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A Model of Engagement for the Online Learner in the Liminal Space of Dissertation Research

(O'Dea & Brennan, 2019)

Presenter: Majella O'Dea

Automation: Problem?

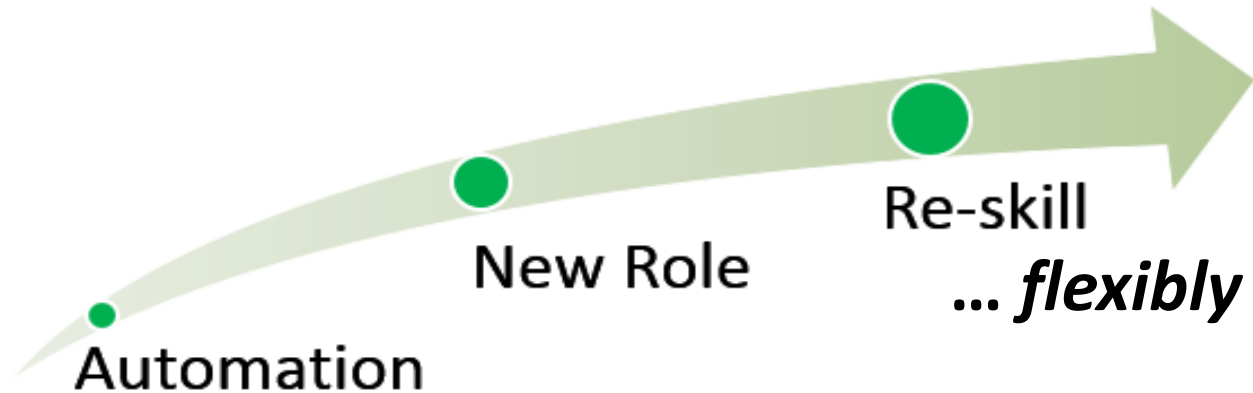
38% of American jobs will be at risk due to automation by 2032
(Glaser, 2017)

Approximately 50% of tasks in the workplace can be automated
(McKinsey Global Institute, 2017)

Automation: Problem or Opportunity?

400-800m people may need to find **new jobs** (Gonser, 2018)

Although certain occupations are likely to become automated, employees will almost certainly be required to perform **new tasks** rather than become unemployed (Barnes et al., 2018)



Flexible Re-Skilling



Skills-based Adult Learners
Lifelong-learners
On-the-job training
Re-train (while in employment)
Part-time *Global* **Accessible**
Flexible Learning Pathways
Focussed **Modularised**
On-line Learning



Engagement
Retention through
Liminal Space
Poor Completion Rates

Liminality and Threshold Concepts

Liminality: confusion during transition from old state to new state
(van Gennep, 1909)

Threshold Concept (in education): difficulty in a liminal space of
learning (Land et al., 2014)



(Kuemmeth, 2019)

What's the Life-Line? ...

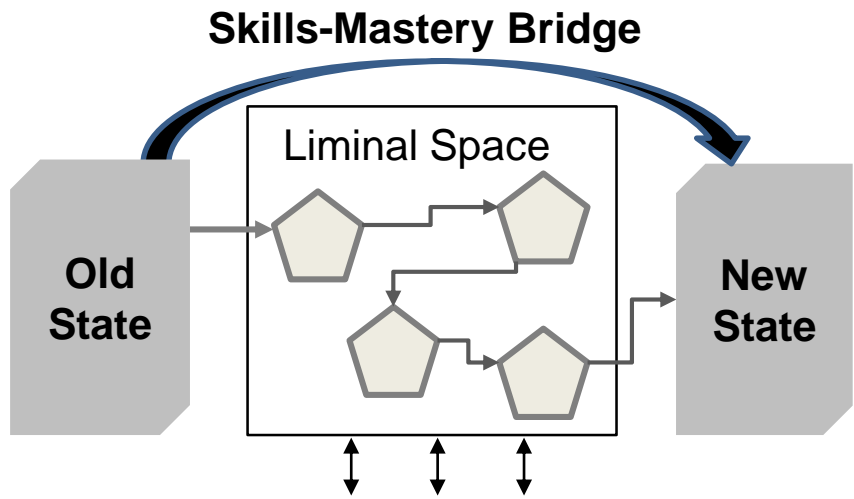
Introduced an (*evolving*) model in 2016-17:

