating self-motivated, engaged and autonomous readers in preparation for learning during and beyond the delivery of the course.

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Table 1 Summary of materials content

Semester	Module	Module credits	Directed/private study hours	Journal articles	Book chapters	Books	Videos/podcasts	Web links	Other	Total Sources per module
1	A	10	76	25	0	0	0	2	1	28
	B	15	110	59	23	0	9	4	14	109
2	C	10	67	2	24	0	0	11	0	37
	D	10	76	1	12	1	0	2	0	16
3	E	10	56	0	23	0	0	4	2	29
4	F	15	90	12	0	20	9	16	1	58
	G	15	150	45	24	1	4	0	10	84
5 & 6	H	20	116	4	12	86	0	0	0	102
6	I	15	144	16	10	0	1	1	4	32
7	J	15	100	2	0	5	0	2	4	13
8	K	15	144	7	2	19	61	6	3	98
	<i>Totals</i>			173	130	132	84	48	39	606

Source: Authors

