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*Victoria University learning in the workplace and community: connecting partners, connecting fields, connecting learning*

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# Victoria University learning in the workplace and community: Connecting partners, connecting fields, connecting learning

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This paper outlines the innovative cross-discipline Learning in the Workplace and Community (LiWC) partnership model being trialled in the Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development (FAEHD) at Victoria University (VU). The multi-faceted model responds to challenges arising out of a VU commitment to 25 per cent LiWC assessment across all courses. The model is based on the creation of holistic dialectical partnerships with external organisations in triangular learning relationships, consistent with the reconceptualization of twenty-first century learning. It responds to the challenges of developing and articulating authentic learning outcomes across a diverse faculty and scaffolds quality outcomes in scholarship of teaching and learning, graduate capabilities, flexible learning, and curriculum internationalization outcomes. The multi-faceted model also supports all stakeholder learning and maps learning outcomes, which supports the evaluation of progress. Lastly, this paper will also outline the operationalization model, which addresses resourcing issues, such as workload and time constraints, for all stakeholders. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 2012, 13(1), 13-22)

Key words: Work integrated learning, scholarship of teaching and learning, experiential learning

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## VICTORIA UNIVERSITY (VU) CONTEXT

Since 2004, VU has been committed to developing a whole of university approach to Learning in the Workplace and Community (LiWC). This commitment recognizes that the workplace and the community are legitimate and valuable sites for learning for students from all sectors. LiWC has been embedded in the university's strategic direction and priorities planning, including the *Making VU 2016: A Statement of Purpose* (Victoria University, 2008) and the *Diamond innovations, thirteen great examples of innovation in teaching and learning at Victoria University* (Aitkin & Mitchell, 2008). Both documents outline key priorities, which directly relate to successful LiWC practice, namely students, staff, and local and global enterprises and communities.

Put plainly, the challenge for universities, especially in the schools or colleges where large volumes of students need to be placed in accordance with professional accreditation guidelines, is to maximise the learning opportunities that Miller's model of clinical competence (as cited in Orrell, 2009) highlights as being associated with the professional authenticity of an assessment. In it, authentic LiWC is at the top of the learning pyramid and knowing through examination is at the bottom. The core distinction that this model makes is between the LiWC experience that is clearly articulated in terms of relevant and authentic learning outcomes and the *placement, or know how to*, behaviorist model.

In response to these challenges and university priorities, the model being trialled scaffolds quality scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), the creation of twenty-first century graduate capabilities, flexible learning forms and internationalisation outcomes, consistent with the reconceptualization of the imperatives of twenty-first century dialectical learning

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(Bryans & Smith, 2000, Roth, 1989)) between people and organisations. The model also provides the basis of a significant research agenda through the shared learning project element and fosters valuable partnerships with one or multiple partners, across key strategic contexts; university Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education (VE), cluster, faculty, and school.

#### FACULTY OF ARTS, EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (FAEHD) LIWC MODEL IN DETAIL

The model is designed to be universal, that is, able to facilitate single and multi-partner, single and multi-discipline, national, international and cross sector partnerships and it is based on four core elements which comprise the sine qua non: partnership organisations; universities; students; and shared scholarship / area of enquiry.

The model builds upon the VU School of Education Project Partnerships (PP) praxis inquiry pre-service teacher practicum model. In the PP model, pre-service teachers, mentor teachers and a university colleague work as a team on a learning community Accelerated Curriculum Project (ACP) that benefits the learning of school students. The Project Partnership enables each pre-service teacher to work on complex educational projects negotiated with mentor teachers.

