

BLENDED LEARNING IN AN LIS MODULE: A REALIST ASSESSMENT

Sally Witbooi

Dept of Library and Information Science

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And UWC colleagues and students



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A place of quality, a place to grow, from hope to action through knowledge

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction and background
- Methodology
 - Research question for Action research
 - Specific evaluative research question
 - Realist Assessment
 - The overall action research project
 - LIS intervention
 - Flexible provision in LIS
- Context
- Mechanisms
- Outcomes
- Conclusion



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- UWC decided to limit it after-hours classes in most faculties
- In Arts faculty it ceased this service – LIS a dept here
- Working unqualified and under-qualified LIS were adversely affected.
- Factors that played a role: increase of intake of young full-time students; ongoing pressure on staff to generate research, and the strategic objective to promote post-graduate studies



CONTINUES

- The Division of Lifelong Learning (DLL) undertook action research
- Flexible Learning and teaching Provision (FLTP)
- 3 pilot sites, LIS site no 1
- BLIS program
- LIB111 module focus of this paper



METHODOLOGY

- Realist assessment deemed appropriate:
 - as multiple interacting components were present
 - these components did not act in a linear fashion
 - it was reliant on people to carry out the intervention; and most importantly,
 - it was highly dependent on the context in which it took place



RESEARCH QUESTION FOR ACTION RESEARCH

- What conditions need to change to enable working students access in order to achieve success in Higher Education?



SPECIFIC EVALUATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What was the overall nature of the intervention? – Context
- What factors/mechanisms hindered/ supported the intervention? – Mechanisms
- What were the experiences of students and staff? – Outcomes
- How/where/ to what extent did the intervention manifest as blended learning?



REALIST ASSESSMENT

- Program evaluation: what works and what does not in an intervention
- A realist approach assumes that programs are ‘theories incarnate’. That is, whenever a program is implemented, it is testing a theory about what ‘might cause change’, even though that theory may not be explicit. One of the tasks of a realist evaluation is therefore to make the theories within a program explicit, by developing clear hypotheses about how, and for whom, programs might ‘work’. (Pawson and Tilley 2004, 3)