Engagement in Liminal Space (ELS) Model

Case-Study: IT Online, MScSED, NUIG

Liminal Space: Dissertation completion

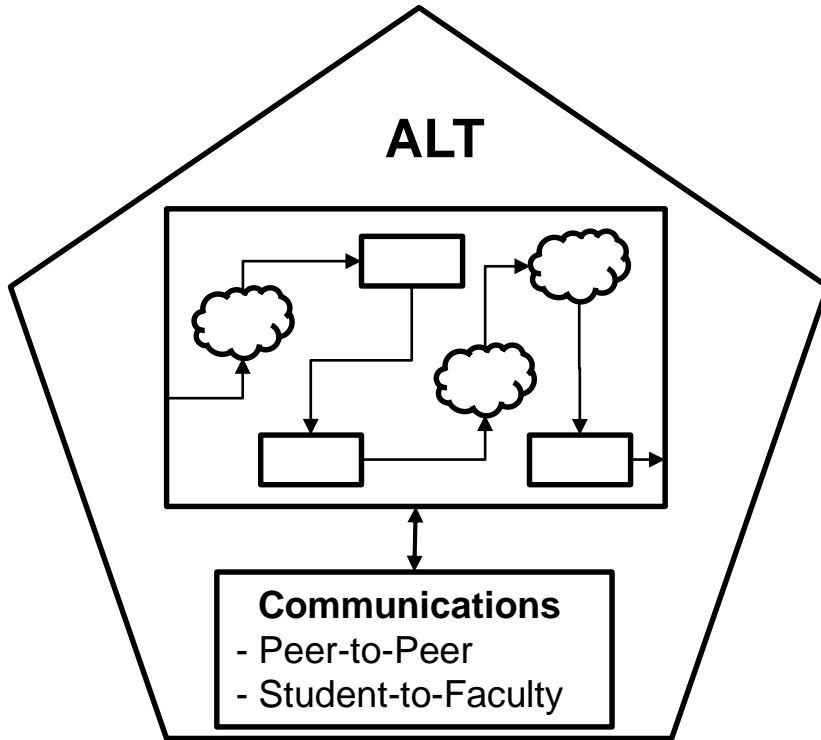
Engagement in Liminal Space Model



- ELS Supports
- Communication Channels
 - Formalised Support
 - Clear Expectations and Deadlines
 - Feedback, Praise & Encouragement


Active Learning Task
(ALT)

Active Learning Task (ALT)



Cognitive Threshold Task



Skills-Based Threshold Task

Active Learning Task (ALT)



Designed to:

- maintain student engagement and motivation in the liminal space
- appeal to the learner's affective domain

- Communications
- Peer-to-Peer
 - Student-to-Faculty



Cognitive Threshold Task



Skills-Based Threshold Task

(inspired by Salmon's concept of e-tivities (2013))