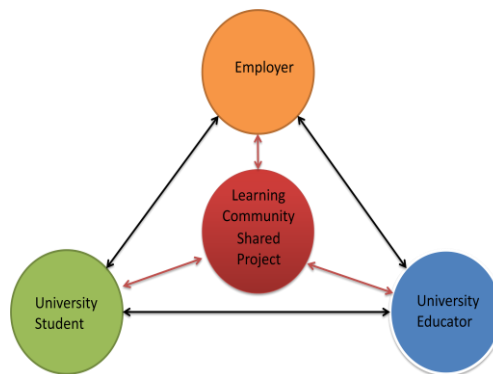


FIGURE 1:  
Proposed AEHD LiWC Model

In the proposed model, above, the university representative would be one with a teaching role and would be actively involved with the mentor teacher and student(s) in researching and publishing the results of the shared learning project. The university educator would not only engage with the learning project actively with a SoTL focus but they would also support both the teacher and the student to do the same. The connection between the university educator and the teacher is strengthened and the connections between both the teacher and the university educator and the learning project are strengthened significantly. The shift is thus from being engaged in terms of supporting the learning of the student in the PP model to supporting the systematic reflection on teaching and learning with the aim of making the project public. The proposed model, then, increases the value of the partnership for all parties and forms the basis of sustainable improvement in teaching and learning for both the partnership school and the university.

While the model is designed to be as flat and democratic as possible, strong academic input is essential in guarding against ignorance sharing. The question of facilitation and / or leadership, then, becomes a crucial one. In the model, VU would facilitate the partnership and, through an experiential learning approach, work towards both avoiding the sharing of ignorance and achieving a balance between theory and practice for the benefit of all parties (Lieberman & Wood, 2002).

### SCALABILITY AND CROSS-DISCIPLINE PARTNERSHIPS

A key challenge for faculties is to cater for significant student numbers, prescriptive practicum requirements and an often a vast array of academic pursuits. This model is equipped to cater for cross-discipline partnerships, while maintaining its triangular design integrity. This is of critical importance as any growth beyond this principal triangular relationship would dilute stakeholder connectivity and accountability and thus the strength of SoTL, graduate capability outcomes and learning value-add for the employer.

By applying a layered approach, the model is effective both within a single- and a cross-discipline dimension. The layered feature of the model scaffolds whole university, cluster-based, cross-faculty and school-based partnerships. The model below highlights a partnership with a single organization, Football Federation Victoria (FFV) that contains multiple disciplinary dimensions, across the FAEHD. For example, the FFV business is a broad one and this is reflected in the model. The partnership then supports projects across the areas of sports management and administration, through communications, sports psychology, education, community and cultural outreach, and marketing.

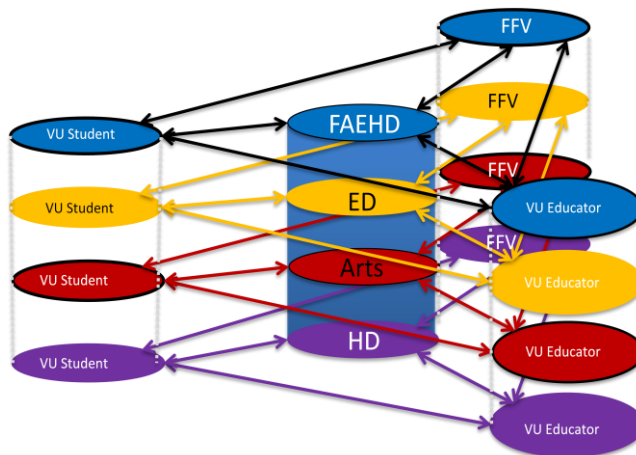


FIGURE 2:  
Single Partner with Cross Discipline Partnership

Further, the model has the potential to grow into multi-party partnerships locally and / or internationally, consistent with the conceptualisation of twenty-first century global skills. The narrow partnerships have the potential to grow both in depth with like partners or in breadth with the addition of partners in related fields of expertise. An example of growth in depth would be a VU-FFV partnership expanding to include other football associations, locally, nationally or internationally, enabling participants to develop more complex views of

the issues they are concerned about. Through an expanding series of connections, members become committed to each other and to larger ideas and ideals that expand their world and their work.

The model has the capacity to support both multi-partner and multi-discipline partnerships under a single banner. An example of this is the partnerships with the National Partnership Extended School Hub (NPESH) project, aimed at whole-community renewal. In this case, the project is led by a single lead organization, The Smith Family, but in practice, it contains multiple partnerships across multiple disciplines. For example, the Heathdale Community Hub, Wyndham BEST Start and the Western English Language Schools, together, present a broad range of valuable LiWC partners able to connect with VU schools across the FAEHD, and university. The value model in this context is that it scaffolds scholarship and learning on an individual partnership level, while the central shared learning community space also fosters a convergence of the different elements of the whole project to produce deeper learning and more innovative thinking for all partners.