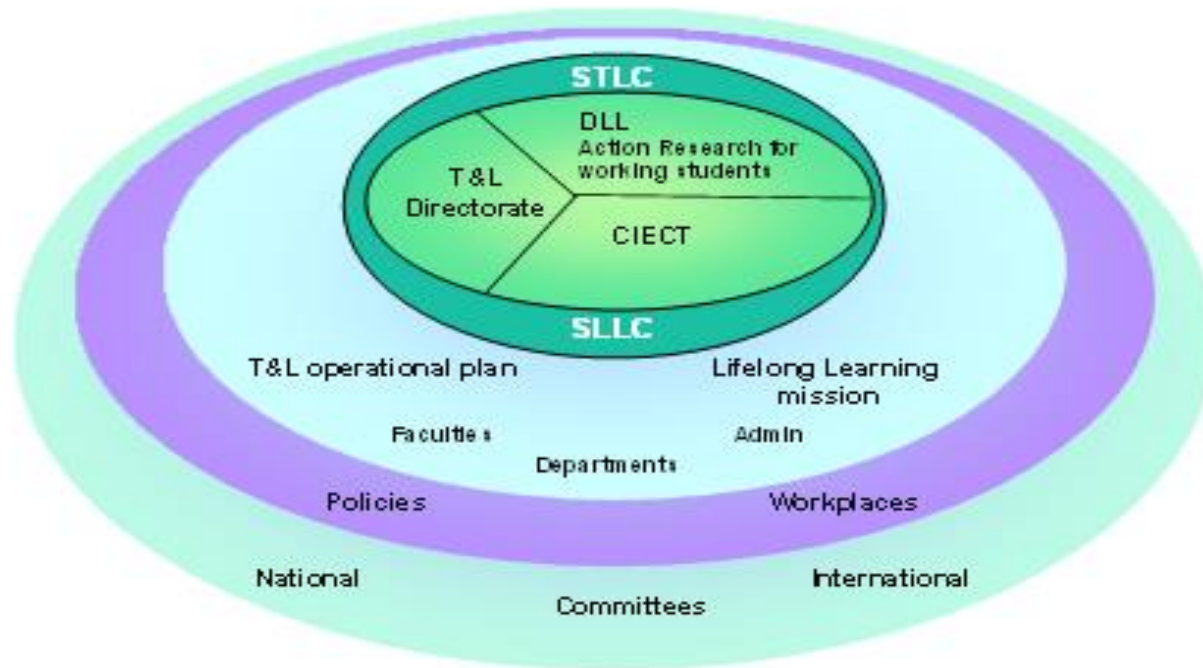


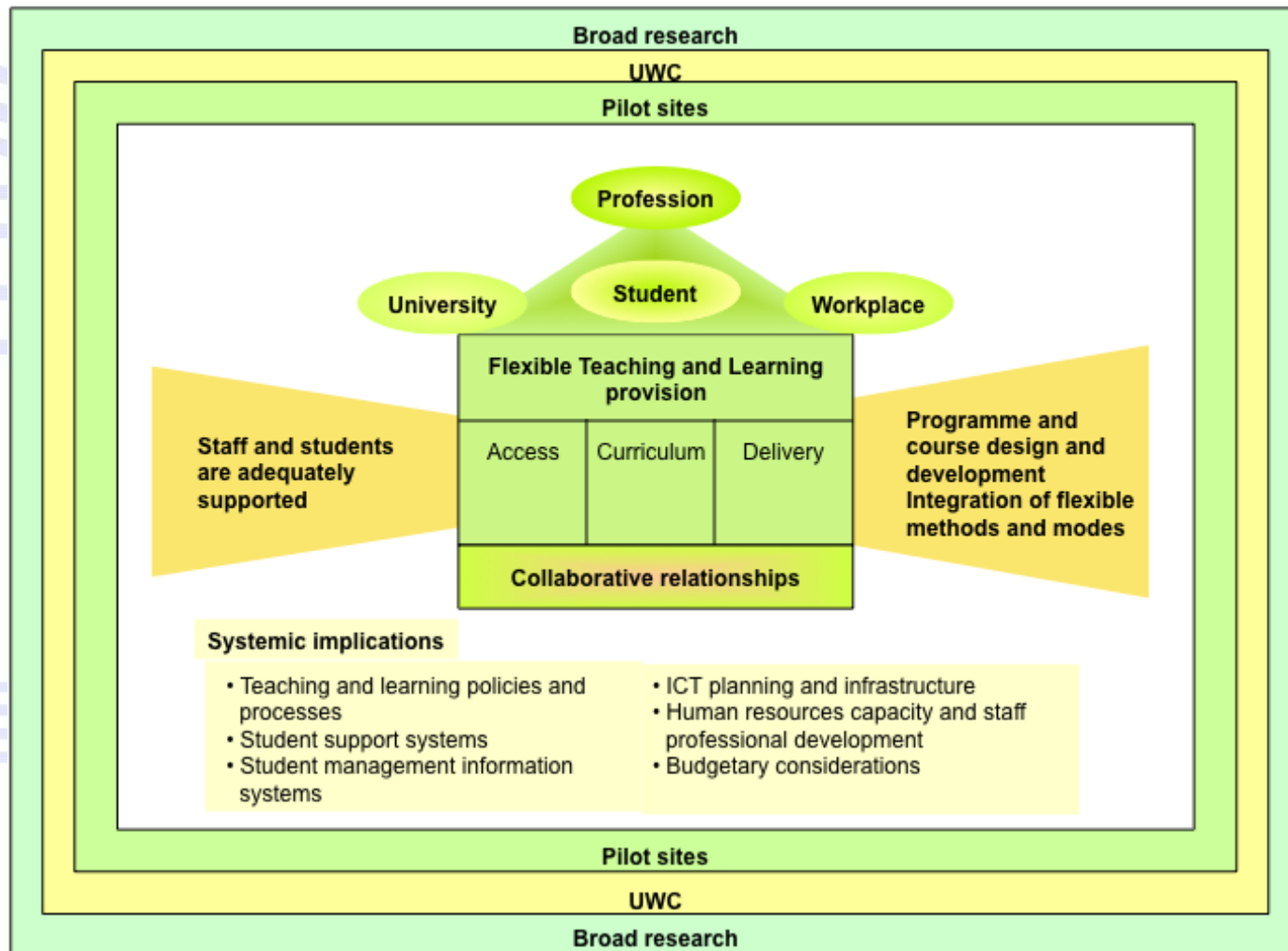
CONTINUES...