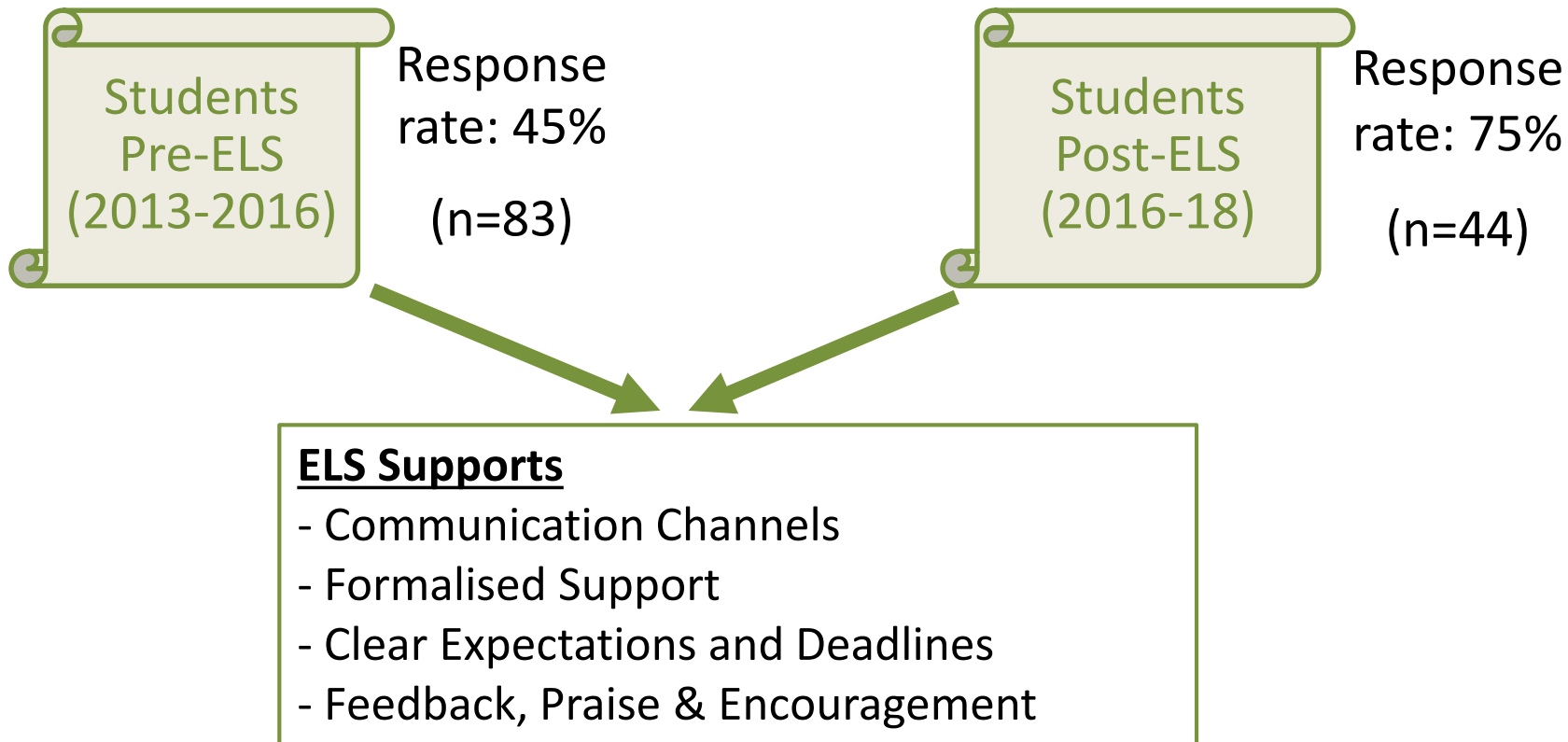
Research Questions

“the number of postgraduate students is increasing, the writing of a master’s dissertation still poses numerous challenges”

(Wagener, 2018, p. 1)

1. Does the ELS Model aid students transitioning through the Dissertation Liminal space?
2. Did the introduction of the ELS Model impact positively on Dissertation completion rates?

ELS Model: Aid in Dissertation Limina?



ELS Support 1: Communication Channel

PRE: 41% (n=37): concerns over student-to-advisor partnership

POST: 6% (n=33): indicated requirement for more advisor-support

18%: highlighted strong working-relationship with advisor

*I find it difficult
to pick up the phone and ring my
adviser out of blue... feel like I was
making a nuisance of
myself*

*advisor's advice, and
quick responses were of
tremendous help*

ELS Support 2: Formalised Support

PRE: 24% (n=37): diminished belief in their own abilities (i.e. self-efficacy) and/or a lack of strong “locus-of-control”

POST: 0% (n=33): diminished self-belief

*More help/
guidance ... - an awful
lot more!
pressure does need
to be applied*

*<ELS> provides support
Network.
Without <status requests>
I would have not completed*

ELS Model: Aid in Dissertation Limina?