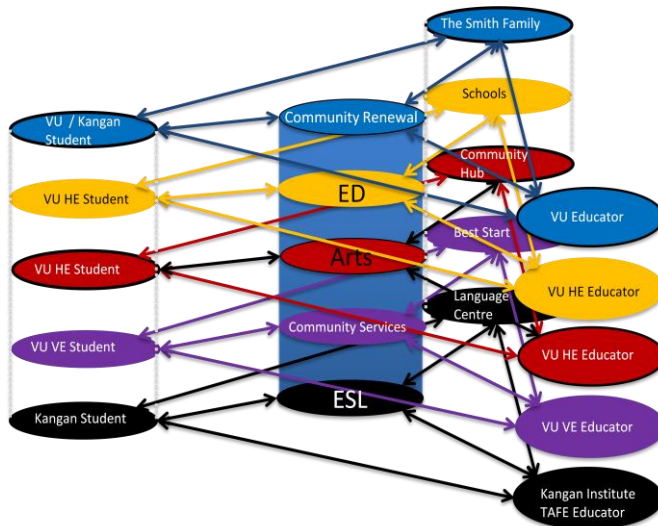


FIGURE 3: Both Single and Multi-party Partnership with cross-discipline, cross-sector and pathway dimensions

Lastly, the model supports valuable learning experiences for students at different levels, concurrently and collaboratively, thus scaffolding VU educational pathways across university sectors. From within the learning community shared space, students from each sector and level can collaborate valuably and democratically in shared learning experiences. The NPESH partnership presents the Education and Transition Cluster with valuable partnership opportunities for VU students across certificate level courses through to diploma, degree and PhD, including multiple pathway transitions.

During 2010, the university undertook a review of LiWC policy and practices (VU, 2010). While it identified generally high levels of practice, it also outlined a set of recommendations to which this model directly responds.

TABLE 1  
Responses to the VU LiWC Status Report Recommendations

	Recommendations	How addressed by model
Create:	Faculty peer review School Learning & Teaching Committees Course Teams & Research Teams Learning & Teaching Communities of Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scaffolding by SoTL practice (makes experiential learning visible)</li> <li>• Consolidation of existing approaches (makes more manageable)</li> <li>• SoTL provides platform for faculty structures to function from</li> </ul>
Hold:	Seminars and conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes learning &amp; scholarship</li> <li>• Publications fuel further conferences</li> <li>• Puts VU at centre of LiWC innovation</li> </ul>
Promote:	Professional Development Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundation on which to build experiential professional development program across the university</li> </ul>
Collaborate:	Industry and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes understanding, rather than knowledge acquisition</li> <li>• Students progress from low to high skill levels</li> <li>• scaffolds reflective practice for all partners</li> </ul>
Collaborate:	Other institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• highlights formal learning pathways</li> <li>• facilitates collaboration with the Kangan Institute, amongst others</li> <li>• facilitates meaningful SoTL collaboration with partner learning institutions both locally and globally</li> </ul>

#### LIWC MODEL IN CONTEXT OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LEARNING PARADIGM

The model responds to the emergent twenty-first century paradigm in that it recognises that both employers and students themselves have “very different expectations of education, its outcomes and delivery forms than they did even 20 years ago” (Kozma, R., Intel, Microsoft, and Cisco Education Taskforce, 2009, p.13). To be prepared to operate in a global knowledge-based society and economy, then, a new set of skills and practices are needed to enable effective performance. As it is incumbent on national governments to strive for social and economic equity, it is incumbent on governments to equip all citizens with the requisite skills, literacies and understandings to succeed.

The implications, then, for LiWC are clear; they must include instrumental (technical) learning but go beyond this to include dialogic and self-reflective learning. A model that offers the opportunity for participants to write and reflect with other professionals (Lieberman & Grolnick, 2005) and helps to create an ongoing social network of professionals will satisfy the needs of the contemporary workplace.