- The distinct philosophical orientation to programme theory:
 - analytic centerpiece' of realist evaluation;
 - search for underlying mechanisms (M)
 - that in particular contexts (C),
 - generate outcomes (O).
 - Sometimes presented as a simple formula of Context + Mechanism = Outcomes.

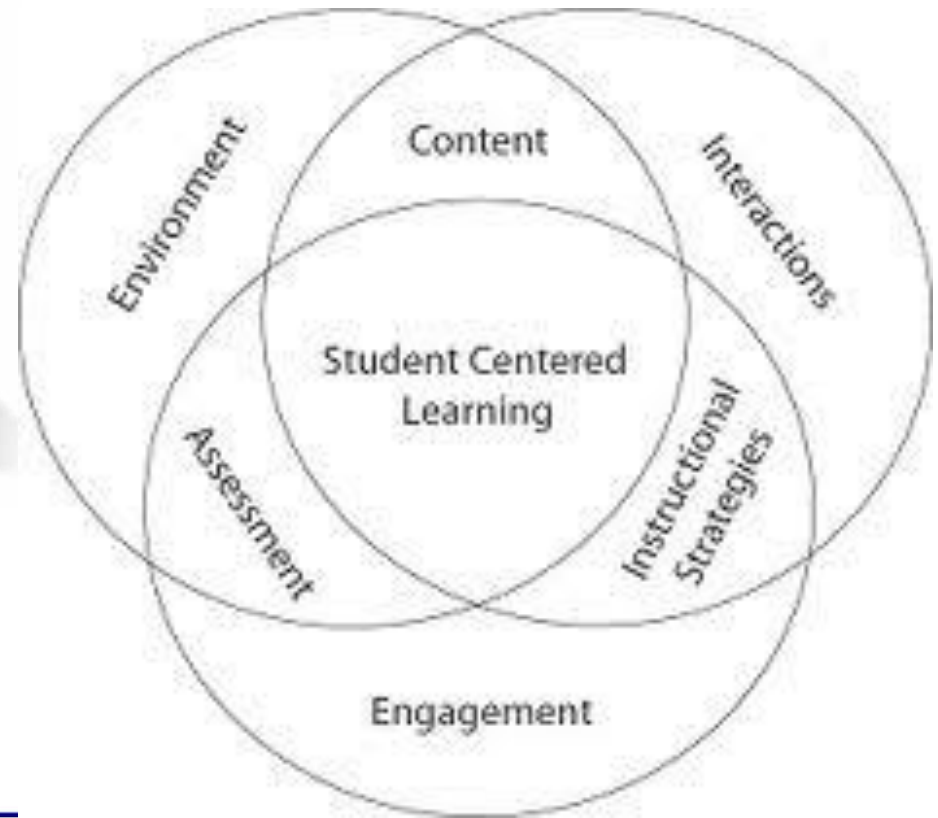


THE OVERALL ACTION RESEARCH CONTEXT



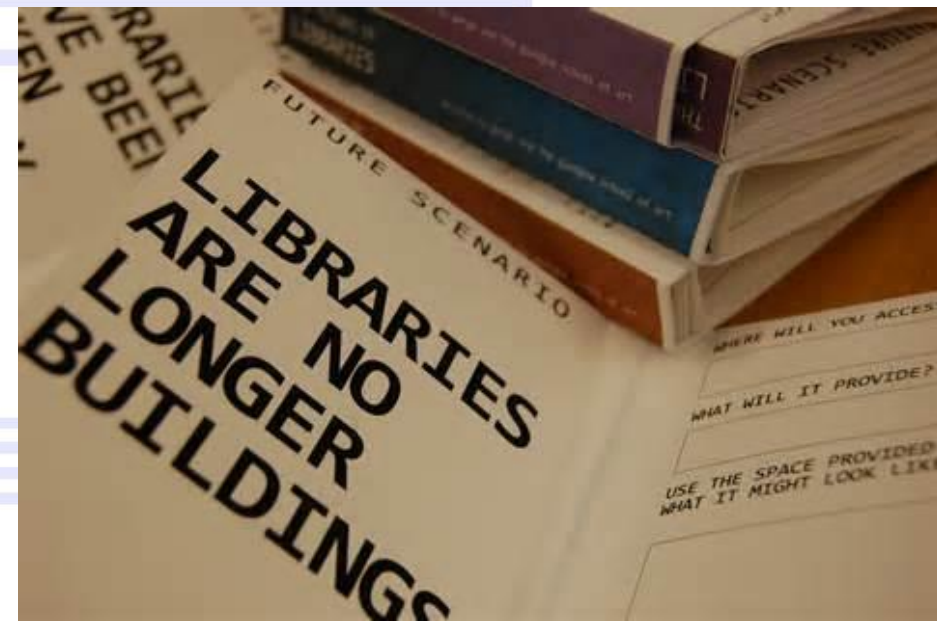


LIS INTERVENTION



CONTINUES

- BLIS selected for this project
- Majority of students are working in public library sector
- They have to attend on 'full time' basis
- They do so with 10 days attendance leave and 10 days study leave.



FLEXIBLE PROVISION IN LIS

- The first year module (LIB111) has been put on LMS (Ikamva) – course resources to be accessed online.
- Printed format was totally abandoned
- The ‘announcement’ feature allowed for rapid communication with students regarding course developments and students were notified via email
- “Resources’ feature is the space where additional materials such as Power-point presentations and worksheets were deposited for students to access
- A blended learning approach was encouraged, founded on pedagogy that puts the student at the centre of learning



CONTEXT

- Students at risk
- Tutorial frequency
- Timetable clashes
- Drop in student numbers
- Initially more than one Learning Management system
- Student lived off-campus
- Students e.g. lack of literacies
- Technology e.g. instability



MECHANISMS

- Monetary incentive for the department
- Early uptake of technology by one staff member before intervention – the champion
- LMS
- Willingness to engage
- Staff members availed themselves for training
- Pilot project committee meetings
- Meeting between the City of Cape Town (CoCT) Library officials and the LIS department.

OUTCOMES

- Part time students felt treated equally with full time counterparts; get same course content and instant communication
- Students initially struggled to access Ikamva remotely as it was on a separate platform
- These students then suggested that only one LMS should be operated from the UWC website– Ikamva as it was easier to navigate
- Their suggestions about Ikamva features lead to the improvement of the LMS infrastructure



CONTINUES

- Staff:
 - Making materials/ information available online does not mean it will be used. Students still attend class not having read what is freely available online.
 - For most students English is their second language and they are/were not used to the discussion forum environment.
 - The availability of physical space (classrooms) affected the timetable. The use of technology requires laboratory space, not lecture halls.



CONCLUSION

- Institutional decisions about the use of facilities, resources and capacity generally favoured students who were residential and full-time
- While the innovation 'mirrored' a blended learning course model, allowing students more flexibility about when, where, and how to access information, students were still required to attend the same number of face-to-face contact hours as stipulated in the institutional curriculum policy framework



CONTINUES

- LIS should be allowed to experiment with the notion of contact hours for both classroom sessions and tutorials
- The realist approach to this assessment allowed for the articulation of the context(s) in relation to explicit and emerging mechanisms that were used or operational during the intervention.