ELS Support 3: Praise, Encouragement & Feedback

PRE: 38% (n=37): diminished self-belief (needed more confidence)

POST: 0% (n=33): diminished self-belief

10% (n=33): showed value of praise, encouragement, feedback

*problem I found
was to keep up with
motivation
Without help ...
never completed*

*keep asking
students where they are and encourage
another paper review and another 30
mins on dissertation
<feedback> of great help*

ELS Support 4: Clear Expectations & Guidelines

PRE: 24% (n=37): uncertain about expectations and deliverables

POST: 0% (n=33): uncertain about expectations and deliverables

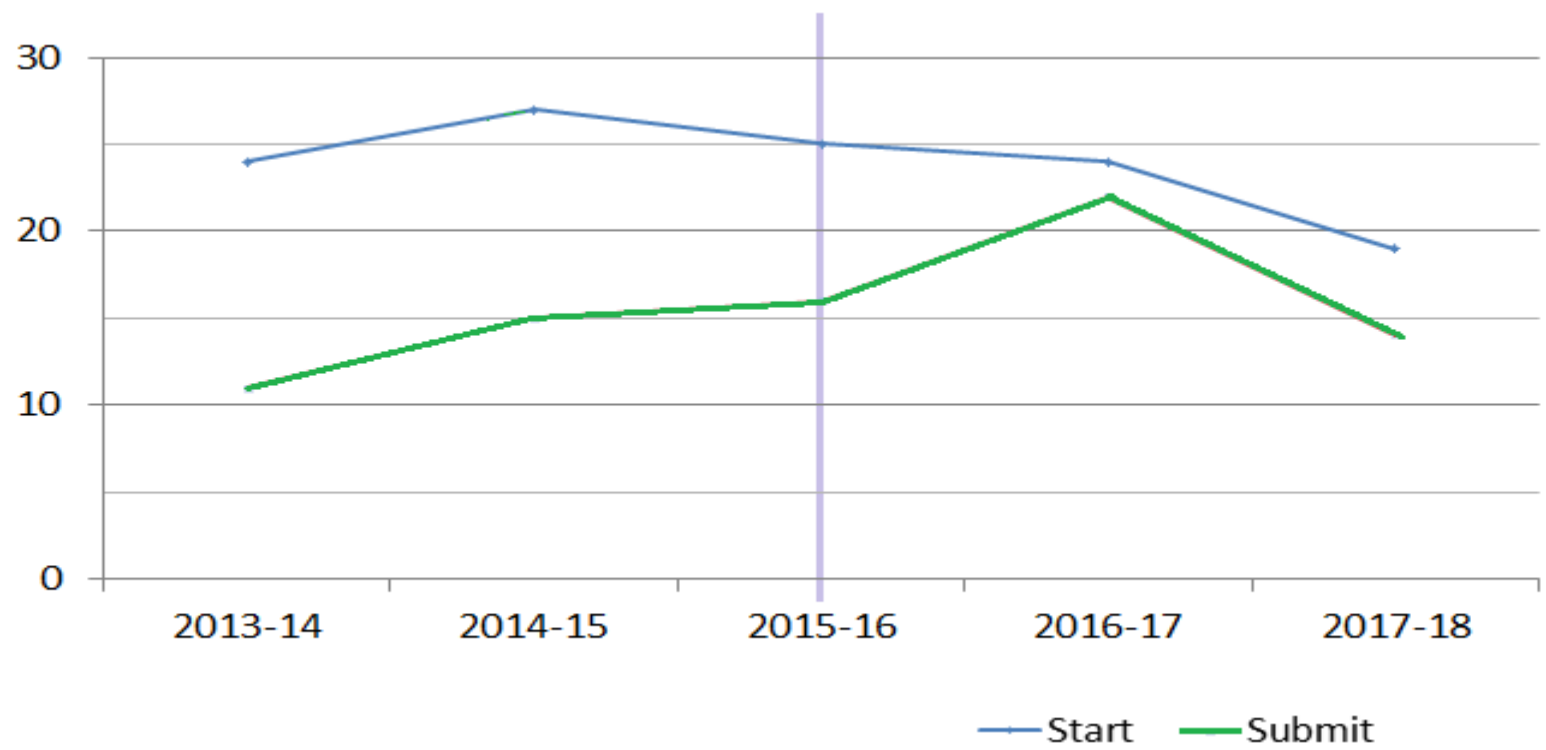
11% (n=33): highlighted value of ELS for managing their progress

*structure
dissertation
in measurable bits
Incremental
instalments*

*<ELS Model> help me to
know what I achieved, and
what was left gave clarity and
focus to my research*