LiWC models must avoid the twentieth century behaviourist trap, by moving from a placement conception of LiWC to a partnership conception. Placement-focussed or behaviouristic models of practice understand learning as nothing more than the acquisition of new behaviour based on environmental conditions, and developed as the field emerged to meet the needs of production orientated organisations after World War Two, (Engström, 2001) with a workplace education level of the far below today’s norm, and technology

considered primitive by today's standards. By contrast, effective learning in contemporary workplaces is the way in which individuals or groups acquire, interpret, reorganize, change or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills and feelings. It is also primary to the way in which people build meaning in their personal and shared organisational lives (Marsick, 1988).

Pancini and McCormack recognising the importance of providing progressive learning forms to students, however, argue that:

Rather than focus on the question: How can education become more attuned to the concerns of employers and the workplace? the enquiry should focus on the counter questions: How can workplaces be(come) places of productive learning for students? That is, how can workplaces help produce graduates with learning attributes that are attuned and responsive to a flexible, more liquid, world of change, complexity and contingency? (2009, p. 1)

These questions are useful in terms of focusing on the contextual nature of the twenty-first century learning paradigm; however, the context should focus not on the workplace or school or university but on each, simultaneously; the notion of interdependence is critical to twenty-first century LiWC.

A twenty-first century learning environment where learning is a process embedded in production and flexible organisational structures (Garrick & Usher, 1999) and is, therefore, about participation in an innovative community of practice which draws on contextual theories about learning or situated learning (Cullen, Hadjivassiliou, Hamilton, Kelleher, Sommerlad, & Stern 2002). Put another way, the broad trends in workplace learning can focus on the individual (ideally transcending their existing limits) and/or on social and situated learning and building communities of practice (Illeris, 2003). To this end, the onus of creating social learning to fit the new twenty-first century paradigm should rest equally with workplace, student and educators, rather than taking a placement focus, which puts the onus of creating learning workplaces on industry.

The creation of an inclusive dialectic approach, then, is essential to adapting learning in the workplace to fit the interdependent twenty-first century paradigm. There is much that education institutions, academics and industry can and need to learn from each other. For example, the most successful twenty-first century companies have become flatter in structure, their decision making has become more decentralized, their information is widely shared, their workers form project teams and their work arrangements are more flexible. Further, there is a strong link between both information sharing and decentralized decision-making and the company's innovativeness. Indeed, Bauman (2000) rightly characterizes the emerging twenty-first century learning paradigm as being 'liquid' and as a result, he suggests that learning itself must become more liquid to keep up.

Similarly, Schön (1983) and Senge (1990) rightly highlight the value of scholarly reflection in terms of professional practice and organisational success. Through reflection, a professional organisation can, Schön suggests, surface and challenge tacit understandings that have grown up and around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty. He makes the case for the university involvement in adding value to the workplace and highlights the difficulty for organisations to effectively reflect-in-action alone. This serves to make the case for partnerships to scaffold this process, creating a powerful force for effective practice for all partnership parties.

The notion that the LiWC partnerships are a genuine vehicle for workplaces to become learning organisations is of fundamental importance to the success and sustainability of effective LiWC models. Schön highlights the primacy of problem setting over problem solving:

The problem is that too often problems faced by organisations are framed and reviewed by individuals as a win/lose game. Individuals seek to solve problems by a strategy of mystery and mastery rather than a process of research-based objectivity, thus establishing a self-reinforcing system; either role and problems are framed to suit a theory of action, or a theory of action is evolved to suit the role and problems that are framed. (1983, p. 228)

In a partnership with university, effective problem setting is scaffolded by research-based dialogic reflection-in-action with external personnel. That is, the action extends thinking and the reflection feeds on the action and the results. Each feeds the other and each sets boundaries for the other.

The process of problem setting is also at the heart of best practice teaching and learning, and at the heart of the VU FAEHD LiWC model. As Barrie (2006) argues, graduate attributes, scaffolded in effective LiWC experiences, should not be seen as being discrete learning outcomes, but rather as *enablers* of all learning. In this conception, graduate capabilities are an integral substrate of discipline knowledge and are the core of all scholarly knowledge.

The scholarship of teaching and learning may best be thought of not as discrete projects and investigations, but as a set of principles and practices that bring people together and energize their collective work: a commitment to making teaching and learning public, to rigorous and constructive peer review and to building the field (Hutchings, 2002). The involvement of university educator(s) and university students creates very real benefits for any organisation in terms of its own learning and / or problem solving Trigwell, K., Martin, E., Benjamin, J., and Prosser, M (2000). The benefits thus reach far beyond the specific tasks performed by the students.

## GOVERNANCE

The extent to which the learning value of LiWC partnerships for both students and educators can be both maximized and sustained relies heavily on the effectiveness of the partnership governance model; this need is particularly acute when establishing diverse partnerships across disciplines. In particular, clear partnership mapping that outlines projects, stakeholders and learning outcomes and a program of ongoing evaluation and monitoring of the quality of learning in the workplace and community is vital. Further, evaluation for, and of, learning must ensure that expectations of all parties, curricula, students, and work and community host organizations are explicit and reasonable. All parties need to be clear about the aims of the experience and their own particular responsibilities, making use of learning contracts where possible.

The FAEHD model anticipates that bilateral multi-faceted partnerships such as the VU-NPESH partnership, the VU-FFV partnership and future partnerships, be managed as single partnerships by reference groups comprised of representation from each of the key organization and school-based stakeholders. In the model below, the reference group would comprise representative(s) from the partner organization across the different partnership fields. It would also include a senior research academic in each partnership field.



The model provides for each partnership field being led by a senior researcher who would have strategic oversight over the field partnership, while a dedicated person appointed by the university maintains the individual triangular relationship at school level. Each field partnership may be broken down into multiple contexts. For example, a teacher education partnership may involve a cluster of schools, each pursuing their own bespoke area of interest and inquiry. The key factor is that the core theoretical underpinning of each site should fit within a single research cluster. This is the key factor that makes it possible for the senior researcher to maintain a meaningful strategic oversight over multiple partner contexts.

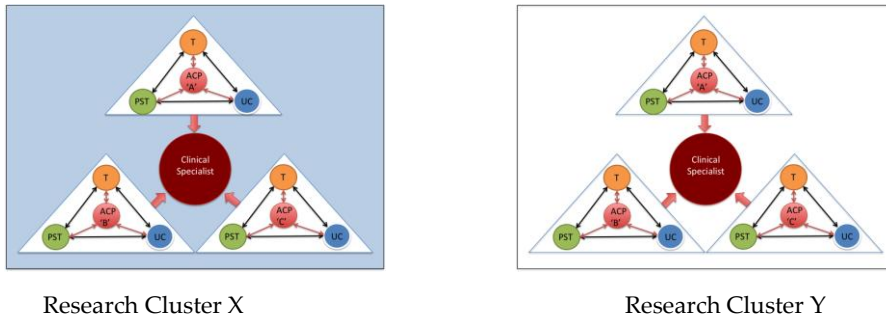


FIGURE 4:  
Common Experiential Learning Framework

To maximize the possible learning for each stakeholder and to maintain continuity for the partner organization, a common experiential learning framework is adopted across each partnership field.

The diagram below outlines the (Glaser & Roadcap, 2007) experiential learning model, which will serve as the learning structure that facilitates stakeholder learning across the semester. The red points indicate the input stages for the research academic. They also represent key assessment opportunities for course designers. Importantly, as each cluster would be working within a single research cluster, the research academic would input three times per semester on a cluster (rather than an individual school) level, acknowledging workload issues.

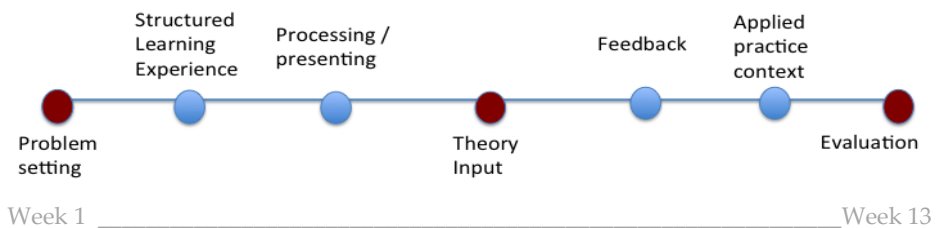


FIGURE 5:  
VU FAEHD Experiential Learning Cycle Adapted from Glaser

To be sustainable and effective, it is important that any governance structures scaffold clear communication with all key people and committees on a micro- and a macro-level across curriculum, support and policy areas. The faculty governance structure, outlined below,