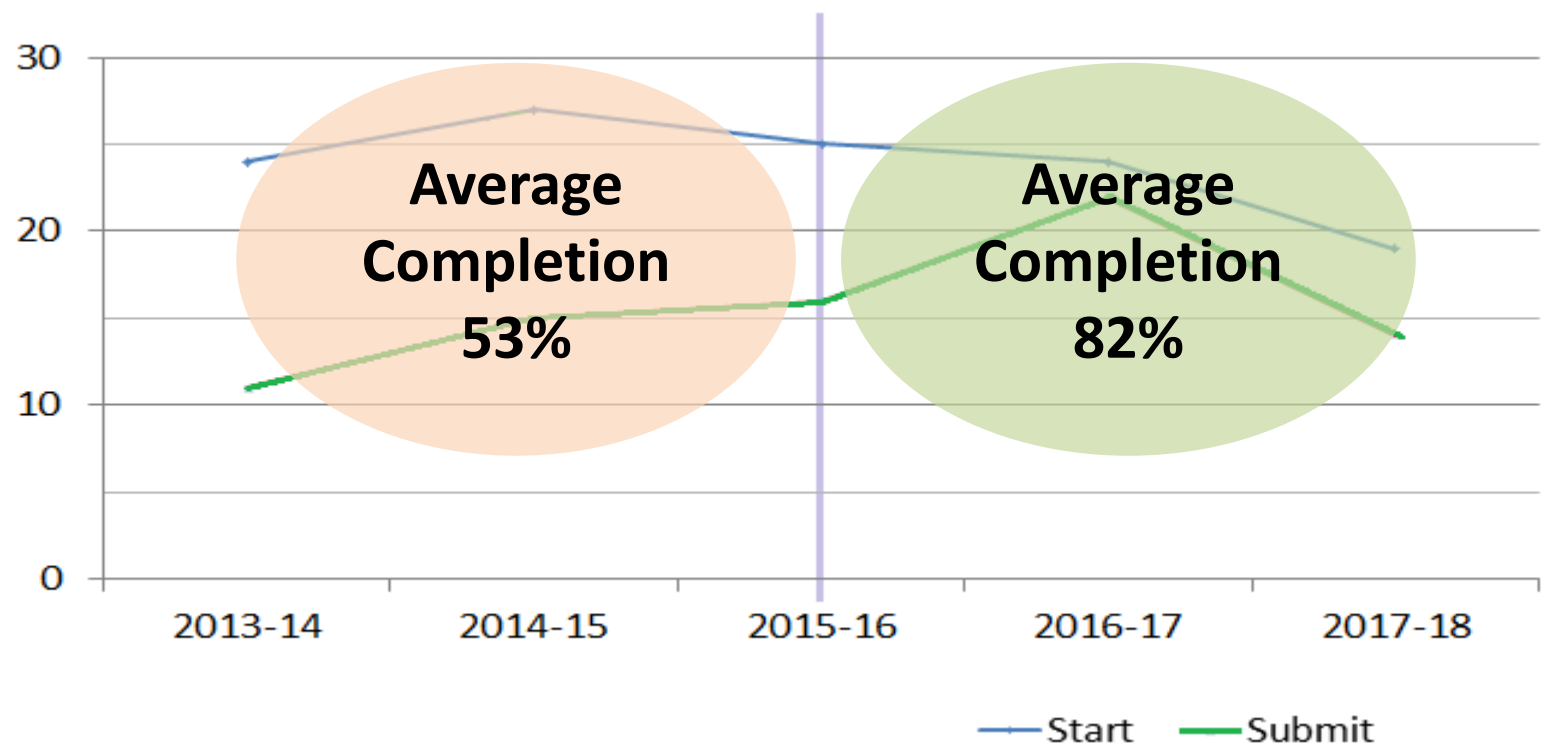
ELS: Impact on Dissertation Completion

ELS Model Introduction



ELS: Impact on Dissertation Completion

ELS Model Introduction



1. **Authors' Contention:**

the ELS Model may be applied to any aspect of online learning with which students experience difficulty

Test!

2. **Gather data on affective domain**

Can a student's locus-of-control be "grown" via the ELS Model?

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