centres primary strategic oversight of cross-faculty LiWC projects within the faculty Senior Advisory Committee (SAC) group. This is a scalable structure that can be expanded to fit both university cluster groupings and whole-university LiWC relationships. The LiWC group feeds into SAC, which has strategic oversight from within the faculty across learning matters but also in terms of relationship management and curriculum policy. This group feed back to the university-wide LiWC Coordination Committee on Learning; Strategic / logistic; and Research dimensions.

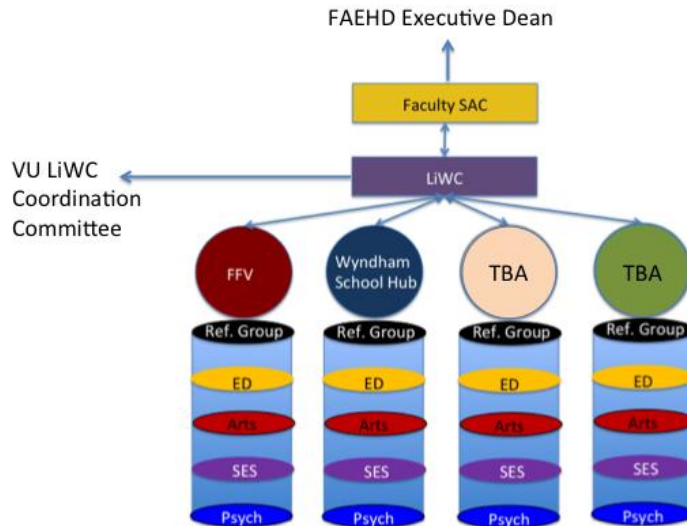


FIGURE 6:  
FAEHD LiWC Governance Structure

## CONCLUSION

VU’s commitment to LiWC across all courses has provided, and is providing, students, academics and workplace and community personnel with rich professional learning opportunities. All VU students across all courses are benefiting from unique LiWC experiences stemming from the institutional investment in innovative LiWC practice. It is within this context that this model has been developed to both scaffold effective practice within a diverse faculty and to make more visible the elements and connections that are needed in every LiWC partnership to optimize the learning experiences for all stakeholders.

The FAEHD model has been designed to respond to quality assurance imperatives, as outlined in the university review and to strengthen the governance structures that are vital to the creation of sustainable and authentic cross-discipline learning experiences which, traditionally, have been difficult to develop. Of further importance, for the faculty and by extension the university, is that this model promotes opportunities for qualitative, ongoing formative evaluation by both employers and students as it facilitates a robust debriefing and feedback process and uses the feedback to improve both the experience and the program of study to which it relates.

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The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative education (APJCE) arose from a desire to produce an international forum for discussion of cooperative education, or work integrated learning (WIL), issues for practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region and is intended to provide a mechanism for the dissemination of research, best practice and innovation in work-integrated learning. The journal maintains close links to the biennial Asia-Pacific regional conferences conducted by the World Association for Cooperative Education. In recognition of international trends in information technology, APJCE is produced solely in electronic form. Published papers are available as PDF files from the website, and manuscript submission, reviewing and publication is electronically based. In 2010, Australian Research Council (ARC), which administers the Excellence in Research (ERA) ranking system, awarded APJCE a 'B' ERA ranking (top 10-20%).

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Manuscripts and cover sheets (available from the website) should be forwarded electronically to the Editor-in-Chief. In order to ensure integrity of the review process authors' names should not appear on manuscripts. Manuscripts should be between 3,000 and 5,000 words, include pagination, be double-spaced with ample margins in times new-roman 12-point font and follow the style of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association in citations, referencing, tables and figures (see also, <http://www.apa.org/journals/faq.html>). The intended location of figures and diagrams, provided separately as high-quality files (e.g., JPG, TIFF or PICT), should be indicated in the manuscript. Figure and table captions, listed on a separate page at the end of the document, should be clear and concise and be understood without reference to the text.



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